

**PLAYING IN THE MARGINS, AN ETHNOGRAPHY IN TWO ACTS: A  
“PRESENTATION” OF A PERFORMANCE OF SOCIAL ACTION THEATRE  
IN MONTREAL**

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## ABSTRACT

**Playing in the Margins, An Ethnography in Two Acts: A “Presentation” of A Performance  
of Social Action Theatre in Montréal**

This is an attempt to work through some of the issues surrounding performative ethnography like the application of anthropological representations in ethnographic writings. Through the process of a play production by the social action theatre group, *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, the thesis “presents” theatrically the ethnographic experience. This “presentation” is an attempt to facilitate the enactment and evocation of the process which cannot be simply textual. In other words, the process can not be reproduced. This textualization is offered in the presentational style of theatre through scripted scenes of the rehearsal and performance process.

The process of cultural production from which this ethnographic experience is derived, is a small theatre play, *Les Lois du Goulag*, produced by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and commissioned by the *Fédération Canadienne des Droits de la Personne*. The play serves as a forum for ideas about the problematic of human rights violations and abuses around the world. It was produced within the context of the social, cultural and political particularities of Montréal, and of the marginality in which the group’s members and the audience share a sphere of exclusion. The play also reflects that reality.

This thesis attempts an alternative way of writing an ethnographic experience about a theatre of action production. It is not the answer to the problems of performative or other types of ethnographies. There are no simple solutions or absolute answers to these problems, but experiments like this can give us new useful insights into cultural productions and ethnographic writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROGRAM: A WAY OF INTRODUCING

In traditional theatre a program usually introduces the story (play), its characters and the artistic biographies of the playwright, actors, directors and designers. Trying to reflect the theatricality of this thesis, this introduction will be framed like a theatre program. This program will introduce the ethnographic story, its protagonists, as well as what is usual in a regular introduction (the thesis problem) and a listing of the chapters of the thesis.

#### The problem

This is the story of a theatre group's efforts to create a play which would respond to the needs of the FCDP (Fédération Canadienne des Droits de la Personne) with their creative intervention. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* was commissioned by the FCDP to create a play about the problems of human rights, its implementation, bureaucracies and lack of funding. They presented the work at the annual gathering of International Human Rights activists from around the world in June 1996 in Montréal. For a few months I participated with the theatre group in the creation of this play entitled *Les Lois du Goulag*.

For the space of a few months prior to working on this particular play, I attended meetings of *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, their theatre performances, and became familiar with the individual members of the group. My objective was to familiarise myself with *Mise au*

*Jeu Montréal's* work, asking: "how did they respond to current ongoing socio-political challenges, such as welfare cutbacks, day-care payments and homeless teens and Québec nationalism influences in politics? I wanted to get to know the actors' personal lives, aspirations and social situations. However, I did not ask formal or informal questions in the sense of interviews. I wanted to allow the negotiations and discussions of their personal and social situations to come through within the events I am trying to present in this thesis. Thus, this study attempts to present the group's individual makeup, its activities in general, and one of their projects in particular, revealed through the process of the play creation within a particular context. Through this exercise I wanted to learn about the process of cultural creation in the particular environment of Québec and Montréal in particular.

To write a performative ethnography it became apparent that such work needed to be built on the core of the theatre production itself. I could not find a satisfactory way of writing the ethnography either within the narrative style advanced by Michael Taussig<sup>1</sup> (a poetic prose style which moves closer to a fictional genre), or in the narrative style of Johannes Fabian, who uses verbatim accounts in ethnographic writing (which does not move far enough away from "realism"). It became clear, as the rehearsal process (of the theatre production) informed me, that the writing of the ethnographic experience, would have to reflect the theatre experience's process, its form, as well as its content. Without becoming a reproduction (representation) of the process, the writing or presentation of

events of the process of the play production, would have to be grounded on actual events which the participants would consider worth mentioning.

A multivocal and dialogical performative ethnography, with a different way of “evoking” from that of Johannes Fabian (1990), can yield a narrative which more appropriately reflects what was “given form to” in the ethnographic experience. An ethnographic rendering of the process can move away from the constraints of “representation” (as in theatre) utilised by Fabian, without the rendering becoming a total fantasy. Fabian’s attachment, in his 1990s book, to the safety of “realist” representation is the main thrust of how I differ from him. In theatre, there is a clear distinction between “*presentational*” and “*representational*” plays. Even though this distinction is blurred time and again in a number of performances<sup>2</sup>, they come from two different perspectives. For the sake of this thesis I would like to outline such a distinction. Representing, as in representational theatre style, is the enactment of theatre closely associated with “realism” while “presenting”, as in presentational theatre style, is the enactment of a theatre form free from the constraints of adhering to reality.<sup>3</sup> Taking the example of presentational theatre style and associating it with ethnographic representation, I suggest that the most appropriate way to write the story of a “presentational” theatre production, (*Les Lois du Goulag* is presentational), is to “evoke” it through the device of creating presentationally scripted scenes.

My textualization (through scripted scenes) came out of the experience of working with *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. Its shape grew out of the experience of the process of putting

on a play in a “presentational” mode. By not attempting to provide verbatim realistic detail, I try to produce an ethnography which (presentationally) evokes an imaginative territory that can be filled and inhabited by the reader.

The whole idea of ‘evoking’ rather than ‘representing’ is that it frees ethnography from *mimesis* and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails ‘objects,’ ‘facts,’ ‘descriptions,’ ‘inductions,’ ‘generalisations,’ ‘verification,’ ‘experiment,’ ‘truth,’ ‘and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies” (Tyler in Writing Culture, 1986: 130).

Through this ethnographic experience I have come to realise that the theatrical processes of presentational theatre are valuable when enacting and evoking cultural productions. This type of presentational theatre narrative helps to enact ethnographic situations through the examination of the production processes of performance. Theatrical presentational narrative best encapsulates the essence of the subject matter in this study. Through scripted scenes, as a narrative tool, this performative ethnography will be an attempt at “giving form to” what was enacted in the process of theatrical (cultural) production.

### The acts

This thesis will be comprised of six chapters. In the spirit of theatre in the main part of the thesis, the ethnographic story, chapter four and five will be called act one and act two. Chapter one is this introduction. Chapter two will discuss the theoretical/methodological underpinnings of the process. The third chapter succinctly

surveys the social and political context in which the theatrical production takes place.

Chapter four which will also be called act one, evokes through scripted scenes, the way in which the process of rehearsal becomes an arena for discussions of meanings, feelings and objectives brought into the production by all involved. Chapter five (also called act two) as it is scripted, is an evocation of what is “given form to” (knowledge about a cultural production) during the theatrical intervention of the theatre group with the targeted assembly. Chapter six is the conclusion.

A Short Introduction to Characters Luc, Victoria, Peter and Mayda as seen by the researcher. (Some names have been changed.)

### **Luc Gaudet**

He is tall (almost 6'5") and thin, with a passion for vegetarian food. He looks non-threatening in spite of his size. His appearance is always impeccable and he favours jeans and well-designed shirts. He also wears a goatee. He is gentle when speaking, never has anything negative to say. He is easily amused, a workaholic, always occupied in theatre of social action or writing plays, rehearsing scenes, and travelling to conferences.

He was born in L'Acadie, New Brunswick, about 40 years ago, moved to Montréal to attend school and university and stayed. In the 1980s he worked for the YMCA in Montréal where he held the job of Latin American liaison officer. This downtown “Y” has always been a centre for social action and social action organisations. Through this job he became even more aware of the plight of immigrants, and the most vulnerable in society. He participated in the work of a human rights group which did theatre in Honduras.

Through his work at the YMCA he came into contact with many people who were arriving in Canada as refugees and immigrants, as well as Canadians who were being disenfranchised economically and socially.

Luc has been active in community work and popular theatre for the past fifteen years in Montréal. He has participated in theatre exchanges with other groups in Canada, Asia and the Americas. Luc is the founder of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and is also a writer, director, fund-raiser, and actor.

Seven years ago Luc quit his job and began working full-time in social action theatre. He is very generous with both time and resources, and his determination and selflessness landed him in prison in Honduras. While he was helping to organise a theatre company in that country, he was accused of being a Communist. This obviously has not deterred him.

### **Victoria Ramos**

She is very thin and of average height. She has a vulnerable face, but is strong willed. Victoria is not particularly concerned about her appearance except when she is on stage. Originally from Barcelona, Spain, she has the odd stiffness of a flamenco dancer. Victoria is in her early thirties, has been all over the world (studying and experiencing different types of theatre), including New York, where she lived before coming to Montréal. At the time of this research she had been in Montréal for over a year. She wanted to work with *Mise au Jeu Montréal* to gain theatrical experience and not because of a social or political

commitment. Victoria's overwhelming concern with her acting made her seem very self-absorbed and did not make her a good team player. Nonetheless, she brought a fresh approach to the project. Her concerns were those of an actor in a particular play, at a particular time in her life.

### **Peter O'Grady**

Peter is of medium build physically. He is serious yet ready to crack a joke or two. A Francophone, he originates from the Sherbrooke area of Québec, and now lives in Montréal. Peter is a good actor and a hard worker. He is a long time member of the troupe, and otherwise unemployed. (No one in this company can live exclusively on earnings of the troupe. ) Peter is in his mid thirties and struggles to survive, hoping one day to land a good role in mainstream theatre. In the meantime he volunteers his talent to *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. He knows he cannot earn a living just working with the group, but he will stay until he gets a break.

The many times I talked to him he seemed preoccupied, as though his mind was somewhere else, perhaps playing a big part in a professional theatre. He was generous with his time, always rehearsing with us even if his part was polished; he was there for our benefit.

### **Mayda Parovian**

She is a very energetic and opinionated person. Physically she is a small woman with middle Eastern features. Mayda was a member of the theatre group almost from its foundation in 1990. She is Armenian, married to a medical worker, and grew up in

Montréal where she has worked in many social organisations. She participated in "Tools for Peace," a solidarity group which works for the Nicaraguan people by sending them equipment, medicine and other necessities. During the 1980s Mayda and her husband worked as volunteers in a medical brigade in Nicaragua. There she felt, from looking at the faces of sick and dying Nicaraguan children, the ugly visage of injustice. In Montréal Mayda volunteers her time to *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and collaborates as an actor as well.

Mayda has a child, whom she brings to rehearsal when she does not have anybody to baby-sit. She is always busy, juggling time between her other commitments, her child, and the play we were working on. Many times we have to rehearse without her, due to one or another problem with her commitments.

**Al (Alberto) Guevara** (As described by Luc Gaudet)

Alberto has dark hair and eyes and skin, and is of small build and bone structure. He is a trickster type who loves jokes, but has a workaholic streak, and an affinity for concrete solutions. He has been a professional performer in Nicaragua, Toronto, and Montréal, has worked in legitimate theatre in English, French and Spanish.

Alberto is just doing thesis research. He came here to work with us, and to observe, but he ended up being part of our company, at least for a little while. He is in his early thirties. The point is that he wants to write about us, about working in social action here in Québec. He is an immigrant, sometimes sensitive to what is going on, and feels intensely about injustice. He is not new to theatre of action, but he is very new to theatre of action here in Montréal and the way we do it. I wish him well.



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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In his latest work, The Magic of The State (1997), Taussig draws on his previous fieldwork to create a surreal work located in a fictive Latin American country (See Taussig, 1997). Nonetheless, theatre, and in particular non-realistic theatre is not best described in prose but in presentational scripted form. I will not concentrate on Taussig's style here. A narrative poetic prose could not do justice to a performative ethnography.

<sup>2</sup> In 1991 I played several roles in the French Canadian production "La conquête De Mexique" by Jean-Pierre Ronfard. In this production both styles were utilized in the same characters, other times the styles were separated according to the character.

<sup>3</sup> Presentational theatre as we know it today emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a theatre form in Europe, as a reaction to realist and naturalist theatre. It was embodied in many theatrical forms ("expressionist theatre," "dada," "epic theatre," "theatre of cruelty" etc..) (see Brockett 1987: 591-742) In realistic theatre the audience accepts the "fourth wall" convention (behavior which takes no cognizance of the audience), expecting a realistic set. They also assume that the characters will have complexity and psychological shading. Diderot (Brockett 1987: 373), for example, advocated "that drama would move an audience profoundly only if it created a complete illusion of reality." Zola a French theatre naturalist in the late 1800s, argued that "on stage the environment which shaped the characters and events should be reproduced with exactness so as to demonstrate the relationship between cause and effect" (Brockett: 551). Furthermore, in this type of theatre there is usually an identifiable "hero" or "heroine" and a clear narrative line that goes from one scene and act to the next. In presentational theatre no set is necessary, a box can be a table or a house or a mountain, the characters are drawn in bold lines and not very complex, there may be no distinct hero or heroine and there is often no clear narrative which follows from one scene or act to the next. In presentational theatre the story might be allegorical or epic, but it is never based on psychological truths, and it needs no great technical staff to be mounted.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CURTAIN RISES

#### A Brief Look at the Issue of Performative Ethnographies: Do We Represent?

During an international author's festival in Toronto some years ago, Eduardo Galeano, Rick Salutin, and a Polish writer were asked a question by a member of the audience. The question seemed very simple: "Could you please tell me why you write, what makes you write, what is your motivation?"

The moderator took immediate charge of the situation, inviting the Polish writer to go first. The Polish writer seemed to enjoy answering the question. He smiled and took a deep breath. His voice took on the tone of a wandering poet who had just arrived at the promised land. "I write because I love to share my voice with people; you the audience are always in my mind when I write; you are my motivation." Rick Salutin, a well known Canadian playwright, novelist and journalist responded in an almost cavalier tone: "We writers have an obligation, a duty to write for those who can't. We write for the people who do not have the ability to write, and who therefore cannot be heard by others. I write because I want to give voice to those who have none." When the moderator came to Galeano he simply and humbly said; "There is no such a thing as people without voices, only people without ears." Galeano's answer appeared simple at the beginning, but after

close examination it reveals its complexity. Within it was encapsulated the complexity of authority and voice in writing.

That incident years ago reminds me of the current debate in ethnographic theory and the efforts in ethnographic representations (writings) to situate the self and the other and the problems of authority and voice in representation. This positionality comes as a problem of voice: whose voice are they utilising, who makes the final cut, who controls the production of the ethnographic work and how are all of these represented? As Hastrup and Hervik (1994, 5) put it: “there is no way back to summits of unchallenged authority on a particular culture by way of stating that ‘I saw it myself’...” This problem of authority and voice has changed ethnographic representation from conventional ways of portraying the other, to more sophisticated attempts (e.g. Clifford, 1983; Marcus, 1980; Marcus and Fischer 1986 et al). George Marcus 1989, in “Imagining the Whole: Ethnography’s Contemporary Efforts to Situate itself,” points out this never-ending debate:

If there is one broad impulse to change past conventions of ethnographic writing - to break out of generally acknowledged genre constraints - it can be characterised as the desire for ethnographies ‘to say more’ than they have. This in turn is a response to multiple critiques of anthropological practices that have appeared over the past two decades, and that come down to complaints about the inadequacies of ethnographic accounts by various omissions or absences despite the anthropological spirit of holism (10).

According to James Clifford “ethnographic authority” can be derived from two theoretical camps, the experiential/interpretative and the dialogical/polyphonic one (in

Rabinow, 1996: 241-247). Clifford has shown that anthropological writings have generally been monological with a steady move towards polyvocal ethnographic writings. Furthermore, Clifford (in Rabinow, 1996: 245) posits that “Dialogic and constructivist paradigms tend to disperse or share out ethnographic authority, while narratives of initiation confirm the researcher’s special competence. Paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to paradigms of discourse, of dialogue and polyphony.” These remarks are borne out in the efforts by many ethnographers who have sought to demonstrate dialogism and multi-authorship in their work. However, some anthropologists have found problems within dialogical and communicative efforts themselves. Johannes Fabian in his work “Power of Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theatre in Shaba, Zaire” (1990), has tackled some of the concerns that have arisen within communicative and dialogical ethnographies.

Fabian reflects in what sense one could and should go beyond communicative and dialogical ethnography.<sup>1</sup> Even though he notices important directions in communicative and dialogical ethnography as being successful, for example, “the ethnography of speaking” emerging in contrast to “text-collection”, Fabian (1990: 5) is not convinced that these approaches are the panacea for the researcher’s problems. In fact, he believes that communication and dialogical approaches can become “a dangerous concept if merely to assert it is believed to guarantee ‘power-free’ interaction on equal terms” (Fabian 1990: 6). No matter how communicative the approach to ethnographic research has become and how far away from positivism it is moving, he observes that the researcher still acts as an

investigator. “As long as one participant asks questions and the other is expected to respond with information (irrespective of how much grammatical or rhetorical questioning occurs in their dialogue), the situation will remain asymmetrical, to say the least” (Fabian 1990: 6). He posits that:

When they are used to describe the nature of ethnographic research, communication and dialogue are above all epistemological concepts (they point to intersubjectivity and the constitutive role of language in formulating and sharing knowledge). But very often communication and dialogue are invoked in ethical arguments calling for freedom from constraints and domination and for encounter on equal terms (1990: 5).

Fabian believes that we must move beyond that entanglement. In his opinion he suggests that:

As I see it, the criteria are epistemological first (naming conditions that enable us to know) and only secondarily ethical (prescribing attitudes to be adopted by ethnographers toward their interlocutors). Moreover, if ‘epistemological’ is to cover not only (and even not so much) rules of verification but ways of accounting for the production of knowledge, we must get beyond using communication and dialogue as cover-all protestations of good will and spell out in as much detail as we are capable of what actually happens when we communicate and engage in dialogue (1990:5).

Fabian is proposing a type of ethnography in which the work of the ethnographer is redirected from an “informative ethnography” to a “performative ethnography,” an ethnography in which process informs and produces knowledge. He believes that one can accomplish this by exploring areas which have remained outside anthropological knowledge, the knowledge that can not simply be retrieved by asking questions. That knowledge that is only produced, or becomes apparent, emergent through action.

In spite of acknowledging the success of past anthropological research in acquiring considerable insight into social structures and ecological adaptations from myth, ritual and so on, Fabian insists that not enough attention has been paid to large areas and important aspects of culture. In these important aspects of culture “no one, not even the native, has information that can simply be called up and expressed in discursive statements” (1990: 6). He believes that such “information” can only be mediated by action. “Performances,” he states, “although sometimes asked for, are not responses to questions.” And the role of the ethnographer is not that of a questioner. She<sup>2</sup> is just another “actor” in the emerging “drama,” in the weakest sense a “producer” (1990: 7). In another sense the ethnographer becomes just another participant in the performance production. In Fabian’s words (1990: 19), “a performative ethnography” is the kind “where the ethnographer does not call the tunes but plays along.”

For Fabian, “performance” seems to be a more adequate description both of the ways people enact their culture and of the method by which an ethnographer produces knowledge about that culture. “This has epistemological significance inasmuch that I recommended an approach that is appropriate to both the nature of cultural knowledge and the nature of knowledge of cultural knowledge” (1990: 18). Fabian believes that through a performance one can come in contact with the process of knowledge creation of a culture through a specific cultural performance i.e. the play the troupe Mufwankolo was trying to put on in Zaire. At the same time, the process performance can give ethnographers an insight into culture.

Fabian demonstrates his “theory” by examining a traditional proverb about power in Zaire. He illustrates how the performance of *Le Pouvoir se Mange Entier* was created, and performed by the theatre Troupe Théâtrale Mufwankolo. He proposes five ideas which guide his study. First, he asserts that his study is above all epistemological (trying to find conditions that enable us to know) as opposed to ontological (trying to find and name existing things). He aims to abandon hierarchical positions in which the ethnographer occupies a more privileged position than her “informants”. Second, he is determined to show that the process of a performance is more important than the final product of performance. This has a lot to do with the importance of the process, the situationality of each step of the process, and time and space. Fabian (1990: 12) posits: “If the material for anthropology is events rather than things, and if ethnography is unlike a collection of artefacts but like a repetition of performances, then it is in principle impossible for a culture to appear or be witnessed at a given time as anything but the tip of an iceberg.”<sup>3</sup>

The third guiding idea refers to performance as an action which is contingent on a number of situations and actors, and not the enactment of a pre-existing social script. In other words, actions are determined by particular processes happening at particular times.

Fabian says that:

Performance, I like to think of it here, certainly is action, but not enactment of a pre-existing script; it is making, fashioning, creating. What I called sociality (better, perhaps: social praxis) is, in this view, the result of a multitude of actors working together to give form to experiences, ideas, feelings, projects... (1990: 13).

This is a very important point because it shatters preconceived notions of cultural production as being somewhat predictable.

The fourth idea is the notion that performance should not be projected onto societies in order to contrast them with our own societies. Not everything considered performance in one culture may necessarily be so in another. There is always the problem of extending our understanding of performance onto other cultural situations. There should be no rules and the studies should be open-ended. That is understandable considering the Eurocentric origins of anthropology in which imposed frames often determine ethnographic studies. One should come to the ethnographic sight free, as much as possible, from pre-existing ideas of what constitute a performance in that culture we are entering as ethnographers.

The fifth idea guiding Fabian's study deals with the cultural content and the form of reporting the process of the performance (i.e. the form of the ethnographic representation). Here, Fabian appears to contradict his position on the aims of description in ethnographic work. On the one hand, he says that the cultural content of a study is in a way extraneous to the inquiry of anthropology. He says:

The ethnographer participates in, and gives accounts of performances because he or she wants to report what is given form to. That cultural content, always the result of contingent historical processes, could be generated from sets of abstract, transhistorical principles (be they structures of the mind, basic needs, or what not) is in my view extraneous to the tasks of cultural anthropology (1990: 14).



According to this logic, the ethnographer gives accounts of performance only because she wants to show “what is given form to.” In other words she wants to show the process of performance detached from everything else in that particular culture. Political, economic, and historical considerations are not intended to be considered in the analysis of the process. On the other hand, Fabian says that showing the process and interpreting it is paramount to the ethnographic task because, “...when actual records, texts, are included in the presentation this is not only, as it were, a matter of ethics or politeness (‘giving a voice to our informants’) nor a matter of literary theory (recognising multiple authorship). It is required by the claim that such writing gives accounts and interpretation of process. ...” (Fabian 1990: 15). I believe that there is always a strong connection between the process and the cultural content. If one interprets the process of the performance, I suggest that it is necessary to include the “informant’s” interpretations of the process as well. Those interpretations can not be separated from the political, the cultural and the economic exigencies which inform them. These interpretations may not necessarily be anthropological; they could also be political and sociological. Therefore, cultural content, in my view, goes hand and hand with the description of the process. They interconnect at many junctures and some times parallel each other. I will explain this point in detail below.

Fabian (1990: 15) in the fifth guiding idea, points out that the writing of ethnographies needs to give accounts and interpretation of process (This is the point that I would like to explore through my own experience researching in Montréal). However, this action, he believes, is destined, inevitably, regardless of which formal device we use to

present the ethnographic experience, to “tell baroque and tortuous tales.” He believes this is so, because one cannot have a “perfect match of content and form between text and translation... covering , and only covering the announced subject of research” (1990: 15). Apart from being able to escape redundancy in the way the story is presented, one has to justify the presentation of the story as a contribution to a body of knowledge. “As writer, the anthropologist fashions and forms his material. He differs from the writer of fiction, not in that he presents, but in that he needs to justify his presentations as contributions to a body of knowledge” (1990: 87). Justifying presentations to a body of knowledge is, of course, necessary in our kind of work, but can there be a particular narrative device which enhances our presentations ? I suggest that there is. While trying to discover a way to evoke this ethnographic experience (presenting the story of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* as a performative ethnography), I realised that the most appropriate form to enact and evoke my experience was a script <sup>4</sup> in the style of presentational theatre. Presentational theatre as narrative form is different from both narrative forms of representation (“realistic ethnography”)<sup>5</sup> and representational theatre. For this purpose a parallel between representation in the theatrical sense and representation in the anthropological sense can be drawn.

