

**UNE OUVERTURE SUR LE MONDE:
CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND THÉÂTRE DE LA VIEILLE 17**

by

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B.A., University of Ottawa, 2005

A THESIS IN PARTIAL FULFILLEMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

April 2008

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ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades, the plays and productions of Théâtre de la Vieille 17 have made significant contributions to French Canadian children's theatre. Their productions embrace a fantastical and imaginative narrative that make them accessible to most audiences. As much as this company shows a remarkable openness to the world, it maintains strong ties to the Franco-Ontarian theatre milieu. This thesis examines key elements that have contributed to La Vieille 17's continual commitment to children's theatre as well as ways in which its productions and policy making have resulted in its increasing artistic and financial success.

This study begins by looking at La Vieille 17's three most significant plays: Le Nez, Mentire, and Maïta. This analysis takes into consideration the narrative of each play, production elements, co-producers and collaborators, funding, the scope of their tour, and awards and recognition. Each of these aspects contribute to giving these productions a broader world view and help to establish La Vieille 17 as a leading producer of children's theatre.

The second part of this thesis analyses key moments during the company's history as well as moments in which it has acted as a common front with other Franco-Ontarian theatre companies. Both of these activities have shaped La Vieille 17's children theatre programming and have led the company to create a successful model in which to produce their works.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Je tiens d'abord à remercier ma directrice de thèse Kirsty Johnston pour son appui constant, sa grande patience et sa générosité exceptionnelle. Je voudrais également remercier George Belliveau qui a accepté d'être membre de mon comité et qui a aidé à finaliser ce mémoire.

Je désire exprimer ma reconnaissance envers le duo de Joël Beddows et Craig Holzschuh car ils ont joué un grand rôle dans mon cheminement théâtral : l'un m'a donné le goût de rechercher la pratique théâtrale au Canada français ; l'autre m'a permis d'y contribuer en tant qu'artiste.

Je tiens aussi à remercier Alice Cocunubova, archiviste de référence au Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française (CRCCF) à l'Université d'Ottawa, qui m'a aidé à effectuer l'étude du fond d'archives du Théâtre de la Vieille 17.

Je remercie également le Conseil des Recherches en Sciences Humaines et Sociales du Canada ainsi que The University of British Columbia pour le soutien financier accordé à cette recherche.

Finalement, je veux exprimer ma profonde gratitude à ma famille. À ma mère et mes sœurs, pour leurs encouragements et leurs présence dans les moments les plus difficiles de cette quête et de s'être laissées contaminer par ma passion pour le théâtre. À John, mon grand complice de la vie, qui fut un fort appui tout au long de ce parcours et qui continue de m'inspirer. Sans eux, cette thèse n'aurait jamais vu le jour.

1 INTRODUCTION

Like a number of francophone theatre companies that emerged in Ontario in the 1970s and early 1980s, Théâtre de la Vieille 17 grew out of the groundswell of Franco-Ontarian shared identity. As several scholars have suggested, this period saw the birth of numerous theatre companies driven by artists who were deeply committed to the concerns of the collective (O'Neill-Karch, Paré, Les littératures, and Beddows, L'institution). By emphasizing ideas of accessibility, communal contribution, and social change, theatre played an important role in the shaping of a specific cultural and historical identity that had not otherwise been articulated. While most of these companies initially created works for young audiences, alongside their adult productions and community outreach programs, La Vieille 17 is remarkable as the only company whose commitment to producing children's theatre has been constant. Furthermore, over time La Vieille 17 has become a significant theatre company not only for its strong local ties but also for its ambitious international reach and success.

Unlike other Franco-Ontarian theatre companies who were trying to achieve collective consciousness through their work, La Vieille 17 was not preoccupied with issues of marginality and identity when it came to its children's theatre. Théâtre de la Vieille 17's children's theatre chose to exist outside of that culturally marginalized identity, embracing a fantastical and imaginative narrative instead, thus making their productions more accessible to national and international audiences. The vitality of Théâtre de la Vieille 17 rests in its openness to the world in terms of its productions' form and content as well as the company's touring mandates and artistic exchanges. La Vieille 17's success is chiefly due to its commitment to broadly meaningful and often fantastical

subject matter. The company's children's plays focused more on the realm of the imagination than trying to create characters and dialogue that reflected the concerns and reality of its Franco-Ontarian audience.

La Vieille 17's three most successful productions, Le Nez, Mentire, and Maïta each offer strong evidence of this openness to the world in terms of form, content, touring mandates and artistic exchanges. After outlining their key aspects, I will explore La Vieille 17's mandates, processes and resources to show how they have allowed the company to cross borders into other cultural spaces. Finally, building on these different aspects, I hope to demonstrate how La Vieille 17 sets itself apart from other Franco-Ontarian companies by the longevity and constancy of its commitment to children's theatre and increasing the quality of its work. These aspects have been largely connected to the company's touring network, and the recognition that it has received both nationally and internationally. I have identified five key elements that I suggest have helped to establish La Vieille 17 as a leading producer of children's theatre: strong leadership, committed collaborators, a long development process, an outward look, and a drive to *liaise* beyond borders.

Ironically, while focussing outward La Vieille 17 has helped to establish a Franco-Ontarian repertoire of children's theatre. This seemingly contradictory effect is largely because in moving away from the minority subject and the dream of the collective, La Vieille 17 makes a point to continue to affirm itself as a Franco-Ontarian theatre company. In its beginnings, Francophone theatre in Ontario had an idealist vision of forging a cultural Franco-Ontarian identity that existed outside of English Canada and Québec and that was based in *oralité*, the spoken language. Works gave voice to the

oppressed Franco-Ontarian and, more often than not, were the product of collective creations. Many scholars who study Franco-Ontarian culture, notably Roger Bernard (13) and François Paré (*Théories* 49), have argued that there has been a radical transformation within the Franco-Ontarian community. According to Bernard, as of the early 1990s the intellectual elements of this culture separated themselves from the material elements: “Nous sommes témoins de la première grande rupture culturelle: les éléments intellectuels de la culture sont séparés des éléments matériels” (13). The current paradox that most of Franco-Ontario is facing is that its theatre artists have, for the most part, detached themselves from their audience, they are therefore marginal within a marginal society. In so detaching themselves from the public and their cultural expectations, these artists are left to create works in a laboratory setting and to seek out an audience for these productions that is not necessarily confined to the cultural boundaries of Franco-Ontario. La Vieille 17’s children’s theatre is a prime example of this phenomenon and its three most recent productions show the effects of this detachment from a specifically Franco-Ontarian audience.

2 THREE PLAYS

Although the company has produced a dozen plays for children ranging from the ages of five to twelve, three stand out as particularly good examples of how La Vieille 17 has been crossing boundaries, moving away from the politics of local Franco-Ontarian identity and into the broader realm of the imagination. These plays are drawn from distinct moments in the company's history and suggest the company's sustained commitment to developing their audiences beyond their local Franco-Ontarian context. The first play that I wish to examine is Le Nez (1983-1984 and 1994-1995), followed by Mentire (1997-1998), and finally Maïta (1999-2000).

2.1 Le Nez

La Vieille 17's production history comprises two entirely different productions of Le Nez: the first production of this play took place during the 1983-1984 season, while the second was during the 1994-1995 season. Each involved different artists, and as shown below, they both contributed to the growth and expansion of the company. The original version of this play is significant in establishing La Vieille 17 as a double-mandated company, while the second production attests to the quality of the written text and its appeal to a broader audience.

Le Nez is a play of firsts for La Vieille 17. Along with being the company's first production to be remounted, Le Nez also marks the first of La Vieille 17's "Aventures Théâtrales." This style of presentation became the company's trademark for children's theatre from the early 1980s until the mid-1990s. The 1983-1984 production was a decisive moment in the company's history as before this children's theatre was simply

one of its many activities. This play also marked the company's first major success in terms of children's theatre by gaining recognition outside of Ontario and receiving the Chalmer's Award. Further, this first production initiated the beginning of a long partnership between the company's artistic director Robert Bellefeuille, costume and set designer Luce Pelletier, and sound designer and composer Louise Beaudoin. Le Nez was also La Vieille 17's first children's play to be published. For its part, the second production of Le Nez marked La Vieille 17's first international collaboration and was the first time that one of its children's productions was presented abroad. It involved both La Vieille 17 and Guy Freixe's Théâtre du Frêne (Paris) and allowed for the play to be presented in front of both French and Belgian audiences.

Le Nez is an adaptation of Gogol's satirical story of the same name about a man whose nose, feeling ill-treated, decided that it would abandon its owner and develop a life of its own. Le Nez's co-playwrights, Robert Bellefeuille and Isabelle Cauchy, chose to focus on the farcical element of the situation by creating larger than life cartoon-like characters. When describing the style of the "Aventures Théâtrales" for grant applications, the company wrote that these plays were a compromise between commedia dell'arte and cartoons (Project de commandite). All of the company's "Aventures Théâtrales" -Le Nez (1983-1984 and 1994-1995), Folie furieuse (1985-1986), Petite histoire de poux (1988-1989), and La Machine à beauté (1990-1991)- are farcical and:

the prevailing mood is one of a world gone mad acted out by characters. In farce anything is possible, and the audience expects surprises, transformations, quick changes of heart (and costumes), trapdoors suddenly opening, revelations in closets, remarkable concealments and discoveries, and a general feeling of

wilderness and hysteria building to a grand, accelerated climax (Cirella 38).

Formally, La Vieille 17's "Aventures Théâtrales" all followed the same pattern: they built upon a simple text with universal themes and much wordplay and humour; the acting, costumes, and set were stylized; they used masks and the scenography offered a colourful atmosphere (Projet de commandite).

The title of this work, Le Nez, refers to the main character of the play, an enigmatic figure who everyone talks about and searches for, and who only appears as a life-size character near the end of the play. Le Nez, which means nose in French, also indicates the thematic content of this play and acts as the subject matter and source of inspiration for many play on words and fantastical characters. For example, in one of the scenes of the play, most characters on stage appear as life-size noses.

