MAKING THE HEADLINES:
THE EVOLUTION OF HEADLINES THEATRE COMPANY

by

LYNN MOCKLER

B.N., The University of New Brunswick, 1978
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1993

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 1998

© Lynn Mockler, 1998
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Theatre, Film, & Creative Writing

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date Oct. 14, 1998

DE-6 (2/88)
ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the history of a Vancouver theatre company from the time of its inception in 1980 to present day. *Headlines Theatre Company* formed with a mandate to create socially relevant theatre. This thesis also examines *Headlines’* life and evolution as a political and popular theatre company; specific plays and productions were selected for examination which were found to be representative of the development of the company’s work.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter explores the formation of the collective and the company’s successful initial work, which employed agitprop techniques. This chapter also highlights *Headlines’* follow up venture into the medium of film using material from their theatrical work. The company’s next theatrical project, which resulted in a national tour, is also documented.

This theatre company’s direction underwent an enormous change subsequent to their second theatrical production. Chapter Two introduces the company’s move from a collective to a traditional organizational structure while it continued to produce agitprop theatre. As well, this chapter investigates *Headlines’* introduction of the theories and practices of Brazilian director Augusto Boal into its new work, Power Plays, to create both conventional and forum theatre.

Chapter Three looks at the further development of *Headlines’* forum theatre productions, the Power Plays, and its experiments with this theatre form. This chapter examines the company’s search for an even wider audience through the innovative merging of live interactive theatre with the medium of television.
Headlines’ brief return to a more conventional style of theatre is discussed in Chapter Four. In both of the productions reviewed in this chapter, the company faced funding obstacles due to the content of the play or the discussion following it. Chapter Five surveys the progression of Headlines’ work as it incorporates the later work of Augusto Boal. The company’s Theatre for Living programmes and methods of operation are further explored. The final chapter reveals some of Headlines’ recent collaborations with other theatre artists as well as with artists in other disciplines, a direction the company will continue to pursue in the future.

Headlines is shown to be a small, professional theatre company that is a well-established member of Vancouver’s theatre community. By documenting their history and examining selected productions and projects, this thesis chronicles an extremely active theatre company whose work has evolved greatly over a period of eighteen years. With its evolution in content, form and function, Headlines has been an innovative popular and political theatre company.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

PREFACE v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS viii

INTRODUCTION BYE, BYE GOVERNMENT FUNDS 1

CHAPTER ONE BUY, BUY VANCOUVER 5

CHAPTER TWO SHIFTING FORMS 27

CHAPTER THREE CROSSING BOUNDARIES: FORUM AND TELEVISION 46

CHAPTER FOUR THE POLITICS OF MONEY 54

CHAPTER FIVE THEATRE FOR LIVING 67

CHAPTER SIX TODAY'S AND TOMORROW'S HEADLINES 81

GLOSSARY 91

WORKS CONSULTED 93
PREFACE

_Criticism is a social practice which is within, not outside, ideology._

_Ann Wilson 1988._

My letter of application to graduate Theatre Studies indicated my interest in political theatre. I had just completed a degree in English Literature and political theatre brought to mind some dramatic texts. Foremost were the works of Irish dramatists: the plays of Sean O'Casey and Brian Friel, even W.B. Yeats' propaganda piece _Cathleen Ni Houlihan_. Elizabeth Robins' _Votes For Women_, many plays of George Bernard Shaw, and texts in a similar vein constituted political theatre for me.

Admittedly, I was unclear about what exactly the term _political theatre_ meant. It did seem to involve plays in which left-wing ideas about the government or governance of a people were discussed. It often seemed to include plays that considered the distribution of wealth and the plight of the poor or other oppressed groups. It always meant the content of plays, usually written and presented in a traditional manner.

Over the course of my theatre studies, my thinking about political theatre evolved greatly. Early in a popular theatre course (and at a time when I was especially exasperated with the gorgeous, shallow pageants presented on the main stages of Vancouver and its university) the revelation occurred: all theatre is political. I will trace the journey in brief.

Theatre, by its very nature, has more political potential than any art form. It is an immediate interaction between living persons in a public space, where stories are told, where society's behaviours, values, assumptions, and myths are exhibited and evaluated. But decisions are made in the theatre as to which story or whose story will be told, and how the story will be told. These choices have political implications (McGrath 1).
What had become clearer to me was the political basis of all culture, including theatre and the institutions of theatre. All culture:

contains or expresses or implies a political view: all art, whether consciously or unconsciously, is tendentious, polemical, partisan; all literature and drama speak on behalf of an admitted or unacknowledged belief that one order of things, one set of social arrangements, one structure of political relations, is better or worse than another (Holderness 5).

Some ideological conception of social organization informs every cultural act. The political nature of every theatrical production is often only obvious when an ideology other than the dominant one informs the artistic choices. A feminist interpretation of The Taming of the Shrew, for example, clearly demonstrates an ideological imposition.

So, if all theatre is political, what is political theatre? For the purpose of this paper, I have settled on a definition of political theatre as that theatre which deliberately targets the dominant ideology --- the naturalized ruling order --- for exposure and inquiry. Political theatre achieves this ideological critique in its theatrical content, form, and/or function.

Indeed, many theatrical events might be considered political theatre on the basis of content, where ideas of the political left are introduced in the subject matter, as discussed above. Brecht’s epic theatre, alienating and theatrically self-aware, uses form to confront hegemonic ideology. But political theatre also challenges the dominant ideology in function. Holderness describes the politics of function as:

de-stabilizing the conventional relation between spectator and performance, disrupting traditional expectations of narrative and aesthetic coherence, de-familiarising and interrogating the oppressive power of naturalised cultural forms (13).

Fitted with a new understanding of political theatre, I was surprised to find an established, highly active, professional political theatre company alive and well in Vancouver.
This thesis documents the history of a professional political and popular theatre company in Vancouver. It provided me the opportunity to do archival research, take oral histories, and explore the literature on political and popular theatre, of which there is, not surprisingly, a limited amount. My access to this theatre company was regulated by both the openness and restrictions of its artistic director, and I have had to write within these. It was not always possible to contact former members of the company and, more importantly, it was not possible for me to observe or participate in any of their projects of the past few years.

I believe it has been a most worthwhile undertaking. Theatre is lost to history with frightening ease, and this company has been a very innovative and active part of Vancouver's theatre community for almost two decades. It is, I believe, important to document our local theatre history for its contribution to our theatre in the present and future, and to our culture as a whole. And I believe that it is time for popular and political theatre work to receive greater recognition, especially in the academy. This thesis is thus my own small political act.
I would like to thank my advisor Jan Selman for her patience and unspiring impartation of her expertise. I thank Peter Loeffler for the many gifts of his knowledge and wisdom he has made to me, always with great kindness and humour. Both Jan and Peter have challenged me to understand and appreciate theatre in new and important ways.

I am most grateful to David Diamond, whose generosity of time and resources facilitated this project.

I would like to express my gratitude to Saeideh Nessar Ali, Nettie Wild and Colin Thomas who willingly gave their time for interviews. They provided much information, some delightful memories, and many insights. I thank John Lazarus for his time and astute observations.

It has been my privilege to find a good friend and colleague during my theatre education, and I thank Marnie McEwan Rice for her support and sustaining humour.

I would like to acknowledge my friends Mark McNab and Gregory Paul Greenfield, both of whom departed this life during the course of this work.

I especially thank Tod McNab for his technical and editorial assistance, and even more so for his ongoing love and support.

This work is dedicated to my sister, Donna Mockler, who always helps me get around the moguls.
INTRODUCTION

BYE, BYE GOVERNMENT FUNDS

Alternative theatre flourished in Vancouver, as in the rest of Canada, in the 1970s. Some companies, such as Tamahnous and Savage God, John Juliani’s early ‘70s cultural curio, explored non-traditional modes of theatrical expression; that is, at times, these companies detoured from scripted, plot-driven products and indulged in process-oriented events, increasingly image-based and focused on new relationships with theatre space and audiences. Other alternative companies, such as Touchstone, sought to create theatre with socio-political consciousness in combination with these aesthetic experiments outside the theatre establishment. All aimed at producing a more popular theatre; that is, theatre more accessible to the general public on many levels --- culturally, physically, financially. Although abundant in creativity, freedom, and enthusiasm, Vancouver’s alternative theatre companies of this period experienced some want of means, relieved in part by government grant funding.