Fabian represents in the theatrical and anthropological sense, because he adheres to “reality.”<sup>6</sup> The form he chooses to enact the production of knowledge in the performances is through verbatim accounts of what went on in the rehearsals and performances in both languages (Swahili and English). Even though he provides some

contextualization and analysis before and after the scenes, he shows us the process that “gives form to” the play by presenting us with verbatim transcriptions of a number of rehearsals. Presentation (in the theatrical sense) can be an important tool to help us move away from the “baroque and tortuous tales” to which he refers (1990: 15). It is possible to move away from the constraints of representation without neglecting contextualization and analysis. Presenting in small scripted scenes, can be used here to complement the way we evoke our ethnographic experiences through analysis and description. Thus, the form I shall use to write the body of my ethnography is presentational scripted scenes. The point is to evoke the experience without falling into the constraints of representational “realistic ethnography.”

This is an attempt to work through some of the issues surrounding performative ethnography, employing my study of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* in the specific context of Montréal, by experimenting with a presentational format. Rhetorically the authorial voice is always evident in dialogic, polyvocal performative ethnographies. Even Bakhtin, (1986: 109-110), while he discusses authorial voice, acknowledges the role of the author as a directing agent. “Bakhtin does not pretend that an author is not still in control of his material while allowing his characters to be subversive” (Cuddon 1991: 120).<sup>7</sup> For example, once Fabian chose particular theatre events as the subject of his inquiry, his choices were his authorial voice, no amount of fidelity (verbatim accounts) can eliminate it. By presenting my ethnography through scripted scenes I acknowledge right from the start that the process of writing an ethnography involves a degree of “fictionalising.”

Hiding behind the illusion of “representing ” in verbatim accounts, disguises the fact that no matter how multivocal, polyphonic and dialogic the performative ethnography is, the authorial voice of the writer is always present.

My choice is evocative of the spirit of the performative process. I have written in the style that any of the members of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* would have chosen themselves to write these scenes (of the ethnographic experience). For example simple language and uncomplicated characters give a clear but bold insight into the process. It is important that the form in which I wrote these scenes was the same presentational one utilised by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* while producing the play. I have blended the voices of all the protagonists within my authorial voice without the rhetorical device of “realistic theatre” or anthropological representation which includes “the kitchen sink.”

To Present or to Represent, That is the Question: The “Evocation” of Experience.

...cultural fictions are based on systematic, and contestable, exclusions. These may involve silencing incongruent voices... or deploying a consistent manner of quoting, ‘speaking for,’ translating the reality of others. Purportedly irrelevant personal or historical circumstances will also be excluded (one cannot tell all). Moreover, the maker (but why only one?) of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it. ...All constructed truths are made possible by powerful ‘lies’ of exclusion and rhetoric (Clifford 1986 (1): 6,7).

This is an attempt to “evoke” through writing the enactment of the theatre production “*Les Lois du Goulag*.” Evocation in this sense is a way of making available to the reader what is absent and can be conceived, but not presented or represented (Tyler in Writing Culture, 123). “It evokes what can never be put into text by any writer, and that is the common sense of the reader” (138) I am proposing to carry out my ethnography by way of presentational theatre which I suggest is both polyphonic and interpretive. It is polyphonic in the sense that this presentational narrative was produced co-operatively. It is interpretive because it is not a realistic verbatim account of the experience. First, I will clarify what I mean by presentational theatre, and then I will show how it applies to this thesis as a performative, polyphonic, interpretive evocation of the experience of producing social action theatre.

The process of ethnographic writing should best allow other voices to be heard through the utilisation of elements of other genres such as story telling, novelistic

narratives, playwriting, or impressionist tales. There is a huge leap from the native voice to our anthropological vision. However, this leap is not out of “reality” (outside the event) because “no discourse can exhaust reality” (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994: 5). As Kohh states in the same text,

‘we’ are interpreters of cultures and can observe ‘others’ only through our own cultural and experiential lenses. The ‘other’ and the ‘self,’ however one might define them, are frequently brought together in such statements to remind ourselves of the subjective, creative and relative nature of our craft, especially apparent in our writing” (13).

I am proposing to evoke “other’s voices,” and my own, by presenting the ethnography. When I say presenting, the reference is to *presenting* as opposed to *representing* in a theatrical way.

Presentational theatre aims at telling a story and posing a question, by “non-realistic” means. The director or the actor is not concerned with a realistic portrayal of what goes on in real life situations. She could very well use parody, comedy, mime, pantomime, exaggeration, or even animal personae or objects to impersonate and exaggerate movements, voices and so on. This theatre style allows fantasy and poetry to speak without forgoing the subject matter. Stefan Brecht (1988: 280) while observing and studying Vermont’s “Bread and Puppet Theatre,”<sup>8</sup> noted that: “Presentational theatre-acting is presenting a character in movement or speech without attempt at psychological indications or at creating an illusion of identification....” A real life situation does not have to be enacted as such. The presentation of a blood transfusion does not

have to be identical to a real-life blood transfusion, it does not, for example, need to use props identical to real syringes, tubes or needles. Mimicking it with imaginary objects can do the trick. It could be enacted with props that have nothing to do with a blood transfusion, a pencil as a syringe or blue coloured water as blood.

Presentational theatre mediates real life through non-realistic elements and constructs characters sometimes based on real life, but portrays them non-realistically, even fantastically. Presentational theatre metaphorizes “real-life” characters and in some cases makes them more accessible as theatre characters for most audiences.<sup>9</sup>

Representational theatre, on the other hand, was born as an attempt to recreate reality, and aims at portraying it as closely as possible. This European movement for a greater “truth” on the stage stemmed from Victor Hugo’s famous 1827 manifesto. He proclaimed that life, and life alone was the only model for the stage:

Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the façade of art. There are neither rules nor models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general rules of nature which soar above the whole field of art, and the special rules which result from the conditions appropriate to the subject of each composition (Roose-Evans, 1973: 17).

“In the nineteenth century the ideal was a theatre larger than life (Roose-Evans: 155). Subsequently, this need for realism has taken theatrical experimentation from “external, or photographic realism to a search for an inner realism” (18). Stanislavsky was instrumental in implementing this transition in the beginning of this century (Brockett 1987). Representational theatre is literally a recreation of “real life” characters,

environments, and circumstances. Through representational realistic theatre the actor and director attempt to recreate what is observed, lived and experienced in real life.

Representational theatre aims to reproduce an event as though ‘the fourth wall,’ the wall that separates the audience from the stage, has been removed. This type of theatre became popular in the late 19th century in Europe. Presentational theatre began as a reaction to realistic or naturalistic theatre, and does not attempt to reproduce real life in performance. It includes expressionist, dadaist, theatre of cruelty, American musical comedy and popular theatre. Presentational theatre uses any imaginative device to convey a political, philosophical or aesthetic message without any pretence at imitating real life.

Most ethnographic efforts being carried out today, even those of Fabian, in his quest to move away from positivism, are representational in the theatrical sense. Such efforts try earnestly to imitate realistic happenings in narrative forms using verbatim accounts of the experience which amplify the truthful nature of their representations at every opportunity. These forms always end up as attempts to represent accurately a way of life, a ritual, or a performance. Fabian himself states his dissatisfaction with textual transcriptions. He is concerned with portraying “truth,” “accuracy” or, in other words, “reality” He posits:

In short, although the recording is of a good quality and there are not many unsolved problems of transcription, this text exemplifies almost painfully the limits of textual documentation based on sound recordings. In no conceivable way could it be said that it adequately documents the event during which it was recorded. Recording and text are, sometimes more, sometimes less so, only tokens, remainders, clues of the reconstruction of the event...(1990: 110).



If this is so, why should we insist on trying to represent “realistically” what we experience by transcribing the entire rehearsal and performance as in Fabian’s study. The process can be evoked and interpreted through a presentation using scripted scenes, and capturing more than the linearity of a faithful transcription of speech and events.

In the case of my ethnographic experience I propose to take presentational theatre and apply it to the way I write the ethnography. I will evoke the voices of my ethnography in some small scripted scenes, by delivering them in the “presentational/theatrical mode.” The voices in my scenes will not resemble the voices in the interviews proposed by Marcus (1993),<sup>10</sup> in which verbatim transcriptions of interviews stand alone. Those are almost free from interpretation. Nonetheless, the polyvocality and interpretation of the performers in my study will be revealed through our conversations. In the form of footnotes and self-reflective post-analysis within my scenes, I will evoke authorship and authority. Within dialogue it is always obvious who is speaking. There is shared authorship and authority because the “official” play script was a “conversation” between the group, the organisation requesting the theatrical intervention (FCDP), and finally, the audience. The rehearsal dialogue was a conversation between the actors and the director/ animator, Luc<sup>11</sup>, in relation to the play script. The “actual” final performance was also a conversation between the animator/director, actors, the audience as audience and the audience as actors. The scripted scenes that I present highlight the authorship and authority of all involved. My selection of these scripted scenes reflects the

form of the “original” script (negotiated by the group and the FCDP) with the added element of poetic license. As Bakhtin writes:

The vast majority of literary genres are secondary, complex genres composed of various transformed primary genres (the rejoinder in dialogue, everyday stories, letters, diaries, minutes, and so forth). As a rule, these secondary genres of complex cultural communication *play out* various forms of primary speech communication. Here also is the source of all literary/conventional characters of authors, narrators and addressees... (1986: 98).

It is through the transformation of primary genres (*Mise au Jeu Montréal's* story) that the scripted scenes would evoke that story. For example, all the scenes of *Les Lois du Goulag* were unrelated to each other in time and place, (Romania, the Philippines) some are non-verbal, yet the link between all of them was the capacity to evoke a response from the audience which inspired them to participate in changing the scenes, the dialogue and the outcome of the play itself. Likewise, the way I evoke the ethnographic experience through the writing of scripted presentational scenes was informed and produced by the experience itself.

The point is that questions of form and content are not prior, the form itself should emerge out of the joint work of the ethnographer and his narrative partners. The emphasis is on the emergent character of textualization, textualization being just the initial interpretive move that provides a negotiated text for the reader to interpret (Tyler in Writing Culture, 1986: 127).

The social problems *Mise au Jeu Montréal* tries to address with theatrical intervention and the ethnographic problem I pose here, come together in the nature of performance. For example, the way I have chosen to evoke the ethnography this whole

analysis pertains to, has a lot to do with the form and content of the process in which *Mise au Jeu Montréal* operates. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* has chosen to utilise a form of presentational theatre (theatre forum) for a number of reasons. Theatre forum is suitable to the kind of educational, political, social, and cultural work they do. Audience participation is the most important pre-requisite in this kind of social action theatre. Scripts have to be simple to facilitate not only the audience's participation in the process of analysis and problem solving, but to facilitate the actor's/ animator's quick response to the challenges of acting. The scripted and non-scripted process of rehearsals and theatre forums in *Mise au Jeu Montréal's* plays like *Les Lois du Goulag*, are polyvocal and reflect their multiple authorship nature. *Les Lois du Goulag* in particular is indirectly authored by the FCDP who provided research material, opinions, suggestions and also participated in early workshops of the play. They have a strong voice in what does and does not go into the play. For example, when we presented the first sketches of the play to the executive of the FCDP in May of last year, they rejected, as stereotypically offensive, the strong language in one of the scenes. They also had firm opinions regarding which language should predominate in certain scenes.<sup>12</sup> They wanted the scene that critiques non governmental organisations to be in English. They had their reasons; perhaps most of the NGO workers at the conference understood English better than French. The FCDP executive had their own agenda. Besides being in closer contact with the composition of the audience, they were financing the project. Aesthetic considerations and creative freedom often had to be compromised. The power of the FCDP was clearly affecting the

process, and therefore, present as a voice. This became evident early in the rehearsal process.

Luc's authorship as the director/ animator is reflected in the direction he provided. This theatrical direction, some of it contested by the actors and the FCDP, found its way into the performances because of his experience, or simply because he was right aesthetically. For example, in one of the scenes Luc insisted that the characters needed more corporeal work, that is to say, they needed to be clearer non-verbally. He said, "I want your bodies to be able to speak their feelings, but without the need for verbal language." I thought that in order to become more corporeal and non-verbal with a subject matter such as human rights experiences required "method acting techniques" which are contrary to presentational theatre. Other actors believed that to achieve such demands of non-verbal communication and to be clear we needed more time to develop the characters, something we obviously lacked. Nonetheless, we listened to Luc and implemented his direction. He was in charge of seeing the project to the end and there was no time for argument. His power over us came in the form of implementation of his direction, which stayed in our minds the entire time of the play production. Thus most of Luc's suggestions on movement and non-verbal communication found their way into the process and the final performance. I went along. I knew that the play would lack "aesthetic" quality in the "professional " sense. The play needed to be done. My voice, the voices of the actors, Luc, the FCDP and authorship from all of us came through in these

ways. The process of rehearsal and performance was shaped by it, one can see it through the rehearsals and the theatre forum enacted in June of 1996.

The theoretical/methodological problem I pose here is that of presenting to evoke, in the theatrical sense as opposed to representing in both anthropological and theatrical sense performative ethnographies. Moving away from the constraints of a “realistic” verbatim representation, I propose, can be done in this performative ethnography, evoking by way of presenting instead of trying to represent what we experienced. This form of writing of “what was given form to” closely resembles the experience itself.

The presentational scripted scenes more closely reflects the nature of performance of *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. Multivocal experiences cannot be as easily reproduced in any other genre currently used by ethnographers. One should be able to evoke the sensual (smells, hunger, feelings, etc.) and also the awareness of the activities in and out of the theatre production of those who participate in that process of performance. They are the product of, and they are brought about by, political, social and cultural situations specific to some converging circumstances. Those details are not extraneous to the tasks of cultural anthropology. They are necessary elements in locating or situating the process in all its steps. My effort to evoke the process of this performance, the production of “*Les Lois du Goulag*,” is exercised through the presentation of scripted scenes.

In my case, unlike Marta Sivigliano’s,<sup>13</sup> the performance scripts are not just a metaphor for politics, they are political by definition. The act of writing a performative ethnography in a “presentational” form is political because it is the same presentational

(script form) used by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and other social action groups around the world. The presentational theatre form is a political expression when it is used as an alternative theatrical form to mainstream and commercial theatre. It is a tool for education, problem solving, interaction as well for entertainment. For example, Bread and Puppet Theatre, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, *Parmis Nous* (Québec), *Nixtayolero* (Nicaragua), *Candelaria* (Colombia) all utilise a presentational theatre form and scripts for social action.

The actual choice of using theatre forum with audience participation is in and of itself a political act. Cultural content, the historical, social, linguistic, political, and even artistic influences of the individual performers informed and shaped the process. For example, the political and linguistic distinctions of the individuals participating in the rehearsal and performance process at this particular historical moment in Québec, influenced the individual participant and therefore the process and the performance in terms of movement, performance style and even choice of language.<sup>14</sup> The fact that all the members rehearsing the play live in Québec and are from different political, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds inevitably influenced the dynamic of the performance.

A performative ethnography which is evocative and framed in small scripted scenes, is polyvocal because of the way it unfolds. The construction of the ethnographic experience, especially the scripted scenes, calls up the discussions between myself and the participants. Bakhtin has written that part of the polyvocality within the *genre* of the *novel* comes from all the languages (“socio-ideological”) present in it. He asserts that:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes

even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised. The internal stratification of any single language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups... is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)... (1994: 262-263).

The novel is multivocal, but it has one “author” (the person who writes the novel). A theatre performance (such as *Les Lois de Goulag*) does not have just one author: the interpretations of the “written text” or of the ideas forming the performance are produced (authored) by many authors/actors. In the case of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* the authorship was broader because some of the audience became author/actors as well. In so doing they further changed the interpretation of the scripted text. My presentation of the ethnographic story of *Mise au Jeu Montréal*'s process of putting on the play through the scripted scenes throughout this thesis, are attempts to capture the multi-authorship not only of the play (*Les Lois du Goulag*), but also the interpretation and even the analysis of the process of performance which the entire ethnographic experience became. I will also be relying on prose narrative which I will include in the form of descriptive paragraphs. These paragraphs written in prose will help contextualize my voice as the writer of the ethnography. They are the textual trace of the act of self-reflection.

The written discourse of those scenes which make up this thesis was submitted to the theatre company for critiquing. They easily understood the discourse because as actors

they are familiar with playwriting and scene formats. However, the full responsibility for arranging those scenes was mine. In one instance, after Luc, (my main collaborator and the director/ animator of the group) read the first version of the scripted scenes he appeared surprised. He told me that even though he did not remember things happening the way I described them, he found them tremendously interesting. He said “interesting” in the sense that “I m not accustomed to seeing myself from another person’s points of view when I am animating.” He did not dispute my take on the scripted scenes on the members, their interactions with each other, and their personal lives, from a “realistic” point of view. He did, however, feel that perhaps I was dramatising things a little bit too much. Others wanted their own points of view to be expressed in the scripted form. Most members of the group thought of these scenes as an interesting recording of what went on during the rehearsals. Most remembered and agreed with me on the validity of points of view. Most importantly, the base of the scripted scenes came out of field experience that I recorded on audio, on video, and the odd informal interview I conducted during and after the rehearsals.<sup>15</sup>

In situations such as mine, the ethnographer needs not to position him/herself at a comfortable distance in and out of the ethnographer’s seat as in the style of monograph writing. At the same time the ethnographer should not let the voices of the participants stand alone and let them speak verbatim as those voices were recorded, or written in the ethnographic process. Voices do not need to be contextualized, only in the standard descriptive narrative formats. Depicting interviews where a dialogue is at work is not



enough for them to become dialogical, as Fabian reminds us (1990: 15). Marcus, expressing a similar concern,<sup>16</sup> states that there is a danger in letting strong commentaries “stand unanswered by the interviewer, however effective this strategy of presentation might otherwise be, since at least some readers might actually be seduced by the intelligence, sophistication, and sympathetic self-positioning of his commentary” (1993: 13-14). One has to contextualize within the framing of the interviews, so that they are not left hanging in the air. The way I choose to contextualize the process of performance is through scripted scenes. My contextualization of the process takes the same form as the process itself.

During the months we rehearsed and negotiated *Les Lois du Goulag* I came to the realisation that to understand a cultural production such as this, it was necessary to examine the processes of its cultural creation. Fabian is right on this point of emerging knowledge through performance. The process, the rehearsals leading to the actual theatrical intervention, was contingent on emergent situations shown only through the action of production. The examination of this action gave me an important angle from which to understand the group, the performance piece, Montréal’s social organisations, and much more.

In the context of the production of the theatre play, as the researcher/actor in the process “I did not call the shots,” as Fabian would say. I merely participated in the flow of events, acts, practices and discussions. Fabian (1990: 13) has mentioned that performance is action, but not merely enactment of a pre-existing script; it is recognising the

situationality of the action in that particular moment. It is the result of all voices and their negotiations of power relations, asymmetries and ambivalence. Likewise, my participation in the process of the theatrical production of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* positioned me to experience the particular power dynamics and ambivalences, as part of the process itself.

Having said that, we also have to take into consideration that what makes *Mise au Jeu Montréal* the group that it is, and its success at this level of struggle, is its legacy as a Montréal “theatre of action” group. The political, cultural and social context in which the company operates is central to the analysis of its work and needs some exploration. The following chapter will do just that.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fabian (1990, 7-10) gives us a brief summary of the uses of "performance" in and around anthropology where he details earlier trends. One of these trends can be characterized by a proposition against the praxis of "text-collection" which converged in "the ethnography of speaking" and was followed up by developments in visual anthropology and ethnomusicology. In this proposition, "who speaks to whom, when, where, how, and why" are crucial questions in understanding language as a "system in action" (1990, 8). "Attention to performance becomes the criterion that distinguishes the oral historian from his colleague who works with written documents (Ibid.). Fabian moves beyond this proposition as he sketches his strategy. He refers to a second trend influenced by Victor Turner which "takes spectacular ritual, social drama, and theatricality in general as its point of departure. 'Experience' (rather than communication or speaking), 'symbols,' and 'interpretation' or 'hermeneutics' (rather than text, speech events, and rules) are the keywords of its discourse" (Ibid.). Fabian sees himself as being increasingly influenced by Turner.

<sup>2</sup> She will stand for he and she.

<sup>3</sup> I agree with Fabian; however, we should never forget that "the tip of the iceberg" can serve as a warning or it can indicate what lies below the surface.

<sup>4</sup> In this sense this form of theatre is non-realistic, in that a piece of blue cloth in Kabuki symbolizes a body of water, a "scene-setting monologue" in Brecht's plays locates the action in Setchuan, or Mahagony, or a tall actor becomes a tree in Into the Woods, an American musical.

<sup>5</sup> Recent ethnographic representations have tried to move away from what Marcus (1986: 23) has called "ethnographic realism." For example, these representations no longer use a mode of writing which tries to represent the whole of a society or a way of life. Ethnographic representation has, nonetheless, kept the narrative devices which are used to demonstrate that the ethnography is representing "reality" as it was perceived by those involved in the experience. The need to transcribe verbatim illustrates this last point.

<sup>6</sup> Fabian (1990: 89) is critical of the "empiricist's belief that recordings-made-into-texts are objective representations of reality..." He is equally critical of the formalist models and logical schemes. He, nonetheless, feels the need to transcribe the process of rehearsal in his story, as Van Maanen (1988:49) puts it, "straight from the horse's mouth."

<sup>7</sup> For example, "In Tolstoy's fiction he sees a type of 'monologic' novel where all is subject to the author's controlling purpose and hand, whereas Dostoevski's fiction is dialogic...different characters express varying, independent views which are not 'controlled' by the author to represent the author's viewpoint" (Cuddon 1991: 120).

<sup>8</sup> Bread and Puppet is a theatre group operating in Vermont, US. They do political theatre and utilize giant puppets. They have been active since the 1960s in the United States. (See Brecht, 1980: volumes 1,2,3 and 4).

<sup>9</sup> This has been my experience while doing theatre in Nicaragua. People were more interested in participating in theatre as audiences or actors when our theatre group used fantastic characterization, and theatre of extraordinary reality.

<sup>10</sup> In the Introduction to the Series and Volume one... Marcus discusses experimentations with "the reportage format." Through interviews Marcus and colleagues experimented in a form which he believes "allows, even demands, reflexive framing which at least exposes to the reader the biases of construction rather than hides them, or else preempts a lot of the critique of representation in cultural studies..."

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(Marcus 1993: 3). This experiment he believes presents other discourses in a mediated way. This format allows for less editing, interference and is “unassimilated to given concepts, theories, and analytic frames” (Marcus, 1993: 4) However, Marcus articulates the strongest concern with this format. The fact that some interviews stand alone is very dangerous. letting commentaries stand unanswered or unengaged by the interviewer can be problematic. “Some readers might actually be seduced by the intelligence, sophistication, and sympathetic self-positioning of his commentary... (for example, self-serving claims that the Russians never oppressed anyone)” (1993: 14).

<sup>11</sup> From the French word meaning master of ceremonies, director and dramaturg.

<sup>12</sup> The play is multilingual.

<sup>13</sup> A performance is not a linear written script experience: it includes emotional, sensual, atmospheric and interactive elements that cannot be contained in a simpler reporting of a dialogue. Savigliano (1995) in *Tango the political economy of passion* selectively uses lyrics, poetic description of movements, and heightened atmospheric language to portray the “experience” of the dance (tango) as a metaphor. She wishes to create in the readers’ minds the passion, smells, sights and emotions of the dance itself. This is poetic. It is not baroque and convoluted in the tortuous style suggested by Fabian (1990: 15).

<sup>14</sup> In a second performance in July 1997 it was decided to perform the scenes of the *Les Lois du Goulag* in English and French separately. In Québec, bilingual plays are performed with the assumption that the plays will be understood by a bilingual audience. In this case the FCDP made clear that the previous audience (for the 1996 performance) spoke only one of the two languages. However in July of 1997, the performance was deliberately separated into two languages reflecting the composition of the international audience who spoke either French or English. Some scenes were done totally in English while others exclusively in French.

<sup>15</sup> I am aware of the warnings Fabian (1990:15) gives on relying on recordings of performances and the need to contextualize when using such transcriptions. I, however, do not quote verbatim from those recordings. I tried, with the subsequent help of the members of *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, to script them, in order to encapsulate (integrate and present) mini-stories complementary to the experience as a whole, as a kind of interpretation.