Before looking at the specifics of each of the two productions of this play, in terms of their reception and how they relate to broadening the company's national and international outreach, it is necessary to understand the narrative of the dramatic text and how it contributes to setting this play apart from the other "Aventures Théâtrales." The play begins one morning as Yvan, the town's barber, is about to bite into the homemade brioche that his wife Simone has prepared for him. To his dismay, he discovers a nose hidden in it. Disgusted, he begins to cough and Simone takes it as an insult to her cooking until she also sees the cause of his distress. He offers to throw the nose into the garbage, to cut it into little pieces, or to hide it in different locations, but Simone objects and tells him that she does not wish to see him until he has fully gotten rid of it. Once on the street, Yvan leaves the nose on the ground. A woman passes by and upon seeing it screams and runs away. After this scene, Yvan finds himself unable simply to desert the

nose in such a public place. The woman returns with a police officer, causing Yvan to run away and drop the nose into the river. Thinking that he has finally managed to rid himself of the nose, Yvan walks away triumphantly until he bumps into the police officer, who has just rescued the nose from the water. Yvan is brought to the police station. Elsewhere in the city, professor Nicolas wakes up to discover that his nose is missing from his face. He rushes out of the house in search of his lost nose. He meets Madame Marie on the street and convinces her, all while covering his face with a handkerchief, that he is sick. He keeps on encountering people on the street and with each meeting comes a new excuse that explains why he is hiding his face. Finally, a giant walking female nose and her nose-baby enter on stage and are soon followed by another nose-woman and her nose-dog and finally by a nose-man. It would seem that Professor Nicolas sees everywhere what he misses most. Back at the police station, Yvan is being questioned as to how he came in possession of a nose. A woman enters the station complaining that a noseless man on the street tried to grab her nose. They go after this mystery man while Yvan manages to escape from prison. During this time, Professor Nicolas has made his way to the office of the town's largest newspaper and it is there that he meets Renée (notice the obvious play on words: Renée is a name that refers to both the nose and rebirth). It is here that he confesses to her that he has lost his nose and shows her his noseless face. Renée agrees to help him by placing an advertisement in the town's newspaper. By the time he leaves the office and goes back onto the street, he notices that the ad has already been placed and people begin to tell him where they last spotted his nose. As it turns out, his nose has decided to become a cabaret dancer. He finds his nose, Nanette as she is now called, and begs her to return. She complains that

he has mistreated her and that she breaths better now that she is free from him. She manages to get away, but just then, the police officer arrives and recognizes her from the other noses at the cabaret. He seizes Nanette and delivers her back to Professor Nicolas, who then tries to put her back on his face. Unfortunately, his nose is still unwilling to stick to his face and just when he is about to give up, a group of doctors enters his house. The doctors use various types of fastening instruments, ranging from tape to screws and finally they opt for crazy glue. By the time they finally leave, Professor Nicolas' face is covered in bandages, but even this cannot make his nose remain on his face. Just as he is about to give into despair again, Renée arrives unexpectedly at his front door and convinces him that he is likeable even without a nose. She leaves but promises to return shortly and during her absence his nose miraculously goes back into place. The play ends with a song and dance between the trio, Professor Nicolas, his nose and Renée.

What is important to note about this narrative is that it does not try to represent a local cultural and politic landscape, but rather focuses on creating a fantastic world where anything is possible. Unlike the plays created by other Franco-Ontarian companies at that same time during the early 1980s, such as Théâtre du Nouvel Ontarioⁱ (Sudbury) and Théâtre d'la Corvéeⁱⁱ (Vanier), which for the most part dealt with local children's realities and concerns, with Le Nez, La Vieille 17 offered its audience an aesthetic interested in pushing the boundaries of the imagination. This aesthetic based outside of time and space made Le Nez, and subsequent "Aventures Théâtrales," accessible to various audiences at different moments in the company's history.

2.1.1 Le Nez (1983-1988)

The first production of Le Nez was a decisive moment in the company's history as prior to this play children's theatre was simply one of its many activities. In its early years, when it was first founded in Rockland, Ontario in 1979, La Vieille 17 sought to fill a niche and create works for and by people of the region. In the grant proposal for the 1983-1984 season, the year in which Le Nez was produced, the company insisted that although it was creating yet another high energy piece it was not a theatre dedicated to children nor was it claiming to be or ever become one: “Il est évident que la Vieille 17 n’est pas un théâtre pour enfants... et nous prétendons pas l’être non plus ou encore en devenir” (Demande de subvention, 1983). This statement obviously was made before the success of Le Nez for after the production of this play, La Vieille 17 began to consider itself a double mandated company, creating works for both adult and children audiences. This obvious shift in preoccupation is evident in the company's subsequent grant applications to different funding bodies. In a 1987 grant application, while still touring this production of Le Nez, the company wrote: “L’un des axes importants de notre programmation a été ces dernières années la création de spectacles pour enfants” (Lettre au Conseil des arts du Canada).

In 1985, while Le Nez was still touring, it won the second prize for the Chalmers Award. This award, which was discontinued in 2001, was granted by the Ontario Arts Council through the Floyd S. Chalmers endowment fund. The purpose of this award was to encourage Canadian playwrights to develop new plays for young audiences and was bestowed on those whose professional plays, whether in English or French, had been presented at least twice to school audiences in the Toronto area. Considering that Le Nez

was La Vieille 17's first fully scripted play, its winning of such a distinction as the Chalmers Award suggests the high quality of the written text and definitively acted as an incentive for the company to pursue its exploration of children's theatre. Le Nez became in a sense the company's first blockbuster, touringⁱⁱⁱ Ontario, Québec and New Brunswick for many years and helped to expand La Vieille 17's audience network. Over the years, this production had five different casts and toured numerous times throughout Ontario and Québec. It also reached large audiences through festivals. In August 1985, Le Nez was presented at the Festival International du Théâtre Jeunes Publics (Montréal) and later that year at the Maison Théâtre (Montréal).

In the summer of 1987, Le Nez was produced in Acadie by La Compagnie Viola Leger. What is interesting about this production was that although the actors were all local, they aimed to be faithful to Bellefeuille's mise-en-scène by having Michel Marc Bouchard, an original cast member of La Vieille's Le Nez, instruct them on stage directions and character intentions. Bellefeuille had been unable to direct the production himself due to his involvement as an actor with Robert Lepage's Trilogie des Dragons, which premiered that same summer. Instead, he chose Bouchard whose previous contribution to La Vieille 17's programming included Rock pour un faux bourbon (1982-1983), Le Nez (1983-1984), Les Feluettes (1984-1985), and La Visite (1986-1987) and who was also a major player in moving La Vieille 17, along with Bellefeuille and Anne-Marie Cadieux, from the rural setting of Rockland to Ottawa. Bouchard was given the task of assuring the quality of the production in Acadie. By this arrangement, La Compagnie Viola Léger covered most of the costs to employ local artists and La Vieille 17 was able to promote its visibility outside of Ontario. During this tour, Le Nez was

presented forty times to different audiences. Following this engagement, La Vieille 17 revived its production of Le Nez for a Ontario tour during the fall of 1987. Finally, in the summer of 1988, almost five years after this play was first created and after having been presented more than 230 times to the audiences of three Canadian provinces, Le Nez was shown for one last run for La Roulotte, a summer theatre that travelled to different parks in and around Montréal.

This first production of Le Nez helped to establish La Vieille 17 as a children's theatre and forged long lasting partnerships between individuals -Bellefeuille, Beaudoin, and Pelletier- and different theatre institutions. Le Nez was La Vieille 17's first children's production to benefit fully from the Théâtre français du Centre National des Arts' newly created fund for the development of regional theatre (DTR). Having been presented in Montréal and hailed by its critics, La Vieille 17's productions became regulars on the Montréal stage, especially as presented at La Maison Théâtre.

2.1.2 Le Nez (1994-1998)

The company's second version of Le Nez also helped to establish La Vieille 17's children's theatre, this time internationally. This production of Le Nez marks the company's first international co-production by bringing together La Vieille 17 and the Théâtre français du CNA in an artistic collaboration with Théâtre du Frêne (Paris), for whom international collaboration was also new. This Parisian theatre company was created by Guy Freixe in 1988, after having been an actor at Théâtre du Soleil for many years. On its website, the company describes itself as being an actor-based popular theatre that lends itself to non-realistic explorations of theatrical conventions:

Depuis sa création, en 1988, la Compagnie est une équipe à la recherche d'un théâtre populaire, affirmant la théâtralité et la priorité donnée au jeu de l'acteur, utilisant des codes de jeu se référant explicitement à la convention théâtrale, pour tendre toujours vers la suggestion plus que vers le réalisme.

These two companies were drawn together because of their mutual concern for the exploration of form which for the most part goes beyond realism to create new theatrical conventions. Both companies prioritize a style of acting in which the actors explore physical acting techniques that permit them to play larger than life characters and multiple roles within a same show. There are many parallels that can be made between the two companies: both are double mandated, creating works for both adults and children; the respective artistic directors often choose to work with the same actors and designers, thus creating a sense of continuity within the company and a particular aesthetic; and finally, both companies consider touring as an essential part of their mandate.

For this production, Luce Pelletier, who since the first Le Nez had normally been responsible for all aspects of the company's children's theatre designs, focused only on costumes, while French designers created the set, masks and puppets. The music was produced by Louise Beaudoin while Robert Bellefeuille acted as artistic collaborator to Freixe's vision of the play. There were ultimately three casts for this production: a mixed Franco-Canadian one comprised of Alain Batis (FR), Gatienné Engélibert (FR), Guylaine Guérin (CND), and Marc-Antoine Picard (CND), which was used for the initial European and Canadian tour; a fully French one which toured France and Belgium that included Batis, Engélibert and Alain Carnat; and finally an entirely Canadian cast made up by

Guérin and Picard alongside Esther Beauchemin and Henry Gauthier for an extensive tour of Ontario, Québec and Acadie^{iv}. This production of Le Nez toured from 1994 until 1998, during which time both companies created other productions that involved some of these same actors^v.

Rather than relying on the different levels of government, whose arts funding had undergone drastic cuts from conservative governments^{vi}, La Vieille 17 decided to find a national corporate sponsor to fund the production. Banking on the previous success of a recent “Aventure Théâtrale,” La Machine à beauté, La Vieille 17 created a gala fundraiser night for the première of Le Nez at the CNA. Further, on another occasion, they organized another fundraiser to celebrate the company's fifteen years of existence. These activities were meant to help finance the development of other plays and to highlight the company's past and current achievements.

As with the first version of Le Nez, this production toured for a long time, and it was the company's first international children's production. Presented to audiences at least 260 times, Le Nez travelled throughout France three times, Belgium twice, and in Canada throughout Québec, Acadie and Ontario. This second production of Le Nez enjoyed as much, if not more, success than the original version in terms of the duration and the international and national breadth of its audiences as well as the reception that it received from critics. It demonstrated both that there is a Franco-Ontarian children's theatre repertoire and that it is exportable to the international market. It raised the profile of the company's children's theatre nationally and internationally and suggested a successful model of co-production across borders.

Le Nez was La Vieille 17's first piece of children's theatre to be published at Les

Éditions Prises de Parole in 1992. Only three of its other plays have been published: Machine à beauté in 1995, Mentire in 2000, and Maïta in 2001. The works created by La Vieille 17 have helped in establishing a Franco-Ontarian children's theatre repertoire, not only by having their plays published and made accessible to the public at large, but also in the revival of its plays by community, school, and professional theatre troupes. These plays that were written for La Vieille 17 have also been included in school curricula and are found in various studies on children's theatre. In her book Introduction aux textes du théâtre jeune public, Hélène Beauchamp includes two of La Vieille 17's plays as part of her study: Le Nez and Petite histoire de poux.

The second production of the play inspired the company to extend its reach. By seeking out national and international collaborators, Mentire (1997-1998) and Maïta (1999-2000) have surpassed the financial and artistic scale of Le Nez. Furthermore, all subsequent productions took advantage of new initiatives by art councils to fund projects that encourage international exchanges and the exportation of Canadian theatre to the world stage.

2.2 Mentire

The title Mentire, chosen by co-authors Louis-Dominique Lavigne and Robert Bellefeuille, refers back to the central characteristic of the play, where each character is guilty of lying. The use of the Italian word for lying hints at the style of presentation that inspired the writing and production of this play. This play borrows from Commedia dell'arte in terms of characters, design elements and techniques -lazzi and slap stick- as well as in terms of creative process. The actors involved in the workshop of Mentire first

worked with an outline of the action provided to them by the co-authors and they improvised the words and gestures of the play until an actual text was established by Lavigne and Bellefeuille. The process was lengthy and precise, and it was only after six versions of the text, two workshops, and many readings that Mentire was ready to be produced during the course of the 1997-1998 season.