Successes varied. Artistically, this period was rich and fertile with stylistic variations from scripted musicals and revues to happenings in cafes and Stanley Park. In contrast to the rest of Canada, Vancouver’s alternative theatre had more of an introspective than social orientation; theatre was seen not so much as “a tool for social action, nor as a comment and interpretation of life, but rather as an integral and potentially enriching part of living itself” (Usmiani 66). Content, therefore, often involved self reflective explorations whose inquiry incorporated aspects of Freud, Jung,
Gestalt and dream analysis. *Tamahnous*, for example, used these perspectives to experiment with Greek classics. There were, however, some examinations of community concerns, although these tended to be more sociological rather than political in nature. Many works were created with a collective approach, and many were more successful in their visual than their verbal imagery. And, as in the rest of Canada during this period, (well documented by Alan Filewod in his book *Collective Encounters*), local alternative theatre companies became increasingly nationalistic in producing work *by, for and about* Canadians.

Notably, the births of these alternative theatre companies were in large part midwived by existing federal government programs that provided moneys for cultural development. Funds were available not only through the *Canada Council* --- the nation’s largest arts funding body, created to encourage development of the arts and play a role in constructing and preserving national unity --- but also through the ‘make work’ schemes of *Canada Manpower* (Wallace 125). Its *Local Initiatives Program*, for example, pumped money into theatre companies, although it favoured new companies over those established, small professional ones that had been struggling for funds for years. In addition, the *Secretary of State’s Opportunities for Youth* program provided moderate sums for summer activities to cultural groups regardless of professional training. Consequently, the cultural climate was ripe for experimentation and theatre benefited hugely. In particular, those companies who worked in a collective mode, an often slow-moving method of creation, received some luxury of time along with the largesse.
Still, it seems all good things must indeed come to an end, and so too for this unusual and unstinting dispersal of the public purse to cultural groups. The Canadian economy felt the pangs of recession and the Local Initiatives and Opportunities for Youth programmes began to dry up in the mid-'70s; subsequently, government subsidies to cultural agencies were frozen in 1977-78.\footnote{It is worth noting that, from our current perspective, these were the good old days --- government funding for the arts was far more abundant and easier to obtain then than now.} This funding stand-still caught many theatre companies unaware, and many staggered under this unfamiliar financial situation. These companies, it seems, had paid little regard to audience development as a factor in their sustainability, and thus they expired somewhat prematurely.

Consequently, by 1979 outraged and frustrated artists of many disciplines decided to gather and discuss the situation at various times; the lounge of the Arts Club Theatre on Seymour Street was equipped with the appropriate setting and libations for such an endeavour. It was in this auspicious milieu that two theatre artists, David Diamond and Nettie Wild, met and became the organizers of what was then the Vancouver Artists’ Alliance. The Alliance was quite large for a period (up to several hundred members) and its role was to represent artists of all disciplines to all three levels of government. The core members met in Diamond’s living room once a month to organize government lobbying, plan demonstrations, and generally “bitch” about the state of work for artists in Vancouver. Eventually, this core group decided to stop complaining and take matters into their own hands: they decided to create a “socially relevant” play (Diamond 1997). Thus, in this theatrical bedroom of creativity, collective process, dwindling arts funding, and
burgeoning social and political consciousness, *Headlines Theatre Company* was conceived.

This thesis serves two purposes. Firstly, it will document the history of one of Vancouver’s most active professional theatre companies. It will in no way be a comprehensive history of this well established company; rather, it will explore the evolution of their work by considering selected productions representative of major trends or directions. Secondly, it will examine the work of *Headlines Theatre Company* as both a *political* theatre and *popular* theatre\(^2\) company, by reviewing its work in terms of its content, form, and function. This thesis will demonstrate that Vancouver has been home to a highly political and yet little recognized popular theatre company for many years.

---

\(^2\) This writer’s use of the term *political theatre* has already been discussed in the Preface. As with *political theatre*, no simple, unqualified definition of *popular theatre* exists. For the purpose of this paper, *popular theatre* is defined as theatre created for, with, and/or by members of a particular community to empower them and enable them to alter their destiny. For that community, this theatre must be accessible physically, financially, culturally and intellectually.
CHAPTER ONE

BUY, BUY VANCouver

Headlines has always been a political theatre company and remains so. It's not good enough to just entertain people. That's one of the real problems we have in our culture --- that 'culture' has become entertainment. And that's terrible. It is paralysing, it's destructive to our society, to our well being both as individuals and as communities.

But we knew that then. And the purpose of Headlines was to research, write, and produce socially relevant theatre IN and WITH the community.

David Diamond 1997

Late in 1980, a group of twelve Vancouver Artists' Alliance members began meeting to discuss the creation of a “socially relevant” play, a greater challenge than they had initially anticipated. Eventually the group dwindled to six interested members who hoped to take dramatic story lines out of current community events and issues. They rejected the structure of traditional theatre companies and instead chose to form as a collective; that is, they chose an organizational structure in which each member participates equally as a creative collaborator.

This choice of collective creation was, in fact, not out of keeping with many alternative theatre companies in Canada at this time. Theatre critic and historian Alan Filewod reports that beginning in the late 1960s, Canadian theatres: "... produced hundreds of collective creations, created by the actors through research and improvisation, and documentary plays compiled from research into communities and historical issues" (Filewod 1987, viii). This trend toward the process of collective
creation "...in which the actors contribute directly to the compilation or writing of the performance text, was part of the international movement to challenge the traditional hierarchies of theatrical production" (Filewod 1987, 22). The collective process pulled actors to "the most easily accessible themes and character types"; forms and styles of the resulting plays varied according to the specifics of the material and the nature of the collective (Filewod 1987, 22,26). Often the resulting plays were performed in non-traditional theatre spaces.

For their first project, the small group of Vancouver Artists' Alliance members considered contemporary social and political issues, and selected two possibilities for development: the Canadian Constitution and the rental housing crisis in Vancouver. The latter was selected because it was a meatier and local topic, and a personal problem for each of the members. Armed with the plan for a revue-style piece about the shortage of affordable housing in Vancouver, Nettie Wild and David Diamond approached the Explorations program of the Canada Council\(^4\) and obtained funding to cover the costs of researching and developing the script.

Subsequently, the collective embarked on a month of research work, during which time they spoke with a wide range of persons with a diversity of expertise regarding housing. These included the Mayor and officials at City Hall, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Greater Vancouver Renters Association, the B.C. Housing

---

\(^3\) Unless otherwise specified, interview quotes are taken from oral interviews conducted by the author with past and present members of Headlines; these interviews are listed in the Works Consulted section at the end of this thesis.

\(^4\) The Canada Council’s Explorations grants were given both to artists producing their first work and also to established artists who wanted to move from one discipline to another. The Explorations program also
Commission and the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. Of significance, they were unsuccessful in their attempts to contact the Social Credit provincial government and large developers. The troupe became investigative playwrights for a period, meeting daily to share what they had uncovered in the course of their interviews and other research.

Few of the group had any experience with this kind of theatre work before. Eventually, they reached that point where they had to terminate their research and begin to do some creative work. In the office at Chalmers United Church, a large sheet of newsprint hung on the wall; scene titles and ideas for scenes were written on this, then developed through improvisation and further writing. The process was a bit intimidating and not without failures. Fortunately, the weeks of research generated a lot of material for the company and cutting out segments was thus not traumatic. They chose a revue format because, as Diamond explains:

“It's a really easy mode for a collective to work in. If you're not going to have a playwright — if you're going to have many — then you're not going to have one through-story. A group of people can't do that together; it's very hard. We were all writing, so what would happen is that we would take threads — each of us would be responsible for a thread — and in the midst of these threads of stories were stand-alone bits, skits almost. We realized early on that that afforded us something that gave us a lot of strength, and that was that if we wanted the play to adapt daily to the news, it had to be in units — to be able to take this out and put something else in and not have it effect the whole play. And that style allowed us to do that really easily.

The group settled on the name *Headlines Theatre Company* (herein referred to as *Headlines*) after struggling with a fitting designation for their work and their purpose.