<sup>16</sup> I believe that it is problematic to present dialogues and exchanges as published interviews, to me they are *representations* more than *presentations* of the happenings of those interviews.

## CHAPTER 3

### SETTING THE SCENE

A survey of the urban social movement (coalition) of Montréal<sup>1</sup> and its relationship with *Mise au Jeu Montréal* will help us situate the theatre group and the ethnography within the political, social, cultural, and economic sphere of Québec and the city of Montréal. This also will give us insights into important roles that theatre of action, such as that utilised by *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, can play because of its proximity to the problems faced by those brought to the margin by political and economic circumstances (According to the urban social groups neo-liberal capitalism in Québec).

On April 19th 1996, I had the opportunity to attend the annual general meeting of the popular and community movements of the Island of Montréal (a coalition of more than one hundred groups ranging from organised labour to small action groups from neighbourhoods around the Island). I was invited to attend as a member of *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, whose performance of a theatre piece about the urban social groups (represented in the coalition) and historical aspects of Québec was a main part of the conference.

More than one hundred and fifty delegates from one hundred and fifty-five popular and community organisations gathered to discuss the present social, political and economic state of their respective social groups. They were also concerned with the social coalition as a whole in the present political, economic and social climate, and the

challenges facing Québec and particularly Montréal. The main goal of this assembly was to come up with strategies for the establishment of a common front against what the participants called, “the economic and socio-political attack on the people by the politics of neo-liberalism.”

The meeting was organised around small presentations, by using an open forum format so that every delegate who wished to speak could do so. The speeches ranged from the needs of the groups within the coalition or the urban social movement (everyday concerns like homelessness, harassment, poverty, cuts in Medicare etc., exacerbated by the measures of neo-liberal policies in the city, the province and the country) to the need to increase solidarity with oppressed peoples in other parts of the Americas, and calls for the democratisation of municipal government in Montréal. The assembly acknowledged that recent attacks from neo-liberal politics, and consequences of those attacks on the people, were not only a global phenomenon, but needed to be tackled at the local level as well.

The main consensus that emerged from the assembly as it came to a close was the need for social organisations to redefine their positions towards their governments and the institutions in their community. New challenges require new strategies, they posited. Most delegates spoke of the redefinition of their roles and identity. They said: “ We have to ratify our identity as Montréalers, and as members and actors of the urban social movements of Montréal”. They put a number of questions to each other, the most outstanding of which had to do with the strategies to fight back against what they considered the mean policies of neo-liberalism. The efforts of governments, especially

provincial and municipal, to implement their policies, is affecting the most vulnerable in our cities.

The following remarks are a summary of the most important questions or concerns raised in the meeting. I have chosen these at random to represent the thrust of the meeting:

1. As governments move to the right, what direction should we take as a movement? 2. What keeps us together as a movement? Is it our common predicament as people at the periphery of power? 3. What do we want as a movement? Is it empowerment? How do we obtain it? 4. What are the most difficult obstacles that we need to overcome as a movement?

As the assembly progressed and other issues related to the previous ones were raised, suggestions were presented and discussed. The key to these questions, they emphasised, is readiness to tackle issues, to put pressure on governments by different means. They cited instances from the past where major gains had been achieved in such areas as affordable housing and accessibility for the disabled.

As an observer at this meeting in Montréal, I could not help but come up with some questions of my own. Two important issues came to mind. As an immigrant to Canada and a resident of Montréal I had been hearing a lot about nationalism in Québec. I witnessed the close call for the unity of Canada in the last referendum on the future of Québec. It had appeared that the nationalist sentiment influenced every social and political corner in the province. The second issue was the relationship of the urban social groups as

a movement and the group *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. Most of the theatrical work done by *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, that I was aware of at that point, was somehow in co-ordination with or commissioned by one of these social groups operating in Montréal. This theatrical work appeared to me to be played out within a marginal experience, a marginalization brought about by the exclusion of these groups' perspectives from the political and social sphere of decision-making political power.

With regard to the former question (issue) of the relationship between nationalism and the urban social groups, in the coalition, the social and popular movements I thought, were fertile ground for ideological (Québec nationalist) mobilisation. I deduced that Québec nationalism should be strong in this meeting. Nonetheless, during the assembly I heard nothing that indicated strong nationalist sentiments among these popular urban groups. I was surprised that no one spoke of the language conflict that has been going on in Montréal for quite some time. No one said or implied that English Canada was a menace to their sense of identity. No one drew a correlation between immigration and unemployment. These had been the usual arguments and rhetoric utilised by most Québec nationalists. There was, however, criticism of the policies of all three levels of government, one of which, (the provincial), is ideologically nationalist. This, however, did not mean that there were not Québec nationalists in the coalition.

It was a concern of mine to find the relationship between *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and the urban social coalition. It was obvious from what I had learned about *Mise au Jeu*



*Montréal* that several of the urban social groups in the coalition have used the theatre group *Mise au Jeu Montréal* as a tool for communication. I wanted to determine whether the relationship of social groups (such as the FCDP, Canadian Federation for Human Rights) with social action theatre groups had a history within the urban social coalition. It became apparent that what brought the urban social movement of Montréal and *Mise au Jeu Montréal* together was the common predicament of marginality. Although, there could be other reasons for the proximity of the theatre group and the coalition of social groups, a type of marginality became a pattern throughout my study.

According to Anna Tsing (1993: xi) marginality refers to the groups of people who live within the modern world (and are affected by modern capitalism), yet their perspectives are excluded. They are on the periphery of state power and political control. They have distinctive perspectives yet this distinctiveness is forged in dialogue, not in isolation. I believe that *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and the urban social movement of Montréal share that sphere of exclusion. Most members of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* belong to the ever-growing army of unemployed and welfare recipients and disadvantaged citizens surviving in Montréal. Social action theatre is a vehicle utilised by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* to confront that political and economic system of exclusion to which they belong. For Anna Tsing (1993: 254) a “postmodern marginality” does not deny dominance or exclusion. A postmodern marginality is another form of resisting that which created marginalization in the first place. What a postmodern marginality does is absorb the essence of power and then transform it so that the power is seen in new forms and

relationships. For those living at the margins there is too much at risk. “The eclectic fragments of marginality argue for survival. Even their deconstructions press for a space to stand on the (already undermined) platform of power. If this is parody, it is no joke but a gesture of respect toward how much imagination it takes to stay alive” (1993: 254).

Similarly, *Mise au Jeu Montréal* while using the tool of theatre of social action enacts situations of the actors, the audience, and those at the margins (oppressed, oppressor, abused, abused) in power relations. Through this enactment they are looking for empowerment for both themselves and the audience. They make fun of those same situations while exposing asymmetrical power relations; for example, bureaucratic human rights abuses. This way of resisting still has the capacity to satirise or make fun of the audience, the actors and the process of enacting itself. For example, in the last scene of *Les Lois du Goulag* about abuse of power in a non-governmental agency in the Philippines, the power does not derive from the director, but on the telephone and the clock which dictates what is prioritised during the day in the office.

In order to tackle these two important questions (nationalism and social movements in Québec and those movements vis à vis *Mise au Jeu Montréal*), a quick survey of the history of the urban social movements in Montréal and Québec will be required. The political, social and economic particularities of Québec at the moment that this investigation was taking place can be illuminated by an overall examination of the urban social organisations in Montréal.

### The Influence of Nationalism on the Urban Social Movements of Montréal as a Whole.

There is enough archival evidence to indicate that a great number of social groups in Montréal, from labour unions to small citizen groups, have followed a pragmatic line on the question of Québec nationalism throughout their history. Loraine Pagé, a Québec sociologist, stresses that in the early 1960s at the beginning of the “Revolution Tranquille” (the Quiet Revolution which marked the beginning of serious secular power) and after the Duplessis era (named after a populist right-wing Premier of Québec), political ideologies occupied the social and political space in Québec (1991:185). The social movements in the province, and to a certain extent in Montréal, were forced to subscribe to the major socio-political currents of political parties. One of those political forces was the ideology of nationalism in Québec. However, this subscription by the urban social groups to nationalism did not last long and did not change the focus of these groups’ commitments to their communities.<sup>2</sup>

Even though there were other social and political factors influencing the mobilisation of social groups within the coalition,<sup>3</sup> it was Montréal’s specificity, particularity and originality, marked by political, linguistic and urban conflicts, that gave Montréal’s urban social movements their main characteristics, i.e., high levels of organisation, solidarity, pluralism, and heterogeneity. These characteristics were not necessarily nationalistic in ideology. Some of the organisations and urban groups originated as bilingual movements with the specific purpose of changing urban living conditions and organising citizens for social action. The first citizen’s groups were

organised in the early 1960s. From 1963, the year in which a citizens' group was organised in Little Burgundy in Montréal, to the late 1960s, the city saw a collective awareness of the importance of urban social movements in the struggle for social change in the city (Hamel 1991: 106).<sup>4</sup>

Even though the nationalist question and linguistic fights were at the centre of political life, non-partisan urban social organisations concentrated on social change and managed to make a difference in the province and most particularly in Montréal. Both political forces, partisan and non-partisan, influenced each other but acted independently.

Hamel reiterates:

A notre avis, les organismes communitaires sont doublement caractérisés depuis une dizaine d'années par une adaptation aux tendances et aux contradictions qui marquent les sociétés complexes ainsi que par une volonté d'affirmation de leur identité et de leur autonomie" (Hamel, in Dumont, Langlois and Martin, (1994: 964).

During the 1970s and early 1980s the urban social groups in general had become even more pluralistic, not only at the level of ideology, but at the level of organisation. The urban social movements became more focused on specific problems of the community. It was more advantageous to work on single social issues. Some groups specialised in the physically disabled, the aged, the unemployed and tenants' rights (Hamel 1991: 112).. Close connection to municipal and provincial governments had pushed some groups away from the issues they were more concerned about and had failed to advance issues that were close to their constituency. Most groups had learned their lessons and the

consequences of allying themselves to partisan politics, whether nationalist or federalist, and had opted for the most pragmatic option of pluralism.

In the 1960s and 1970s the local scene and the political systems were challenged and consequently transformed by the actors of the urban social movements in Montréal. Social action had tremendous impact on politics, not vice versa. One example of this is the fact that by the 70s FRAP, (Fédération pour le Rassemblement d'Action Politique)<sup>5</sup> could not even manage to elect a single member to the municipal council. The reason given by many for this (Hamel, Pagé et al) is that FRAP fought from an ideological (partisan) platform, ignoring the quotidian problems of most urban social movements (Hamel 1991: 102-4). This of course indicates that when groups in the social movement became involved in ideology (i.e. nationalism) the groups fell apart. The RCM (Rassemblement de Citoyens et Citoyennes de Montréal), unlike FRAP in the 70s, came to municipal office in 1986. According to Gabriel Gagnon (1988:118), this municipal political party possessed the essential elements for a new political culture in Montréal. It was made up of Anglophones, Francophones, Allophones, Nationalists, Social-Democrats, Socialists, Unionists, Community militants and others. It is clear that to get into office and to change municipal politics in Montréal, politicians had to create a non-partisan, non- "ethnic" strategy. Nationalist alliances had to be minimised to increase their appeal to all social and political sectors of Montréal's growing diverse community.

The action of the urban groups in Montréal has contributed to the democratisation process since the 1960s in Québec (Hamel 1991: 205). The actors in these urban social

groups, Hamel insists, were actual participants in the betterment of the everyday social, political and economic conditions of the population of Montréal. For example, the establishment of tenants' rights (rental) boards, environmental laws, and the application of services exclusively for the aged, the physically impaired, etc., were the result of social action. This social action came in the form of political pressure, or outright militant protest on the streets. These changes in government priorities towards its citizens were only made possible because all the different communities worked together to achieve them. Theatre of action was always part of this protest.

Another strong factor keeping Montréal social movements focused on social action instead of partisan politics was that their social base was constantly changing. During the late 1980s, for example, this social base was further modified. As the original population of Montréal became older or left the city, the increased presence of ethnic minorities in the city and within the urban social movement, in social groups of refugees and the like, increased. The exclusivity of a party line or a political ideology, such as Québec nationalism, became less appealing to urban social movements, specially those at the margins of social and political power in Québec and Montréal.

Nonetheless, one cannot treat Montréal's urban social movements in the coalition as an homogeneous block. For example, some of the unions representing municipal and provincial public employees (CSN) participated actively in the project of nationalism. To say that all urban social groups and unions are pluralistic would be to miss the point of the diversity of people who make up Montréal's urban social coalition movement. It is enough

to know that generally the majority of the members abandon nationalistic rhetoric when it is not convenient. For example, unions such as the FTQ, The Federation of workers of Québec, who collaborated closely with certain urban social action groups, working to change government policies, were also actively involved in the pro-separatist nationalist campaign in the referendum of 1995.

To remain relevant, the social movements of Montréal have generally responded in ways which accommodate individuals and groups from different political, social, and cultural backgrounds. Social action, fighting negative policies against the poor, the disabled, the elderly, immigrants, women, and those who are different (gays and lesbians), united these organisations in a search for new strategies to fight the policies of the increasingly negative attitudes of government toward the most vulnerable in our society.

This succinct survey of the urban social movements indicates that in general the ideology of Québec nationalism has not been too influential in the development of these urban social groups as a movement. For the general purpose of fighting inequality, marginalization from political and social power, and hopelessness, the urban social groups of Montréal as a coalition have maintained a pluralistic attitude towards Québec nationalism, and federalism, for that matter. This, I believe, is one of the reasons I did not experience the overwhelming Québec nationalism which I had anticipated in the general assembly of the urban social movement. This pluralistic attitude can be observed as well in the composition and method of social action of the group *Mise au Jeu Montréal*.

How can we locate *Mise au Jeu Montréal* within the struggles not only of the urban social movements surveyed above, but also within the political and social culture of Montréal? To answer this question it is necessary to explore the relationship between *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and the urban social movement and what their common predicament is.



Sharing the Margins: The Urban Social Movements and *Mise au Jeu Montréal*.

The members of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* share the margins of political social and economic powerlessness with the organisations for which they work: the coalition of urban social groups in Montréal. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* is utilised by those urban social organisations as a tool to communicate and educate as well as a way of finding alternatives and solutions to their respective issues. This relationship has been very important for both, and for the past five years it has made a difference for them. Furthermore, the individual members of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* are themselves members of the urban social groups, as welfare recipients, gays and lesbians, human rights workers, and battered women. For example, when there were openings for new animator/actors, the group was recruiting welfare recipients for the positions. For this reason, the urban social movement's distinctive perspective is better articulated and communicated through the tools provided by *Mise au Jeu Montréal*.

In a bulletin entitled "Coups de Théâtre" (1996:12-13) Luc Gaudet the animator/director of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* offered the following insights into the group:

In these stormy times *Mise au Jeu Montréal* has launched itself again for a fourth year for the realisation of its principal mandate: to promote an art to carry and be carried for a different culture. Creating such that the world sees itself alive, talks to itself, shows its contradictions, and sings its hopes.. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* collaborated this year with 17 community organisations and institutions. It had worked on ground sometimes fertile, sometimes frozen by ragged winters. Whether in the heart of the city or touring the regional highways our path led us to discover and make discovered the universe of the marginalized whether for reasons of health (mental or physical) or those marginalized for their sexual orientation or lacking the tools for literacy. We also discovered

the universe of popular community groups who seek to organise themselves in order to make their work in the trenches known and their power to recuperate their scorched and crashed humanity often isolated from the mainstream.

In this passage Luc expresses the essence of his group's work. It also exposes the constituency for which such a work is vital.

Even though *Mise au Jeu Montréal* started operating about 10 years ago under a different name, it is in the last five years or so that their work has focused on their present mandate. The company was organised by Luc Gaudet and others to facilitate popular education of the issues affecting citizens of Montréal. It was a loosely organised company with people from different linguistic communities; Francophone, Anglophone, and Allophone. In the early 1990s *Mise au Jeu Montréal* became an organisation with specific goals, membership and a budget. It was at this time that a partnership was forged with many groups of the urban social movement of Montréal.

*Mise au Jeu Montréal* is a non-profit entity. It has a membership of about fifty persons, as animator/actors, researchers, a set designer, a tech person, an office manager, and many volunteers who help organise events or participate as actors, and so on. It receives annual contributions principally from The Québec Employment Centre, Unemployment Canada, Peace and Development, The Québec Association of International Co-operation (AQOCI), and from the urban social groups and organisations which need their animation<sup>6</sup> services (Marcotte, 1996: 13-14).

*Mise au Jeu Montréal* offers an expertise in animation to social sectors who need to call on the participation of their members in response to problems which confront them. The general objectives are animation, training, research and creation. They promote the use of theatre techniques as tools of animation, and individual or group education, in order to create intervention. The most used techniques are derived from “the Theatre of the Oppressed,” particularly the technique of “Forum Theatre”. This technique is, nonetheless, complemented and some times transformed with other theatrical techniques found in Latin America and North American popular theatre such as collective creation. Forum Theatre is utilised because it facilitates a collective reflection on problems facing different groups. This method of theatre facilitates the participation of “audience/actors” in the search for solutions to their problems. “Forum Theatre” is a theatrical methodology developed by Augusto Boal (theoretician and theatre director from Brazil) within a theoretical perspective of “Theatre of the Oppressed” and put into practice in most third world countries and around the world. “Theatre forum” is a method that utilises a theatrical performance which involves the audience by inviting them to perform with the actors. They are asked to participate and search for solutions through the action on stage. Augusto Boal (1995: 122) lays down the basics of theatre of the oppressed as follows:

Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case, a “catharsis” occurs; in the second, an awakening of critical consciousness. But the poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (actor) either to act or to

think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonistic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans to change-- in short, trains himself for real action.

For some time *Mise au Jeu Montréal* has been working on a documentation centre and a collection of different animation techniques which will permit animators and social agents to have access to these resources. They are designing the tools for each individual group and then teaching them how to use them. Another of the group's objectives is the development of a network of cultural works and animators and popular educators. This is to facilitate the training in the area of cultural community action as a way of knowing and re-learning the power and possibility of such an approach.

During the last five years or so *Mise au Jeu Montréal* has worked with a number of urban social groups and other organisations. Among the groups they worked with last year were: Le Collectif de Défense des Droits de la Montérégie; Épilepsie-Montréal (Foundation for the defence of the rights of epileptics), Le Comité tripartite contre la violence dirigée à l'endroit des gais et lesbiennes (Committee against Violence against Gays and Lesbians), and Le Centre de ressources sur la non-violence (a centre dedicated against violence in general, such as the use of military force against civilians). The project with the foundation for the defence of the rights of epileptics, for example, was a co-ordinated effort. It was conducted in order to raise public awareness about resources and rights available to people with mental illnesses. The theatrical technique used was based on "theatre forum" which makes people aware through audience/actor participation. The foundation for the defence of the rights of epileptics provided the participants

(audience/actors) as well as the financing of the project. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* provided the research and the animation.

Let us go back now to the general meeting of the urban social groups of Montréal in April of 1996. It was during this meeting that the question of the relationship between the movement and *Mise au Jeu Montréal* came up. As a partner in the struggle for community action *Mise au Jeu Montréal* was invited by the organisers of the meeting (a committee representing each urban social group and, labour unions) to provide animation. For the occasion *Mise au Jeu Montréal* intervened with theatre by tackling a problem which was seen by the organisers as the main issue in their social and political struggle.

*Mise au Jeu Montréal* presented an interactive play about the history, evolution and problems facing the coalition of urban social groups comprising the social movement in Montréal. They include the welfare coalition, antipoverty movement, and some unions. The company used the medium they knew best to propose and solicit solutions to some of the problems facing the movement. They put together and performed a piece which was a combination of the history of the movement as a whole and problem-solving strategies through games.

Through this articulation, by means of various theatrical games and satire, they emphasised the need for unity among the different social groups. Organisation was the key, they believed. It became apparent that the theatrical response to the problem was expressed as the lack of unity and communication between the different organisations. A united front had to be prioritised, according to the theatre piece, against the neo-liberal

policies imposed by all levels of government. The need for co-operation and solidarity emerged as a theme throughout the entire performance.

In one of the sketches of the performance piece, the group depicted a race for resources such as money and government grants, by the different social action groups of the city. Many actors wore t-shirts with the names of different groups emblazoned on the front. At a distance was an actor costumed as a fat bureaucrat sitting on a mountain of cash. This was 1969. The actors began to literally race around the space trying to reach the “money man” first. They were racing against each other. The point was not lost on an audience of social action group members, and they realised that lack of unity is a worse enemy than government policies.

Year after year the urban social groups of Montréal are threatened with extinction as they face challenges with little support from society at large. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* is not an exemption from the rule; they also are threatened both as a group and as individuals living outside the sphere of power in Montréal. These two entities (the urban social groups present in the coalition and *Mise au Jeu Montréal*) have come together in the conjuncture of marginality (political, social etc.). The urban social movement utilises *Mise au Jeu Montréal* as a tool for communication, education and empowerment for their members, while *Mise au Jeu Montréal*'s raison d'être is to work with the members of the coalition or any other group from the community.

In the case of *Les Lois du Goulag* (to which this thesis is dedicated) that readiness was put to task while fighting back and responding to the challenges of oppression, and bureaucratic apathy facing human rights workers. The response to the problem was proposed not only when

presenting the final play to the targeted audience, but also by the process the members went through when learning and educating each other through the production of a play with society at large in mind.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use "urban social movement" (singular) to refer to the agglomeration of urban social groups which make up a coalition of urban social groups organized in Montréal.

<sup>2</sup> For example, when the Québec language law was being implemented, the head of the labor movement of Québec spoke out against the changing of language laws. He was concerned with the revival of the Québec economy, which was suffering. At the time of the language law revision (late 1970s), a nationalistic alignment no longer served their purpose. The nationalist ideology existed coincidentally within the membership but it was not invoked when it was not needed. As recently as 1996 the zealous tactics of the Office de la Langue Française (popular known as the Language Police) was severely criticized by a number of labor leaders.

<sup>3</sup> During the 1960s in which the urban social movements in Montréal were born, other North American urban social organizations were born out of similar social and political problems, (without Québec style nationalism) (Hamel, 1991: 102). In the Mission district of San Francisco, for example, the MCO (Mission Coalition Organization) appeared as a response to the threat of urban renewal in that neighborhood. (Castells, 1983: 304-305). In Montréal urban social groups appeared as response to similar challenges.

<sup>4</sup> "Une première conscientisation collective autour de la nature des enjeux urbains s'est effectuée au cours de cette période. Cela s'est réalisé à travers de conflits et des oppositions à des projet publics et privés de redeveloppement urbain de grande envergure: il y a eu des demandes de participation répétées du réveil des citoyens de la petite-Bourgogne à 'aménagement de leur quartier, affecté par un projet de démolition-rénovation, mais il faut se rappeler aussi la lutte du comité de citoyens de Milton-Parc contre le projet de développement immobilier résidentiel et commercial..." (Hamel 1991: 1060).

<sup>5</sup> A municipal party organized by some social movements.

<sup>6</sup> Animation is a theatrical tool utilized to educate and empower groups of people. It is a forum for discussion where ideas and solutions to problems of the community and social groups are discussed.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ACT ONE

#### “GIVING FORM TO” THE PERFORMANCE

It is this echo, then, of participatory reality that post-modern ethnography seeks to evoke by means of a participatory text in which no one has the exclusive right of synoptic transcendence. Because it is participatory and emergent, post-modern ethnography cannot have a predetermined form. Whatever form the text takes--if any--it will stress sonorant relativity, not only between the text and the community of discourse of which it is a part--the usual sense of ‘cultural relativity’--but within the text itself as a constitutive feature of the text (Tyler in Writing Culture 1986: 129).