Mentire is a simple story contrived around a lie that Arlequin has told Madame Pantalone in order to get a bite to eat. Although keeping with the traditional characters of Commedia dell'arte, Lavigne and Bellefeuille innovated by creating female versions of certain stock characters. The play opens with a song in Italian and is followed by a scene in which the miserly Madame Pantalone tells her servant, Arlequin, that she is ruined and that they will have to starve themselves rather than spend more money on food. Arlequin manages to fool her into giving him food by telling her that a man wishes to make her acquaintance. Love struck, she demands a meeting with this man for that very night. Coincidentally, a man arrives that same day and having already heard of Madame Pantalone's riches, decides to assume the disguise of a Capitaine in the hopes of gaining access to her gold. Realizing the mess that he has gotten himself into, Arlequin considers drowning himself so as to avoid punishment, but he admits his cowardess and is unable to do so. He confides to Tartaglia, Madame Dottore's servant, and at that moment, Capitaine, who has been spying on the whole scene, announces himself in front of the two servants. He boasts that he is the greatest captain of the seas and suggests a meeting with the beautiful Madame Pantalone that very night at midnight. Madame Pantalone consults Madame Dottore and wishes for medication that will help sooth her nerves that have been overwhelmed from hearing the good news. Madame Dottore meets Capitaine

and falls for his good looks; he too is smitten by Madame Dottore. Capitaine, thinking that he is alone, speaks the truth about wanting to steal from Madame Pantalone. Arlequin and Tartaglia, having overheard the scheme, decide that he has to be stopped. Seeing as the rendez-vous between Madame Pantalone and Capitaine was arranged to be on the dock near a tree and that there is no actual tree present in that location, Arlequin tells Tartaglia that he has to pretend to be the tree and when Capitaine pronounces words of love ("mon amour") he must hit him over the head. Madame Dottore arrives and is in on the scheme to stop Capitaine from committing the crime. She finds that Tartaglia's tree does not look real enough and decides to wrap him in material that she has in her medical bag. Madame Pantalone arrives on the dock, near the tree, and pronounces the said words of love. Tartaglia hits her over the head and she is knocked out. At that moment, Capitaine arrives in search of her, Arlequin imitates Madame Pantalone's voice, at which moment Capitaine pronounces the exact words of love. However, Tartaglia, being too scared, is unable to hit him. Madame Dottore gives him a medication that makes him become very aggressive and he knocks everyone out, including himself. As she was the first to be made unconscious, Madame Dottore wakes up before the others and tries to wake the Capitaine, but she manages only to take off his glove. She sees a scar on his hand that is identical to her own. When he awakes, they realize that they are long lost brother and sister. Overcome by happiness, Madame Pantalone invites everyone to a feast at her place. The play ends with the same song as the beginning, though this time sung both in Italian and French.

By placing the intrigue on a deserted island and having the characters speak in both Italian and French, the authors of Mentire push the cultural and geographic

boundaries of the play. In an interview with Serge Quinty, Bellefeuille expressed the desire to create a show that stood apart from all other children's theatre in Canada : "J'ai envie de faire voyager les enfants, à travers le temps et à travers le monde. J'ai tout simplement envie de leur raconter une histoire où la fiction et non pas la réalité est à l'honneur" (16). In this passage, Bellefeuille explains that what he intended with Mentire was to have his audience travel through time and space, away from reality and into a world of complete fiction that is marked in some way by the different characters who are motivated to distort the truth.

In La Vieille 17's production, the audience was immediately confronted with the artifice of the event. Actors transformed themselves into their characters on stage, dressing and preparing in plain view of the audience before the beginning of the performance. In the preface of Maïta, Robert Marinier speaks of this distancing effect, to which La Vieille 17's various productions are drawn to, as allowing for a certain detachment that helps to create the metaphor rather than pushing the audience to become the judge of the action as with Brecht's theatre: "Mais au lieu de nous détacher du sujet, pour que nous puissions observer froidement et juger de la situation comme le voudrait Brecht, cet effet d'étrangeté nous plonge en plein dedans, et nous sommes pas moins émus et bouleversé à la fin" (Beauchemin 9). The audience is therefore drawn to the artistry of the production rather than to its representation. La Vieille 17's productions are not looking to alienate their audience by exposing the production's framing devices, but rather are looking to make complicit. This is another way that La Vieille 17's productions look to push boundaries: we have seen it so far with the geographic locations that its plays have toured to, the collaborators it chooses to bring in, the subject matter of

its

plays and the theatrical traditions from which it borrows. Finally, the actual form of La Vieille 17's productions also looks to blur the boundaries between audience and stage.

In many of the children's plays created by La Vieille 17, there is a travelling figure, a person who crosses boundaries and chooses a nomadic lifestyle rather than a sedentary one. In Lavigne and Bellefeuille's play, the traveller is embodied by Capitaine who arrives on the island from distant lands, having travelled the open seas. It is this very attribute that allows him to mislead all of the other characters as to the earnestness of his actions. When he first enters on stage, he is in plain clothing and puts on his Capitaine disguise knowing that Madame Pantalone has a weakness for captains. This disguise allows him to later mislead everyone else into believing that he is the greatest captain that ever travelled land and sea. In this manner, he personifies the French proverb *a beau mentir qui vient de loin* (he who comes from far may lie with impunity), which is sung in the play's epilogue.

Originally intended to be a co-production between Théâtre de la Vieille 17 and Théâtre populaire d'Acadie^{vii} (Caraquet, New-Brunswick), three other companies collaborated in terms of both the artistic and financial aspects of Mentire: the Théâtre Français du Centre National des Arts -as regular collaborator with La Vieille 17 through the DTR fund-, Théâtre du Frêne (Paris), and the festival Les Coups de Théâtre (Montréal). This project pushed the geographic and artistic boundaries of children's theatre in Franco-Ontario by bringing together two countries, four francophone communities and five different theatre organizations, thus allowing this project to benefit

from many different government funding programs. In 1997, Mentire received funding from the Commission internationale du théâtre francophone (CITF). According to the CITF's website, Mentire received funds from Canada, the Francophone community of Belgium, France, and Québec and was among the nine projects to be supported that year.

The CITF was created in 1987 in order to support multilateral projects of creation and of distribution throughout the francophone world. To be eligible, a project had to involve three artistic partners, two of which had to be theatre companies, from three francophone countries spread out on two different continents. It should be noted that Canada and Québec are considered as two separate entities as both are financial supporters of projects, which means that co-productions between French Canada and Québec are able to easily access these funds should they intend to take part in international festivals. Projects were and are evaluated based on artistic quality, the innovative character of their method, their pertinence in terms of the impact on francophonie, the practicality of their budget, the professionalism of the partners and the guarantee of their technical or financial commitment. (CITF's website).

Along with the generous amount received from CITF, Mentire benefited from funds received from the Ontario Arts Council, the Canadian Council for the Arts, the Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes (Québec), the Government of New-Brunswick, the City of Ottawa, the Regional Municipalities of Ottawa-Carleton, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Fondation Franco-Ontarienne. This production was able to access funding from three provincial government granting agencies because of the amount of collaborators that it brought together for this project. In expanding the reach and scope of this production, La Vieille 17 was able to invest in

its artistic quality.

In addition to the financial benefits described above, this collaborative piece brought together artists from Ontario, Acadie and Québec. Luce Pelletier took on once again the role of costume designer; set and accessories were designed by Luc Rondeau, TPA's main scenographer; music was composed by Jac Gautreau, also affiliated with TPA; Carole Caouette of Montréal took care of lighting design, production management, and was technical director for the production; and Diane Fortin, a long-time collaborator with La Vieille 17, took on the play's stage management. Esther Beauchemin, Ginette Chevalier, Luc Leblanc, Luc Thériault, and Yves Turbide made up the cast for the duration of the production. As Mentire was an attempt to be as faithful as possible to Commedia dell'arte, Guy Freixe, who has previously worked with La Vieille 17 on the second version of Le Nez and who was trained in this particular form of physical theatre, was flown in from France and worked closely with the actors for a month so that they made proper use of their masks.

The efforts made by those involved in Mentire to have the production reach across borders contributed to the production's financial and artistic success. As it was a co-production involving Les Coups de Théâtre, the production was eligible not only for Québec funding, but also provincial awards of recognition. In 2000, Mentire was nominated for two Masques, prizes of excellence handed out annually by the Académie québécoise du théâtre: the Masque for best young audience production and the Masque for costume design. The following year, in 2001, La Vieille 17 announced its last touring dates for this production, with a total of over 140 representations in front of audiences

from Ontario, Québec and Acadie during the course of its four year run.

Although no longer travelling to schools and focussing more on presenting in theatres and community centres, Mentire was able to reach diverse audiences and gain recognition on new fronts. The experience of producing Mentire justified the company's new commitment to a longer development process, both for dramaturgy and production. It also demonstrated the benefits of forging new partnerships, both artistic and financial, and of taking the time to develop a specific aesthetic for the production, thus breaking from the “Aventure Théâtrale” mold.

2.3 Maïta

Maïta is La Vieille 17's most significant work to date in terms of quality, production scale and dramatic scope. The visual and dramatic quality of this piece exceeds anything else that has been created by the company. However, what links Maïta to the company's earlier plays is that it goes beyond the minority reality of Franco-Ontario by pushing the boundaries of the imagination, borrowing from other theatrical traditions and reaching outwards to national and international communities. Based in eloquent playwriting, and precise mise en scène and technical elements, the recognition that this production has received surpasses all of the company's other productions. It has toured throughout Québec and parts of Ontario and travelled to Mexico in 2003^{viii}. The play itself has been translated into both English and Spanish and has won significant awards^{ix}. Maïta's style is distinct and unlike the comedic approach of all of La Vieille 17's other plays, it sheds light and humanity on a contemporary issue and offers a tragic

narrative.

Maïta is the first play written by Beauchemin, who acted in many of La Vieille 17's children's production. As with Mentire, the company committed itself to a long dramaturgical process involving several dramaturges, actors and some of the designers. Four years went by before it was produced for an audience and it ended up touring for a total of seven years. The idea for Maïta, came about from Beauchemin reading a piece in the newspaper in the mid-1990s about a factory in Asia in which child workers were employed. These children, who were tied to their machines and locked in, were unable to escape the premises when a fire broke out. This tragedy resulted in 188 victims. Beauchemin took up this tragedy and explored who these children could have been and how they might have grown up and played within the walls of the factory:

Quelques lignes dans le journal, parmi les faits divers, sont à l'origine de Maïta. Au milieu des années 90, l'incendie d'une usine où travaillaient des enfants, a fait 188 victimes. L'employeur verrouillait les portes afin qu'ils ne puissent rien voler ou partir avant d'avoir terminé leur travail. Certains étaient attachés à leur machine, jour et nuit. Après l'indignation, sont venues les questions : qui sont ces enfants prisonniers? Que se racontent-ils, attachés à une machine dans le silence et l'obscurité de la nuit? Des personnages commençaient à vivre. L'idée d'une histoire commençait à germer... (Beauchemin, La Comédie Humaine 30-31).

Originally, when first writing, Beauchemin had intended to contrast the story of Maïta in Asia with that of Mathilde, a young Canadian girl who also goes through hard times. However, after having the chance to workshop the play at different instances,

Beauchemin eventually chose to focus uniquely on Asia and the story of Maïta. In its final publication, the story of Maïta is juxtaposed with an invented story of Issane, princess of light.

A co-production between La Vieille 17, the Théâtre française du CNA, and Québec's Théâtre de Sable, Maïta draws on the real life events of the sweatshop tragedy as well as Wayang Kulit shadow puppets. The main story explores the conditions of children forced to take part in child labour, while the use of different layers of puppetry in the production are meant to make possible the exploration of such a dense subject matter. The juxtaposition of both the story of the sweatshop children and that of Issane, make the issues of the play seem at once contemporary and universal, reaching beyond spatial and temporal boundaries.