What most impacted their choice was the fact that their work was adapting daily to what

had a strong community mandate and would fund artists who were taking risks in areas artistic and otherwise. This funding program no longer exists.
they found in the news, by their examination of newspaper *headlines* to obtain their material, and the inclusion of these *headlines* in the course of the production. Although the company identified itself as a collective in an organizational sense, in reality Wild and Diamond were shouldering most of the administrative and production tasks.

Rejecting theatre’s traditional hierarchical relationship with its audience, *Headlines* decided to take its work out into the community. Subsequently, they searched out non-theatre spaces and arranged performances in locations such as community centres, schools, and church halls. As luck would have it, a strike by municipal workers resulted in the company having to quickly scramble to find alternate venues since the community centres were rendered inaccessible. Consequently, *Headlines*’ debut performance was held in the auditorium of UBC’s Student Union Building on February 4, 1981. New venues were found as the run progressed and Diamond’s answering machine often became the only way for potential audience to find out where that night’s performance would be held. It was hit-and-run theatre; actually locating a performance became part of the challenge and the charm of the *Buy, Buy Vancouver* experience. Actor Colin Thomas explains: “Part of it was that people really liked the chase. It was impossible to find that show --- it moved every night. There was an element of treasure hunt about it. All the shows were jammed! I think people liked that guerrilla aspect.” All performances of the show were given on a pay-what-you-can-afford basis.

Clearly, *Headlines* sought to make the production socially relevant by making the work as pertinent to their audience as possible. After each performance, the cast held open

---

5 No influence came from *The Living Newspaper* of the *Federal Theatre Project* or other political theatre companies, of whom the group seemingly had little awareness.
discussions with audience members, affording the latter a chance to discuss housing problems and possible solutions. By late April 1981, a Housing Crisis Week event was held at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, and a formal debate on topics from rent control to capital gains tax followed each performance; a wide range of participants, representing interests as diverse as the Fraser Institute (a Vancouver-based conservative think tank) to downtown community activists, entered into the debate. The theatre lobby was filled with displays and booths by various community and government agencies. The company’s partner for the production was the Red Door Rental Aid Agency, an organization that linked people having specific housing problems with the social agency that could best help them. This was the first of a series of partnerships that would distinguish Headlines’ presentations, whereby practical and useful information about the play’s topic would be made available before and after the show, as well as during. As a final offer of assistance to those with concerns about affordable housing, the company made it known that this production (or parts of it) was available outside of the scheduled run for use in demonstrations or other forms of protest.

Buy, Buy Vancouver was a brilliant marriage of style and material, and the match was celebrated by audiences and critics alike. Their choice of a revue-style production was an excellent one for their satirical approach to the topical subject matter. The cast was strong for this material (Wild and Diamond were joined onstage by actors Colin Thomas and Heidi Archibald, and musician/songwriter Jay Samwald) and Suzie Payne added an effective directorial finish. A very loose, simple through-story followed a single, working mother as she attempted to find adequate, affordable accommodation within reasonable distance of her place of employment. Engaging music and songs, and piquant comedy
sketches were woven into the main through-story and formed the bulk of the script, making it light in tone with variations in rhythm. Bold theatrical metaphors articulated the housing crisis. In one scene, the single mother became a contestant in a game show called “The Inside Track” in which she is pitted against a greedy landlord and an aggressive, loud, flashy host who changes the rules of the game to favour the latter. Surely, there are big winners and big losers in this real estate game, and the powerful rule-makers abet the win.

*Buy, Buy Vancouver* contained many elements of agitprop. For the most part, these elements appeared in the form of satire. But the production also contained some more direct attack on the status quo in which fingers were pointed at politicians, developers and landlords — all identified by name. Politicians’ resignations were called for and in a song of direct address the audience was strongly reminded that if the politicians would not change, they could change the politicians in the next election. Caricatures of the enemy were presented, and the audience was incited to organize, educate others, and unite to undertake and conquer the specified enemy. The attacks on government were aimed at both the right-wing provincial government and its centre-left federal counterpart. No overt party politics were involved, but their attacks on the speculative real estate market and its effects on housing, especially for those with lower incomes, had a distinct left-wing flavour. In addition, germane recent newspaper headlines, often from the day of performance, were read by actors moving across the stage, underscoring the sense of an immediate, important, and topical message.
Buy, Buy Vancouver captivated the Vancouver theatre scene, delighting its audiences and pleasing local critics. All reviews\textsuperscript{6} were favourable, praising its blend of politics and entertainment, making note of its political activism and encouraging attendance by the wider theatre-going community. Critic Max Wyman remarked on the invigorating quality of this iconoclastic newcomer, describing the company as a challenge to "...the safety, the conservatism, the rigid status quo of the Vancouver theatre scene." (Wyman 1981). Indeed, in the content, style, venues, and target audience peculiar to this production, Buy, Buy Vancouver was an exciting theatrical maverick that became an underground hit. Almost every performance played to a full house in spite of the fact that potential audience members had to track down the itinerant company.

Even Headlines was caught off guard by the show’s phenomenal success. This motley collective, formed with really only one project in mind, was now being given much media attention. The notice became more than local. Macleans Magazine, a national news magazine, interviewed Diamond for an article on housing.

Indeed, one audience member was so impressed that he helped to make the company even more peripatetic. Despite the play’s overt politics, Mayor Michael Harcourt invited the company to bring the production to a three-day National Housing Conference, at which he was keynote speaker, in Ottawa in March 1981. Harcourt provided $500 from a special Mayor’s discretionary fund, and another $1,500 was received as a grant from the Secretary of State’s office to cover expenses. The script was reworked en route to include a direct address to the federal Minister of Housing Paul Cosgrove, who would be in the

\textsuperscript{6} Almost all reviews cited in this thesis are from local newspapers. No attempt has been made by this writer to criticize the critics or analyse the quality of the reviews.
audience. Here, *Buy, Buy Vancouver* played to its most hostile audience of housing ministry officials, only lightly peppered with some housing activists. Perhaps a *Headlines* anecdote best illustrates the situation: their request for donations, in lieu of admission, produced less per capita at the Ottawa show than at a performance for Vancouver street people at the downtown eastside corner of Hastings and Gore.

As a result of *Buy, Buy Vancouver's* success, and in response to demand for ongoing productions, *Headlines* created a video documentary treatment of the same subject: *Right to Fight*. Nettie Wild directed the project with the creative assistance of cinematographer Kirk Tougas, editor Bill Roxborough, and David Diamond as assistant director. The company regarded film as an effective medium for packaging and distributing the information to an even wider audience. Selected dramatic segments from *Buy, Buy Vancouver* (filmed in a local cable television studio) were interspersed between documentary interviews and filmed sequences of organized citizen meetings and protests.

*Headlines* was able to raise moneys for three full-time salaries for the five and a half months it took to complete the $27,000 film production. Financial support for this project was again received from the *Canada Council Explorations* program; the Boag Foundation, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Vancouver Community Arts Council and various other community groups also contributed. The *National Film Board* provided editing facilities during the four months of post-production work and maintained first right of refusal on distribution.
Released in early December 1981, the project was screened to full houses at various Vancouver locations, such as the Carnegie Centre and the YWCA, in partnership with the Housing Rights Coalition. Critical response was positive. A tour of British Columbia, sponsored by grants from the Legal Services Society and the Secretary of State, followed in April 1982, in which a screening of the videotape was incorporated with a workshop led by local community activists. Right to Fight eventually was given further screenings in Amsterdam, Germany, and Cuba and received an award from the National Housing Video and Film Festival in 1985.

Right to Fight is a fascinating, tightly shot and edited work that enhances some of the agitprop elements of Buy, Buy Vancouver by combining them with the potent realism of documentary footage. The story line of the play sets up the problem in dramatic terms and other satirical sketches theatrically define the underlying social conditions. Headlines’ objective with the forty-five minute video was to provoke the creation of tenants’ rights movements.

Right to Fight delivers its message strongly in three sections. Voices of politicians and activists denying or declaring a housing crisis are heard over the potent opening image of the demolition of a large older house. “Part One: The System” begins with a vaudeville-style skit of singing and dancing real estate agents from Buy, Buy Vancouver, intercut with images of conspicuous material consumption. Juxtaposed with shots of gleaming office towers and sailboats on English Bay are those of angry citizens standing in front of the ruins of their former home. A strong point is made when the voice of the provincial Housing Minister, heard attesting to his accessibility, is played over images of
"Authorized Personnel Only" signs at his office. "The System" closes with a scene from Buy, Buy Vancouver, the skit of the television game show called "The Inside Track".