As we discussed in chapter one, the evocation of this ethnography follows a multivocal, dialogical performative form but it tries to move away from “representational” (“realistic”) portrayals. In this act I will elicit the process of rehearsal “performance” that “gave form to” the insights about the particular cultural activity of a particular theatre of action production. I will attempt to accomplish this by writing the ethnography in small scripted scenes in the presentational theatre mode. Although this is not a “realistic” description of events of the process, the presentational scripted scenes call out what cannot be written or described. These scenes are designed to evoke the multivocality and the dialogical nature of the process of rehearsal. By moving away from trying to “represent”, one becomes less restricted to verbatim portrayals of events, and at the same time, the presentational mode reflects the political choices of the theatre of action (*Mise au Jeu*).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, my choice to write the ethnography in a “presentational” form is a conscious effort to work out the power relationships not only of the process of rehearsal itself but also of the process of writing up the ethnography. This form best reflects and gives voice to the subject of the inquiry. This process will include the mode and nuances which make the exercise less linear. Describing is always difficult because of the linearity of the descriptive devices (representational forms). Presenting through scripted scenes permits me to explore other “senses” (the physical environment, visual, audio and so on) which can be elicited by the openendedness of the presentational mode.

The author/actors and director/ animator did not come to rehearsal in a vacuum. They came to rehearsal bringing the emotional, political and social baggage of their daily lives to the process. Victoria’s frustration with bank machines (scripted scene # 2 ) spills over into her frustration with the interpretation of the written text (*Les Lois de Goulag*) within the process. She ended up resisting Luc’s directions and challenging the scripted lines she was given using the energy that was generated by her original frustration. The presence of Mayda’s baby due to lack of money for a sitter, proved both an addition and a distraction to the performance process. It created a solidarity within the group towards her plight. It also enhanced her power within the group, in that she came to rehearsals when she could and Luc almost never gave her criticism or any direction but tangential. These nuances can be explored and incorporated in the scripted scenes, and provoke images within them.

The writing in prose that follows some of the scenes is how I contextualize the voices, not of the scripted scenes themselves, but the act of self-reflection within the process and the choice of writing a presentational performative ethnography. The “why I am evoking the ethnography through scripted scenes”?

What is the knowledge that was “given form to” during the process that *Mise au Jeu Montréal* went through when coming up with a theatrical response to the issues requested by the FCDP? What are the negotiations? How do the protagonists of the ethnography resist power? How is marginality manifested? What does one learn about that cultural manifestation through this process?

“While the scope of anthropology lies beyond the retelling of local stories, these and the experimental grounding remain the foundation of anthropological knowledge” (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994: 10).

#### PERSONAE DRAMATIS:

Social actors, cultural actors, informants or participants, in order of appearance in this act:

- LUC:** He is a Québécois, in his late thirties, who has a very generous attitude towards life and people. He is director, coordinator, animator and social activist of the theatre group *Mise au Jeu Montréal*.
- ALBERTO (AL):** He is a Nicaraguan MA student, a researcher, and an actor, in his early thirties. He has two particular conflicting sides: Alberto one is sceptical, free thinking, and has an artistic internal bent. Alberto two is more down to earth; his is the voice of reason. Alberto with his two internal voices (ALBERTO ONE and ALBERTO TWO) speaks with one voice most of the time.
- VICTORIA:** She is a Spanish actress, who is mildly obsessive about theatre, and very concerned about her own talent. She has recently joined the troupe.

- PETER:** He is a Québécois, is originally from the Sherbrooke area, and now lives in Montréal. Peter is a good actor and a hard worker. He is a long time member of the troupe, and otherwise unemployed.
- MAYDA:** Mayda is an Armenian Québécoise, a vehement social activist, and an actress in the piece.
- AUDIENCE:** They are a particular kind of audience. One hundred and fifty delegates to a human rights conference from around the world. They are all aware of the human rights problematic, and they are enthusiastic about the presentation. They range in age from twenty to seventy years of age. They are the perfect audience, attentive, vociferous, not shy.
- PARTICIPANTS** Members of the audience.

Scene OneResearcher Makes Contact

IN THE MIDDLE OF A ROOM IN A COMMUNITY CENTRE IN OLD MONTRÉAL AL AND LUC GET TOGETHER TO DISCUSS A THEATRE RESEARCH PROJECT. IN THE OLD, HIGH CEILINGED ROOM THERE IS A TABLE, A SOFA, A SMALL COFFEE MAKER AND SOME PLANTS IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW. IT IS IN THE MIDDLE OF A HOT SUMMER AFTERNOON. LUC IS SITTING ON THE SOFA, AL ENTERS THE ROOM. HE GIVES LUC A HUG, BOTH SEEM HAPPY TO SEE EACH OTHER

**AL:** Hola Luc como estás?

**LUC:** I am fine, how are you, viens, sit here. *(Al sits down next to him.)*

**AL:** Caramba I haven't seen you for a long time, Were you out of town or something ?

**LUC:** No I have been here working hard, you know les travailles ici deviennent plus importants dans cet moment la d'incertitude

economique et politique. Pour nous, comme toujours, il y a plus de travaille a faire.

- AL: I understand, seems it's the same economic and political situation everywhere: not only in Québec but around the world. Hey hombre, don't even ask about Nicaragua.
- LUC: *(He smiles, shuffles some papers he had nearby)* Yes malhureusement, that is the way it is, but it really does mean more work for people like us *(he smiles with a seriousness in his face)*. We have many projects with community groups.
- AL: *(Al seizes the opportunity, and takes out a thesis proposal from a knapsack)* Talking about projects, I have a project that I want to discuss with you. *(He hands some pages to Luc)* I would like to join your company, well not permanently.... I'd like to do this project with you guys. Hmm. You see I'm interested in studying Mise au Jeu and like, maybe.....
- LUC: *(with an attitude of surprise and pleasure)* Qu'est ce que tu veut faire, tu vas jouer avec nous aussi?
- AL: Well, I wouldn't mind acting again...but my main interest is to participate as a researcher in one of your theatre projects. Maybe you could let me work with you on some project right from the start. Like through rehearsals all the way until it's put on. What do you say?
- LUC: *(Reflective)* Creo que es posible, You would need to meet the rest of the people in the group.
- AL: When do you meet, how often?
- LUC: Right here, every Tuesday at 9:30 in the morning. Are you going to be in town next Tuesday? I could introduce you to the rest of the group.
- AL: I'll be right here in Montréal!
- LUC: What about attending one of our meetings?
- AL: Perfecto, aqui' estare' entonces el martes.

LUC:           *(Al gives Luc another hug and walks to the door)*  
 Okay be here. Hold it, before you go, tell me, I am curious... why  
 Québec? Montréal? Why *Mise au Jeu Montréal*? You could have done it in  
 Ontario. Tell me, what do you intend to do?

AL:           *(Jokingly.)* Mañana. I will tell you tomorrow!

#### END OF SCENE

As Elin Diamond (1996: 4) writes: “to study performance is not to focus on completed forms, but to become aware of performance itself as contested space, where meanings, and desires are generated, occluded, and of course, multiply interpreted” This scene does not yet establish the parameters of the entire process (performative ethnography) produced in a contested space; however it introduces the ethnographic story; and the scenes to come: The parameters of the relationship which will become clear and develops among researcher and the rest of the members of the group. In this scene it is apparent that the characters (Luc and I) come to the process with two different desires. These desires meet somewhere in the conversation.

Some weeks later I met the rest of the group. Luc did read my proposal and invited me to join the group. He was excited about my working with him; we have known each other for more than seven years and, after all, I had done some theatre of action before. However, during this period of organising the research I worried about doing this with *Mise au Jeu Montréal* and Luc. I worried about the prospect of forfeiting “objectivity” because of my friendship with Luc. At first I was a little apprehensive about the reaction of the rest of the group to my presence in their space. “Maybe they won’t like

me,” I thought, “after all who am I to come and study them?” Even though this was a normal phase in the process of identifying the “target group,” I could not help going through a period of anxiety. For example, I asked myself if it was the right choice to write an ethnography of a subject I am too close to.

Meeting the group was not difficult at all. I came to one of their weekly meetings where all of them, secretaries, researchers, actors, animators and the director, assess the week’s work or tasks.

At the first meeting I attended, there were about twelve people, I was introduced at the beginning of the session as a friend of Luc’s, as a theatre worker, as a Nicaraguan, and as a researcher. It was my intention I told them, to work with them in order for me to get to know their work and write an anthropological thesis on theatre of action in Montréal. They found the possibility very interesting and offered to help me in any way.

After a few months I discovered that the membership was changing. I could not follow a particular member of the group because I did not know if that person would be around for the next project. This constant renewing of the membership had a lot to do with the background of the members. They did not only work with and for the disenfranchised communities in Québec and Montréal society, but were actually part of these communities as well. The nature of the theatre work of *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, consisted of dividing the group into different tasks: artistic, logistic, and research. There are always different teams, most of the time two or three, working on different plays about different themes during the same time of the year. I decided after spending a few months

going to and following different performances, that my research should concentrate in one project alone. From that moment on the research focused on a theatre play that was just being conceived. The play had recently been commissioned by the (FCDP) Fédération Canadienne des Droits de la Personne. The rest of the theatre projects of the group were in mid-process, they were already being performed in public, or were being rehearsed. The play about human rights, commissioned by FCDP (The Canadian Federation of Human Rights), was still in the process of negotiation between the theatre group and the organisation.

I spent a few months following the process of creating and producing *Les Lois du Goulag*. When Luc needed someone who could speak French, English and one other language, and who had some idea of “presentational performance” as in street theatre, political theatre or improvised theatre, he invited me to be an actor in this work. I considered the fact that I was an actor in the play, and my role as a participant observer as an important aspect of my insight into the process.



Scene Two First Day of Rehearsal: The "Script" of The Play is Introduced

IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM THERE IS A TABLE WITH SCRIPTS, PENCILS, WATER BOTTLES, ETC.. AT *MISE AU JEU MONTRÉAL*'S REHEARSAL SPACE IN OLD MONTRÉAL LUC IS ABOUT TO PRESENT THE TENTATIVE SCRIPT TO THE REST OF THE FIVE MEMBER TEAM WHICH WILL WORK ON THE PLAY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS. IT IS LUNCH HOUR, LUC AND AL ARE LEFT SITTING AT THE WORK TABLE WHILE THE REST OF THE TROUPE IS MOVING ABOUT IN AND OUT OF THE REHEARSAL SPACE. PETER IS PRACTISING SOMETHING, ONE OF HIS CHARACTERS, OR HIS LINES, AND THEN HE GOES TO THE PHONE TO MAKE AN IMPORTANT PHONE CALL TO AN UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE. VICTORIA EXITS THE ROOM FOR A WHILE, AND MAYDA IS IN THE NEXT ROOM TAKING CARE OF HER ONE YEAR OLD CHILD.

WE HEAR THE CRY OF A BABY AND MAYDA TRYING TO CALM HER DOWN OFF STAGE. THE CRYING DECREASES LITTLE BY LITTLE UNTIL IT CAN NOT BE HEARD ANY MORE.

AL:           *(Who knows Luc is really broke)* Luc, Est-ce que vous avez besoin d'un lunch?

LUC:           *(Al offers Luc some smoked meat sandwich, a soda drink and some fruit).* Oui.

AL:           Tell me Luc, how did you end up with this script? I thought we all would be involved in writing it.

LUC:           Well, usually we all , the team, participate in the creation of the tentative script, but this time I had to do it alone. We don't have enough time. You see the main event is in less than two months.

AL: I see, so then, did you meet with the FCDP and come up with this script?

LUC: I met with members of the Foundation once, and on that occasion, filmed their discussion on the problem of human rights abuses around the world, you know, bureaucratic problems of the organisation and so on. They told us stories of the problems as well as providing us with documentation.

AL: How long did it take to write it? It seems as though you didn't have time to do much research.

LUC: *(Looking a bit concerned. He breathes deeply)* As you'll see later on in the rehearsals, this is a blueprint script, not the final one. It took two weeks to write. I worked for two weeks and this is the script. Now we are all going to work on it together. *(Changing tone)* Can I tell you something?

AL: *(With intrigue)* Yes. What's up?

LUC: The other night when I was writing the play, I was trying to come up with a title. I was feeling a little bit down and overworked. So...

AL: Yes.

LUC: So I decided to turn on the radio and there it was. *(Laughing and amazed)* There was an interview of a Russian writer on radio. The writer was talking about the years he spent in the Goulag in Russia and how that affected his way of looking at the world. Voilà, the title of the play was right there. "*Les Lois Du Goulag.*" He talked about survival. He said "in order to survive you must remember three things: Don't trust anyone, don't get angry, and don't ask anything from anybody above you"

AL: Amazing. I always believe that everything is connected to everything else. *(Changing the tone of his voice to a more reflective one, He takes the script and looks at it)* But a blueprint script and only a few days to rehearse. Aren't you worried about... I don't know, drawing the characters too...big?

LUC: No, it'll be ok. You'll see what's most important to us is that this play is easy for the audience/actors to participate in. It can't be that complicated. You'll see.

VICTORIA: *(She enters bearing fruit, some drinks and sandwiches. She looks frustrated and unhappy. She puts her goods on the table and takes off her glasses.)* Hi there, did you know that those bank machines didn't want to give me any money. O la.

AL: *(In a joking tone, trying to make her feel better.)* Come on. Maybe you didn't have any money in your account, machines don't usually give money to people without it.

VICTORIA: *(A little bit more relaxed)* Of course I had some money, I have at least 30 dollars in the bank. Well I thought I did. *(She laughs)*

LUC: Sorry about that Victoria. Should we start the reading?

MAYDA, AND PETER JOIN THEM AT THE READING TABLE. THE BLUEPRINT OF SCRIPT IS READ.

THE PLAY: *Les Lois du Goulag*  
*(As it was presented to us by Luc)*

NE FAIS CONFIANCE À PERSONNE, NE TE FACHE PAS ET NE  
 DEMANDE JAMAIS RIEN! DÉMOCRATIE, ENVIRONNEMENT,  
 DÉVELOPPEMENT LA CITOYENNETÉ AU RISQUE  
 DE L'INDUSTRIE

L'intervention commence sur des coups de tambour. Les articles sur les droits à la différence et sur les droits des peuples à l'auto-détermination sont récités

en Français, Anglais et Espagnol de façon monocorde et... monotone sur fond sonore rythmé par les percussions d'un tam tam.

PETER: Tous les êtres humain naissent libres et égaux en dignité et en droit.

VICTORIA: All are equal before the law and are entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law.

ALBERTO: Todo el mundo tiene derecho a participar en el gobierno de su país, directamente o por la vía de la representación.

*Trois personnages lisent, écoutent, écrivent, réfléchissent sur scène durant cette nomenclature.*

*Introduction et réchauffement Objectifs: 1. Introduire les principes de l'éducation populaire. 2. Présenter les personnages de l'histoire. 3. Détendre et réchauffer l'atmosphère (et les spectateurs)*

***(These are Luc's objectives, and obviously the FCDP's as well, as they appeared in the original script)***

Personnages:

A: Victoria (Silvia de l'Europe de l'est)  
 B: Peter (Francophone)  
 C: Alberto (Latino-Américain)  
 D: Mayda  
 M: Musicien(ne) ( A duo of drummers was invited)  
 MJ: Meneur de jeu (Luc played this character)

A: Big deal!

B: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?

A: It's quite nice to state that all people have rights to this and that. But how do we implement this in the real world?

*Troisième participant, Latino-américain, arrive tout animé. Cet exercice sert d'échauffement des participant (es) dans la salle.*

C: Buenas, como estan, Que pasa? No tienen animo?.

*(Trouver l' expression locale qui veut dire que vous n'avez pas bonne mine...)* You should move a little bit. Shake it up! Bougez! Vous êtes trop dans la caboche! Saben, en mi pais cuando la gente se encuentra cansada o desesperada, para despertarles usamos dinamicas!

- A: What do you mean by dinamicas?
- B: Il veut dire que dans son pays, quand ça va mal, ils utilisent de la dynamite! ( *en se moquant de A* )
- C: Mas o menos...dinamicas are sort of activities which often make traditional educators uncomfortable ( *en référant à A* ),they generally involve moving around, expressing ourselves in different ways and taking initiative to solve problems.
- B: Nous faisons aussi ce genre d'activités de dynamique de groupe pour permettre aux gens de briser les barrières et pour les préparer à travailler ensemble.
- A: I would never imagine myself dancing in front of my colleagues to start a discussion on human rights...
- B et C: Why not?
- C: Porque no lo hacemos!
- A: Right now?
- B: Right away!  
...Chers amis de tous pays,
- A: People of the world,
- C: Compañeros y compañeras:
- B: Bonsoir
- A: Good evening
- C: Buenas noches ( tardes)

D: *(Bonsoir en Syrien ou en Arménien)*

T: *(Bonsoir en langue slave)*

***(In the actual performance, the following speech gets improvised but with more or less the same content)***

MJ: Nous sommes des travailleurs culturels, animateurs et comédiens membres de *Mise au Jeu Montréal*, un groupe de théâtre populaire basé ici, sur l'île de Montréal, et nous sommes heureux d'être parmi vous ce soir. On the invitation of the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, we would like tonight to demonstrate how we often use theatre as a means of sensitisation on various community issues. We have prepared three short skits that we would like to present to you to see if they correspond to defenders/educators.

*Mot citant les objectifs et le programme de la soirée. Introduction de l'exercice du droit à la dissidence et à la différence. Incorporant un peu de théâtre.*

*La musique du tam tam rythmera le tout tant pour le réchauffement **(The actors are expected to invite the audience to dance to the rhythm of drums)** que pour le théâtre forum non-verbal.*

#### *Non-verbal forum*

*It is non-verbal and utilises movements and action. Five actors enter, wearing black uniforms. The five characters look like policemen or some type of government agents. They do a march in which they show their inclination for uniformity. They march in a diagonal line moving their hands and feet at the same time. Besides wearing black attire, they also sport baseball caps, all the same colour.*

*One of the characters commences to deviate from the norm during one of the marches. The character starts to dance leaving the group behind. The character takes off the baseball cap and puts on a beautiful hat and wears a nice scarf. The chief of the group becomes irritated by the action and with another agent or policemen comes back to the centre of the stage and tries to force the deviant to conform to the march. They put the cap back on the character and force her/him to march in uniform.. They succeed for a while, but after a few seconds, she/he continues with her/his idiosyncratic dance. This time the agents are not amused and comeback very angry. They plan to use even more force. The skit ends.*

## PLAY SCENE TWO

*Le droit des minorités nationales.*

- A: Ok, I agree, that was fun but it doesn't solve our problem....
- B: Non, tu as raison, ça ne règle pas nos problèmes. Mais ne trouves-tu pas que ce soit lié en quelque sorte aux problèmes de droits que vous vivez dans votre pays?
- A: Nos problèmes?...La prise de conscience et l'action collective fait de moins en moins partie des valeurs de la population en Europe de l'est. (*This was changed to English*) Depuis l'avènement de la "démocratie", rien n'a changé véritablement. La liberté a été établie au niveau de la parole mais pas dans la conduite des gens.
- C: Entiendo.
- A: Tenemos muchos problemas. People are apathetic, their energy is geared to their individual survival and not for social change.
- C: Es la misma cosa en mi país. Lots of people are resourceless, without land, without sufficient food, without a shelter often. With the inaction of government, cynicism is winning over the faith for change.
- A: In Eastern Europe, Chaos is winning! Nobody is really in control. There is no adequate structure. (A B:) Il n'y a plus d'ordre social. La criminalité et l'opportunisme gagnent. Souvent, les minorités ethniques deviennent des "scapegoats..."
- B: Spaceghosts
- C: No scapegoats (*emphasis*)
- B: Ah! Des boucs-émissaires.
- A: In my country, for example, there are two classes of people: citizens and non-citizens.

*Les tams tams se font entendre de nouveau. Des articles de la convention pour la protection des minorités nationales se font entendre.*

### **Mutual fear-suspicion and alienation.**

Objectifs: Faire ressortir les problèmes reliés au statut des nouveaux groupes minoritaires depuis la "chute" de l'empire soviétique.

Personnage:

C joue X: *"Autrophone" faisant maintenant partie d'un groupe ethnique minoritaire. Il cherche à faire reconnaître son organisation comme représentative de la communauté ROMA. Il devrait soumettre ses dossiers aux autorités pour rechercher l'approbation. Il serait prêt à changer de nom pour s'intégrer davantage dans le système étatique.*

A joue EE: *Employée de l'état, parle avec un constant sourire. Pour arriver à la fin du mois, elle vend des cigarettes sur le marché noir. Elle entretient des propos assez racistes envers les Romas (Bohémiens).*

B joue CM: *Citoyen moyen faisant partie de la majorité ethnoculturelle du nouveau pays, ne proteste par contre les actions de l'autorité.*

D joue CX: *Citoyenne exclue de type bohémien qui tient à vivre dans la rue. Désillusionnée et très cynique par rapport à la possibilité de changer les choses. Elle règle les choses à sa manière, avec ses propres règles de survie.*

*La scène commence sur des chants de type bulgares.*

EE: (Victoria) *(EE arrive dans la salle (derrière ses verres fumés) en tentant de vendre discrètement aux spectateur des cigarettes.) Cigarettes! Cigarettes! (Trouver l'équivalent en Bulgare) You want to buy cigarettes? Cigarettes à vendre.*

CX: (Mayda) *(Marche de son côté de la salle avec son enfant dans les bras en demandant de l'argent dans une langue incompréhensible à la majorité des gens; pourrait être en Arménien)*



EE: (Victoria) Go away! Si vous ne voulez rien acheter, je n'ai rien à voir avec vous!

CX: (Mayda) Ravisna glaimé. *(Elle continue les explications en insistant sur les besoins de l'enfant)*. Amra it kliné, rouhtsta kal barin. Barin roushtakal. Barin roushta!

EE: (Victoria) Mais laissez-moi tranquille, vous me retardez... Je n'ai rien pour vous. Cigarettes!

CX: (Mayda) *(Insiste de plus belle en laissant son enfant au sol devant la vendeuse au marché noir. Khra Barin roushkatal!)*

EE: (Victoria) *(Frustrée, lui lance sans la regarder une cigarette et se défile au pas rapide plus loin dans la salle)*.

X: (Alberto) *(Entre en scène. Il a le sentiment de ne pas avoir accès à la direction du pays. Il tente de changer sa situation et celle de ses semblables. Pour se faire reconnaître comme représentant légal, il doit faire enregistrer son organisation officiellement auprès de l'Etat. Il s'exprime en français du mieux qu'il peut)*.

Eh prima *(ou cousine en Espagnol)*! Que haces aqui?

CX: (Mayda) Hermal.. Eh, ce que tu es beau, tu te bulgarises ou quoi?

X: (Alberto) *Lui montrant le projet*: It is done! The project of the organization to defend our rights is ready. I am bringing it so that we become finally official-legal.

CX: (Mayda) .!Sueñas primo! You think they will allow you to become like them?

X: (Alberto) I don't want to become like them! What I want is that we be recognised as we are...J'aurais besoin de signatures de gens comme toi qui pourraient bénéficier de l'organisation pour appuyer la demande.

CX: (Mayda) My signature *(rires)*. You're funny! On n'écrit pas mon nom, on le crie seulement *(elle crie avec mépris)* Puta madre. Non, tu perds ton temps primo. À la prison, pour survivre, j'ai appris les règles que je sais qu'il faut suivre ici aussi: Ne fais confiance à personne,

ne te fâche pas et ne demande jamais rien à celui qui est en haut de toi! Ça ne servira à rien ton projet...

*(Elle s'éloigne, résignée dans son refus de participer)*

X: (Alberto) Esmeralda, don't let me down?

*(Musique d'une complainte de "Plain chant") X revient sur scène. Il attend, surpris que le bureau ne soit pas encore ouvert.*

EE: (Victoria)*(Arrive en trombe sans cigarettes).*

X: (Alberto) Le bureau ne devait pas réouvrir à 13 heures?

EE: (Victoria)Je serais arrivée à l'heure, monsieur, si je n'avais pas été harcelée sur ma route par cette bande de nomades paresseux et irresponsables qui se servent de leurs enfants pour faire l'aumône. C'est odieux!

X: (Alberto) Ces gens que vous décrivez sont des Romas n'est-ce pas?