Théâtre du Sable is a theatre company that has been dedicated to the exploration of puppetry since its foundation in 1993 by co-artistic directors Gérald Bideau and Josée Campanale. The company prides itself on its commitment to constant aesthetic renewal and the rigor of its approach. As they explain on their website, Théâtre du Sable creates works that are accessible first and foremost to audiences of all ages and they believe in the natural prolongation of the development process. This Québec city-based theatre company has been involved in over thirty productions. For Maïta, Campanale designed and directed the different variations of puppets used and was assisted by Réjean Bideau, brother to Gérald Bideau, in their actual making. For his part, Gérald Bideau acted as artist consultant and dramaturge alongside Franco-Ontarian playwright Robert Marinier and Bellefeuille.

For its part, La Vieille 17 brought in its own artists, to complement Théâtre du Sable's artistic contribution. As with most of La Vieille 17's earlier children's theatre, Robert Bellefeuille directed this production. Esther Beauchemin, Roch Castonguay, Marie-Thé Morin, Nathalie Poirié, and Bernard Alain made up the original cast^x. Jean Hazel, noted designer in Québec, designed both set and lighting for this production, while Louise Beaudoin once again collaborated with La Vieille 17 as composer and sound designer.

Beauchemin's Maïta is the story of a young girl who, at the age of eight, is rented out to a factory in order to help pay her family's debt. Issane, princess of light, is the puppet that was given to her by her father, a shadow puppeteer, on the day that she entered the factory. Four years go by and on each day she removes one of the beads that have been sewn onto Issane's dress by her mother. This helps Maïta keep track of the time that has passed as the remaining beads represent the exact number of days that are left before she can return to her family. She is the only child who works in the factory who knows how to read and for this reason she has become indispensable to Wunan, the factory's manager, as he is analphabetic. During her four year stay she befriends two other child workers, Naosin and Dengtsiao, and tells them the story of Issane and the labyrinth. The play within the play tells how Issane, princess of light, one day woke up earlier than usual and disturbed the goddess of night by burning her with a ray of light. Infuriated, the goddess locked Issane in her labyrinth for four years, during which time the world was deprived of daylight. Issane made many attempts to escape the labyrinth, but each were to no avail as she always found her way back to the room with the nine doors, always having to restart. Woken by the singing voices of humans, Issane tried

once more to escape the labyrinth. This time she attached one of her long hairs to the knob of one of the nine doors and continued tying her hair together so as to be able to make a long cord that would help her keep track of each path she had already taken. Guided by the singing voices, she was able to find the door leading to the outside world and it is at that very moment that daylight was recovered. As in Le Nez and Mentire, song plays a pivotal role in the plot as it is the element that ends up freeing Issane. Maïta promises that when her father comes to get her in a few days, he will also care for the other two and teach them the art of shadow puppets. A few days before their departure, Wunan arrives with a new boy who is meant to replace Maïta. However, Liyen, the boy in question, mocks authority, refuses to do as told and pretends not to know how to read or count. He is punished while the other three children take part in the Monsoon celebrations. When it is announced that the owner of the factory will be visiting in a few days, the children are forced to work more quickly, and in the chaos of the rush Dengtsiao falls on one of the machines and dies. As part of the ceremony of lights, a boat is put on the water in memory of Dengtsiao and during this moment of commemoration, Liyen steals away from the factory grounds with the Issane puppet. Two days later, Liyen is brought back and looks battered. His parents, having sold him to the factory, did not want him back. Wunan locks the doors of the children's working area from the outside in an effort to avoid having any of the other children run away. In the night, one of the machines catches fire and Naosin is the only one who manages to escape as she is the smallest child. The father, who returns to the factory after four years, as promised to his daughter, finds Naosin, who holds Issane in memory of her late friend. Like Issane, she has managed to escape. Learning that she is an orphan, Maïta's father accepts to take

her with him.

As with Mentire, the idea of border crossing is found not only in the artistic approach of the play, its appeal to outside collaborations and financial support, but also in the actual subject matter of the play, as seen through the figure of the traveller. In Maïta, the fact that the father is a travelling puppeteer indicates that he has a greater consciousness of the world. This is echoed by his daughter who wishes to have the same profession as her father. She makes the other children forget about their dreadful situation by telling them the story of Issane and by promising to bring them along with her when she leaves. Dengtsiao also shows this openness to a world that is beyond the factory walls by constructing his boat out of garbage material. He plans to set it free on the water during the festival of lights so that it can float away from the reality that he knows and travel to far off lands that he has only imagined.

Maïta proposes a poetic vision of the world insofar as it suggests a specific interaction between stage and audience and creates a captivating atmosphere. Beauchemin noted the silence of the audience when she recounted her experience in Mexico in Entr'Acte. I noticed a similar atmosphere when I saw the play in Toronto during a public matinee of the production at the Berkeley Street Theatre as part of Théâtre Français de Toronto's season, in May 2007.

As described in Maïta's very detailed pedagogical guide^{xi}, many of this production's technical elements were deliberately organized to create some distance between the action of the play and those watching it. This is done primarily by revealing the artificiality of the construction through the production's technical and dramatical

elements. As described in the section about Mentire, this is another technique used by the company to blur boundaries. As much as the audience is pulled into the story, many of the production's formal features create a *mise-en-abîme* which reveal the plays inner workings.

One such formal choice concerns the kinds of puppets used in the production. Four different types of puppets are in fact used in La Vieille 17 and Théâtre du Sable's production of Maïta: Marotte à main prenante, Javanese Wayan Kulit, rod held, and puppets manipulated at a distance. In the case of the Marotte à main prenante and the Wayan Kulit, the audience sees both character and actor appearing onstage in the same instance. One of the reasons why puppets were used for this production rather than having the actors take on the physical role of children is simply that children rarely appear onstage in La Vieille 17's productions. In fact, of the company's twelve children's productions, only two have had children characters: Les Inutiles (1993-1994) -in which Beauchemin played the role of the child- and Maïta. Having had the middle-aged actors fully perform the role of children could have acted as a parody or seemed slightly moralist for a children's audience. According to Bellefeuille: "C'est rarement réussi. Or, je ne crois pas que les enfants puissent s'identifier à des personnages qui les représentent mal, qui les ridiculisent même parfois" (Burgoyne 86). Instead, in wanting to tell this story and create an atmosphere in which the audience could be captivated on both an emotional and creative level, those involved in this production chose a fantastical world whose artificial elements were by no means hidden from the audience.

The main characters of the play consist of the Marotte à main prenante. This type of puppet is an evolved form of the marotte where one of the hands of the manipulator

holds the rod that is at the back of the puppet's solid head, while the other hand is an integral part of the whole, and becomes the puppet's hand. In the event that two hands are required, another actor steps in and lends an extra hand. For this production, puppets ranged from 1.2 to 1.5 metres and were about the actual size of children. Like bunraku puppeteers, the actors in this production were in full view of the audience and wore loose fitted black garments that allowed for fluid movement. When making these puppets, Josée Campanale first did research on different Asian countries, looking at shapes and colours. For every head, she first used glaze so as to shape the face, later using plaster and finally fibre glass. In keeping with the tradition of the Marotte à main prenante, the puppets' heads were simply attached to a garment and in an effort to make these puppets seem more alive, lead was sewn into the seams of each character's costume, thus giving it weight and a sense of three dimensionality.

The story of Issane that Maïta tells the other children is meant to shed a little hope into the harshness of their existence. This play within a play also acts as another device used to lighten the tone of the piece. The puppet used in this instance was the Javanese Wayan Kulit. In Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre : Contemplations on the Art of Javanese Wayang Kulit, Jan Mrézek describes the elements that are required for this type of shadow puppet. The Wayan Kulit is traditionally a carved puppet that is made of leather. It holds a central controlling stick as well as side rods that are used to manipulate both the arms and legs. A translucent cloth and an electric lamp are also required. (Mrézek xiii-xv). Although keeping with the main tradition, Campanale made some slight adjustments to these elements in Maïta to keep with the idea that the story of Issane was one imagined by a child working in a factory. The small work table, once used as a

surface covered by equipment, after working hours became the stage space for Maïta's storytelling. A small translucent cloth was put up against the table so as to act as a screen, while a candle was lit and placed on the table, thus enabling shadow. The central controlling stick of the Issane puppet was fixed into the table while her hands were controlled by means of rods. While the actor manipulating Maïta focused on telling the story, the actors manipulating Naosin and Dengtsiao had their puppet take hold of one of the rods and move it in accordance with the story. As the puppets became puppeteers, the story became more fantastical and further melded the real and imagined spaces. The production also added to the Wayang Kulit by including beads. This symbol is specific to the story and as the play progressed, more beads were taken off, thus letting more light pour through the carvings on the puppet's body.

The operational mechanisms of the third and fourth types of puppets that the company used were more concealed. Their function in the story, unlike the first two types of puppets, was demonstrative rather than narrative. They therefore contributed to the aesthetic of this production without affecting its poetic metaphor. During the festival of lights, elephants and Buddhist monks appear to the children characters. These flat figures were two-dimensional cut-out puppets of the profiles of the above mentioned. These puppets, like the Wayan Kulit, were rod held. They were designed to pass above a screen or wall without the hand of the manipulator being visible to the public. (Philpott 88). The final type of puppet found in this production was one that was manipulated at a distance. When the audience first entered the space, there were small wooden boats positioned far downstage. These boats remained in this position until after the festival of lights, when the boats were put on the water. To give the illusion that they were floating

away, a long pole or string was used off stage to have the boats move along the stage before disappearing into the wings.

The production's extensive use of puppetry was supported by Jean Hazel's set design. It had many levels, thus creating different acting areas for the action of the play, both inside and outside of the factory. It was painted in brown and the wall paneling was made to resemble bamboo. According to Maïta's pedagogical guide, the simplicity of the style of the set was meant to echo the austerity of Japanese houses. (27). As the puppeteers were not hidden behind a puppet booth, the set was an open space where the puppeteers could freely manipulate the puppets onstage. After the tragic fire scene that killed Maïta and Liyen, once Naosin has managed to escape the factory, the walls of the set collapsed and the stage was brought forward, as if both were manipulated by the invisible hand of an off-stage puppeteer.

The use of puppetry in this production was at once seamless magic and yet a constant reminder of the construction of this illusion. This play remained broadly meaningful and often fantastical, thus making its focal point the magic of theatre. It did not seek to be moralist by openly denouncing child labour, but rather was concerned with how children in such situations play and create worlds that went beyond their every day reality.

Storytelling plays an important role in this play. Maïta's father is a puppet master who has taught his daughter the art of puppetry. She in turn teaches her friends to believe in the magic of storytelling by having them engage in the telling of the Issane story. Like many of La Vieille 17's previous work, Maïta does not reflect its audience's reality onstage and focuses more on the realm of the imagination through both its form and

content.

Maïta, unlike many of La Vieille 17's earlier shows, was not presented within the school context, though schools were invited to book matinees at the actual theatres where it was being presented. The technical design of this production, as described earlier, was more complex than the pop-out style of some of the earlier "Aventures Théâtrales" and required the facilities and stagehands of actual theatre spaces. Created in Québec city at Les Gros Becs and Carrefour International du Théâtre de Québec, home to Théâtre du Sable, in May 2000, Maïta finally traveled to Ontario during that same fall, where it was presented at the CNA as part of the théâtre français' "Grand Galops" series and in Sudbury at the TNO. Throughout the course of its production history, Maïta either took part in festivals, was presented as part of a theatre company's season or in community centres.