More images of literal home-wrecking opens "Part Two: The Victims", the most powerful section of the video. Here the focus is on those people directly affected by the shortage of affordable housing and what it means to them personally. Interviews with marginalized people (e.g. the elderly, welfare recipients) are supplemented with those of agencies who are working to assist. "The Victims" packs the biggest political punch: interviews with both the provincial and federal Ministers of Housing display their political sophistry and abnegation of responsibility. The problems surrounding the lack of affordable housing are clearly defined in these interviews as well as in the Buy, Buy Vancouver skits interspersed throughout. Using strong close-up images, a single mother is shown trying to find rental accommodation and encountering restrictions on children, sleazy landlords, and long commutes from less expensive housing in the suburbs. This section of the film ends with the powerful reminder that more voters rent homes than own homes.

Picking up on that message, "Part Three: Organizing" is the rallying cry for those who believe themselves casualties of the real estate business and powerless to change the situation. Ideas about how and why to organize others with similar concerns are presented, and the Housing Rights Coalition of twenty-five community groups is featured. Here, the more distinctly agitprop segments of Buy, Buy Vancouver are used. Songs prescribe direct action: change the law makers if laws do not change. "Organizing" contains film clips of tenants’ groups speaking to City Council and holding city councilors accountable. Some footage of demonstrations and riots is also included, a bold insinuation
that this type of civil disobedience is not only possible, but sometimes required. This final section of *Right to Fight* emphasizes the ability of ordinary citizens to demand action from their elected representatives. The video ends with a strong graffiti image of the words *RIGHT TO FIGHT*, a motto for the new urban guerrillas.

Following its initial screenings in Vancouver, Nettie Wild and housing activist Linda Mead headed out on tour across British Columbia with *Right to Fight*. Compatible with *Headlines*' desire to provide each audience with something to take away from the performance, Wild created a step-by-step booklet on tenants’ rights and how to use them, funded by the Law Foundation, to accompany the video. The B.C. tour had limited success; it traveled north to small towns to discuss what was essentially an urban problem. The video had a more successful national tour, showing in larger urban centres such as Toronto and Montreal. The video tape was put on sale at a cost pro-rated according to the size and financial abilities of the purchasing organization. Some copies of *Right to Fight* sold to organizations in the affordable housing movement and, subsequently, the video lived in an underground network in North America and Europe, winning several prizes at underground festivals. It continues to have a limited circulation within this housing movement.

Moreover, *Headlines* was rewarded for the successes of its two initial projects with an invitation in late 1981 from *Project Ploughshares*, a national disarmament coalition, to begin a project on militarism and disarmament. The company accepted and began a three year long undertaking: *Under the Gun: A Disarming Revue*. Research
began, and in June 1982 Wild and Diamond, sponsored by the United Church, attended a United Nations Special Session on Disarmament which greatly influenced the shape and focus of their work. *Under the Gun* became concerned not only with disarmament issues, but now encompassed issues such as militarism, the global arms race and exploitation of the Third World.

Initial plans were made for a seven week community tour and a two week run at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre’s *Festival of Peacemaking* in May 1983. As with their previous theatrical venture, *Headlines* members prepared themselves for debates which they hoped would be sparked by, and follow, each performance. In addition, written materials pertaining to the subject were made available to the audience. Again, the company wanted to take the show to mainly non-traditional theatrical venues, such as community centres and church halls. Eventually, financial contributions were obtained from various sources including the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (as co-producer), some peace organizations such as the United Church, OXFAM Canada, and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, as well as other labour and community organizations. Substantial funding was also provided by the *Canada Council Explorations* program.

Material for the script was garnered in a one year period, and writing began in October 1982. Once more, a collective of writers/researchers formed around the play-building including Suzie Payne, who would again direct the company, music composers Reid Campbell and Bob Bossin, actor/playwright Colin Thomas, and several others. From the beginning, the company was challenged to keep the material current due to frequent developments in the peace movement in Europe and Canada, and revisions were made
often. But the winning collective of *Buy, Buy Vancouver* was not able to repeat its

triumph. Thomas recalls the struggle:

*I think that collective writing is really difficult and what became more difficult is that
it wasn’t really collective, because David (Diamond) had an agenda going in. And
that is defined by the nature of the work, by the nature of the task, because he would
have to get funding bodies on-side, and you can’t get funding bodies on-side without
knowing what you are doing. So he would have obligations to the funding bodies ...
and you end up writing into an area that’s artificial to you. There wasn’t a rough
story, but there was a conceptual framework. And then there was the tortuous process
of trying to fit something like a story into this conceptual framework --- and it wasn’t
going to happen.*

Wild, too, was displeased with the collective process:

*We also suffered through this incredible period, which apparently everyone on the
west coast did, where everything had to be a collective. And the way we interpreted
that was that everyone did everyone else’s job --- and we drove each other out of our
minds. ... *Under the Gun* suffered from everybody doing everything but nobody
doing the most important thing --- coming up with a story that worked.*

The company set out to have *Under the Gun* become another revue-style piece
consisting of original songs and sketches with a loose through-story woven in. *Headlines’*
agenda was twofold: to tell the other side of the argument about the global arms buildup
(in contrast to that told by ‘big government, big business, and big bucks’) and to impress
on ordinary citizens that this issue was not too big for them to either understand or get
involved with. But the issue was, in fact, too big for a seventy-five minute theatrical
production.

Ironically, the company’s political considerations got in the way of their theatrical
ones. Despite their best efforts and intentions, *Under the Gun* could not match the
success of *Buy, Buy Vancouver*, and this was largely a failure of the script. Indeed,
politics often overwhelm the drama in this very ambitious work, and the subject matter proved too large and complex for the theatrical style selected. Now *Headlines* attempted to weave revue-style material into two serious through-story lines that unfold concurrently. The first involves an employee at a Canadian company producing the guidance system for the American Cruise missile; the other story tells of the exploitation of workers, to some degree by foreign multi-national corporations, in the Philippines. It proved theatrically difficult to make the thematic link between these two stories and there is no clear dramatic focus at times. Wild admits: “That’s what didn’t work about *Under the Gun* — it was only political stuff. It didn’t cross over into political theatre ... It didn’t focus in. There was lots of research, but that doesn’t make for art” (Wild 1997).

Be that as it may, *Under the Gun* does contain some exceptionally effective scenes and these are, for the most part, the revue-style scenes. Probably the most theatrically potent was “The D.P.S.A. Tango”, a visually articulate and deliciously wicked dance of the Defense Production Sharing Arrangement between the United States and Canada. Actor C. Holte Davidson, tall, suave, assertive and dressed in a stars-and-stripes shirt was the powerful and seductive lead in this tango, danced with the actor David Diamond who, wearing a Canadian flag as a cape, appeared smaller, passive, and eager to please. The two sang a clever, satirical song about their mutual dependence in weapons production, enhancing the notion of a sick and destructive affair eloquently told in theatrical language.

Other scenes are far less cogent, and some are outright misfires. *Under the Gun* often explains issues using discourse rather than theatrical language. In particular, the play contains a series of rather stilted monologues in which characters not involved in the main
stories are introduced. Dramatically, they serve only to supply even more detailed information on the issues covered, making these monologues more like discursive lectures. Another serious problem facing the company here is identification of the enemy, a considerable difficulty for political theatre in a pluralistic society and especially so when addressing complex and interrelated issues of a social, political, and economic nature (Kershaw 80). Gestures are made in the direction of those responsible rather than direct finger pointing. The play's international scope divests it of the dramatic immediacy and potency that permeated *Buy, Buy Vancouver's* local subject matter. The tone is thus heavier, containing more facts and figures than caricatures and comedy, although songs and musical interludes both support the material and provide intervals of relief. *Headlines* was aware of the problems with the script and, using feedback from the post-show discussions, re-worked and honed it into a tighter, more lucid work over a period of months.

The production's political impact was unquestionably weakened, but not nullified, by the script's shortcomings. The writing is unregretfully ideologically biased, slamming free market capitalism and taking an only mildly critical approach to Soviet militarism. No feasible alternatives are presented. In this way, the production fit the agitprop characteristic of presenting an ideologically arrogant and unsophisticated model of the world (Kershaw 79).