EE:(Victoria) Le regardant d'un air dérangé. Bien sûr des Romas, qui d'autre?

X: (Alberto) The Romas are members of my community. I am coming to register a legal organisation to ...help them.

EE: (Victoria)Vraiment! Vous croyez vraiment que ces gens ont envie de faire quelque chose pour se sortir de leur...merdier? Les parents n'envoient pas leurs enfants à l'école. Au contraire, ils les encouragent à vagabonder dans la rue. The Romas don't want to integrate...They prefer to disintegrate!

X: (Alberto) My organisation wants to make sure that things change. If we give the Romas a chance, the Romas can get involved.

EE: (Victoria)Votre organisation est à caractère politique?

X: (Alberto) What do you mean it is political?

EE: (Victoria)Oh vous avez le droit, c'est juste que ce n'est pas de notre ressort. Ici nous n'enregistrons que des organisations selon la loi sur les

personnes et la famille. *(Lisant son formulaire)* Votre organisation tiendra des activités sociales, culturelles ou éducatives?

X: (Alberto) Social, euh,...cultural, no educational...ya educational.

EE: (Victoria) Comment comptez-vous vous financer? Ne comptez pas sur l'appui financier de l'État. Dans l'état où sont les choses,...je reçois moi-même à peine de quoi payer mon loyer avec mon salaire. Vous remplissez ce formulaire et vous nous le rapportez signé.

*Entre CM (Peter) pour venir livrer le journal à son amie EE (Victoria).*

CM: (Peter) Bonjour Silvia!

EE: (Victoria) Ah! Ivan! *(Avec hypocrisie)* Quel bon vent vous amène?

CM: (Peter) Je viens vous apporter les dernières nouvelles! *(Il cache dans un sac un paquet de cigarettes de contrebande qu'il lui remet discrètement sous le journal)*

EE: (Victoria) Bonnes, j'espère. *(elle lui remet des \$ en cachette pour payer sa cargaison)*

CM: (Peter) Le gouvernement annonce qu'il passe un décret pour créer un Conseil National sur les Problématiques Sociales et Démographiques..

EE: (Victoria) Oui je sais, nous avons été informés de cela.

X: (Alberto) Excusez-moi?

EE: (Victoria) Only well established national organizations can apply for this. Votre petit groupe ne sera pas admissible à se présenter sur ce Conseil...

CM: (Peter) *(À EE)* Qui est-ce?

EE: (Victoria) Un autre de ces Romas qui veut changer le monde.

X: (Alberto) Excuse me...I would also like to make a request to restore my original name.

EE: (Victoria) Vous voulez changer votre nom? Pourquoi? Boris c'est joli!  
(*Ironique*) Vous n'aimez pas?!

X: (Alberto) You know that during the communist regime we were forced to change our names. That's what my parents did for me. I would like to restore my original name so that my children be aware of their cultural heritage.

EE: (Victoria) Vous savez que ce sont là des procédures qui vont prendre du temps. Si j'étais à votre place, je ne perdrais pas mon temps avec cela. Pour que votre demande d'enregistrement soit valide, vous devez obtenir les signatures d'appui des gens de votre communauté. ...Si jamais ils savent écrire!

D: (Mayda) *En voix off*: Ne fais confiance à personne, ne te fâche pas et ne demande jamais rien... *Musique d'une plainte*.

A: (Victoria) *En contrant C*) Don't trust anyone, don't get mad and never ask anything...

### **PLAY SCENE THREE**

#### **la démocratisation à l'intérieur des ONG (NGO'S)**

*Scène principalement jouée en anglais.*

*Objectifs*: Aborder les contradictions organisationnelles entre les méthodes de fonctionnement interne de l'organisation de défense de droits et les principes généraux qu'elle défend (leadership non partagé, partage de la formation, répartition des tâches, etc.)

Personnages:

B: (Peter) ED: Executive director of the organization

D: (Mayda) Cns: Counsellor/conseillère

C: (Alberto) TH: Téléphone horloge

A: (Victoria) S: Stagiaire ( apprenti)

S: (Victoria) Cigarrillos! Cigarrillos for sale!

Cns: (Mayda) (*Trouve quelqu'un qui pourrait être sa mère parmi les spectateurs et lui laisse son enfant*). Inà? Inà! Salamat thank you mother for taking good care of her. She had a rough night. Her teeth. I should

come back at noon after the meeting! Ouh uli. I'm late! I must go now! Bye bye! (*Court sur scène avec son sac à l'épaule*)

TH: (Alberto) (*Sur scène au bureau*) 8:45

ED: (Peter) (*Préparant l'agenda au mur de la salle de réunion et faisant les cent pas*). They're late! Never there when they say they are going to...

(*Cns (Mayda) and S (Victoria) arrivent ensemble en courant*)

TH: (Alberto) 9:45

Cns: (Mayda)Hi Ricky!

ED: (Peter) Mr. Bélair!

Cns: (Mayda)God!

ED: (Peter) I told you not to call me by my first name in front of our apprenti.

Cns: (Mayda)Bien le bonjour monsieur Richard! Vous avez bien dormi?

ED: (Peter) You're both late for the meeting. It's not that way we will become very efficient in our work. Where is Karl?

S: (Victoria) (*Unease*) You were not here, he told me last night he was not going to be able to make it this morning, he had to go out of town for the cordillera people training program.

TH: (Alberto) Dring! Dring!

ED: (Peter) MNOPQRST good day! (*Sec puis tres subitement cordial*) Good morning Ruth! Yes of course, good evening for you... Yes, ah, ah, yes, ah ah, yes, yes, yes,...

TH: (Alberto) 10:30

ED: (Peter) ...ah ah, yes, yes, yes of course! I will be there. Yes I will check for the dates. Yes, ah ah...My pleasure! See you soon!

I'm sorry ...it was a long distance call! You have all read the agenda? 1. Reorganisation of workload. 2. Documentation centre 3. Varia: (il ajoute) invitation to Canada. Other point to the agenda?

S: (Victoria) ...La basura! Garbage! I am always the one cleaning up and who is taking responsibility to empty the garbage.

ED: (Peter) Yes of course...we'll talk about it if we have time...(*Il ne rajoute pas sur l'agenda par écrit*) Approved?

TH: (Alberto) 11:00

ED: (Peter) So since the grant is not coming in as it was supposed to, we will have to cut Karl's allowance.  
Point 2. Now.

Cns: (Mayda)"Excusez-moi Monsieur le Directeur Exécutif" This is it? This is how you announce the situation. How will we be able to pursue our Mission?

ED: (Peter) Everything had to be decided rapidly. There is no possibility to reverse the decision. I consulted the board members and they also felt that the creation of a documentation centre is becoming crucial to our organization.

Cns: (Mayda)A documentation centre? Who will take charge of this? We are all already overwhelmed by our domestic workload? (*Showing an old roll of paper left on the side of the wall*) Our mission states that we are an educational body for the community at the base Rick...

ED: (Peter) Mrs. Rhoda Buenavista, may I remind you for the last time to call me Mr. Bélair. It has become too familiar in this office. Things have to change from now on. ...Since we are talking about the documentation centre, we will move on to the next item on the agenda.

TH: (Alberto) 11:30

Cns: (Mayda)*zombied out, speechless.*

ED: (Peter) ...if we want to get out of the financial hole we're being put in... So I'm glad to see that you agree to move on with the project. I have already prepared the submission for the London NGO, if we get it,

it will revamp our image internationally you'll see! I am sure Lima will make a good settler for this project.

S: (Victoria) I was not really expecting this, I'm a little surprised by the announcement...

ED: (Peter) The promotion!

TH: (Alberto) 12:15 DRING! DRING! *The answering machine goes on non-verbally.*

*We begin to hear the drums of the beginning again. Fade in crescendo until end.*

S: (Victoria) It might be Karl, he said he would phone to check in how it goes...

ED: (Peter) *(Interrupts)* It might be somebody else too. Leave it for now...*(looking at Rhoda-Cns)* We started late!

Cns: (Mayda)Inà! My daughter... I must leave.

ED: (Peter) Since there is not much time left, we will pass the varia item. *(Looking on the board)* I was invited to Canada for an international training seminar on Human Rights. I just want to inform you that I will be gone for a month in June. ...I can count on Rhoda to run the office chores for that period of time? *(Avec un sourire faux)* Thank you it was a great meeting! Adjournment! *(Il s'essuit le front avec son mouchoir)*

Cns: (Mayda)I must leave. *(She leaves zombied out, she can't listen anymore)*

*Nous voyons les acteurs reprendre la position du début de lecture, d'écoute, d'écriture sur fond musical intense des tambours. Sans parole cette fois.*

MJ: (Luc) C'est ici que nous arrêtons l'histoire avant que ça ne s'empire. We'll stop here before it worsens. Our friends evidently need to be cheered up. ...Validation des histoires, demande aux spectateurs s'ils entrevoient la possibilité d'agir autrement pour changer les situations... Dans quelle histoire, faire un choix de priorité. Explication des étapes pour effectuer le forum sur une ou sur deux dernières histoires.

END OF READING

LUC:           *(With expectation)*.So what do you think?

PETER:        It's a good start. Je pense que ça marche.

MAYDA:       *(Calm and determined)* That's fine. Now the work starts.

MAYDA AND VICTORIA LOOK AT EACH OTHER, AS THOUGH REFLECTING ON THE CONTENT OF THE SCRIPT. AL IS A BIT CONFUSED.

AL:            I don't understand a lot of what is going on in here, but I believe it'll come to me.

VICTORIA:     *(She shows signs of disappointment, but she never says it directly, she only hints that the script is inadequate)* It seems a bit confusing to me, there's no clear story, but I guess this is not the definitive script.

LUC:           That's right, this is just to start.

VICTORIA:     So let's get to it. There is no time to waste.

MAYDA:       *(Takes her baby and walks to the door)* I'll be back in a second.

PETER:        I also need to do something. I'll be back.

LUC:           Don't. Mayda will be right back.

VICTORIA:     What kind of costumes do you have in mind for my character...  
*(Worried)* Do we have any lighting?

MAYDA:       *(Who is back)* School teacherish *(She smiles indicating the mindlessness of the question)*



VICTORIA: Luc, I need to go, it's late.

LUC: Ok. (*Smiles*) Let's call it quits for today.<sup>2</sup>

EVERYBODY WALKS OUT FEELING UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE SCRIPT.

END OF SCENE

My scene tries to evoke the contested "space" of the rehearsal process in the social context of its actors. It demonstrates how the meanings and desires of the actors "dialogue and interact." Luc's position, for example, as animator/director created a rhythm and pattern, to make of the actors useful animator/tools for the FCDP. He had a mandate from the FCDP. The scene also elicits the other members' voices and desires in the process. It was not only a dialogue between experience and innocence with respect to this kind of theatre (Luc, Peter and Mayda have already done a lot of this kind of theatrical intervention), but also an expression of the social situations of the members.

For Luc, the physical work with a minimalist script (a blueprint of a "standard playscript") was more important than the concerns Victoria and I had about what we thought was a "poorly written script." He was experienced, had been doing it for more than 15 years, not only in Montréal, but in Honduras, The Philippines and Indonesia. His ultimate aim was a play which would affect the participants or the target audience. Besides, Luc also had in mind pleasing the organisation which was requesting the project. The FCDP was financing the project so he had to pay attention to their way of looking at the problem and somehow blend it in with the rehearsals of "*Les Lois de Goulag*."

Mayda and Peter were not concerned about a minimalist play script, not only because of their experience in that type of intervention, but to them there were other more pressing issues in their lives. Their concerns were grounded in more personal issues. Mayda's baby crying in the middle of the rehearsal is an indication of what was going on in her life. She had brought her baby to rehearsal for a number of reasons, one of them being the lack of affordable day care for poor families. This happens not only in Montréal, but the incident of unemployment and lack of day care is very high in this city.

Peter came to the rehearsal in the midst of looking for a job. For him that was what he was most worried about at that particular moment. This situation did not seem to interfere with his concentration as an actor while rehearsing lines or discussing possibilities for the play. However he left the room very often to make telephone calls to possible employers, which created a break in the rhythm of the rehearsal and affected the concentration of the rest of us.

Victoria's concern (which she expressed to me many times) was that the text did not give her a subtext, or psychological underpinnings from which to build her characters. That was expressed by demanding attention, asking many questions, some of which had obvious answers. She was deflecting the concentration of the group but seemed oblivious of it. Her frustration with bank machines, and her obvious lack of money, spilled over into the rehearsal. Victoria wanted to act and experience a new type of theatre she had not done before. She had several trepidation about the kind of theatre we were doing, but she did not say anything in public. She told me in private that we needed to have extra

rehearsal time outside the group, which she and I had. She felt that Luc was lacking directorial skills. She could not make a leap of imagination to the performance until the end. She called for tremendous amounts of attention; that was the way she resisted the imposition of a type of theatrical experience she was not familiar with.

When I looked at the text I thought that a script such as this would hinder a good outcome, aesthetically at the very least. The written scripted discourse used was not good, in the sense that nobody uses this language in spoken discourse. When we read the script the characters did not sound like people talk when they dialogue in social situations. The play seemed as though it was taken straight out of written text. I was concerned with my own situation, which was writing a performative ethnography of the experience. I was pulled between my particular situation as an engaged actor as well as with my main purpose in being there, the ethnographic story. I went home trying to make sense of what I had just experienced.

In the process of ethnographic writings most of the experience one relates to the reader comes from the writer/ethnographer. A lot of what went on in the process of this research was filtered through my own reflective thinking. In this next scene Alberto one and Alberto two enact an evaluation of what it meant to the researcher (through the interaction of both Albertos) at this point in the research process. The scene elicits my own contribution, the social, emotional, political, cultural and intellectual struggles that I bring to the process.

Scene Three Actor/Researcher Dichotomy: Al One and Al Two Meet.

DAYS AFTER THE FIRST READING. IN HIS STUDY, THE RESEARCHER IS SITTING ON A SOFA BED IN FRONT OF A PILE OF BOOKS ON THEATRE, PERFORMANCE, PHILOSOPHY, LITERARY CRITICISM, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND HISTORY. THE ROOM IS SMALL BUT COMFORTABLE, THERE ARE PLANTS HANGING FROM THE CEILING, SITTING ON THE FLOOR, DESKS AND BOOKSHELVES. THERE IS COMPLETE SILENCE IN THE ROOM. IT IS MIDNIGHT AND THE RESEARCHER CANNOT CONCENTRATE, HE CANNOT DO HIS READING, BUT NEITHER CAN HE SLEEP. HE REPOSES HIS HEAD ON A PILLOW AND THINKS OF ANYTHING BUT THE RESEARCH.

AL ONE:       *(He comes into the study and speaks in a loud voice)*  
Hi! I thought I would come and talk.

AL TWO:       *(Annoyed)* Be quiet you're going to wake up the neighbours. I can't concentrate right now I can't sleep either. Go away.

AL ONE:       *(Now whispering)* I wanted to know what you're feeling about the script we read today.

AL TWO:       Why do you ask me? Aren't you the actor? You should know about those things. Of course I have an opinion. I believe that it's too early to say anything about it. I am interested in the process. But it's too early to judge.

AL ONE:       Early or not I think it'll be difficult to give shape to that script. I think it would be better to improvise everything. It's going to be a poor play, there is not enough time, and the script.. oh boy. I don't know what to say about that.

AL TWO:       Something constructive, maybe? Look, Luc, Mayda and Peter seem to be Okay with it. I think you should think about Luc's position. Luc believes that these types of "scripts" work in terms of the main aim of the projects. You know, "animate," "actors of change" and "audience".

AL ONE:       Maybe we could just, I don't know, workshop it?

- AL TWO: The whole process is a workshop isn't it?
- AL ONE: Yes that's true, it's all about process.
- AL TWO: You just have to stop worrying about what you look like as an actor and think about what Luc is trying to accomplish.
- AL ONE: Right, Luc's method has worked in the past, I don't deny it. But what bothers me is the aesthetic part. It's impossible to do a decent acting job with this "script".
- AL TWO: You didn't come to the group to do acting jobs. That's not your main concern. Do you understand what I'm talking about? What does the quality of the script or whatever have to do with the outcome of this research? Remember process.
- AL ONE: My friend, everything is connected, you'll see, aesthetics, process, my part, even what's her name?
- AL TWO: Want my opinion? Don't get too involved; our mission, or should I say my mission, is to write a performative ethnography. I'm more interested in the "what" not the "how" and the "why" they do it. Do you understand? If you're concerned about acting and outcomes you go audition for movies.
- AL ONE: Don't you have something to say about the content? This play is supposed to address human rights, it's about subjugation and oppression. We've experienced discrimination, haven't we? Don't you feel something when we discuss oppression? Are you made of stone? Do I have to remind you?
- AL TWO: (*Excited*) I understand your concern, I'll talk about "oppression" when I think it's necessary.
- AL ONE: Hey, hey relax. Sure you will. Remember one thing: no matter how different we are we're still just the voices of the researcher at the moment. Whether you like it or not we are One. (*In a louder voice*) We are One.
- AL TWO: You exist just to complicate my life. It was confusing enough the way it was before you came to talk about acting, and scripts. Please just go back to wherever you came from and be quiet.
- AL ONE: You're asking too much. I can't do that. I have to bother you, it's my job. See you later.

THE RESEARCHER COMES BACK TO HIS PREVIOUS STATE OF MIND  
UNABLE TO WRITE UNABLE TO SLEEP. HE STANDS AND WALKS TO THE  
DESK WHERE HE PLAYS THE RADIO. A BASEBALL GAME BETWEEN THE  
EXPOS AND THE BRAVES IS PLAYING.

END OF SCENE

This scene gives an example of the process of reflective thinking that I experienced during the research. Being a researcher and a theatre actor in the process within the contested space of a theatre production, in the social and political context of Montréal, produced a heated internal dialogue. In this internal dialogue, political, social, cultural and aesthetic issues are discussed. The dialogue is brought to the rehearsal process and is present in it. It is present in approaches to character development, and in social and political issues.

Alberto One and Alberto Two live in a permanent discussion, sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing on how to go about the rehearsal process. Alberto One is seduced by theatre, by the dynamics of rehearsal, and building a character. Alberto One is also interested in developing close ties with the other members of the cast; sharing Luc's, Peter's, Victoria's and Mayda's real life dramas, listening to Peter confide about his personal struggles in the ranks of the unemployed, and sharing with Victoria her theatre and travel stories. He is interested in the shared lives of immigrants and the feeling of displacement which that entails. He is curious about Luc's personal problems with his partner, his new home and the lack of jobs. He is concerned with Mayda bringing her baby

to rehearsal because of the lack of daycare for the unemployed and then listening to child's cries while practising lines.

For Alberto One, an immigrant to Canada and Québec, playing Hermal, the Gypsy character, was very significant. Hermal's existence in Eastern Europe was a marginal one. He felt displaced, and Alberto One has felt that also, to a lesser degree. Not to trivialise Hermal's suffering by looking for parallels between his life and Alberto One's, but there were some glaring similarities, which Alberto One was aware of, and could use.

Alberto Two has his own agenda which he considers most important in the process. He wants to know more about the lives of the members of the group, to have that information as data. He asks questions, he wants to know more statistical things, he is thinking about his ethnography, his status as a student of anthropology, about his research. He asks questions like "So, Peter, how do you manage to get by"? He seeks information: "are you receiving welfare?" Alberto Two writes down data presumed important, he records conversations and audio tapes entire rehearsals. He asks the other members their opinions about the rehearsal process and negotiates with them for the sake of listening to their rationale on problems.

While in the rehearsal process of the play I usually spoke with the voice of Alberto One or the voice of Alberto Two. It was noticeable, for example, while negotiating with the other members of the group on the direction of the play. While discussing my role as Hermal I definitely spoke with Alberto One's voice. Luc suggested that for the character building of Hermal I should try to play the part with an oppressed Latin American

individual in mind. Somebody in the mountains tortured , humiliated, discriminated against because of his colour, his social status, or the like.

Alberto One believes that he does not need to go that far to get inspiration for his character. He is an immigrant to Canada and Québec. He knows about discrimination first hand, he has no need to fictionalise a character out of some Latin American prison.

Alberto One remembers working in a restaurant where it was prohibited to speak anything but French. He got fired from that job for arguing with the boss about it. He told the boss that one should speak the language one feels most comfortable with. He had experienced harassment: when he was standing one day in his own front yard, he was told to move out of the province because he was not from there, yelled at to get the hell back to where he came from. He also knows about the attitude of politicians and bureaucrats in Québec about “ethnics” . He just has to remember Québec’s referendum night in 1995. Thus he does not have to go far to get inspiration to build his character. He can play himself.

Alberto Two does not want to get too involved. He suggests playing the part any old way, and moving on with the research. What matters in all of this is the research. What are the findings?. What is useful, what is not. Alberto Two is worried about losing sight of what he came for. For the researcher the research should be the priority.

Luc was aware of discrimination in Québec. He, Victoria, Peter and Mayda have experienced it to some degree. Poor people and those at the fringes of society are discriminated against everywhere, all the time. The thing is that discrimination is relative.



Nobody experiences it the same way. Alberto One's experience of discrimination in Québec brought a particular twist to his characterisation of Hermal. He is sure that the particular ideas and experiences of discrimination of Victoria and Peter were brought to their characterisations of Lina and Ivan.

Peter is a Francophone but his name is Irish; in Québec a name can give you away. Peter has to constantly prove that he is Francophone. He told me about one such incident. While he was in a room full of people where they knew him only by his name, they assumed he did not speak French. The people in the room started to talk about him assuming he did not understand, and referred about him as the "Anglo". They were surprised when Peter started to speak French with a Québécois accent. They apologised and confessed to him they had believed he was not a French Québécois.

Victoria is an immigrant and has lived as such in many places around the world. In Québec she has a French accent because she lived in France, but her name is Spanish, and she is poor, and that also gives her some perspective. Victoria never told me about being discriminated against, the only thing she said was that she could not stay in Québec to live. She likes to move around a lot, she also said she did not have enough money to be able to afford to live in Québec. "I will never find a decent job here". The implication was clear: Victoria was not a Québécoise, therefore her chances of finding work here were really slim, in spite of her ability to speak perfect French, English and Spanish.

Alberto Two felt uncomfortable when rehearsing, because whenever he came across something interesting that he thought worth recording, he wanted to write it down

right there in the middle of rehearsal . Most of the time this did not bother the others, but it made him feel uncomfortable.

Even though he audio-recorded some of the rehearsals, there were things that were visual, and he thought them important to note down. This of course was not fair to the others, who at the beginning perhaps thought he was not serious enough about playing the part to do it adequately . Alberto One wanted to do his theatre; Alberto Two wanted to do his research. Both struggled for supremacy but in the end just learned to live together. They took turns speaking when their voices needed to be heard.

I have chosen to write this scene at this particular moment in order to provoke images of the internal vicissitudes the researcher in this particular ethnography goes through at this particular moment in the process. In an ethnographic story there are many situations like this. I could have included several. However, I think that one is enough to give the reader an idea of the internal process and the choices made.

Scene FourRehearsal: Putting Together, Compromising,  
Learning, And Negotiating.

SAME REHEARSING SPACE IN OLD MONTRÉAL. AFTER A WEEK OF REHEARSAL. IT IS NIGHT, EVERYBODY GATHERS AFTER A DAY OF OTHER ACTIVITIES SUCH AS LOOKING FOR WORK AND LOOKING FOR APARTMENTS.

LUC:           Where is Mayda?

PETER:        She is not here yet, maybe she had problems at home. You know...

LUC:           Yes, of course. I am sorry I forgot to tell you. She told me she is not coming today, her baby you know. My fault.

VICTORIA:    *(Deflective)* I don't feel that the characters... my character, is going anywhere. I need something, but I don't know what. What?

LUC:           Je suggère que le texte... ..je le trouve....we should play a little bit with the spoken language, French and English. In the first scene when Al says *dinamicas* in Spanish it should be obvious that Peter does not understand exactly . Peter says in French; *Il veut dire que quand ça va mal dans son pays il utilise de la dynamite*, this is really playing with the fact that you don't understand Spanish but understood the word *dynamite*.