Both in quantity and range, the recognition that Maïta and its creators received surpasses any of La Vieille 17's other children's theatre. In 1997, when still at the very beginning of its creative process, Maïta was among the 49 cultural projects that emphasized Canada's year of Asia Pacific in the province of Québec (Quebec Celebrates). In October 2002, Beauchemin was given the Christine Dumitriu Van Saanen prize at the Toronto Salon du livre, a monetary award that recognizes of quality of the work of a francophone author living in Ontario. Following in the footsteps of Mentire, Maïta was nominated for three Masques in 2003: Masque for best young audience production, Masque for Sound Design, and Masque for Innovative Text.

Although pleased that the artistic value of this production was being recognized

by the Académie québécoise du théâtre, the company issued a press release on its website following the announcement of these three nominations that raised issues in regards to the fact that this production was only eligible for these awards because it was a collaboration with a Québécois theatre company. It should be noted that when French Canadian theatre companies outside of Québec produce their own work, their production has only access to one Masque, the Masque for Franco-Canadian production, and are excluded from the categories that praise the merit of their specific production elements. It is only when collaborating with Québécois companies that they can then gain access to the other Masque categories. In the press release, Bellefeuille argues the importance of convincing the Académie québécoise du théâtre to allow Franco-Canadian productions and artists to be recognized in the different categories, especially when their productions tour the province of Québec. He considered this to be a question of survival, development and of recognition that is made as much by peers as by the audience. (Press release January 20, 2003).

Along with the above mentioned awards, Maïta, like Le Nez, was invited to travel internationally, this time to Mexico. Having initially been invited to the April 2002 Festival Del Centro Histórico de la Cuidad de Mexico, some measures were taken to make the play accessible to a Hispanophone audience. Maïta was translated into Spanish by Cecilia Iris Fasola, a translator who had previously worked for Montréal's Le Théâtre du Carrousel, a Québécois children's theatre company who has long produced the work of playwright Suzanne Lebeau. However, following the attack of September 11, 2001 in the United States, the festival had to limit its programming, especially in terms of young audiences, because of private sponsors pulling out at the last minute. As Beauchemin

explains, much of the festival was funded by private enterprises who had, for the most part, their registered office in the World Trade Centre. Consequently, the managers of the festival had to compress the little funding they had left and made programming choices that affected La Vieille 17's plans of going to Mexico that year. The invitation was postponed to the following year, which in fact gave the company more time to prepare for its Spanish début. Supervised by Daniel Zamorano, the francophone actors of the original production learned the Spanish text phonetically. Along with these preparations a performance of the play was given in Spanish at La Nouvelle Scène in Ottawa, thus allowing the performers to try out the new language on familiar grounds. Profits made that day were given to Free the Children, an international organisation working towards abolishing child labour throughout the world. When describing her experience in Mexico, Beauchemin explains that although the audience's energy was vibrant, the actors were anxious because for the first time Maïta was being presented in a country that is actually affected by the issues of poverty and child labour explored in the play. She comments that the play was well received at each of the four representations and that the actors came away from this experience hoping that more exchanges like this would be created in the future. (Beauchemin, Maïta au Mexique 65-70).

Although a first experience for Francophone artists in Ontario, Mexico and the province of Québec have been exchanging both adult and children's productions since the late 1990s, as detailed in Cahier de Théâtre JEU's volume 123. Productions of the work of Suzanne Lebeau, noted children's theatre playwright for Le Théâtre du Carrousel, offer one set of examples. She first was invited to present a Spanish version of Ogrelet at the 2000 Festival Del Centro Histórico de la Cuidad de Mexico, the same festival that Maïta

participated in -three years beforehand-, Ogrelet then went on to tour the country and had a subsequent tour in 2005-2006. Another of Lebeau's plays was invited to Mexico in 2003, Contes d'enfants réels. Thus following in the footsteps of Lebeau and others, Maïta shows a significant shift for the La Vieille 17 as it gained access to the international market in a way that other Québécois artists have been doing for quite some time now.

The three above mentioned plays, Le Nez, Mentire, and Maïta, demonstrate the importance of co-productions for La Vieille 17 as it enables a longer duration to the life of a production, cultural exchanges between creators that enhances the quality of the production and tends to inspire future projects. On this matter, Bellefeuille has commented that:

On grandit quand on rencontre des gens d'autres pays, d'autres cultures. Les artistes ont un monde intérieur qu'ils doivent cultiver continuellement. Lorsque l'acteur voyage, il est confronté à des publics différents qui ont d'autres références, d'autres réalités et ça amène l'acteur à se dépasser. (Barond p.42).

These exchanges are seen as beneficial not only to the company, but also to the individual, who takes away new skills from each encounter: Commedia dell'arte training from Guy Freixe, different types of puppetry from Josée Campanale, and basic Spanish pronunciation from Daniel Zamorano.

3 MANDATES, PROCESSES, AND RESOURCES

La Vieille 17's children's programming has been profoundly shaped by the company's broader mandate. This mandate has led them to seek and create with other artistic organizations and to sustain an investigational approach to their work that does not limit itself to the collective. The company's commitment to being a dual-mandated company has also had an effect on the company's visibility nationally and internationally. Success in both spheres has allowed them to improve the quality of their work and take more time with their children's theatre production process.

3.1 La Vieille 17 throughout the years

La Vieille 17 did not start out with a specific mandate to serve children. The company was founded in the rural community of Rockland, in Eastern Ontario, in 1979 at a time of great social commitment. Like many artists of the time, Robert Bellefeuille, Jean Marc Dalpé, Lise L. Roy, and Rock Castonguay, -the company's co-founders- aimed to create theatre that was accessible, involved communal contribution, and sought social change. As a Franco-Ontarian theatre company, La Vieille 17 was committed to shaping a specific cultural identity for the collective and sought to fill a niche by creating works for and by people of the region. The company's first success came in 1979 with the collective creation Les Murs de nos villages, a humorous look at a day in the life of a village of Eastern Ontario. The founders of the company were also engaged in cultural animation and created plays for all walks of life. In that first year of existence, along with Les Murs de nos villages, La Vieille 17 held a poetry and music event, presented a multimedia intervention show, and performed a pedagogical piece for school children

entitled Le Roi Dagobert.^{xii} In its subsequent season, La Vieille 17 continued to seek a broad range of audiences with this same energy. It produced Dalpé and Brigitte Haentjens' Hawkesbury Blues (1981-1982), a show for adults, and a collective creation clown show intended for children audiences, Premier! Premier! (1981-1982), that brought together the talent of Bellefeuille, Anne-Marie Cadieux, Castonguay, and Vivianne Rochon.

Despite its success with both children and adult audiences, La Vieille 17 only really began to consider itself a double-mandated company by the mid-1980s. It was also at this time that Robert Bellefeuille began to distinguish himself as the company's artistic director. As I suggested in chapter two, the many levels of success achieved by the first version of Le Nez helped to anchor children's theatre as one of La Vieille 17's two main activities. However, this success alone did not inform the company's decision in this regard. Rock pour un faux Bourbon (1982-1983), a play written by Michel Marc Bouchard with Bellefeuille, Cadieux, Castonguay, Rochon and Patrice Coquereau making up its cast, was described by the company as "une experience captivante mais difficile à vivre" (Demande de subvention, 1983). This play was intended for teenage audiences, but because it dealt with teenager delinquency it was considered too difficult to market in schools, and instead became a workshop open to the public. In addition to these marketing problems, La Vieille 17's collective creation for adult audiences, La Voix des Années 30 (1983-1984) was deemed a complete letdown. As a consequence of these two different financial disappointments, the company was in debt and started to question the manner in which it did theatre and the location of its headquarters. Its members made the decision to move away from rural Ontario into the urban setting of

Ottawa. This was done in the hope that it would enable the company to create greater opportunities for playwrights to test out their ideas and for the company to engage in co-productions and re-invest its energy in children's theatre. Changing its mandate in these ways, the company began to professionalize its theatrical practice, explore new territory and seek audiences beyond its local Franco-Ontarian community.

In contrast to its early locally-based and community-oriented activist work, La Vieille 17's children's theatre gradually moved away from the minority subject and the dream of the collective. Its members stopped trying to reflect directly the reality of their audience on stage through the use of realistic theatre techniques. Instead, they borrowed theatre techniques from other cultures, told more fantastical and less culturally specific stories, toured outside of the province, and co-produced with other companies. In so doing they created a theatre of laughter that incorporated genres and styles that are often related to children such as masks, clowns, physical comedy, and cartoons. As we saw in chapter two, their productions are predominately playful events that often emphasize the theatricality of the representation. Their various productions have incorporated such diverse performance traditions as Feydeau inspired farce, Asian shadow puppets, Turkish shadow puppets, Commedia dell'arte and the European clown. Their formal mixings have led La Vieille 17 to create a distinct style that crosses boundaries and goes beyond the reality of the minority theatre audiences in Franco-Ontario.

As much as its children's theatre practice has been marked by this openness to the world, its adult theatre maintains itself as an independent entity that often, as was the case with the recent mounting of Patrice Desbiens' L'Homme invisible/The Invisible Man, deals with the minority subject. La Vieille 17's adult theatre is completely independent

from its children's theatre and they operate as two different entities. One deals with more realistic and identifiable subject matter while the other clearly seeks to create a fantastical world in which unimaginable circumstances take place. L'Homme invisible/The Invisible Man is a lyrical poem that was written by Desbiens (1981). It is the story of a man who was born bilingual in Northern Ontario (the Francophone self was portrayed by Rock Castonguay in La Vieille 17's production; the Anglophone self by Robert Marinier) and who is torn by two cultural identities: Québec and English Canada. In search of a self, he leaves the North and travels East to Québec. It is a quest that does not limit itself to the question of cultural identity, but also involves that of love, human connection, and the feeling of void that can be felt by any individual. For its part, La Vieille 17's adult theatre has moved away from the collective "us" to an interest in the individual whose story happens to be written by someone who considers him or herself to be Franco-Ontarian.

After Premier! Premier! (1981-1982) and Le Nez (1983-1984), La Vieille 17 continued to create works for children that pushed the boundaries of its audiences imagination. Each of these productions combined Commedia dell'arte and cartoons to create a new blend of physical comedy that was labelled "Aventures Théâtrales." Folie furieuse (1985-1986) is seen as a likely follow-up to Le Nez, though coloured with more humour and high energy. This play was inspired by a short horror story and was set in the atmosphere of a 1930s cabaret. Written and directed by Bellefeuille in collaboration with Cadieux and designed by Luce Pelletier, Folie furieuse toured across Ontario and Acadie. It was performed at Toronto's Harbourfront Festival and opened La Maison Théâtre's (Montréal) 1986 season. Petite histoire de poux (1988-1989), which once again

brought together the trio of Bellefeuille, Pelletier and Beaudoin, is an imaginary world in which life-size fleas try to take over the world. This production toured Ontario and parts of Québec. The actors involved in the project took a Commedia dell'arte workshop from Nicolas Serreau, a former student of Ariane Mnouchkine, and worked with masks in a pop-up set inspired by the 1890s and the work of Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo. La Vieille 17's following production, Fou rire sous le grand chapiteau (1989-1990), moved away from the aesthetic of the "Aventures Théâtrales" of the previous shows by emphasizing and re-exploring the European clown that was introduced with Premier! Premier! The responses that Prologue for the arts collected from teachers who had seen the production with their students were mixed: the company was reproached for the simplicity of the production's plot by some teachers; while others enjoyed its fast and repetitive pace.