Yet *Under the Gun* never suffered from lack of media attention; it was too hard-hitting, topical, and lively to be ignored. It was almost universally criticized for its lack of
theatrical focus in its attempt to cover such a broad and complex range of topics. This surplus of information was found to be confusing to some audiences (Allen 1983). It was also criticized as having sketchy, superficial plotting (Allen 1983), difficulty with wordiness, continuity and scene transitions (Read 1983), and need for greater variety in pace and rhythm (Canadian Tribune 1983). Still, audiences and critics found it impressive in its sincerity and for the entertainment value of the skits and songs.

Nevertheless, as one measure of its success, Under the Gun was noted in the press to be a tool of the disarmament movement. It particularly appealed to people afraid of the possibility of nuclear war and aimed its message at this community. As well, Headlines advised its audience to get educated, get organized, and get active --- again advocating demonstrations and civil disobedience. Each performance closed with a reading of contemporary headlines of the successes of organized campaigns.

Despite its flaws, Under the Gun enjoyed a successful run in Vancouver, playing to near-capacity audiences in selected community venues. Moneys were raised through the Touring Office of the Canada Council and PLURA (a coalition of Christian churches), in addition to further funds from some of its original funding sources, for provincial and national tours. The seven week provincial tour began in late October 1983 with almost thirty communities included. The production went to communities on the request of various activist groups, ranging from church peace groups to larger coalitions.

---

7 Under the Gun sparked controversy in the British Columbia interior community of Creston, where some residents charged that the play was “communist propaganda”. Headlines responded by printing extra advertising leaflets for its performance there, taking full advantage of the publicity (Sarti 1983).
Headlines' national tour of Under the Gun began in Ottawa in mid-January 1984 and finished seven weeks later in Calgary. It was a physically grueling experience Wild recalls as "this ragtag little theatre company driving across the Prairies in February," moving day-to-day from one small town to another. In some rural communities it became necessary for the company to put up maps at the venues that showed where the Philippines is located. During the course of the tour, the exiled opposition leader of the Philippines, Benino Acquino, returned to Manilla and was shot, in front of media cameras, in less than a minute after disembarking the aircraft. Interest in Under the Gun was ignited by this event, particularly in the expatriate Filipino communities. The show also received some nationwide publicity: Wild and Diamond were interviewed by Peter Gzowski for CBC Radio's Morningside program. Excerpts of the play were reproduced in the studio for this broadcast.

Interestingly, the audience program from the tour is highly revealing of the essence of the production, its ambitions and weaknesses. Eight typed pages long, it included: facts and figures quoted in the script, a list of Canadian companies producing and marketing for Departments of Defense, a list of some "Disarmament, Development, and Peace Action Groups" in Canada, and a list of "Suggested Reading and Viewing". Ironically, Under the Gun's final performance was given in Vancouver in the same week that Cruise missile testing began in Canada.

In a rather indirect way, a documentary film also followed Under the Gun. The show marked the end of Nettie Wild's artistic association with Headlines. During the
production’s run, some Filipino audience members spoke with Wild about popular theatre work being done in their native country. Wild’s interest was sparked, and she obtained a *Canada Council* grant to travel to, and work with, popular theatre groups in the Philippines, where she spent three years. At one point, she returned briefly to Canada to raise funds for a film about the Filipino armed resistance movement; *A Rustling of Leaves*, a feature documentary, was the result. The film won the *People’s Choice* award at Berlin’s *Forum for New Cinema* in 1989, and Wild’s new full-time career as a filmmaker was underway.

*Headlines*’ experienced remarkable success in its first public ventures, attracting ample audiences and considerable media attention, both locally and nationally. The company had so far met its mandate to create theatre that addressed current social issues and to bring this theatre into the community, using non-traditional theatre venues to attract people who were not regular theatre-goers.

Both of *Headlines*’ initial offerings were political theatre in their content. Each contained many elements of agitprop theatre: “*Agitprop is advocacy rather than analysis: it presents a polemic statement on an issue and depicts the ideological meaning of events rather than the events themselves. Like pageants, agitprop relies on an iconographic reduction of reality*” (Filewod 1987, 7), political struggles pertinent to ordinary citizens were “*reinforced by the inclusion of up-to-date reports on topical current events and political discussions with the audience following the performances*” (Filewod 1987, 89). In addition to the agitprop techniques previously discussed, factual material was
incorporated in each *Headlines*’ script to create a polemic, a technique common to much political theatre. Their productions were “popular” in that “…the significance of the theatrical event requires a personal or ideological relationship between audience and subject matter” (Filewod 1987, 8). Their goal was to empower their audience to take action.

Performing in non-traditional spaces, and charging affordable prices, meant *Headlines* took their work to and engaged with the community, providing a political challenge in terms of function. The highly presentational performance style of the revue format provided editorialized information directly to the audience, relying less on the perhaps unfamiliar subtleties of mimetic drama. This direct political address in the form of accessible skits and songs made it a familiar and amicable communication with people who might not usually attend theatre. As well, working with few theatrical trappings highlighted the theatrical nature of the event and enhanced the artists’ cachet as committed activists with a message. But performing in these conditions may have, inadvertently, also intensified the agitprop quality of their work: “It is extremely hard to project in basketball courts, where the lighting turns you green, and hard to pull focus. You end up with all the brush strokes — the really wide brush strokes — of really broad agitprop, bellowing at the top of your lungs to get over the echo” (Wild 1997).

Certainly, the success of politically oriented theatre companies cannot be measured by purely aesthetic criteria; their practical objectives, which may be as simple as a raising of consciousness, must be afforded at least equal consideration. From this standpoint, both *Buy, Buy Vancouver* and *Under the Gun* were successful productions. How successful,
in practical terms, is difficult to gauge precisely. Undoubtedly, *Buy, Buy Vancouver* and the *Right to Fight* video, which appealed directly to compelling local concerns, inspired some audience members to join tenants' movements and fight for cooperative and social housing. The success of *Under the Gun* was less obviously practical. Nettie Wild agrees:

>The thing that was great about *Under the Gun* was ... it was during the whole disarmament movement and we raised the flag and said disarmament is the issue. It's militarism, and if that sounds really grim and determined, well Canada is involved in it up to its eyeballs, essentially helping to stoke the US military complex. And we tried to --- rather than bonk people over the head --- we tried to weave that into two stories, one that took place in Canada and one that took place in the Philippines. But I think we bonked people over the head (Wild 1997).

*Headlines* generally did not, however, stress propaganda at the expense of aesthetic considerations. Strong acting and singing, plus skilled musical accompaniment, characterized both of these early productions.

One criticism inevitably launched at *Headlines* was that its work was *preaching to the converted*. Theorist Baz Kershaw contends that agitprop indeed does speak successfully "only to the converted, i.e. to the oppressed who think themselves oppressed" (80). Colin Thomas finds this a valuable element of their work: "I think there's a tremendous argument for 'preaching to the converted'. Why not? The 'converted' need a little focus". But David Diamond rejects this charge:

>That's a red herring. There's no such thing as the "converted." They don't exist. That phrase "preaching to the converted" is a weapon that people use to de-value work. When the Fraser Institute (conservative think tank) has a conference, do people criticize them for preaching to the converted? But when people go to see work that is committed to social change you get "preaching to the converted." Why is that? I think it's because people are resistant to change and they are afraid of anything that is going to create change, so there is an inherent desire to damp that down (Diamond 1997).
I agree with Diamond; charges of “preaching to the converted” are never leveled at theatre whose political sympathies lie with the status quo. This theatre:

_ can imply political meanings unself-consciously, precisely because the political perspective on which it rests is the dominant one. The principal aim would be to make the ruling order seem a ‘natural’ condition (‘there is no alternative’) rather than a system requiring justification by political argument (Holderness 14)._

Would this agitprop be as successful today, or was its success relative to a certain set of social, cultural, and historical features? Both Nettie Wild and David Diamond believe that the type of work found in these early _Headlines_ plays would be just as successful in Vancouver in the late 1990s, suggesting a certain timeless quality in agitprop. The energy, vitality and “guts” that agitprop require are, according to Diamond, available to young artists who are not afraid to offend those with money and power. Colin Thomas is less sure, arguing that the public has become far more culturally sophisticated in the intervening years with increasing cynicism and skepticism, particularly regarding politicians, and that it has accepted a fiscally defined political agenda. He notes that agitprop requires not only a great deal of physical energy, but also equal parts idealism, a sense that things can be changed and that individuals can be effective in this change. I concur with Thomas, and add that for agitprop to be successful today it would have to use today’s aesthetic language: energy and tone that is fast-paced, raw, cynical and sharp-edged. It would, however, be even more difficult to identify the enemy in this “information age” of post cold-war politics and deficit-driven political agendas.
The stresses of two successful touring productions in rapid succession left *Headlines* in a state of serious fatigue, in need of rest and rejuvenation. Nettie Wild and David Diamond each went in their own directions at this point; Wild to the Philippines and Diamond to Europe. Subsequently, *Headlines* would also set a new course.
CHAPTER TWO

SHifting forms

If the domains of culture and language are saturated with political meaning, then whenever we live or act or feel through them, we are potentially at a point of political confrontation.