PETER:        What?

LUC:           I see your character in scene one *(referring to Peter)* like a scale, it is funny isn't it, he tries to mediate in any situation, you are like a chameleon.

PETER:        *(Peter repeats his revised lines to himself as he writes them down)*  
Il veut dire que quand ça va mal dans son pays, il utilise de la dynamite....  
Yes that's better. You're right.

LUC:           *(To Victoria)* I see you as a school teacher: very rigid.

VICTORIA:    *(With a rigid expression)* Okay.

PETER:        *(Approving)* Oh yes, That's it.

LUC: *(Pointing at the book she has in her hands)* Use your book!

(VICTORIA PRACTICES ENTERING, SHE WALKS AROUND)

**A: (played by Victoria) Big deal!**

**B: (played by Peter) Qu'est qu'il a?**

**A :** **It's quite nice to say that people have the right to do this and that, but how do we implement this in the real world?**

**B:** **Tu a reason, c'est bien beau.....**

LUC: *(He directs his voice to Victoria.)* Stop. What are you talking about?

VICTORIA: Well, I am talking about how people make sense of human rights in real life situations. Am I making sense?

LUC: *(Taking the tone of a teacher)* Okay, what makes you react, what makes you .... furious?.

VICTORIA: The fact that there are so many words and sometimes words are just words.

LUC : Where are the words?

VICTORIA: Here. *(she points to the note book she has been using)*

LUC: Very well, but in terms of theatre movements... Oh. As audience I would like to see that action. Remember the audience/actors will like to repeat the scene, it should be clear visually what you are trying to say. Our ultimate goal is for the performance to become a useful tool for the audience. *(to Al)* Al, I would like you to be here, your character sees what is going on between these two. He understands about theatrical animation and its effectiveness, that enthusiasm should be shown physically. Okay?

AL: *(As if distracted by something)* Oh. yes, of course, Luc.

LUC: So the action without speech becomes non-verbally very clear.

AL: That will be hard to do in so little time. I think.

PETER: Don't worry, it always works out in the end.

AL: Are you always happy with the quality of the performance in the end?

PETER: *(He laughs)* Sometimes yes, sometimes no. But what's important, I believe, is that the animation gets done and, after all, we have enough time to do an okay operation.

AL: Great.

LUC: *(Coming out of a deep reflection)* I want the multilingual, multicultural nature of our work to show that it is possible.

AL: How?

LUC: The relationship of your bodies with objects and the languages we use.

AL: *(Not convinced)*. We'll see.

(VICTORIA ENTERS STAGE LEFT)

THE SCENE IS REPEATED, BUT THIS TIME PAYING ATTENTION TO SCENIC ELEMENTS, BODIES, VOICE TONE, EYE CONTACT AND BODY EXPRESSION. THINGS , IT SEEMS , ARE FALLING INTO PLACE.

LUC: Bon! *(to all)*, do you feel the characters building?

PETER: Bien! oui!

MAYDA: Une peu plus, yes.

LUC: C'est bon. There are some details that we need to work on later. But we can see now that those characters have to have more physical expression.

VICTORIA: On la répete?

LUC: Oui.

VICTORIA: Okay, Luc...

*Victoria begins again.*

**A: Big deal....**

LUC: *(to Victoria)* Please put a little bit... an attitude of...

VICTORIA: Of anger?

LUC: *(Looking up as if looking for a word)* No, not anger, we call it anger but it is not anger. You should be uncomfortable with the context in which you are going to work.

VICTORIA: *(somewhat confused)* OK, OK.

LUC: This also, I believe goes for your character, Peter, more attitude to your character. ok.

PETER: *(Disinterested as though worried about something else).* Okay, I see.

LUC: Al, play your character like a fly, like a Mosquito. Obviously your character has done animation before, he knows it works, he is confident. When you say: moving around, expressing ourselves in different ways ( *he*

*exaggerates his voice*) you know you can almost sing : “we do dinamicas in order to prepare the people not only to have fun...”

AL: Ok, but.. I will have to exaggerate (*repeats making big movements and playing with the space*) taking initiative, in order to solve problems....

LUC: (*To Victoria*) As an audience we should understand that you do not know how to transfer this knowledge to make sure that people can be educated . The next line, when you talk about your colleagues, you start a discussion on human rights, you are talking about a course on human rights.

VICTORIA: But if I don't believe it? Ok, he convinces me a bit, I get a bit curious!

LUC: Yes get a bit curious ya, but , I think , we also do this ( *he makes a gesture of disbelief*). Remember this is not method acting. Internalise feelings a little bit, but don't concentrate too much on it.

VICTORIA: I know there's no time to develop a character.

LUC: There is if we don't worry too much about details for the moment.

VICTORIA: (*Going back to the previous concern*) Maybe she is too far out of his world, what do you think?

LUC: Yes!

VICTORIA: When I say that..(*Pause*) I am tired.

LUC: Yes, okay let's take a break about 30 minutes?

VICTORIA: (*Playing around*) Big deal!

ALL: (*laughs*).

#### END OF SCENE

The integration of this scene here does not only serve to help the story along. It is not only about who said what, when and why, but also about reflection of authority, and voices that help the process of an emerging ethnography along. The contestations of some of Luc's directions in this scene by all of us, come not only from different desires and a different way of looking at the process. They are also the reflections of our own goals (putting on the play, getting pay for it, doing research, etc.) for participating in the piece and why we were there in the first place. It is true (I would suggest) that most of us were there, and knew what we were doing in terms of a needed social project. Our way of arriving at that desired goal (creating or crafting a theatrical tool for the FCDP) at this particular time in Montréal pulled us in different directions.

Luc has one thing in mind. Get this thing going, there are other projects waiting to be done. He has done this kind of theatre before with other social groups in Montréal. Victoria wants to experience action theatre in the context of Montréal, but she comes with



a vision of how to do it. This vision clashes with that established by the group. Mayda and Peter are very familiar with the methodology. They do this kind of theatre as a matter of course. They are not too concerned about form and content; they know that in the end it will work adequately. They may contest technical things here and there, but basically the methodology takes a familiar rhythm for them. Their main concern is to get things done, while at the same time taking care of other more important issues in their personal lives. This scene elucidates the process that the researcher/actor was experiencing. The questions asked by me are not only the questions an actor would ask, but those that a researcher would be curious about.

Because of the nature of theatre of action, the scripts with which *Mise au Jeu Montréal* works on are not always fully developed. They are sketches, little scenes, synopses and outlines. Actors in these situations have to be creative in shaping a comprehensive story with their characters while getting little guidance from a script. Furthermore, there is usually no real formalised direction, such as is provided by directors in conventional theatre projects. For example, Luc's work in *Les Lois du Goulag* did not represent the work of a director per se. He was the person who was readier to guide, as he had actually written the sketches.

Trained as a "method actor," Victoria is accustomed to looking into the inner life of her fictional persona, and here she is in a "presentational" company where this training is anathema. In *Les Lois du Goulag* any theatre worker who expected to be directed by a traditional director during the process was bound to feel uncomfortable. Victoria was in a

bind that became clearer while we were rehearsing the play. She obviously wanted very much to do the play. She loved the theatre and its challenge, you could tell she was dedicated to it. On the other hand she hated the way in which it was being done. She could not stand working with little direction. On top of it all, she could not stand to work with a shadow script which required second-guessing most of the action. The rehearsal of *Les Lois du Goulag* started as readings and then went on to the staging. The rehearsals lasted about five to seven weeks. We did not rehearse every day; sometimes we rehearsed once a week. During the last two weeks we intensified the rehearsals to all day four times a week. The script got rewritten as we went along, and we did not have a definite answer for all the technical and other problems encountered during the rehearsal. But we discovered new possibilities that seemed to work in terms of content and form. The process got more complicated because, after we read the script to the directors of FCDP, they insisted on certain changes, such as choice of languages for some sketches.

For Victoria this was too much of a confusion. She repeatedly told me her concerns about the whole experience. She believed that this was not working at all. She thought that we were practically rehearsing in circles, coming back again and again to the same technical problems. She did not see any advancement in terms of the characters, not only hers, but those of others.

Luc deals with this situation by deflecting Victoria's seemingly unimportant concerns, and constant need for attention. He does not have much choice. Luc expects more from me, he believes I can deliver his vision of the Latino character. At the same

time he is gentle with Mayda, accommodating her not only in the play, but also being concerned about her outside the play in her everyday problems. He seldom gives instruction to Peter, but when he does Peter incorporates the direction fast and efficiently.

The actors' relationship to the play becomes established in the rehearsal process. The stories the actors are telling through the enactment of *Les lois du Goulag* are those of people living at the margins in other countries, experienced by other people, from different races, in war zones or under dictatorship. These stories, parallel with the stories of the actors themselves; theirs are not as dramatic as those in the play, but in the sense that most stories about marginality share the same predicaments of exclusion, alienation or oppression. Through the characterisation of the stories of the play, the actors of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* are talking about their own predicaments as marginal people.

These same real-life situations of marginality (poverty, unemployment, welfare or political and economic powerlessness) of the actors make the rehearsal process problematic. The situations of marginality (lateness, disturbance by baby crying, absenteeism, hunger, lack of money for food and the like) caused many problems during the rehearsal process. However, it was the actors' marginality which made them empathise with those they were portraying.

The enactment of this scene tries to evoke the entire atmosphere of the rehearsal process and the connections that are developed between the stories they were enacting through theatre and their own. It is not only about invoking the voices of the actors, but

how these voices are produced by the actors within the particular context of the rehearsal and larger issues of living in Montréal.

Scene FiveRehearsal Five-Second Scene: Same Space, Same Protagonists, Different Problems.

AFTER DOING AN ITALIAN REHEARSAL OF THE LINES<sup>3</sup> IN SCENE TWO, THE ACTORS PUT ALL THEIR PROPS AND COSTUMES IN POSITION. THERE IS AN ATMOSPHERE OF EXCITEMENT IN THE AIR.

LUC: Ok, ok. After the non-verbal forum, after we have danced with the public you enter, Victoria, stage right and go there. Begin your lines.

VICTORIA: Okay here I go:

**A: Ok, I agree, that was fun but it doesn't solve our problem...**

**B: Non, tu as raison ça ne règle pas nos problèmes mais.....**

*The rest of the scene is completed to the end. (See scene one of Luc's script).*

LUC: Okay there are many details we have to work out in here guys. I feel that the verbal parts of our characters are more or less ok, it is the corporal movements that need a little work. I want that your bodies be able to speak their feelings but without the need of language. Verbal language becomes here just another level of the communication. Ok. Do you agree?

VICTORIA: Mais oui je suis d'accord avec toi. Pour ça on a besoin de beaucoup plus de répétition.

AL: That's true Luc, we agree with you but we need more rehearsal.

PETER: So let's do it, we have only three more weeks.

LUC: Don't get me wrong, I think that the scenes, especially this one, are becoming more and more non-verbally clear. We have to remember that the audience won't speak all the languages we use in common. Ok on répété!

VICTORIA STARTS HER LINES AND THE PROCESS BEGINS ALL OVER AGAIN.

**A: Ok, I agree, that was fun but it doesn't solve our problem...**

LUC: Hold on Victoria. Your problem is your relation with this book, it offers solutions that are very abstract but understandable for the audience. (*He contemplates the floor for a second*). Okay proceed. (*He wants her to use her props, like her book, more effectively*).

VICTORIA: (*Repeats speech—holding book out in front of her*).

LUC: Ça c'est bon ça c'est précise.

VICTORIA: Oui, I agree. It's working, the physical part.

LUC: Victoria, in this scene your character still has a barrier in front of her, as in the previous scene. But in this one you are ready to do it, your character says: I would never imagine myself doing this.... You broke the barrier. She is like a prisoner about to be liberated. I want to see that in your corporal expression in the space.

PETER: (*Joking*) Do you feel liberated, Victoria?

VICTORIA: (*Sarcastically*) The character does. Ha! Ha! But seriously, people, when I say, "In this country there are two kinds of people; *citizens* (*referring to Peter*) and non-citizens" (*referring to Al*), I am not sure what to feel.

MAYDA: (*Seriously*) I think you should feel discouraged, you are aware of the injustices in the country.

VICTORIA: Maybe I should be cynical about all of this? What do you think?

PETER: (*Joking again*) Then it should be a little bit of both; you should feel cynical about this as well as discouraged.

LUC: I think you should work that out; I am concerned right now with the flow of the scene.

AL.: (*Anxiously*) Victoria, we could work that out later.

VICTORIA: (*Defensively*) Ok.

LUC: We practice now the little non-verbal scene that links this with the next one. Let's call this "the right to be different."

FOUR CHARACTERS MARCH AS IN A MILITARY MARCH WHILE A FIFTH ONE IS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM DANCING TO THE SOUND OF DRUMS. THE MARCHING CHARACTERS ARE UNIFORMED WITH BASEBALL CAPS . THE MARCHERS TRY TO MAKE THE FIFTH CHARACTER CONFORM TO THEIR

MARCH, THEY ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL NOT EVEN WHEN THEY USE PHYSICAL FORCE.

END OF SCENE

Every rehearsal, even with the same protagonists, space and basic “script,” brings new sets of questions, problems and adjustments that one (actors, director/animators, researchers) has to consider. Even though at this point in the process most of the individual parts of the performance piece were put into place (blocking, voice, tone, costumes, and so on), ideas and concepts handed out via Luc through the script, Luc’s directions, plus the ideas and suggestions of everybody, found a way of being accommodated in our speech and body movement. The technical directions, plus the little time we had, started to give our characters some kind of shape. Luc’s reaction to Mayda in this scene and throughout the rehearsal process was one of omission. He seldom gave her direct direction. He did not go beyond telling her what he thought of the scenes and her characters but actual direction during the development of characters was mainly on “blocking,” not only of her characters, but in general. Mayda has been with the group for many years and she felt very established, sometimes giving directions to me or Victoria. On one occasion, while I was playing the Latin American character in the first scene, she felt I was stereotyping the character. I envisioned the character as a very energetic person, which I demonstrated physically. For her, the character should have been less wild and more focused on the work of human rights, more internalised. Luc called me aside and timidly said, “Mayda thinks that you should tone down the character, she is concerned



with offending Latinos.” The point is that Luc took her considerations seriously. There was a tremendous amount of respect for her, which translated into authority over others.

Peter’s attitude during the rehearsal was humorous, as in “let’s get on with it.” I believe this was so, either because he had little difficulty portraying his characters, or because he wanted to get on with the more pressing issues in his life, like getting a job, or acting in a well-paying production. Peter’s indifference was shown in the way he made fun of most things and situations. This attitude was also shown through his absences, and lateness during rehearsal times.

Luc expected more from those who were permanent members of the group, and was reluctant to push Victoria and me, both transients. For example, Luc deflected a lot of the never-ending questions Victoria posed during rehearsals. It was obvious that he felt that it would be pointless to go over every problem Victoria or I came up with. Time pressure was also a factor for this; there was no time for addressing so many details. It was during the final rehearsals that, obviously pressed by the time constraint we had, that he tried to push his vision on the play. I took that as the best way to economise the time left. He had the experience, was willing to do it, and was happy doing it.

Scene SixDress Rehearsal: Politics, Reality and Rehearsal

AFTER A FEW WEEKS OF REHEARSAL THE GROUP GETS TOGETHER TO GIVE THE LAST SCENE THE LAST TOUCHES. IT IS AFTERNOON, THE REHEARSAL WAS SCHEDULED FOR TWO O'CLOCK BUT PETER AND MAYDA ARE LATE AL AND VICTORIA ARE AT THE TABLE.

AL: Did we say we would get together at 2?

VICTORIA: Yes, I don't know what is going on. We shouldn't waste our time waiting for them, we don't have a lot of time left.

AL: Don't worry about it. Do you want to read with me in the mean time?

VICTORIA: I think we need, I mean I need to rehearse more. We're not ready. We need to practice more. I don't feel that my characters are going anywhere. Oh god. I don't want to make a fool of myself.

AL: Relax! I also feel that the characters need more development, a lot, but it's not bad. This is not a competition to see who performs the best, You know? I think we shouldn't lose sight of the main goal: to create a piece of theatre that is useful for doing forum.

VICTORIA: I haven't done forum before. Do you think we can rehearse some more tonight? I don't feel ready. This is ridiculous. I never felt as frustrated as I am here.

AL: Ok, I think I could use more rehearsal too. Seven at my place, ok?

VICTORIA: Yes. Ok.

*Luc enters the room with some costumes in his hands.*

LUC: Hi! This suit would be very good for Hermal, your Gypsy character (*referring to Al*), specially when he goes to the office to restore his name in scene two of the play. And this bag is perfect for Lina in the same scene. What do you say?

AL: I like the suit, it looks a little bit fifties, it's fine.

VICTORIA: I would prefer to use the other bag, Who does it belong to? The black one?

AL: That's mine.

LUC: Can she use it?

AL: Of course!

LUC: Where are Mayda and Peter?

VICTORIA: They are not here yet.

**PETER ENTERS THE REHEARSAL SPACE AND MAYDA ENTERS CARRYING HER DAUGHTER.**

MAYDA: (*Apologetic.*) Hi, my daughter, you know. I had to take care of her first.

PETER: (*Also apologetic*) Sorry, got hung up.

LUC: Okay, we are ready to rehearse the last scene. Everybody make sure that their props and costumes are in place and let's go.

VICTORIA: (*In position in her space*). Should we go over the second scene before?

LUC: No time for that one, I think we rehearsed it enough. Positions everybody!

AS THE SCENE BEGINS MAYDA'S CHILD STARTS TO CRY. THE SCENE CONTINUES NONETHELESS.

**S: Ok, I agree, that was fun but it doesn't solve our problem.....**

END OF SCENE

Contestation and interpretation varies from rehearsal to rehearsal. Politics and reality have a way of impacting on the rehearsal process. Even though we are aware that as social, political and cultural beings everything we do is somehow connected, in the rehearsal process, socio-political influences become apparent and are worth noting. This rehearsal was negotiated within the marginal existence of the actors themselves in the

context of Montréal. Some of the manifestations of a process about, for and with marginalized people, would have an impact on the rehearsal process. When one worries about when and where the next rent is going to come from (as the case of Peter in particular, but basically the case of most of the group), and one has to bring one's child to rehearsal for lack of daycare for the poor, both situations will have an immediate impact on the performance in the rehearsal. This impact can be positive for the theatre piece, or not. A baby crying during the rehearsal, and the obvious stress Peter was going through looking for a job while having to rehearse, gave a sense of purpose to the rehearsal. Yes, this kind of work is important, and doing our best in the minimum time would be our contribution to making things better for everybody. Some people in the group obviously get some money for the contribution they give to plays as animator/actors. Whether on public assistance, through unemployment insurance or welfare, or small sums of money (between two hundred and three hundred dollars) for the rest of us, we all were being remunerated for our efforts. We wanted to do a good job, not only because we believe in the project, its goals and results (tell stories of marginals around the world, teach the technique of theatre as a tool for education and create a forum for ideas), but we were also gaining immediate benefits (small sums of money, research being done and telling our own stories through the stories of the play).

In chapter two I suggested that the urban social movement of Montréal, for pragmatic reasons, stays away from nationalistic ideologies when working for common causes. During the rehearsal process I find the same phenomenon within the theatre group

*Mise au Jeu Montréal*. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that the group has some members of different ethnic minorities (Latino, Anglo, Arabic,) who participate at one time or another. Perhaps the majority of members (Francophone) are more sensitive about the subject and do not want to bring it up. Maybe it is because more pressing issues became more important questions during the rehearsal process. Whatever the reason, the question of nationalism never came up. In spite of the fact that the nationalist referendum of 1995 had taken place just a few months before we started rehearsing, nobody in the group mentioned it.

The omission of the referendum as well as other issues of nationalism in a group of Francophones and Allophones is significant. This could be a demonstration of how little this political event means in the light of more pressing social concerns. As with the urban social movement, *Mise au Jeu Montréal* functioned as a block. I do not doubt that some members sympathise with Québec nationalism. If so, it was never obvious to me. I was the only person, perhaps, who brought up a related issue of being discriminated against for not being a Québécois, this issue I incorporated in the Gypsy character I played. Even though I did not publicly proclaim how I felt about discrimination under the rhetoric of Québec nationalism, I nonetheless enacted it through my character. However, I never talked about it with anyone. I was expecting to see it replicated in some way but I was disappointed. It never showed up. I could have been criticised tacitly but I never noticed it.

### Comments on Act One

Through this act (with its scripted scenes) I have elicited (not only through the characters' voices but through their moods, the way they intonate their responses or their speech, and settings,) that a multivocal and a dialogical performative ethnography can be contextualized within the scripted scenes themselves, which help evoke our experiences. The usefulness of a performative ethnography such as this is therefore revealed in the form which is appropriate for enacting and evoking by presenting experience.

The main objective of showing these most relevant issues through these scenes is not only to demonstrate how difficult it is to negotiate a theatre action performance under strained circumstances, not only to show that theatre of action works or does not work or to show how badly written or not the "script" play was, but also to evoke specific knowledge. Knowledge about a cultural process in Montréal within a contested social, political, and cultural space. The fact that it was marginal people producing a play about situations of marginality, created a context. A context in which the stories of the actors are projected through the depiction of the stories of the play. The theatre relations and power relations in all their levels created an emergent, situated and conjunctural piece of theatre. *Les Lois du Goulag* is produced under these circumstances with an ultimate goal in the minds of all participants. This goal is to communicate something through theatre.

All the participants had goals of their own. These became clearer and clearer through the process of rehearsal. These goals did sometimes contradict each other as we

saw in the scenes, in terms of styles of acting, approaching a character and the priorities of actors in everyday life situations. However, the ultimate goal of all of us was to enact, (i.e. inform, create a forum for) discussions of problems. In our case the problematic of human rights around the world, poverty, racism and marginality. The contention was how to do it, how to enact, and that was revealed through the rehearsals.

The rehearsal process becomes an arena for discussing not only the play as such but also discusses life, resistance, empowerment, social and personal issues. Through the rehearsal of *Les Lois du Goulag* the actors attempt at interpreting characters who, though they come from other countries and from different experiences, share with them the predicament of oppressed and marginalized citizens around the world. It is through this interpretation that the actors of the group relate their own predicament with that of another human being. In a way, these actors are resisting their own marginality blending theirs into that of the characters. They are being empowered by the fact that they are using marginality as a means of exposing it through theatre, while creating a theatrical tool to discuss it. The rehearsal process evokes these issues of marginalization, poverty, empowerment and power relations at the social, and at the personal levels. These issues are invoked by the situations themselves, by the choice of interpretation and direction within the mechanics of the play, the lack of money for basic necessities of life, unemployment, welfare, absenteeism, lateness, distractions during rehearsal, interaction among the actors, power manipulations while rehearsing the piece, and empathy with the characters in the play.



The main objective was shared by all, but imposed by the FCDP (requesting and financing the project in the first place) in the process of rehearsal. This objective is present in the process since Luc starts writing the “script” with research done, and information provided, by the FCDP. Even though there is, of course, Luc’s input and influence, that comes through in use of techniques, choice of scenes, characters, and situations in the piece. Our contributions are negotiated in the midst of these positions ( FCDP and Luc’s). Our negotiations give form to the outcome every time but that outcome was limited by the frame in which the “script” was already written. Our contributions are evident in the interpretation of characters, building characters and of looking at the world from our own perspectives within this city.