Incidents surrounding Fou rire sous le grand chapiteau, mainly the mixed response that it received and complaints made by the actors who felt they were not well received by the schools, and an increasing cumulated deficit led to discussions within the company surrounding its Triennial plan and the future of its children's theatre. According to the actors involved in Fou rire sous le grand chapiteau, some of the schools had not prepared for the arrival of the show, others did not specify that the play was to be performed elsewhere than on the first level of the building, some treated the actors as if they were students rather than trained professionals, and often it seemed as if the play was merely an extra demand in the school's already busy schedule. Despite its increasing professionalism, like many theatre companies during the late 1980s and early 1990s, La Vieille 17 was struggling financially because of insufficient funds received from different

levels of government. This increasing indifference from the Franco-Ontarian public and funding agencies led some creators, such as Haentjens, Dalpé, Cauchy, Bouchard, and Cadieux (to only name a few) to choose Québec over Ontario. Others, such as Bellefeuille, committed to La Vieille 17, continued operations in spite of the challenges that the company was facing.

Those still involved with La Vieille 17 decided to re-evaluate their theatre practice in order to survive the ongoing difficulties. During its 1990-1991 season, La Vieille 17 set out a Triennial Plan that focused on continuing its development of adult theatre while keeping up its reputation in terms of children's theatre. Several components of this plan addressed to children's theatre specifically. The members of the company aimed to slow down the rate of production; create an assistant artistic director position in an effort to depersonalize the company and to take some responsibility away from Bellefeuille (who was focusing on his acting and directing career more and more in Montréal); seek more co-productions with the possibility of touring internationally; study the market; find new sources of financing; and continue to work closely with Prologue for the Arts (the promotional organization that took charge of booking La Vieille 17's touring schedule). During the period that followed the elaboration of the Triennial plan, the company increased workshops, laboratories and public readings and only a few projects made it past these stages and into full productions. The first year was usually dedicated to the process that led up to the production of a piece, the second to provincial touring, and the third to national and international touring. Consequently, by slowing down its creative process and gradually moving away from the mould of the "Aventures Théâtrales,"

La

Vieille 17 gained recognition for the quality of its work. This recognition led to more co-productions, awards, and touring locations.

The plays produced after Fou rire sous le grand chapiteau show the impact that the Triennial plan has had on the company's children's theatre. Prior to the three productions I analyzed in Chapter two, La Machine à beauté (1990-1991) is arguably La Vieille 17's best production in terms of textual quality as well as mise en scène and design elements. Adapted by Bellefeuille from Québécois Raymond Plante's children's novel about a small village whose inhabitants step into a beauty machine to be transformed into carbon copies of what they believe to be beautiful men and women. This play toured schools in Ontario, was performed at the Théâtre Français de Toronto, was presented in Québec city at Les Gros Becs, was invited to be the holiday season's show at La Maison Théâtre, and was picked up by Réseau-Scène to tour Montréal's surrounding areas. Another direct outcome of the Triennial Plan was Les Inutiles (1993-1994). It was developed by Benoît Osborne, who during the early part of the 1990s became Bellefeuille's second in command. As assistant artistic director, Osborne initiated and developed his own projects as playwright and/or director, and represented Bellefeuille during his absence. He also had the authority to make decisions about touring, funding, projects to endorse and the basic day-to-day functioning of the company.

Les Inutiles was followed by the second version of Le Nez (1994-1995) and Mentire (1997-1998) which were in turn followed by Jazzy Joe et le petit gentil pois (1998-1999), a production by France's Gaby-Théâtre that was invited to be part of La

Vieille 17's season. This play was written by Chantal Lavallée, who was one of the original actors in the first version of Le Nez, and Violaine Donadello. Lavallée is also currently working on a new play in conjunction with La Vieille 17, Le Petit Rocher, that, if produced, will be the company's first full children's theatre production since Maïta.

Though created during the 1999-2000 season, La Vieille 17 has yet to produce a follow-up to Maïta, and was still touring this production as of last season (2006-2007). It is also following the success of Maïta that Esther Beauchemin replaced Bellefeuille as artistic and general director of La Vieille 17. Bellefeuille still acts as advisor to the artistic director and remains involved in many of the company's upcoming projects. Two new children's plays are currently in development at La Vieille 17, Le Petit Rocher and Chuchotements. Through its narrative, Lavallée's Le Petit Rocher brings together Brittany (France) and Gaspésie (Québec). In August 2007, Lavallée took part in a playwriting residency at La Vieille 17 to develop the text, in February 2008 a workshop reading of Le Petit Rocher, that involved actors and designers Louise Beaudoin (music) and Jean Bard (set), took place to help with the shaping of the text, and a public reading of this play is set for June 2008. For this project, Bellefeuille is both director and dramaturge, while Beauchemin acts as artistic advisor. The second text, Chuchotements, which is set to take part in a playwriting residency sometime during the current season (2007-2008), will once again be bringing together Mentire's creative duo of Bellefeuille and Louis-Dominique Lavigne. These two new developments suggest that although the company has changed its artistic director, it remains committed to developing quality children's theatre and to creating projects with artists who have ties to other artistic communities, notably Lavallée and Lavigne who work in France and Québec

respectively.

La Vieille 17's current mandate continues to uphold a commitment to international outreach and the need to affirm itself as a double-mandated Franco-Ontarian company:

Le Théâtre de la Vieille 17 est un théâtre de création franco-ontarien ouvert sur le monde, soutenant la démarche artistique de créateurs dont le questionnement répond à un besoin crucial de prise de parole. Il diffuse à la fois des spectacles pour la jeunesse et pour les adultes à l'échelle régionale, nationale et internationale. La compagnie réalise en outre diverses activités d'animation et d'éducation artistique. (La Vieille 17's website).

3.2 Acting as a collective front

However, as much as La Vieille 17 has set itself apart with a special interest in opening itself up to the world, it has been, and remains, very much an explicitly Franco-Ontarian theatre company. La Vieille 17 has worked closely with other professional theatre companies in Ontario by acting as a common front when dealing with pressing issues such as: external competition, local crises in regards to censorship, the future role and place of theatre in the province as discussed during the États Généraux (1991 and 2007), and lobbying for permanent performance spaces.

At about the same time that La Vieille 17 was launching itself as a professional theatre company in 1979, the Comité provisoire de théâtre professionnel (CPTP) was created, a group in which La Vieille 17 was an active member. The other members of this group included Théâtre d'la Corvée (Vanier), Théâtre du Nouvel Ontario (Sudbury),

Théâtre du P'tit Bonheur (Toronto), and Perd pas l'nord (Toronto). This committee was established to represent the different Franco-Ontarian professional theatre companies by discussing ways to improve touring conditions in Ontario. The key elements discussed were fixing a general touring schedule so that no two companies were touring in the same region with productions for the same age group, setting a standard selling price, and dealing with the competition. The CPTP became a common front for approaching companies and organisations that were seen as infringing upon the development of Franco-Ontarian professional theatre. For example, a delegation was set up to approach both Théâtre l'Hexagone and the Fédération Culturel des Canadiens Français (FCCF). They were both seen as unfair competition because of the lower pricing of their productions and their touring schedule, which often overlapped and occurred in the same location as the productions of the member companies of CPTP. The exchange between the CPTP and the FCCF was rather mild in comparison to their dealings with L'Hexagone and had less impact on the future of theatre in French Canada. At the time, Jean Herbiet, who was artistic director of the Théâtre Français du Centre National des Arts, headed L'Hexagone, a side troupe intended for touring Francophone elementary and secondary schools in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces. As Joël Beddows has explained, the plays produced by L'Hexagone hired actors from Montréal, failed to share the market by touring in the same regions as other francophone companies, and sold their productions at much lower rates, almost half of what the CPTP members were selling them at (L'institution 166-168). The conflict between the members of the CPTP and L'Hexagone was ongoing throughout the years and was only resolved completely in 1982, when Jean-Claude Marcus, newly appointed to youth programming for the Théâtre

français du CNA, chose to dissolve L'Hexagone. In its place, he initiated the Développement du théâtre en régions (DTR), a fund intended for the development of regional theatre in French speaking Canada. This fund, which still exists today, allows the CNA to co-produce with francophone companies without necessarily contributing to the artistic design of productions. The DTR allows French Canadian theatre companies to have access to larger budgets, more resources, and occasionally to the CNA's studio. La Vieille 17 is probably the company in Ontario who took advantage of this amendment the most. The first version of Le Nez was the company's first play to benefit fully from the DTR fund and the partnership proved to be enduring as all of La Vieille 17's subsequent productions of children's theatre have been co-productions between the two companies.

The Franco-Ontarian artistic milieu also underwent a critical moment of rethinking its practice in the mid-1980s following the off-putting reception of Les Rogers (1984-1985) by the community. A co-production between Théâtre de la Vieille 17, Théâtre du Nouvel Ontario and the Théâtre français du Centre National des Arts, this play, like many others at the time, which were originally intended for adults, was brought to high schools in an attempt to promote the production within the town or village. Structured as a Feydeau, Les Rogers was a light comedy in which its co-authors, Jean Marc Dalpé, Robert Bellefeuille and Robert Marinier, took on the roles of three *hommes roses* who deal with the ins and outs of relationships. This production is often referred to as "La Crise des Rogers" and at the basis of this controversy was two scenes of the play: one in which the three characters spoke about their first sexual relationship; the other in which there was a short moment of nudity onstage^{xiii}. The authors were unwilling to cut

or reformat the production for the high school performances. In reaction to these two scenes, school authorities of North-East Ontario cancelled fifteen of its scheduled representations. (O'Neill-Karch 105-106). The effects of censorship and the debates in the artistic milieu that quickly ensued resonated throughout Franco-Ontario, affecting the relationship between theatre artists and the community, notably the school boards of Ontario. Consequently, the TNO began to focus almost exclusively on adult theatre and has only produced two plays for children since this incident. Other companies in Franco-Ontario, such as Vox Théâtre, although not directly involved in the controversy, moved away from creating children's productions. This left La Vieille 17 to be one of the only professional theatre companies still producing this type of theatre during the latter part of the 1980s. For its part, La Vieille 17 was less affected by this controversy as Bellefeuille was less outspoken than Dalpé, and the company was recognized for the quality of its children's productions and had toured Le Nez successfully to high schools the year before "La Crise des Rogers."

The whole Franco-Ontarian milieu evaluated the situation of its theatre during the 1991 États Généraux. According to Paul-François Sylvestre, "les états généraux du théâtre franco-ontarien, c'est notre façon à nous, artistes d'ici, de dire qu'on est en vie, qu'on bouge, qu'on a de l'audace au coeur et que rien ne pourra nous arrêter" (4). The États Généraux are seen as an affirmation of the existence of a dynamic theatre practice in Franco-Ontario and its determination to continue despite possible challenges. It is generally an occasion during which the professional milieu takes the time to reflect upon its current theatrical practice, evaluates the state of affairs and decides upon the procedures to take in the future. During this period of revision, La Vieille 17 made

mention of many of the obstacles that were hindering the development of Francophone theatre in the province: the exodus of talent, the isolation of its creators in respect to its audience and to others working in the domain, the lack of dramaturges, the lack of interest coming from Francophone schools and community centres, and the inability of the milieu to renew itself with another generation of creators (Sylvestre 4). This situation encouraged companies, La Vieille 17 in particular, with its dedication to children's theatre, to look to a different market, namely outside of the province.