Graham Holderness, 1992

The completion of the Under the Gun project brought not only a brief, but a much needed breather to the company. By the time of its national tour, the collective had finally moved its office from David Diamond’s home to the hallway outside of the OXFAM offices in the IDERA building. Now, however, the office became home to Diamond, who found himself attending to most of the day-to-day operations, and reporting on these to the collective on occasion.

Frustrated by this responsibility and concurrent lack of decision-making authority, Diamond believed the collective was fracturing, and expressed his discontent to the other members. It was time, he asserted, for the collective to re-integrate or to give him full decision-making power as director. He had never directed anything, and it therefore was his genuine wish that the collective would continue and progress. Despite that, the members were unable to maintain a sufficient level of commitment to the theatre collective. In 1984, Headlines restructured to form a more traditional theatre company with Diamond as Artistic Director. Accordingly, all future work by the company would be flavoured by his aesthetic, personality, and politics.
Coincidentally, 1984 was the year in which Diamond convinced the Canada Council to provide him with grant funds to visit political theatre companies in Europe. The journey proved to be a turning point for Diamond as an artist, and thus for Headlines as a theatre company:

I went to Europe in 1984 and visited political theatre companies, and there was something that I knew, and that was that something was missing. There was a piece missing. The work was very popular and powerful, and achieving things, but there was something missing. And I was traveling around reading Paulo Freire's [book] Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and it was blowing my mind, because it was what was missing. And in the middle of reading this book I came across Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

Propitiously, Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal was in Paris at the same time leading a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop.

In addition to his work as a director, Boal has gained a reputation as a theatre theorist and is now best known as such. Drawing on his own theatre work with Brazilian peasants, and influenced by the socioeconomic theories of Karl Marx, the epic theatre of Bertold Brecht and educator Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Boal developed his "Poetics of the Oppressed": "... the conquest of the means of theatrical production" (Boal 1979, x). This poetics was expounded in his seminal 1974 publication, Theatre of the Oppressed. His theories are based on the premise that "all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them" (Boal 1979, ix), as well as potently political --- "the most perfect artistic form of coercion" (Boal 1979, 39) --- so that ruling classes can use it to maintain their domination by imposing a finished version of the world.
Boal argues that theatre is, however, also a potential and potent weapon for liberation. Yet to stimulate this potential, barriers must first be destroyed between actors and spectators: everyone must act. The spectator becomes an actor expressing herself through the universal language of theatre, with its vocabulary of the human body available to any person regardless of artistic talent or social class. Thus, in Boal’s vision, the spectator changes from passive witness into subject and protagonist, able to transform the dramatic action.

Significantly, this ability to transform the dramatic action is purported to be the key to liberation, the objective of Boal’s poetics: “...the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself” (Boal 1979, 155). During this process, people have the opportunity “...to try out all their ideas, to rehearse all the possibilities, and to verify them in practice, that is, in theatrical practice” (Boal 1979, 141). Many possible courses of action can be examined; therefore, Boal declares this theatre to be a rehearsal for the revolution (Boal 1979, 122).

Accordingly, Boal developed several theatrical forms, with increasing degrees of spectator intervention, that make the rehearsal possible for the spectator-actor, or spectator. His theory proposes that theatre is a vocation for all human beings. The Theatre of the Oppressed:

*is a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation*

---

8 Boal’s theories and methodology will only be discussed in brief in this paper; readers are directed to his own writings for comprehensive explanation.

9 See Glossary for a description of terms employed in Theatre of the Oppressed.
by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions (Boal 1995, 14-15).

Importantly, the ultimate effect of Boal's theory and practical methods is of democratizing the theatre, removing it from the exclusive domain of elite artists (Boal 1995, xxii). The spectator and performance relation of conventional theatre is completely de-stabilised. Every spectator is an actor, regardless of formal training, because every person has access to the language of theatre by virtue of their own corps, their own bodies. Thus, every person's story --- every political, social, economic and emotional situation --- may be told and explored on the stage. This rehearsal of action onstage will provoke its practice in reality, in everyday life.

In Boal's theatre, the process of making theatre is as important as the final product. This process involves an exploration of the experience of oppression through the human body, using physical, not verbal, language. The Joker leads a workshop of non-actor participants from a specific community, facilitating theatre games to activate the senses and build trust. The group is gradually led through a series of exercises in which they sculpt images of oppression using their own and others' bodies. These images are dynamised using the techniques of Image Theatre, and the Joker further facilitates their development into a short scene in which a protagonist is shown to try, unsuccessfully, to overcome oppression.

---

10 This is also a post-modern approach to drama: "Post-modernism requires a theoretical destruction of such 'macro-narratives', and the re-instatement of cultural diversity and pluralistic perception through the development of 'micro-narratives' witnessing to the discrete and unassimilable experience of particular oppressed groups --- women, racial and ethnic minorities, lesbians and gay men, people with disabilities" (Holderness 12).
11 See Glossary.
12 See Glossary.
The play is then presented to an audience of the larger community as *Forum Theatre*. First, the scene is run through in its entirety; the *Joker* then invites the audience to replace the protagonist onstage and intervene with alternative courses of action as possible solutions. The scene may be replayed numerous times with various interventions and any action is permitted unless it is magical or expressly forbidden. Spectators must become spect-actors to intervene --- possible solutions must be investigated through action, not discussion. The *Joker* sums up each intervention and invites a dialogue about it; much is learned from both successful and unsuccessful interventions.

*Theatre of the Oppressed* is political theatre. The content always involves some element of oppression that is rooted in dominant ideology. The form of this theatre is somewhat alienating; the audience is always aware of its theatrical nature and is invited to think about, as well as feel about, the acts of oppression they are witnessing. The political function of this theatre defies the spectators’ traditional expectations of the narrative --- anything can happen --- and their conventional relationship to the performance. The performance belongs equally to the spectators.

Diamond spent eight days with Boal, inspired by experiencing Freire’s theories in practice, and felt his relationship with Boal became one of peers (rather than student and teacher). It was also at this Paris workshop that Diamond met Kevin Finnan, a British theatre artist who would become an important friend and collaborator.

---

13 See *Glossary*.
14 Diamond was able to work with Boal again in 1986, 1987, twice in 1992 and again in 1997.
Intensely stimulated by this involvement with Boal, Diamond was challenged to discover how he could practically apply the knowledge when he returned to Vancouver. Initially he pulled together a group of friends and experimented on them, and this inspired further investigation:

*I wanted to see if I could package a week long process, to go from zero --- perhaps not even knowing each other --- to performance. Being made on issues that were of concern to them. I had no idea if that was possible. But I mapped it out on paper, and I sold it to seven communities around the province, calling it Power Plays* (Diamond 1997).

The project was finally ready to go out to these communities in late spring 1986, and Kevin Finnan was invited to work in partnership with Diamond. *Power Plays* are Boal’s methodology in action, employing the theatre games and exercises he developed to create trust and generate images. Each project involved a five-day workshop during which one or more short plays was developed for performance in a *forum* format, with Diamond acting as *Joker*. In this process, one or more situations of *oppression* (further defined for participants as “a time when you were hard done by, when you were made to think, feel or do something you did not want”) were examined and articulated using the language of theatre.