As the rehearsal progressed I noticed , and this became even clearer while transcribing, that there was less and less spoken discourse in the rehearsals. For example, some lines had been totally eliminated as of no use, and we were concentrating more and more on movement of bodies on stage, the interactiveness of characters and the like. As actual acting (as opposed to talking about it) was taking form, the discussion about it became, obviously, less frequent. Thus, the scenes were becoming more non-verbal, more simple, physical, self-explanatory. However, as can be seen in scene five, even in the final rehearsals, there was some discussion of the need for the play, not the rehearsal, to become more performative and less verbally oriented. As the play became more performative, so did the rehearsal. During the course of the rehearsal process of his study in Zaire, Fabian (1990: 92) noticed that discourse (spoken, verbal accounts and

propositions, discussions and reflections) became less important than actual action. He states that: "As the rehearsal process develops, talking/discursiveness decreases while timing/acting increases in importance" (Fabian, 1990: 95). Timing he says "... is primarily geared toward delivery, toward creating events, and subevents whose outer boundaries are temporal" (Fabian, 1990: 94). What he is saying is that the duration of the play creates a time constraint in which inner structure is acting, not talking. However, he insists that this should only be taken as a theoretical remainder, not as an evolutionary progression from talking to timing. This movement from talking to performing is worth mentioning here to draw some parallels, but I believe that it is a natural development of every theatrical rehearsal process, one which entails a rehearsal of a predetermined "script" or "blueprint" script.

My choice of expressing this process through these scripted scenes has been an attempt at evoking images through voices, environments and situations, and knowledge about the cultural production within the rehearsal process. I believe that this cultural production of producing *Les Lois du Goulag* necessitates the use of a narrative device which is best able to elicit that which the writer can not describe or write.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Mise au Jeu Montréal*'s choice to do presentational theatre is in and of itself a political choice. There is room for change, improvisation, discussion and negotiation in a presentational script which does not exist in a realistic (naturalistic) representational rehearsed theatre.

<sup>2</sup> Luc expecting problems from Victoria, later indicated to me the difficulty of working with actresses like Victoria.

<sup>3</sup> The actors repeat the lines at five or six times their normal speed. This is strictly useful in learning the lines and cues.

## CHAPTER 5

### ACT TWO

#### CURTAIN: CONVERSATION WITH THE TARGETED AUDIENCE OF *MISE AU JEU MONTRÉAL*

This act, as the one before it, will focus on what “was given form to,” this time in the actual theatrical intervention of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* with the targeted audience. After some rehearsal of *Les Lois du Goulag* the theatrical production took its next step, that of theatrical intervention (theatre forum). Evoking this theatrical production by presenting it through “scripted scenes” is an attempt to move away from representational (“realistic”) ethnographic accounts. This attempt at evoking by presenting the experience is an effort to complement a polyphonic, dialogical performative ethnography.

In this section I will concentrate on interaction of the audience and theatre group. It is through this final theatrical presentation that one can see how the speedy theatrical intervention generated a theatre of action which had potential usefulness. First, the solutions proposed by the audience to the problems posited by the play could help everybody involved understand alternative possibilities. Others may benefit by being exposed to new experiences from members of the audience who brought different perspectives from their own countries and their particular situations. Second, even when those responses or solutions proposed or expressed by the audience were not practically implementable in the real world, at least the audience would feel free to be active and try

audiences who performed in the theatrical work. It is a rehearsal of life situations which will teach possible solutions for real world happenings.

Even though I did not conduct a formal survey of the participants, I had the opportunity to converse with some members of the audience after the presentation. They expressed to me the value of the performance. Clearly, the audience found the intervention useful. Some asked members of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* about the methodology of participatory theatre (theatre of the oppressed). Others expressed their interest in learning the methodology of theatre of action to use it as a tool in their respective communities back home, in Asia, Africa or Latin America. Furthermore, it was expressed during the presentation (as will be evoked in the scripted scenes in this act) how the audience intervention created a dynamic of exchange of ideas and knowledge of particular power relations in their respective situations. For example, when a member of the audience from Eastern Europe said that the bureaucracy in his country could not be challenged by ordinary citizens, he was referring to the particular situation in which he experienced the bureaucracy at home. The event also led to a more global understanding of different human rights problems which were going on right at that moment in the countries represented. We were faced with people who could be returning to deal with quotidian confrontations with wrongful imprisonment, death threats, loss of homes, language and culture, and even torture. Our own marginality was a bit tame in comparison, but created actors who were quick to empathise, and therefore useful to the process..

During the post-mortem of the play, Peter, Luc, Mayda, Claudette (another member of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* who came to help during the performance) and I went out for a beer and talked freely about the performance, the time together, our impact on the audience and the funny moments of the performance. Luc, ever serious and gentle, commented on the ups and downs of the process. The difficulty and usefulness of bringing our own marginality to it. I believe that when actors are marginal themselves, they are easily distracted by real life events in the theatre production (Mayda's baby crying, Peter going off to make telephone calls or coming late to rehearsal) at the same time, they have easier access to the feelings of the people for and about whom they perform. In this meeting we discussed and assessed the intervention's impact on the members of the troupe as well as the possible impact the play had on the audience.

We commented on the interest with which the audience/actors engaged in the performance and followed it up by requesting information about the methodology utilised by the group.. We all felt that our main objective, of creating a forum for ideas through the play as well as demonstrating that theatre of action can be a tool for education and empowerment, was achieved. We had seen the excitement and enthusiasm with which the audience engaged in the process and the readiness they showed to participate in the theatrical discussion. We felt that our intervention had an impact, we could speculate on it. We talked about whether or not the interpretation of each of the characters by us was achieved. These comments were mainly complementary, positive and enthusiastic. At one point Peter and Mayda expressed how amazingly Victoria finally got her non-verbal police

agent. Too bad Victoria was not there, she would have loved that comment.

Even though we did not know if this particular theatrical team of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* would be put together in the future, we felt the need to comment on possible improvements and changes. Language was a concern; the audience seemed a bit confused by the dialogue in English and French in the same scenes. The success of the non-verbal scenes led us to believe that there should be more of those.

After a few more beers, Claudette suddenly realised that Victoria in her usual obliviousness had taken a briefcase containing her keys. I ended up driving Claudette to Victoria's house very late at night. Victoria was not there, only her roommate was home, but Claudette insisted she would wait for Victoria. She ended up staying the night at Victoria's house until her keys were returned. The roommate's acceptance of this situation could hardly be imagined in a mainstream group of people, but in Montréal, in this kind of company, it seemed perfectly natural to allow a stranger from a theatre group to spend the night waiting for a set of keys.

The following two scenes help us situate the characters, protagonists and actors in time and space in the story. They help us understand their moods and feelings about the theatrical intervention which was about to commence. They enact the polyvocal and dialogical nature of the creation of knowledge in a performance. Furthermore, the scripted scenes which I have chosen to evoke the story facilitate the discussion of many issues such as the personal and social concerns of the protagonists, as well as details about the particular nuances of the performance. Throughout these scenes the members of the

theatrical team of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* contextualize their lives within a particular social and political sphere of Montréal that is composed of people operating at the margins of the political and social power of the city. The following scene in particular tries to situate the theatre group's members, not only as performers, but as social beings with their own problems and lives beyond this particular event. Being unemployed, in the case of Peter, having personal problems in the case of Luc and my condition as an immigrant, researcher, undoubtedly had an impact on the process of the theatrical intervention. In spite of our feelings of isolation, frustrations and sense of poverty we brought to the presentation, our work was carried out with a certain degree of passion, commitment and dedication. The point of presenting the following scripted scene, is to evoke the moods, feelings and frustrations with which the actors came to the presentation.



Scene OneSituating the Protagonists in Time and Space

IN THE BACK SEAT OF A CAR, LUC AND AL ADMIRE THE SCENERY, CARS GOING BY, PEOPLE, TREES, BUILDINGS AND BILLBOARDS. LOOKING AT AN APPARENTLY VIBRANT CITY, NO ONE WOULD SUSPECT THE LEVEL OF DESPAIR IN SOME SECTORS OF MONTRÉAL. THE CAR IS BEING DRIVEN BY A MEMBER OF *MISE AU JEU MONTRÉAL*, (NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE PLAY BUT GIVING US A RIDE), AND IN THE FRONT SEAT RIDES VICTORIA. THEY ARE ALL EXCITED AND PENSIVE, TODAY IS THEIR MAIN PERFORMANCE. ALL THAT REHEARSAL IS GOING TO BE PUT TO THE TEST. THEY ARE HEADING TO SAINT ANNE DE BELLEVUE, AN AFFLUENT SUBURB IN THE WEST OF THE ISLAND OF MONTRÉAL WHERE THEY WILL PERFORM AT THE JOHN ABBOT AUDITORIUM. IN LESS THAN THREE HOURS THE FORUM WILL START.

LUC:           *(Showing a very pleased face)* Can you believe it? It is the middle of the summer already! We got to do something together sometime.

PETER:        We should do a potluck, c'est bien fun ça. (to the driver) ouvrez la radio SVP!

DRIVER:       Ok. 99.9 rock'n roll c'est beaucoup fun. J'aime ça.

VICTORIA:    *(In a somewhat anxious voice)* I think we should be doing some voice warm ups. What do you think?

AL:            *(Still thinking about the potluck party)* Can we bring our partners to that party?

- PETER: Of course!
- LUC: Except me *(to Al)*
- AL: What do you mean? You don't want to bring your partner? *(everybody laughs at this remark except Luc and Victoria, who does facial exercises)*
- VICTORIA: *(She stops her facials and)* Luc, how many people are there going to be in the audience today?
- LUC: *(To Victoria)* About 100 people. *(To Al in a more serious and sad tone)* J'ai cessé de demeurer avec mon ami.
- AL: I'm so sorry! Did you move out or is he moving out?
- LUC: We are both moving out. Everybody is looking for his own place now.
- PETER: I found a new place last week. I am going to move in next Monday. Oh boy, I hate moving, but I got a good deal. Could you imagine, high ceilings, a 6 1/2 on Christophe Colomb for three hundred and fifty dollars.
- AL: Oh my god! That's a good deal for sure, you're a lucky guy.
- PETER: Not so lucky. I don't have a job right now so 350 dollars is a lot of money to me.
- VICTORIA: A hundred people?

LUC:           Oui, mostly from Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

THE CAR APPROACHES AN INTERSECTION; AT THE RIGHT SIDE OF IT  
THERE IS A SIGN DIRECTING TRAFFIC TOWARDS SAINT ANNE DE  
BELLEVUE. FIVE MINUTES LATER THEY ARE IN THE TOWN. THEY FINALLY  
ARRIVE AT JOHN ABBOT COLLEGE.

END OF SCENE

Scene TwoThe Locale

IN THE EXTREME LEFT OF THE AUDITORIUM THERE IS A SMALL IMPROVISED STAGE. THIS IS WHERE THE MUSICIANS PARTICIPATING FOR THE DAY WILL BE STATIONED. (MUSIC FOR THE PIECE WAS COMMISSIONED BY LUC FOR THAT DAY ONLY). TO THE RIGHT OF IT THERE IS A BIGGER STAGE. SOME SCENES WILL TAKE PLACE HERE ON THIS STAGE, BUT THE MAJORITY OF THE ACTION WILL BE HAPPENING OFFSTAGE, IN AMONG THE AUDIENCE AND ANYWHERE ELSE. IN FRONT OF THIS STAGE AREA THERE ARE TWO SECTIONS OF SEATS. THE WHOLE PLACE FORMS A SEMICIRCLE, THE ACOUSTICS SEEM TO BE NON-EXISTENT. HALF OF THE AUDITORIUM IS OPEN TO THE CORRIDOR FACING THE SOUTH WING OF JOHN ABBOT COLLEGE. SOME THICK CURTAINS ARE USED TO CLOSE THE SPACE FOR PRESENTATIONS. THEATRE GROUPS LIKE OURS ARE USED TO PERFORMING ON THE STREETS; THIS PLACE WILL CERTAINLY DO.

IT IS APPROXIMATELY 12.30 PM. PETER AND LUC WORK ON THE LIGHTS. VICTORIA AND AL ARE BUSY PUTTING PROPS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE PLACES. MAYDA AND HER HUSBAND ARE TAKING CARE OF THEIR BABY WHO IS CRYING IN THE AUDITORIUM. THE AUDIENCE IS NOT HERE YET, THEY ARE GOING TO COME AT 2: 45 PM; THERE IS SOME TIME LEFT TO PREPARE.

CLAUDETTE AND SYLVAIN, WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP BUT DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN THIS PLAY, ARE HERE TO HELP SET UP. CLAUDETTE IS GOING TO PROVIDE THE SOUNDS AND SYLVAIN WILL OPERATE THE VIDEO CAMERA. EVERY SHOW IS RECORDED FOR FUTURE EVALUATION.

IT IS 2PM: ALMOST ALL OUR AUDIENCE( HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATES FROM AROUND THE WORLD) IS IN THE AUDITORIUM. WHILE PEOPLE TAKE THEIR SEATS, WE CONTINUE TO PREPARE. NOW IT IS TIME TO FOCUS ON OUR BODIES. SOME OF US WARM UP OUR VOICES, OTHERS APPLY A LITTLE BIT OF MAKEUP. VICTORIA IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT HER MAKEUP. FOR THE LAST FEW MINUTES SHE HAS ASKED EVERYBODY IN THE TROUPE IF SHE LOOKS OKAY. EVERYTHING IS READY, THE ACTORS, THE MUSICIANS THE AUDIENCE ARE ALL WAITING.

THE MUSICIANS TAKE UP THEIR POSITIONS. VICTORIA, PETER AND I COMMENCE WITH OUR FIRST INTERVENTION. IT IS THE FIRST SKIT, IN WHICH VICTORIA'S CHARACTER, SILVIA, IS IN A BIND. THE SCENE ENDS, AND EVERYBODY IN THE AUDIENCE IS VERY ATTENTIVE, AND THEY ARE TAKING NOTES, THEY ARE TAKING THINGS A BIT TOO SERIOUSLY (SEE LUC'S SCRIPT, SCENE ONE)

LUC ENTERS THE SCENE AS THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES. HE INTRODUCES THE PLAY AND TALKS ABOUT THE FIRST SCENE OF THE EVENING, ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY AND A LITTLE BIT ON THE HISTORY OF THE GROUP. HE DOES THIS BOTH IN ENGLISH AND IN FRENCH.

LUC: We want to know where in the world you come from. So when I call up your continent or region please rise up.

AUDIENCE: Ok.

LUC: Are you ready?

AUDIENCE: Yes. oui

LUC: Africa!

AUDIENCE: *(Some rise up)* Bravo!

LUC: Latin America!

AUDIENCE: *(Fewer than before rise up)* Bravo!

LUC: North America!

AUDIENCE: *(Some rise up)* Bravo!

LUC: Eastern Europe, Asia. Europe!

AUDIENCE: *(Almost half rise up)* Bravo!

LUC: How many people understand only English ? *(About 25 people raise their hands)*. How many understand only French ? *(About 15 people)*.

MOST MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE STARTS TO GET EXCITED. SOME CHAT WITH ONE ANOTHER, COMMENTING ON THEIR PLACES OF ORIGIN AND THE LIKE, SOME OTHER MEMBERS ARE SURPRISED AT WHAT IS HAPPENING, AND THEY APPEAR TO BE TIMID OR PERHAPS THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT AND THEY REMAIN IN THEIR SEATS. THE PERFORMANCE SPACE BECOMES LOUD AND RAMBUNCTIOUS. LUC CONTINUES.

LUC: Ok. Now. As you know, actors almost never start a performance without warming up. Warming up helps them relax and focus. Today you are also actors of change. We will invite you to join us in our warm ups. Ok? Let's do a *dynamica*.

AUDIENCE: Ok.

THE MUSICIANS COMMENCE THEIR AFRICAN RHYTHMS. AS THE MUSIC BECOMES MORE INTENSE, THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP INVITE ALL MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE TO DANCE. ALMOST EVERYBODY IS DANCING NOW. THE DANCE CREATES AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH AUDIENCE, AS ACTORS, AND MEMBERS OF THE THEATRE GROUP INTERACT WHILE THEY DANCE. THE DANCE LASTS FOR APPROXIMATELY 7 MINUTES. PEOPLE DO NOT WANT TO LET GO, THEY ARE HAVING FUN.

THE NEXT SKIT IS ANNOUNCED BY LUC, IT IS ABOUT THE RIGHT TO BE DIFFERENT. IT IS NON-VERBAL AND UTILISES MOVEMENTS AND ACTION. THIS SKIT IS ALWAYS USED BY THE GROUP WHEN THE THEME OF THE THEATRE PIECE THEY ARE WORKING ON IS RELATED TO IT.

FIVE ACTORS ENTER, WEARING BLACK UNIFORMS. THE FIVE CHARACTERS LOOK LIKE POLICEMAN OR SOME TYPE OF GOVERNMENT AGENTS. THEY DO A MARCH IN WHICH THEY SHOW THEIR INCLINATION FOR UNIFORMITY. THEY MARCH IN A DIAGONAL LINE MOVING THEIR HANDS AND FEET AT THE SAME TIME. BESIDES WEARING BLACK ATTIRE, THEY ALSO SPORT BASEBALL CAPS, ALL THE SAME GREEN COLOUR.

ONE OF THE CHARACTERS (PLAYED BY MAYDA) COMMENCES TO DEVIATE FROM THE NORM DURING ONE OF THE MARCHES. SHE STARTS TO DANCE, LEAVING BEHIND THE GROUP. SHE TAKES OFF HER BASEBALL CAP AND PUTS ON A BEAUTIFUL HAT AND WEARS A NICE SCARF. THE CHIEF OF THE GROUP BECOMES IRRITATED BY THIS ACTION AND WITH ANOTHER AGENT OR POLICEMAN COMES BACK TO THE CENTRE OF THE

STAGE AND TRIES TO FORCE THE DEVIANT TO CONFORM TO THE MARCH. THEY PUT THE CAP BACK ON HER HEAD AND FORCE HER TO MARCH IN A UNIFORM STYLE. THEY SUCCEED FOR A WHILE, BUT AFTER A FEW SECONDS SHE CONTINUES WITH HER IDIOSYNCRATIC DANCE. THIS TIME THE AGENTS ARE NOT AMUSED AND COME BACK VERY ANGRY. THEY PLAN TO USE EVEN MORE FORCE. THE SKIT ENDS.

LUC:           *(To the audience)* Do you recognise this situation? Does it remind you of something? What ideas do you have to confront a situation like this?

PART # 1:     *(A woman, Eastern European, is pushed from the audience)* I don't believe in participatory education but I think I may have a solution. *She goes to the stage, and takes some of the props that Mayda was using, a scarf and a hat.*

LUC:           *(To the participant)* Are you ready? Do you want to start?

PART # 1:     Ok.

LUC:           *(Half jokingly and half seriously)* It is a game; these are not real policemen but actors, so please don't bite them or pull their hair. Ok.

THE AUDIENCE LAUGHS AT THESE REMARKS. THE POLICEMEN BEGIN THEIR DRILLS WHILE THE PARTICIPANT DANCES. WHEN THE TWO POLICEMEN IN CHARGE OF BRINGING HER INTO CONFORMITY GO TO HER, SHE RUNS TO THE OTHER TWO POLICEMEN AND TRIES TO SEDUCE THEM WITH EXOTIC MOVEMENTS, ENTICING THEM WITH SENSUALITY. SHE



ENDS UP PERSUADING THESE TWO TO DANCE WHILE THE OTHER TWO JOIN THEM WHEN THEY SEE THEMSELVES ALONE. THE SCENE ENDS.

LUC: Is this action realistic?

PART # 2: (*A woman from Asia, mid thirties*) No. I believe this is not realistic at all. Perhaps one could convince the oppressors to join our struggle but this would take a lot of time. One can not do it in one second. In the case of this intervention perhaps one can seduce the oppressor in some situations such as recognising pleasure in collective actions.

LUC: Let's not forget, in some instances it does not matter if the action is realistic or not. At least the action made us think of solutions and alternatives. Besides, this is a friendly environment we can make mistakes and play .

PART # 3: (*Asian middle-aged male*) I have a solution.

HE TRIES TO PERSUADE MORE MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE TO GO WITH HIM TO THE STAGE. A GROUP OF SEVEN PEOPLE GATHER ON CENTRE STAGE. THEY FORM A CIRCLE AND JOIN HANDS. MORE PEOPLE FROM THE AUDIENCE JOIN THEM. THEY BEGIN TO SING WHILE THE POLICEMEN BECOME INCREASINGLY NERVOUS. THE SINGING OF THE GROUP FORMING THE CIRCLE BEGINS TO OVERWHELM THE POLICEMEN. THE POLICEMEN TRY TO BREAK THE CIRCLE BY FORCE, BUT DO NOT SUCCEED. SOME OF THE POLICEMEN ARE DRAWN INTO THE CIRCLE. THEN ANOTHER ONE, UNTIL ALL OF THEM ARE IN IT. THE SCENE ENDS WITH THE POLICE TRAPPED INSIDE THE CIRCLE.

LUC:           Ok. Is there another person who wants to try another solution?

PART # 4:    (*An African Male*) Yes. But I need more people with me.

AFTER THIS PARTICIPANT HAS GATHERED A FEW PEOPLE, THEY ASSEMBLE CENTRE STAGE. WHEN THE POLICEMEN TRY TO MAKE THE DANCER CONFORM TO THEIR MILITARY MARCH, EVERYBODY IN THE GROUP PARTICIPATING GIVES MONEY TO THE POLICEMEN. OTHERS INVITE THEM TO DRINK OR TO COME TO THEIR PLACES FOR FOOD OR A PARTY. THE POLICEMEN ARE FINALLY CONVINCED THAT IT WOULD BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS TO GO ALONG WITH THE BRIBERY. THE SCENE ENDS WITH EVERYBODY DANCING

END OF SCENE

Scene Three.

LUC: That was fun, but let's move on. The following scene is about oppression; it's set in Eastern Europe but it could happen anywhere in the world. We use different languages respecting the original situation. If there is something that shocks you about this scene we will look at it together.

WE PERFORM SCENE TWO OF THE *Les Lois du Goulag*<sup>1</sup> A BEAUTIFUL BULGARIAN SONG CAN BE HEARD. A GYPSY WOMAN CARRYING A BABY (PLAYED BY MAYDA) APPEARS AMONG THE AUDIENCE SELLING CIGARETTES. ANOTHER WOMAN, EASTERN EUROPEAN, WELL DRESSED AND CARRYING A BRIEFCASE APPEARS FROM THE OTHER SIDE, ALSO SELLING CIGARETTES. WHEN THEY ENCOUNTER EACH OTHER THEY CONFRONT EACH OTHER. THEY DISLIKE AND DISTRUST EACH OTHER.

IN THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCE, THE GYPSY WOMAN RUNS INTO HER COUSIN HERMAL WHO IS TRYING TO GATHER SIGNATURES FOR A SOCIAL PROJECT WITH THE GYPSIES (ROMAS). SHE REFUSES TO GIVE HIM HER SIGNATURE. SHE ARGUES THAT SHE DOES NOT TRUST ANYONE. HE GOES TO THE OFFICE TO REGISTER HIS ORGANISATION WHILE SHE REPEATS THE WORD OF THE POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE GOULAG. "DON'T TRUST ANYONE, DON'T BE ANGRY AND NEVER ASK ANYTHING FROM SOMEONE ABOVE YOU."

IN THE NEXT SEQUENCE, HERMAL GOES TO A GOVERNMENT OFFICE TO ASK PERMISSION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS ORGANISATION. INSTEAD OF GETTING PERMISSION, HERMAL IS SUBJECTED TO RIDICULE, ABUSE AND HUMILIATION FROM A BUREAUCRAT. THIS BUREAUCRAT (PLAYED BY VICTORIA) IS THE SAME PERSON WHO SELLS BLACK MARKET CIGARETTES (SEE PAGE 72-76).

LUC: Do you recognise the situation? Who is the oppressed person here? Is it Hermal or his cousin? If you were in Hermal's shoes what would you do?

PART # 6: *(Another male participant from Africa)* Hermal should tell the oppressors that there are courts of law, and that he knows the law.

PART # 7: *(A man shouting from the audience)*. Show us how you would confront the situation.

LUC: Yes, come here and show us, please.

THE PARTICIPANT GOES TO THE STAGE, PUTS ON THE JACKET HERMAL USES AND TAKES THE BAG THE CHARACTER CARRIES. HE WANTS TO INTERVENE AS HERMAL WHEN THE CHARACTER IS CONFRONTED BY THE BUREAUCRAT IN HER OFFICE. WHEN HE IS TOLD THAT HIS REQUEST IS REJECTED HE RESPONDS:

PART # 6: Madam you know there are laws? There is a thing called freedom of association. Do you know this?