Since 1991, there has only been one other États Généraux: a first part which took place in the Spring of 2007 with another part intended later in 2008. This second États Généraux evinces how the Franco-Ontarian theatre community sees itself needing to determine the course that it wishes to take for the next ten years. When looking at this particular milieu, I see at once one that is dynamic and expanding and yet also one that is faced with many of the same challenges as those of 1991.

In all of the Francophone minority cultures in Canada, youth and children's theatre are both very productive and visible sectors because of the companies' commitment to touring. In 2008, eleven of the thirteen companies that are members of the ATFC offer youth and/or children's theatre as part of their regular programming alongside adult theatre. The lifespan of these children's theatre productions often surpasses that of adult theatre as they generally tour for months and sometimes years, as was the case with Le Nez, Mentire, and Maïta. Like La Vieille 17, many companies first gained recognition and credibility as professional theatres from their youth and children's productions.

As noted by the members of Association des theatres francophones du Canada

(ATFC), several key problems are associated with touring Ontario with Francophone productions. First, the number of immersion schools in Ottawa has surpassed the amount of Francophone ones which affects the level of language that can be used in a given production. Second, touring to remote regions of the province is sometimes prohibitively expensive. Third, many schools are unable to cover the cost of sending their students to the theatre. Fourth, dealing with uneven school politics in terms of what can be presented to its audience base, as seen with "La Crise des Rogers," can make touring in this way a risky prospect. Finally, companies are often unable to cover the cost of touring productions as the set price hasn't changed in the past twenty years, though the cost of productions have, and grants are still too small. (FCCF's website).

The problem with touring in schools is an ongoing issue that has yet to be solved. When examining the production history of La Vieille 17, there is a remarkable shift away from the school circuit and into actual theatre spaces, which is evident between Les Inutiles (1993-1994) and the second production of Le Nez (1994-1995). The members of ATFC use Maïta as an example of a play that had difficulty touring in schools: "La pièce Maïta du Théâtre de la Vieille 17 a peu tourné dans les écoles qui ont jugé que le propos de la pièce, le travail chez les enfants en Asie, ainsi que le traitement du propos, étaient inappropriés pour les élèves (FCCF's website)." In moving to theatre and cultural centres, La Vieille 17 has managed to free itself from the constraints of trying to please school boards, and has been able to conduct a more elaborate exploration of content and form.

Moving away both from touring to remote locations throughout the province and school circuits and focusing instead on cultural centres and theatres have allowed the

company to plan for more technically elaborated venues with technicians. La Vieille 17 was therefore able to focus more on scenographic design. In so doing, La Vieille 17 moved away from the pop-out style of the “Aventures Théâtrales” to more elaborate sets like that of Maïta, and has gained increasing recognition for the overall quality of its productions. The nominations that it received for both Mentire and Maïta for best young audience production attests to the benefits of having made that shift away from performing in schools.

There is a definite move made by some Franco-Ontarian companies from schools to actual theatres and, as noted with La Vieille 17, an increasing interest in exporting productions to the international stage. Some members of ATFC, such as La Seizième (Vancouver), L’Unithéâtre (Edmonton), and La Catapulte (Ottawa), continue however to organize provincial and national tours for their children and youth productions. These companies answer a specific need in their specific community: La Seizième and L’Unithéâtre are the only Francophone theatres in their respective provinces and La Catapulte is the only Franco-Ontarian theatre dedicated to producing youth theatre.

What is remarkable about the Ontario context for Francophone theatre is that it comprises so many theatre companies, each of which is spread out over the main three regions of the province: Ottawa-Toronto-Sudbury. The sheer quantity of theatres in the province, many of which are double mandated, has allowed a company such as La Vieille 17 to give itself a specific mandate to produce children's theatre for an urban audience of the province that *goes to* the theatre and to export their productions on a national and international front. La Vieille 17’s children’s theatre has been presented to audiences in Montréal and throughout the province of Québec, Acadie, France, Belgium, and Mexico.

By opening up their productions internationally, as especially noted with Mentire, La Vieille 17 has access to new funding agencies and to additional awards, which in turn helps with grant applications for new projects and partnerships. This shift within the company's touring program, in gradually moving away from the school circuit and into theatres and cultural centres, has helped to sustain its commitment to producing children's theatre and to make of it a model that other companies have begun to follow.

La Vieille 17 is the forerunner when it comes to expanding itself to different markets and creating new partnerships with other Francophone communities, but it is in no way isolated from other Franco-Ontarian or French Canadian theatre companies. The TNO during its 1996-1997 season created a piece, Monsieur Lou, its second piece of children's theatre since "La Crise des Roger," which brought together a mix of traditional French Canadian stories and stories written by contemporary authors. This play was presented at the 1997 Jeux de la Francophonie, in Madagascar. As part of its current 2007-2008 season, Vancouver's Théâtre la Seizième is producing Lyne Barnabé's Flocons pour Alicia. This is a play that brings together the story of Félix, a little boy who is awaiting his father's return from the North Pole, Alicia, a young girl newly arrived to Canada from Cameroon, and an elf named Lulu. This production is touring both British Columbia and Alberta. Across Canada, Francophone children's theatre is taking up narratives that are fantastical, world expanding and not fixated on local francophone minority identities or experience.

4 CONCLUSION

Many French-Canadian theatre companies are double-mandated and create works for children and/or adolescents alongside adult theatre. Of those who produce children's theatre, none have achieved the financial and artistic success of La Vieille 17. This company is distinctive for the quality of its productions, its commitment to continuing to produce children's theatre and its strong national and international outreach programs. This openness to the world in French-Canada, of which La Vieille 17's productions were among the first to make this transition, is described by the ATFC, in Un Théâtre qui s'impose et qui s'exporte, as indicating the excellent quality of a production:

Cette ouverture sur l'international n'intéresse pas, comme on peut voir, nécessairement toutes les compagnies et elle ne transforme pas non plus de façon radicale les compagnies qui s'y investissent. Mais elle représente de façon très éloquente une indication du niveau d'excellence atteint par les compagnies et de la crédibilité dont elles bénéficient dans le milieu théâtral professionnel, au Canada et à l'étranger.

My own research has demonstrated that the vitality of Théâtre de la Vieille 17 lies in part in Robert Bellefeuille's ongoing commitment to the company. Further, his longstanding efforts have gained from a talented artistic team which has also committed itself to the company's collaborative process. In this team are such leading artists as Esther Beauchemin, Luce Pelletier, Louise Beaudoin, Roch Castonguay, Mireille Francoeur, and Henry Gauthier. Beauchemin and this team have also benefited from collaborators with precise skills for each new production. La Vieille 17 recognizes when it needs further artistic training and willingly asks for support from outside artists. This

quality is found throughout La Vieille 17's history, with instructors such as Guy Freixe brought in to give specific workshops to the actors. More recently, this commitment to continual artistic training and innovation can be noted with Maïta. For this production, La Vieille 17 chose to collaborate with Théâtre du Sable seeing as it is a company that is dedicated to puppet theatre. Other elements that account for La Vieille 17's success, other than its strong leadership and committed collaborators, are its long development process, its outward look, and finally its drive to liaise beyond borders. These five key elements have allowed La Vieille 17 to continue developing artistic projects that are not tied to specifically local Franco-Ontarian settings or issues and that, instead, are set in fantastical worlds with broad relevance. At the same time, especially in recent years with Le Nez (1994-1995), Mentire (1997-1998), and Maïta (1999-2000), La Vieille 17 has chosen artistic projects that push the company to innovate both the dramatic narrative of the play as well as specific elements of the mise en scène.

In recent time, La Vieille 17 has begun developing two new works, as detailed in chapter three. This is an exciting development as it will be the first time since Maïta that the company will produce a new piece of children's theatre. Both new plays, Petit Rocher and Chuchotements are exemplary of the model that was set out with the second version of Le Nez. First, both projects demonstrate strong leadership from both Beauchemin and Bellefeuille who play a role in each project. Secondly, these projects will involve artists that the company has already worked with such as Jean Bard, Louise Beaudoin, Louis-Dominique Lavigne, and Chantal Lavallée. Thirdly, a long development process has been set out to include writing residencies, workshops with actors and designers, and public readings before the piece is actually produced. And finally, both projects

demonstrate an interest in going beyond borders in terms of both the subject matter of the plays and the national and international partnerships that will come about for each project.

My own research fits into a growing interest in Franco-Ontarian theatre as it relates not only to the dramatic text but also to looking at the internal structure of theatre companies. Children and youth theatre in Franco-Ontario are areas that have been greatly excluded from critical discourse, an issue brought up by scholars such as François Paré (Le théâtre franco-ontarien et ses éditeurs 119) and Joël Beddows (L'institution 254). I can only hope that this is the first of many studies to investigate this aspect of French Canadian theatre. There is still much more to be said about La Vieille 17's earlier children's theatre and the work of other Franco-Ontarian companies that have and/or still produce children's theatre. Among those still left to consider are companies such as Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario (Sudbury), Théâtre d'la Corvée (now Théâtre du Trillium, Vanier/Ottawa), Perds pas l'nord (Toronto), Théâtre du p'tit bonheur (now Théâtre français de Toronto, Toronto), Vox Théâtre (Ottawa), Théâtre des Lutins (Ottawa), and L'Hexagone (Ottawa). I chose to focus my research mainly on Théâtre de la Vieille 17 because it is the company that stands out in terms of the longevity of its commitment to children's theatre, the quality of its artistic approach and the scope of its audience base. Further study could include comparing La Vieille 17's model to that of other Franco-Ontarian companies and to that of other successful children theatre companies throughout English and French Canada. Also, it would be interesting to conduct a full length study on all of La Vieille 17's productions and look for moments when its children's theatre informs its adult theatre practice and vis-versa.

La Vieille 17 is a company that seeks to blur boundaries. This is done by choosing to combine different theatrical traditions as noted in both Chapter two and three. In addition, as seen in Mentire and Maïta, its productions look to push the boundaries of the audience-stage relationship by making the audience complicit in the theatrical representation. This idea of transcending borders is also echoed by its drive to liaise beyond borders by collaborating with non Franco-Ontarian theatre companies and touring to out of province locations. In addition, some of its plays such as Le Nez and Maïta have been translated into other languages, and as seen in Chapter two, Maïta was presented in Mexico, in Spanish, by La Vieille 17. I wonder if, with this blurring of aesthetics and of audience identity, it is still possible to speak of these productions as being Franco-Ontarian children's theatre. It would seem more plausible that these productions should be considered as being accessible to all audiences, regardless of age or cultural affiliations.