Each community identified distinct problems: teenage alcoholism and bar-room violence in Masset, unemployment and the rise of fundamentalist religion in Kitamat, sexual harassment and censoring in the schools in Smithers. In Prince Rupert, a group of teenagers identified sexual and physical abuse as their issue, while adults identified unemployment and racism. It was made clear that, in these situations of oppression, the oppressor must be indicated.
The project received significant national attention through an article on the front page of the entertainment section of the *Globe and Mail*. This review provides a sketch of the workshop with the *Native Women's Sorority Group* in Prince Rupert and details some of the problems and triumphs encountered. Audience reaction was "generally enthusiastic"; the reaction of the women's group is near elation: "All of us, especially the kids, got a chance to express ourselves in a non-threatening way. Some people never thought of the experiences they had as oppression. It felt so good to know...that you weren't alone" (Godfrey 1986). Indeed, telling and exploring the story proved to be as therapeutic as finding solutions for the problems, and was reported as an important beginning for doing so. But the actual theatrical experience was a very large factor in their satisfaction, and, following the *Headlines* project, there was discussion about starting a local Native theatre company. The *Power Plays* were a powerful success.

*Headlines* did not otherwise remain idle in the two year period between Diamond's contact with Boal and the implementation of the *Power Plays* in the late spring of 1986. The company returned to the public's attention in an overtly political encounter with the provincial Social Credit government's restraint policies and plans for the world transportation fair, *Expo '86*. This piece, *The Enemy Within*, saw a return to the agitprop theatre the company had become known for.

*The Enemy Within*, written by Diamond, includes songs and stand-up routine to tell the story of Claire, a cleaning lady devoted to her boss, William the Premier. Claire is eventually laid off as part of the Premier's restraint program, giving her the opportunity to
“compete in a world class city”, and the play charts her course through the frustration of unemployment, low wage service industry jobs, and finally the poverty of welfare and food banks. Her political consciousness develops as her financial situation declines, and she comes to question the actions of the political figure she was once so devoted to.

No attempt was made to disguise the attack on Premier William (Bill) Bennett. Direct quotes from Bennett are used throughout the play, each introduced by a buzzer sound, and these provide some of the funniest and most indicting moments of the show. With appropriate agitprop artistry, Premier William is caricatured, while the working class protagonist Claire is slightly better developed as the character with whom the audience is meant to sympathize. Yet these characters really serve only as representatives of the class struggle. One of agitprop’s most effective techniques is also incorporated; the stage manager holds up signs with slogans for the audience to chant. This aesthetic process, the joining of disparate voices into a united chant, makes the audience aware of their collective strength (Endres xix). And, to demonstrate that the company identified with the political and social concerns of the community, the stage manager also appears briefly as a union demonstrator wearing a Solidarity tee-shirt (promoting the recently formed coalition of labour and community groups that opposed the government’s restraint policies and investments in mega-projects such as Expo ’86).

As usual, the audience was invited to stay after the performance to discuss strategy. A fourteen page program was distributed containing a plethora of information regarding the province’s economic conditions and recent elimination of the Human Rights Commission. Also included was a notably large piece on Asian Special Economic Zones,
as the play makes rather fleeting reference to a Philippine woman, Lulu, who was jailed for attempting to organize a union in her homeland. Funding for the project was received from several labour groups, CUSO, OXFAM, Canada Manpower and Immigration, the Secretary of State, City of Vancouver, and other community agencies. In addition, a public fund raising campaign yielded some moneys.

*The Enemy Within* opened in July 1985 with Suzie Payne playing Claire, Colin Thomas as the Premier, and Pat Keating as the stage manager. A subsequent provincial tour had an entirely new cast, with Meredith Bain Woodward, C. Holte Davidson and Diamond himself as stage manager. Reviewers generally concurred with the *Province* critic in acknowledging the performance as an "organizing tool" and "consciousness raiser", "...politically astute enough to turn into a mini-Solidarity rally afterward as well, providing a forum for complaint and debate" (Read 1985). Most, however, accused the production of preaching to the converted, as in the *Terrace Review*: "Although it could be argued that the spectators were a bit one-sided in their political sympathies, the play itself was ...enjoyable from any ideological standpoint" (Review of *The Enemy Within* 1986). The production was also noted to be highly entertaining: "...mixes its politics with comedy adroitly, making its points quickly, purposefully, and with as much wit as possible" (Moore 1985). Indeed, the production was popular with audiences and successfully filled small, non-traditional venues around the province.

Clearly partisan, *The Enemy Within* engaged in sharp and direct criticism of the governing provincial party, the right-wing Social Credit. In terms of political impact,
*Headlines* again employed many conventional agitprop techniques, and the company was able to represent the audience’s economic and social concerns without engaging in party politics. But the production’s strongest political tactic was its use of what Baz Kershaw describes as the “*paradox of rule-breaking-within-rule-keeping*”, which is “*crucial to efficacy of performance in its contribution to the formation of (ideological) communities*” (Kershaw 28). The portrait of the governing premier drawn in *The Enemy Within* fits this paradox; the rules are broken by making the premier and his restraint policies appear blatantly glib, preposterous and inhumane. But the rules are kept by using his very own words to do so. The production’s set featured a painted TV on a wall; the Premier’s smiling face appears in the shallow TV screen as a literal *talking head*. The device is shrewd. The result is that the Premier, rather than a theatre company with an agenda, makes himself look fatuous.

The style of *The Enemy Within* almost always acknowledges the presence of an audience, often in direct address, and thus articulates a politically cohesive “*common predicament*” (Kershaw 64). This direct address defies the conventional relation between spectator and performance, and shows the audience that all institutions are potentially transformable. But the shortcomings of agitprop are probably most obvious in this *Headlines* production. In particular, “*...the form denies the writer one of the most potent weapons in the dramatic armoury*”; that is, the weapon of peripeteia (Kershaw 79). Caricature allows for no change in attitude on the part of either the character or the audience. Even Claire’s attitudinal shift is too subtle for dramatic effect; instead, she maintains an ironic acceptance of the status quo until the very end, politically heightening the implicit absurdity of the government’s policies.
Although David Diamond maintains that the company had no interest in party politics, in March 1985 two people with strong connections to the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) became members of *Headlines*’ Board of Directors, Darlene Marzari and Svend Robinson. Marzari was a member of Vancouver City Council at the time of *Headlines*’ formation and became a strong advocate for the company. She was later elected as NDP member of the provincial legislature, and resigned her position from the *Headlines* Board when the party formed the provincial government. New Democrat Svend Robinson, a Member of Parliament since 1979, was also extremely supportive of *Headlines*’ work. Although he held a place on the Board for many years, Robinson was never able to actually attend a Board meeting, yet stayed active as a member until the early 1990s.

Diamond denies that the company was specifically seeking out New Democratic party members for their Board of Directors. Although both of these individuals were very high profile politicians, they had little influence in attracting funds or other largesse for *Headlines*. Diamond insists that, if anything, the two may have gotten in the way of obtaining funds; both were high profile because of their outspokenness and thus somewhat unpopular. Certainly, the company felt no direct benefit when the NDP eventually did form the provincial government in 1991, and their funding remained at its previous level. But, undoubtedly, the presence of these two NDP stalwarts lent a certain cachet to the modest company.
Headlines' career as an overtly agitprop theatre company came to an end with The Enemy Within. With the termination of its agitprop theatre came a subtle but significant change in philosophical direction for Headlines, and an entirely different theatrical style was assumed. The company remained dedicated to political theatre, but there was now a more intense recognition that the personal is the political, an awareness that always existed in the company but which eventually became the organizing principle for their work. For Diamond, the Power Plays are overtly political. For non-actors to: "... make plays about their issues and show them to the public is political. The act of them making theatre and telling their story is deeply political."

In addition, this theatre helps explore political issues within a community; the issues may be concomitantly personal and communal, and involve many members of a community in the exploration of both the problems and, just as importantly, their solution. The essence of Headlines' work became transformation. Yet even this worthy intent can become misguided in the theatre as Diamond explains:

There has been an industry built up. It's called children's theatre. It survives from adults deciding what kids' issues are, hiring adults to write plays about those issues, and then hiring other adults to pretend that they're children and present the issues. ...It is, in and of itself, an act of oppression. Because it's a denial that these kids can articulate their own issues and deal with them themselves. And if the reason you're doing the work is transformation, well the transformation is far greater if the kids do it, rather than sit and watch adults pretend they're kids and do it for them. The same goes for adults. It is just easier to see in kids' theatre (Diamond 1997).