BUREAUCRAT:

Sir I don't deal with laws that is not my job. I only do my job.

PART # 6: Tell me what job is that? *(The audience laughs)*

BUREAUCRAT:

I tell you, sir, I am not concerned with laws here. Dealing with you, that's what I do.

PART # 6: *(He gets frustrated)* I saw some money and cigarettes exchange hands here.

BUREAUCRAT:

Sir, show some respect, you are in an office here!

PART # 6: *(Calmer)* I want to make a complaint. What is your name?

THE AUDIENCE APPLAUDS. HE RETURNS THE PROPS TO A MEMBER OF THE GROUP AND GOES TO HIS SEAT.

LUC: *(To the participant)* Do you feel satisfied? Did you accomplish what you set to do?

PART # 6: Yes, I think I accomplished what I intended. The intervention made me feel very good, empowered, at least for the moment I was on stage. I know this is theatre but it make me think about similar real life situation. It also helped my ego *(Laughs)*. It is good that the oppressors (looking at Victoria) know that we know the laws.*(She laughs)*

LUC: A real situation that perhaps happened to you? Would you like to tell us?

PART # 6: No nothing like that happened to me, but you hear about it sometimes.

LUC: Thank you, sir. *(To the audience)* Do you think his intervention is realistic or not? Can you do that, confront a real government official and argue about laws?

PART # 8: (*North American female*) I doubt that confronting people in power the way the participant did is realistic. I am not saying that it can not happen, it is more likely to happen here in North America than in other parts of the world. When the participant confronted them with money and cigarettes being exchanged.... that's dangerous anywhere. Also, naming the law was not realistic, how many people know the laws of their own countries. How many countries follow the law?

PART # 9: (*An Eastern European male*) My friend told me to comment, so I have to do it (*laughs*). In situations like these the officials use the police to reinforce their positions. You have to be very careful when dealing with them, the courts of law are also part of the state, of control and corruption, they control the law. The officials can accuse you of anything. (*he pauses*) I think that the story of Hermal is very interesting.

LUC: Ok, we will start the entire play from beginning to end now. You can stop the action anytime you want to Intervene. Ok.

THE PLAY BEGINS AGAIN, THE THREE SKITS EXCLUDING THE NON-VERBAL ONE ARE PLAYED AGAIN. THE PLAY IS STOPPED ONCE DURING THE SCENE ABOUT OPPRESSION. IN THIS INTERVENTION A GROUP OF PEOPLE INTERVENE WITH A MESSAGE OF UNITY. THE PARTICIPANTS IN THIS INTERVENTION TRY TO CONVINCHE HERMAL'S COUSIN TO JOIN HIS PEOPLE AND SUPPORT HERMAL'S ORGANISATION. FOR THE FINAL SCENE THERE IS NO TIME FOR ANY INTERVENTION. IT IS ALMOST 6: PM. THE CURTAIN IS CLOSED WITH AN INFORMAL CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE THEATRE GROUP AND THE AUDIENCE.

END OF SCENE

During the aftermath of this intervention (or the conversation with audience/actors) most of the human rights workers indicated how invigorated they felt by it. They were pleased by the manner in which the theatre experience gave them a more positive outlook and they appreciated the safe environment which had been provided in which they had been able to experiment with possibilities. We all agreed that the success of the intervention rested on the alternatives for strategies in actual situations it created.

The scripted scenes in this chapter indicate the analysis that came through the presentation. The voices of the participants indicate the participants' concerns, which were brought about in the "play." Their responses through action (while acting parts), through questions etc. demonstrate their evaluation of the stories we were enacting. After all, those stories came from them in the first place. Their stories, which later were funnelled to the FCDP, made up the bulk of our interpretation of the problematic of human rights around the world.

### The Value of Performance, Knowledge, and the Presentation of Performative Ethnography.

The experience of the final presentation, gave members of the theatre group the opportunity to dialogue and converse with the audience. We learned (I as the ethnographer in particular) as much from the process of creation as we did from what we (audience/actors and members of the theatre group) had to say about oppression and human rights. The *Lois du Goulag's* stories which we were enacting had come originally from the audience of human rights workers. These stories were subsequently funnelled

through the FCDP to Luc who wrote the initial “script.” We, the actors, interpreted the script, bringing to that interpretation and enactment our own social and personal baggage. The process had come full circle. Here we were presenting to the audience what were, in the first place, their own stories. It was at this point in the process that the audience/actors would dialogue with us about our interpretation. This dialogue came as a direct audience intervention. The audience/actors questioned the interpretation, proposed alternatives to the interpretation and discovered other alternatives by becoming actors themselves. Even though not all members of the audience participated on the stage (for lack of time, apprehension or shyness), all were involved in the process. They agreed and disagreed with some situations, and they showed it by applauding, jeering or cheering from their seats. Even if some of their suggestions were not realistic, that did not matter. They were taking an active role in the piece, as they learned, proposed, experienced, negotiated, and dialogued alternatives. The usefulness of the project was not in the realness or the authenticity of their claims, but in the action itself.

As Kenneth Burke (1973, 299) has written, “the reading of a book on the attaining of success is in itself the symbolic attaining of that success.” Likewise, one can see that the rehearsal of the proposed action through the theatre forum of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* is the action which amounts to a kind of success in and of itself. Burke says that: “It is while they read that these readers are ‘succeeding’ (Ibid.). It is while they are acting, negotiating and proposing their points of view and experiences that the audience/actors are finding some success. My choice of evocation of the experience through the



presentation of these scripted scenes is also a kind of success. This creation of cultural knowledge and learning about this cultural knowledge is realised by “presenting,” which makes this ethnographic production both emergent and effective. This ethnographic production is effective because it permitted us all (members of the group, the FCDP and the audience/actors and myself as the writer) to try alternatives of enactment of cultural production ( in the case of the theatrical production) and of evocation and enactment of the ethnographic process (in my case as a the writer of the ethnography). The environment in which the *Mise au Jeu Montréal* intervention (as enacted and evoked in the scripted scenes) was created facilitated the actors by acting themselves on stage: members of the group and members of the audience, to try alternatives, test strategies and learn from each other’s experiences. The play was a forum for ideas. Throughout the theatrical intervention of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* the members of the soliciting organisation, the FCDP, were able to try out solutions to their problems almost immediately. They did not have to wait for government or people in power to take up issue with their problems.

### On Evoking the Process

This chapter (act two) tries to evoke the theatrical discussion the group had with the audience. At the same time it shows the highlights of the final presentation. Audience participation was of course the most important aspect in the presentation. The audience took an active role in the outcome of the different scenes that made up the play. The production of the *Lois du Goulag* was polyvocal in the sense that many voices produced

and enacted it. It was through the process of the rehearsal and the final intervention of this “theatre play” that I learned a very interesting point about theatre of action (or theatre of the oppressed). This point has to do with authority, authorship and ultimately voice in theatrical productions.

In “standard theatre” (mainstream) the authority over creation originates with the author or the playwright (there are exceptions such as collective creations), then producers, directors and actors, set, lighting and costume designers. When the playwright creates, she has a perfect, agreeable, humorous, witty ideal audience in mind. This audience is not necessarily the people the playwright is writing about. The intended audience may be separated from the subject matter. The producer meanwhile engages the director who casts the actors who interpret the roles, the director or producer chooses the designers who put together a performance environment, all of whom may in fact have very little in common with the subjects and subject matter of the playwright. For example, The Mother by Maxim Gorki which is inspired by a Russian woman from the working class, was ultimately performed, in many languages, for wealthy audiences around the world. The audiences attending these theatre performances had nothing in common with the subject who inspired Gorki, and those audiences had no say in the outcome of the process. Furthermore, the audiences did not have a direct voice in the process itself. The vision of the director dictates the outcome of the process.

In the process of *Les Lois du Goulag* just mentioned above, the audience with which we communicated had been decided upon ahead of time, unlike the random theatre

goers who attend standard mainstream productions. In *Les Lois du Goulag* the ideas for the performance originated from human rights workers around the world, and the experiences they have encountered. These ideas and experiences were then funnelled through the FCDP to Luc, who created the blueprint of the script. This was then interpreted by animator/actors in the rehearsal to be presented as a forum for ideas and discussion with the very people who had initiated those ideas and experiences in the first place. We have come full circle. The difference between “standard theatre” productions and ours, then, lies on the trajectory of authority and authorship within the process of the production. In *Les Lois du Goulag* audience/actors, soliciting organisation (FCDP), the actors and the director (Luc) are involved in the process from the beginning. It is a discussion and negotiation from the beginning of the process of the theatrical production.

According to Clifford “A postmodernist ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both writer and reader an emergent fantasy of a possible world” (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 125). Similarly, the process of creation of the theatre play *Les Lois du Goulag* was a cooperatively evolved production. This production intended not so much to create an immediate non-existing possible world, but to evoke in the minds of both actors/animations and the audience/actors a world of possibilities.

A performative ethnography which enacts the ethnography through “presenting” is a vehicle for evoking and learning about this “theatre of action” production. As Fabian (1990:92) points out (referring to the production of the play in Zaire) “meaning (whatever it is) can only be obtained through action, “through a series of communicative events, each

of them up to a point complete in itself.” What is “given form to” can not be conceived through collecting, ordering and classifying information (1990: 92). Nor can it be enacted through “appreciation” of writing. It has to demonstrate, it has to enact. To discover what was given form to in this ethnographic inquiry, a performative ethnography was necessary. I believe that it was through the enactment and demonstration (through scripted scenes of presentation in chapter four and five) of the theatrical production that we learned about the production of *Les Lois du Goulag* in the context of Montréal. It is through this action within the production: its negotiations, its controversies, its openendedness that the discovery emerges and is demonstrated. The *presentation* of this ethnography allows the polyvocality and dialogical nature of the performative ethnography to emerge. It facilitated the multi--authorship, relations of power and voices to find a place within the story. Again, my choice of “presenting” the process through these scripted scenes grew out of my conversation, not only with theactors and Luc, but also with the audience.

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<sup>1</sup> See details of the “script” for this scene in act one (chapter three) of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 6

**Finale:<sup>1</sup> The beginning of reflection, a “Conclusion”**

**Postes ouverts à Mise au Jeu...MajM, organisme d'animation théâtrale, recherche 3 personnes bénéficiaires de l'aide sociale pour combler les postes suivants (programmes extra):**

- 1- Animateur/comédien ou animatrice/comédienne**
- 2- Technicien/ne de scène**
- 3- organisateur/trice d'événements...(in Coups de théâtre, February 1996)**

**The end is ...to continue the work of reflection, to widen the audience, to ponder thoughts that were formulated to show how formulations were produced, and perhaps, to argue with some of the statements (Fabian 1990: 257).**

When I met Luc at the beginning of 1996 to discuss and negotiate this ethnographic exploration, he asked me why I had chosen to study *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. At that time I jokingly said *mañana*, meaning I tell you tomorrow. We left it at that. More than a year later, it occurs to me that I did have a concrete answer to that question. At that time I was aware of the important social work *Mise au Jeu Montréal* had been doing around the Island of Montréal. Their theatrical work of social action seemed a perfect topic for an anthropological study. I wanted to learn about the type of work they do within the specific political, social and economic atmosphere of Montréal and Québec and within the sphere of marginality. I have to add that knowing Luc and being familiar with theatre in general and with Montréal was also a factor. Most importantly I wanted to

know who *Mise au Jeu Montréal* was in terms of the political and social climate of Montréal, and how they did what they did.

Throughout this ethnographic exploration I shared with them not only their theatrical work, but also their personal and social lives. As they bring their social and personal issues of marginality to their interpretations, they tell multiple stories of the characters they present as well as their own stories of marginality. They are unemployed, on welfare, poor, immigrants and ethnically diverse. The social groups they work with are also unemployed, on welfare, poor, physically and mentally disabled, or generally oppressed by a neo-liberal social, political and economic system. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* shares the margins of political, social and economic power in Montréal with those groups which they work for within the city. *Mise au Jeu Montréal* is not a passive partner, they are utilised by those groups whom they work for/with as a tool to communicate and educate about their plight. It seems logical that an organisation like the FCDP would see this theatre group as the perfect tool to discuss human rights.

Throughout the theatrical intervention of *Mise au Jeu Montréal* the audience/actors were able to try out solutions to their problems almost immediately. They did not have to wait for government or people in power to take up issue with their problems. Depending on the people in power is another possible strategy also followed by the commissioning organisation (Canadian Federation for Human Rights). The theatrical environment in which the final performance was given, permitted the actors (members of the group and the audience) to try alternatives, test strategies and learn from each other's

experiences. What was important was that the participants felt comfortable enough in an atmosphere free of the pressures and dangers of the real world, to try out and experiment with solutions at all. Although there is no traditional “catharsis” in this process, all the participants leave the experience with a possible methodology/strategy for their own lives.

The ultimate test of the success of the theatre intervention conducted by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* would require a follow up of the audience in their respective communities. In a perfect world, that would not be difficult. Given the full and excited participation of all those present at the final performance, and the wealth of their ideas and proposals, the event was a success by any standards. The value of the theatrical intervention is not measured by whether those propositions will be put into practice or not, but how theatre of the oppressed will be utilised as a tool by those members of the audience who attended this performance. It is always assuring to a theatre company when the commissioning organisation invites them back a year later to repeat the intervention, and I was very happy to repeat my part with *Mise au Jeu Montréal* in July 1997.

The irony in this thesis is that as an actor, working with a minimalist, presentational type of theatre script at the beginning of the research, gave me serious concerns about the aesthetics of the play. This same presentational script form utilised by the theatre group is the one I adopted to write this ethnography. This form came as the link between the written work and the experience itself. When *Mise au Jeu Montréal* are posed with a situation they respond with a presentational type of theatre play. The theatrical style utilised by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* as a tool to educate and communicate a



way of finding alternatives for resolution of the issues of marginality, was that of presentational theatre. Presentational theatre, as I mentioned it in chapter one of this thesis, is the most appropriate style that could be used effectively by *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. The simple mandate of the theatre group, to be a tool for social action in this production, is facilitated most readily by a style of theatre which is simple and uncomplicated. In this fashion the content or the subject matter being addressed by *Mise au Jeu Montréal* is connected to the style they use to implement their action.

I set out to write the ethnographic experience of the theatrical process. A polyphonic and dialogic performative ethnography seemed like a way of enacting such production. As the process of production “gave form to” ethnographic knowledge, (the intricacies of the story) it became clear that a simple verbatim reproduction of the theatrical process (rehearsals and final theatrical intervention) would not be adequate. This did not mean that the overall underpinning of the account would not be grounded in “situations that took place in the shared space and time” by all participants in the production. The narrative form utilised had to capture the content of the ethnography but also the form in which it was being produced. To closely evoke the dynamic of the theatre production the most appropriate way to write it was to present (theatrical sense) the process of production. Experimentation with playwriting and presentational theatre techniques could allow me to bridge the gap between what I would write about the theatre production and the process of theatre production itself.

The way to enact and evoke this experience, thus, was in scripted scenes in presentational form. Ethnographic writings should come as a cooperative efforts from all involved. “The point is that questions of form are not prior, the form itself should emerge out of the joint work of ethnographer and his native partners’ (Tyler: 127 in Clifford and Marcus 1986). Even though the ultimate decision to use this form and the placement of scenes was mine, I consider it a cooperative effort. It was through the process and discussions with the members of the theatre group that I realised that this form could be a good attempt at working through theoretical issues like performance and ethnographic writing. It was a form which permitted my partners in the theatre group to read and offer feedback. They understood the form; they were working with it.

When it comes to writing ethnographies there is “no real answer.”<sup>2</sup> If there is no real answer to the problems of authorship, authority and writing, my effort can only bring different insights to further the debate on these issues. For example, even though I made efforts for this ethnographic writing to become more inclusive of the other members of the theatre group, it was I who made the final decisions about the form utilised. They have been given a lot of credit, but it is my name that goes in front of this thesis. The shortcomings are all mine. The authority as the writer still rests with me no matter how polyphonic and dialogical the process was.

Like any form of ethnographic writing this has its merits and drawbacks. The merits of using this form of writing the ethnography is that it both evokes and come from the subject matter studied. By presenting theatrically a methodology about a methodology

of theatre of social action which itself is a methodology, I enacted and evoked what was studied with the study. The drawback lies in the interruptions of the aesthetic flow of the textual presentation by way of footnotes, annotations and cross-references.

One large issue that emerged while writing this thesis was the idea of writing an ethnography about theatrical production entirely in scripted form. The problems of theorising and the methodology within the scenes could make the reading tedious and tortuous. How do we reconcile aesthetics with theory? Would we ever be able to actually perform (in the theatrical sense) such an anthropological script? Perhaps some ethnographies belong in a theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> To call the conclusion a finale is a misnomer because finale implies an end and ethnographies are open-ended processes. My intention is just to mark the end of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus, Clifford, Rabinow et al have experimented and discussed this point.

## GLOSSARY

**Actor:** In this is utilised as a theatre actor only.

**Animator:** From the French-Canadian usage as a the master of ceremonies, director and coordinator.

**CSN:** A Québec union; Confédération des Syndicaux Nationaux.

**Enactment:** The action of performing, carrying out in action, perpetrating.

**Evoking:** Refers to the act of calling forth images, and associations.

**FCDP:** Fédération Canadienne des Droits de la Personne is a Human Rights Organisation operating in Montréal.

**Forum Theatre:** “ Forum Theatre” is a theatrical methodology developed by Augusto Boal (theoretician and theatre director from Brazil) within a theoretical perspective of “Theatre of the Oppressed”

**FRAP:** Fédération pour le Rassemblement de l’Action Politique. During the 1970’s FRAP was a municipal party in Montreal.

**FTQ:** Fédération des Travailleuses du Québec. A public employees union in Québec.

**Heteroglosia:** According to Bakhtin (1994: 262-263) it is the internal stratification of any single language into different social dialects.

**Le Pouvoir se Mange Entier:** The title of the theatre play studied by Johannes Fabian (1990)

**Les Lois du Goulag:** The play performed by the theatre group *Mise au Jeu Montréal*. In English it means the *Law of the Goulag*.

**Marginality:** In this case, I am using the idea of exclusion from the sphere of social, economic and political power to mean a sort of marginality. In this marginality, however, the marginalized empower themselves by learning and teaching and making fun of their own position of power asymmetry.

**Mise au Jeu Montréal:** A theatre troupe operating in Montréal and this research’s main focus of study

**Mufwankolo:** A theatre group in Zaire.

**Dialogic/Polyphonic:** Stands in opposition to monologic type of discourse. Bakhtin sees the quality of dialogic/polyphonic discourse in the characters of the 19th century novel, (i.e.: Dostoiesvski’s fiction), as a liberating dynamic in the characters.

**Performance:** As in the notion of “performance art” or the theatrical presentation of events.

**Performative Ethnography:** I use Johannes Fabian's understanding of "Performative Ethnography". Fabian believes, on the one hand, that "informative ethnography" is the kind in which the ethnographer collects data and information from another culture. This implies a degree of direct control over that other culture. "Performative Ethnography", on the other hand, is the kind of ethnography where the ethnographer does not call the shots, but plays along as a part of a process.

**Presentational Theatre:** A style of theatre which does not rely realism to enact a performance.

**RCM:** A municipal political party in Montréal. Rassemblement de Citoyens et Citoyennes de Montréal.

**Realism:** I am using the literary definition of realism. The portrayal of life events with fidelity. Reproduction of real events.

**Representational Theatre:** A type or style of theatre which is closely associated with realism. Common knowledge shared by theatre workers.

**Scripted Scenes:** Ethnographic events written as scenes of a play.

**Tam tam:** Drum music. In Montréal during each Sunday of the summer, people gather on Mont Royal park to play drums. This event has been known as the TAM TAM.

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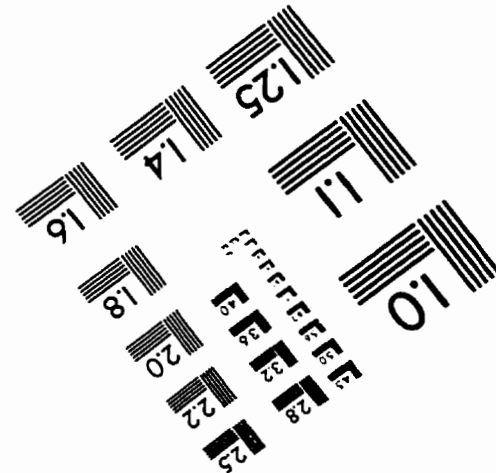
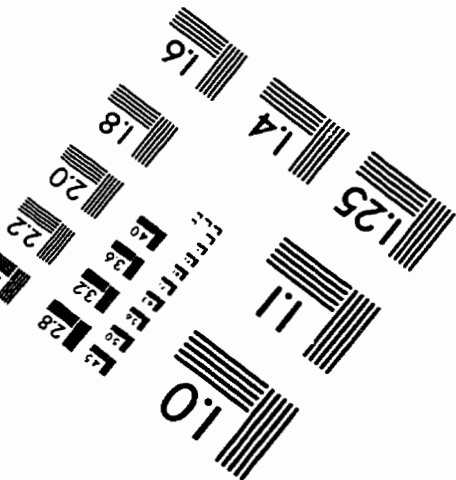
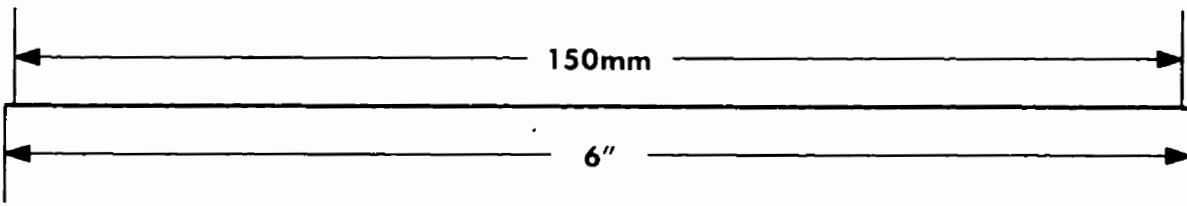
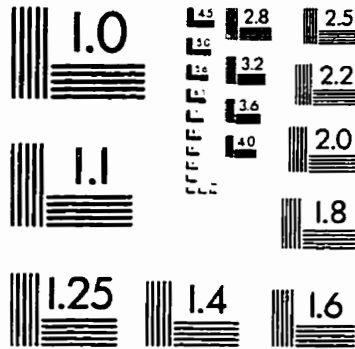
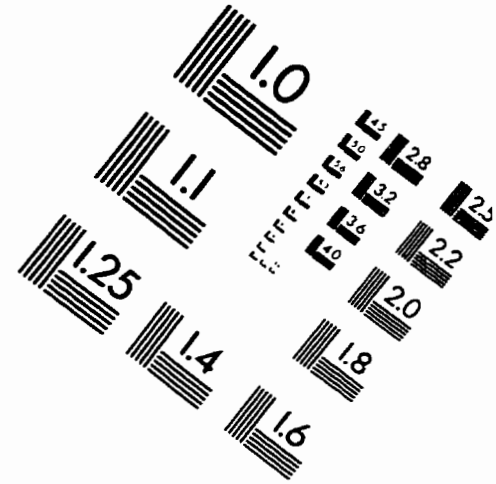
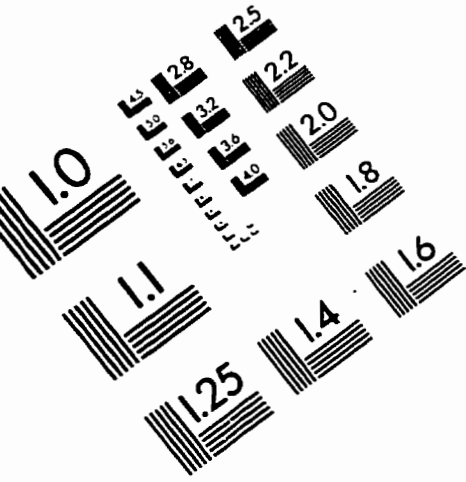
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