ⁱ Théâtre du Nouvel Ontario's (TNO) children's theatre can be divided into three categories : those borrowing from traditional stories, those dealing with the children's reality and concerns, and those that make use of puppetry and clown. Very unlike La Vieille 17, the TNO has had a rather tumultuous existence. Since its foundation in 1971, the TNO has already had nine artistic directors (though some simply acted as artistic director for a short period of time as a means of saving the company) and with each new term came a reshaping of the company's mandate and a shift in the importance attributed to children's theatre. Children's theatre was produced by the TNO as early as 1971 with Chialeux Marabout, a puppet and clown show that toured northern Ontario, and Ti-Jean joueur de tours, the first of a series of plays involving the well-loved French-Canadian trickster, Ti-Jean, who is known for always getting himself into trouble. The following play, Les Folionettes, was created during the 1975-1976 season and made use of puppets. The years from 1976 to 1980 represent, in a sense, the TNO's golden years when it comes to children's theatre as they enabled the touring and recognition of Franco-Ontarian theatre on a national front and the outpour of productions during this period surpass any other one. Ti-Jean was put back on stage during the 1976-1977 season in Ti-Jean de mon pays, an appropriate title for the first national tour of a Franco-Ontarian play. Ti-Jean returned the following season in Ti-Jean fin voleur. In 1978-1979 ...Et si le p'tit chaperon rouge n'avait rencontré le loup, written by André Roy, was the winner of a writing contest created by the TNO. This play took well known fairy tales and rearranged their events into different scenarios, thus allowing for the deconstruction of the notions of 'good' and 'evil.' The 1979-1980 season followed with Mariette Thériault's Bonjour le monde, a story about four children who decide to write their own newspaper. The play, which also toured nationally, dealt with the preoccupations of children and how they relate to the world. During this next period, although creative output was slowed down by the incoming creative and administrative team, productions toured for longer periods of time. André Roy wrote another play that was presented during the 1980-1981 season, Le Chat d'Étienne, that dealt with questions of authority, trust and lies. Laurent et Mille Feuille followed during the 1982-1983 season along with Histoire de Pleine Lune, a play that toured Ontario and Western Canada that borrowed elements from Ojibwa and Cree stories and made use of puppets and narration. Ti-Jean returned to the stage in 1983-1984, the same year as La Vieille 17's production of Le Nez, in Au pays de Ti-Jean. Both plays that year were among the first to take advantage of the changes made to the Théâtre français du Centre National des Arts (CNA). In addition to the plays of this period, there are two productions, Les porteurs d'eau (1982-1983) and Un p'tit bout de stage (1983-1985), that are described as being for children's audiences of all ages. The 1986-1987 season, marks the TNO's first and only collaboration, outside of the Théâtre français du CNA, in terms of theatre for young audiences. The TNO and Théâtre populaire d'Acadie's Des yeux au bout des doigts is the story of a blind girl who has just moved to a new city and who discovers friendship in a little boy. This is the last piece of children's theatre that the TNO produced for ten years. Children's theatre shortly came back for the 1996-7 season with Monsieur Lou, a piece written by multiple authors that mixed traditional French Canadian oral stories with contemporary imagined stories by the authors involved in the project. This isolated production, as there has been nothing created in terms of children's theatre since then, toured from Fall 1996 until Summer 1999 and was even presented at the summer 1997 Jeux de la francophonie in

Madagascar. However, the TNO has not completely given up on its children audience as it still offers plays that it receives as part of its *Série jeunesse*. For example, in May 2007, Sudbury audiences had the opportunity of seeing La Vieille 17's production of Maïta.

ⁱⁱ In the early 1980s, Théâtre d'la Corvée (Vanier), currently Théâtre du Trillium (Ottawa), produced five plays for children that toured throughout Ontario and occasionally in Acadie : in 1980, the collective creation 1, 2, 3 go, which was also later revived in 1982; also in 1980, L'autre jour, j'ai rêvé, written by Paul Doucet; in 1983 the company produced Jeu d'enfants a translation of John Lazarus' Schoolyard Games; in 1983, the company produced another collective creation, Diableries; and for its 1983-1984 season, it produced a piece by Danielle Martin called Jonathan 99-47. In keeping with La Corvée's overall political mandate towards the community of Eastern Ontario, these plays reflected the child's social milieu in such a way as to encourage the child to better him/herself. By the mid-1980s, similarly to the TNO, La Corvée chose to focus solely on adult productions.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the Fall of 1983, Le Nez was presented in Rockland, Cornwall, Prescott-Russell, Kingston, Picton, Ottawa (at the Museum of Man), Alfred, Bourget, St-Isidore, Plantagenet, Orignal, Hawkesbury, St-Eugène, Embrun, Casselman, Alexandria, Ottawa, and at the NAC's Studio. In the Spring of 1984, the production travelled to Sarnia, London, Glencoe, Dorchester, St-Catharines, Penetanguishene, Lafontaine, Perkinsfield, Orillia, Grimsby, Fergus, Georgetown, Mississauga, Kingston. In Fall 1984, it was presented mainly in Ontario high schools though again it was shown at the National Art Centre. The production has also travelled cities and towns: Noelville, Sturgeon Falls, Verner, North Bay, Azilda, Hanmer, Sudbury, Dowling, Azilda, Espanila, Elliot Lake, Sault Saint-Marie, Chapleau, Timmins, South Porcupine, New Liskeard, Garson, Chelmsford, Erin, Strathroy, Arva, Toronto, Don Mills, Downsview, Scarborough, Toronto, Willowdale, Mattice, Hearst, Val Rita, Kapuskasing, Moonbeam, Fauquier, Smooth Rock Falls, Cochrane, Wahnapiatae. In the summer of 1985, the production was presented at the Festival International du Théâtre Jeunes Publics in Montréal. In December 1985 and January 1986, the play travelled to Montréal's Maison Théâtre. After interest shown by the Compagnie Viola Léger in Acadie in the summer of 1987, the production began touring again after a break of a year and a half. In the Fall of 1987, it travelled to Hamilton, Scarborough, Agincourt, Port Perry, Welland, Don Mills, Downsview, Scarborough, Toronto, Fergus, Erin, Guelph, Richmond Hill, Woodstock, Mississauga, Bramalea, Lafontaine, Montréal, Ottawa, Pembroke, Petawawa, and Oshawa. Finally, in the summer of 1988, for over a month, Le Nez travelled to different parks in the greater Montréal region in an organized tour by La Roulotte. This production has been performed over 230 times.

^{iv} Le Nez's initial tour took place from September 1994 until March 1995. During this time it was presented at different cultural centres and theatres in France, at the National

Art Centre (Ottawa), Festival Gros Bec de Québec, La Maison Théâtre (Montréal) and at the Centre culturel de Beloeil (province of Québec). From September 1996 to January 1997, the production toured Acadie, Québec, Ontario, France and Belgium. From November 1997 to January 1998 it toured France and Belgium again. Finally in December 1998, Le Nez toured to different locations in and around Paris.

^v In 1996, Théâtre du Frêne created another children's production, Sol Soleil, that involved Alain Batis and Alain Carnet and toured for five years. In May 1996, the company produced Sganarelle for adult audiences that involved Batis, Carnet and Gatiennne Engélibert, which toured for two years; and in March 1998 produced La savetière prodigieuse, a play which once again involved Batis and Carnet. For its part, La Vieille 17 was still touring Benoît Osborne's Les Inutiles in 1994, in which Esther Beauchemin and Henry Gauthier made up part of the cast. Beauchemin, for her part, was one of the actors involved in workshopping and creating the role of Madame Dottore for La Vieille 17's 1997 production of Mentire.

^{vi} The theatre community was first affected by the cuts brought about by Brian Mulroney's government (1984-1993) and was beginning to benefit from the change in government, from a conservative one to a liberal one, through the inauguration of programs of support for Arts and Culture. However, Mike Harris' provincial government (1995-2002) produced further cuts which produced a negative impact on Ontario artists. In reaction to these cuts, Théâtre Action, the organism dedicated to promoting Franco Ontarian theatre activity, wrote in a communiqué that it was: "surpris par la logique des coupures draconiennes de gouvernement Harris qui auront un sérieux impact sur les artistes de la langue française en Ontario. Les organismes aux arts (OSA) tant anglophones que francophones ont appris que le budget de leur programme sera réduit de 30%." (Communiqué: November 29, 1995).

^{vii} The Théâtre Populaire d'Acadie's has a very broad mandate that includes "créations originales, théâtre contemporain et textes issus du répertoire classique, le TPA produit, tant pour le grand public que pour la jeunesse, une diversité de spectacles qui s'inspirent de plusieurs courants artistiques tout en accordant une place de première choix à la dramaturgie acadienne" (TPA's website).

^{viii} Maïta was created during the season of the Gros Becs and the Carrefour International du Théâtre de Québec in May of 2000, was part of the NAC's Grand Galop series in October, travelled to the Théâtre du Nouvel Ontario in November, all of that same year. In June 2001, the production took part in the Festival des Théâtres en Région (Ottawa). In the Spring of 2002, Maïta was presented at La Maison Théâtre (Montréal) and the Fall of that same year, toured throughout Québec's regions, to locations such as Jonquière, Alma, Chicoutimi, Assomption, Terrebonne, Longueuil, Saint-Geneviève, Joliette, Trois-Rivières. In 2003, it was presented at La Nouvelle Scène (Ottawa) before travelling to

Mexico to take part in the Festival Del Centro Histórico. Another tour of Québec was organized for Fall 2005, and finally in the Spring of 2007, Maïta toured one last time to Sudbury, Toronto and Joliette. In all there were more than 170 representations of Maïta to audiences of Ontario, Québec and Mexico City.

^{ix} Maïta was translated into English by Henry Gauthier in 2005 during a translation residency at the Banff Art Centre.

^x When I saw the production in Toronto as part of Théâtre français de Toronto's 2006-2007 season, Henry Gauthier had replaced Bernard Alain.

^{xi} Written by Mireille Francoeur, one of the actors in *Folie Furieuse* (1985-1986) and long-time administrator of La Vieille 17, Maïta's study guide is divided into six parts: Asia, the play, the puppets, initiatives that children can take, about the artists involved in the production, and practical exercises that the students can do pre- and post-show. The largest part is the first one which details the customs and general lifestyle in Asia, as well as detailing the characteristics of the Asian elephant. The study guide as a whole is written in a tone that might appeal to the children attending the production. Including a three page bibliography, this guide is comprised of 34 pages of text.

^{xii} Les Murs de nos villages was first created in 1979 by Robert Bellefeuille, Rock Castonguay, Jean Marc Dalpé, and Lise L. Roy. The text was reworked the following year, this time including Bellefeuille, Castonguay, Dalpé, Hélène Bernier, Anne-Marie Cadieux, and Vivianne Rochon. During the 1979-1980 season, the company also created a poetry and music event, J'ai au creu des mains une chanson, which was written by Dalpé and Michel Vallières, directed by Brigitte Haentjens, and the cast included Bellefeuille, Castonguay, Dalpé, Roy, Vallières and the band Purlaine. The intervention show that they produced, Protégera nos foyers et nos... dealt with the francophone school crisis in Ontario and the rights of Franco-Ontarians. It was created by Dalpé, Carole Avelin, Victor Dupuis, and Bernadette Marchand. As one of the many activities occurring that season, Roy took the opportunity to introduce the company to younger audiences with Le Roi Dagobert, a piece created by Roy, Jean Emmanuel Allard, Paulette Beaulieu and Daniel Lalande, which involved both Turkish shadow puppets as well as a Muppet-like puppet. Unlike all of La Vieille 17's other shows, this production was intended to help the audience make discoveries of personal expression and to formulate principles of logic outside of their own person. In addition, there was no fixed text for this production as the participation of the children in the audience was widely sought after, thus bringing it much closer to group animation. It toured mainly in Eastern Ontario and that for only a very short period of time.

^{xiii} Companies often created two versions of their main stage plays: a long version

destined for adults; and an abridged version for high school matinees. In Les Rogers, near the end of the play, the three men are on stage in briefs. In the adult version, there is a brief moment where Dalpé's character, Denis, is on stage with nothing on. The school boards and cultural animators requested that the mise-en-scène of this scene be revised and it is at this moment that the artists involved spoke out against censorship.

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