Boal's techniques --- games and exercises designed to prepare non-actors to build a play and take it to performance --- can also be used to build plays that will not be
performed as *forum* theatre. The *Image Theatre* exercises are particularly powerful theatrical tools for the genesis of dramatic scenes; the improvisations can be developed over the available time to create a longer, more textured dramatic work. *Headlines* soon used a *Power Play* workshop to do just that.

Undoubtedly, *Power Plays*’ first major public triumph was the process and production of *No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints)*, directed by Diamond and written by him in collaboration with Hal B. Blackwater, Lois G. Shannon, and Marie Wilson. The play was commissioned and co-produced by the *Gitksan - Wet’suwet’en* Tribal Council who were engaged in a lands claim dispute with the provincial government of British Columbia. Research and writing of the play took place over a nine week period beginning in mid-February 1987, in association with the *Gitksan* and *Wet’suwet’en* Hereditary Chiefs. Images created during *Power Play* workshops (for example, participants’ images of their relationship to the land claims), held in the northern British Columbia towns of Hazelton and Kispiox, formed the basis of the nucleus of the script, developed further through the collaborative process. This resulted in a full-length play which was not presented as *forum* theatre.

---

15 Indeed, many of the games and exercises Boal has collected are valuable for directors to use with actors in any conventional theatre productions. Theatre educators or any person facilitating group activities will find the group-building exercises useful.

16 The land claim dealt with an area in the Skeena region of northwestern B. C., a largely unsettled area of 50,000 square kilometres that includes towns such as Hazelton and Smithers.

17 David Diamond explains this choice: “The *No’ Xya* project needed to be straight story-telling. *No’ Xya* was the opportunity for the *Gitksan* and *Wet’suwet’en* to tell their story about their relationship to the ancestral lands without the constant sense that someone else was going to re-interpret it. It was a very political act to ‘re-write’ history” (1998).
Still overtly political, *Headlines*’ work in this play maintains the zeal of its previous agitprop pieces, but here displays an obvious reverence to the material and a subtlety in its presentation. Because of “the company’s allegiance to the cultural priorities of the community...”, *Headlines* came only close to “...the kind of romantic appropriation of Native culture that has historically excused genocide” (Filewod 1990, xii). The politics of this particular piece are especially engrossing in that a (mostly) white, urban-based theatre company was asked to present the point of view of First Nations peoples involved in a legal wrangle with the government. An enormous cultural barrier was being crossed by the company. A combination of factors made this crossing successful: (1) the company was there by express invitation, (2) all non-First Nations members were adopted into a clan and given a native name (3) all of the First Nations source materials (songs, stories, factual information, and so on) were carefully documented and incorporated into the script (the published script is extensively footnoted, and one song considered so sacred that it could not be reproduced in publication.), (4) the play was not presented entirely from a First Nations perspective (non-aboriginal members of the community were included in the research) and demonstrating both sensibilities gave the work authenticity, (5) the presence of a Representative of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Gitksan Wet’suwet’en peoples at each performance added a formal validation and sanctioning of the work.

*No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints)* tells the story of the Gitksan Wet’suwet’en peoples’ struggle to retain control over land that has been usurped by their visitors, and it does so using a blend of First Nations spirituality and environmental consciousness. The opening of the performance creates a strong sense of this native culture with drums and singing,
and with the entrance of the *Guu Hadixs* (literally, the “Good Swimmer”), Chief of the Salmon People, who introduces the drama. The traditional regalia of the *Guu Hadixs*, bearing the crest of the Salmon, is left onstage at all times and put on by different actors to embody its spirit throughout the play. As *Guu Hadixs* sets the play in the sacred battleground of *Gawa-Gyani*, where peace was made long ago, actors enter from the back of the theatre and run a long white cloth over the heads of the centre section audience, dropping a few feathers of down, symbols of peace. This theatrical gesture is the bringing together of neighbours, and strangers, to different ideas and in peace. Two scenes then follow which set up the aboriginal peoples’ relationship to the land: “The Dance of the Salmon” and “The Dance of the Hunter and the Caribou”. Theatrically, the impression of long established traditions is established, not only the tradition of dance but also of the respect and bond with nature. The first image of a totem pole is erected at this point, another powerful visual image of this venerable culture.

The politics of *No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints)* become increasingly obvious in the scenes that follow this introduction to aboriginal culture and belief. The style becomes more realistic, set by costume and song in 1910, and the audience meet Francis and Helena who have recently immigrated from Scotland because, ironically, the family has been driven from their land. They are befriended by a First Nations couple, *Gyat and Hanakx*, who are tolerant of and generous to these poor immigrants, expecting that these newcomers will respect their home. The interlopers build tension as they build fences and No Trespassing signs. The play next moves forward eighty years, and the couple are introduced as Frank and Helen, the First Nations couple who befriend them as James and Marianne. The cultural clash is made immediate; Frank is laid off from his job at the mill
because aboriginal peoples have blockaded the logging roads and the road that leads to his home. The dialectic is established mainly through the male characters: James represents the First Nations belief system regarding land use and history that stretches back to “time out of memory”, Frank expresses the materialistic concerns of a society centered on profit-making and dominion over all of the earth. The fight becomes physical at one point, a reminder of how easily tempers may flare around this impassioned question. Land issues remain unresolved at the end of the play, as in real life.

The production ends with strong visual and verbal messages about the First Nations peoples’ tradition and their bonds with nature and their ancient homelands. In a final dance, James becomes the Guu Hadixs; he is then dressed in a ceremonial robe and headpiece and has the cane bestowed on him, signifying him as the new Chief. Exclamations in Gitksan are heard throughout the process. A final totem pole is raised while place names in both Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en are chanted. The audience is invited back to Gawa-Gyami as the white cloth again flies over the audience’s heads. Finally, the theatre is declared a Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en Feast Hall, and the tradition of giving gifts perpetuated with each spectator receiving a button as validation of what has just been witnessed. The spectators, “honoured guests” of this Feast Hall, are then invited to speak. As usual, each performance was followed by a lively, audience-driven discussion period with the cast. The discussion leaders, however, were Representatives for the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs, people with a special relationship to the material presented in the play. Marie Wilson, a Gitksan Elder and historian who also collaborated on the script, accompanied the production on its B.C. tour. Chief Joseph Alfred, a key
figure in the Supreme Court lands claim case, replaced Wilson on the national tour. The Hereditary Chiefs Representative for the New Zealand tour was Ardythe Wilson, a contributor to the sound tape production for the show. The discussions were lively, topics ranging from issues of morality to particulars of the court case, and larger numbers of audience members stayed for the discussions as the run went on. The presence of the Hereditary Chiefs Representative also served as a formal validation and sanctioning of the work.

*No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints)* opened on September 9, 1987 in Kispiox and played to an estimated 10,000 people during fifty-one performances in forty-one different communities around British Columbia. Support for the production came from a diverse range of sources that included the B.C. Federation of Labour, the United Church, and the civic employees of Vancouver. Although there was no outright request for donations, almost $60,000 was raised to support the *Gitksan-Wet’suwet’en* court action in the course of this run. The production --- a nine member company with a five ton truckload of equipment --- had a three month tour across Canada in the spring of 1988 with forty-nine performances in thirty different communities. Some sponsors of this national tour include the Assembly of First Nations, the YM / YWCA and the Union of Nova Scotia Indians. *No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints)* was remounted in 1990 and toured to six communities in *Gitksan - Wet’suwet’en* Territory and to five *Maori* communities in New Zealand for twenty-five performances. The show closed with a final week of performances at the James Cowan Theatre in Burnaby.
The production was almost universally well-received. No review failed to note the political content and intent of the play, some finding this its flaw: "... it's finally more effective as politics than as theatre" (Charles 1988). In addition, No' Xya' (Our Footprints) received national press coverage. Globe and Mail critic Stephen Godfrey's review is most astute:

Although there is humour in No’ Xya’, it is most often an impassioned, earnest piece, too elegiac to be described as agitprop, too skillful to be classified as a theatrical lecture. The lack of characterization makes the dialogue stilted in theatrical terms, but the play does succeed in its primary goal of persuasively explaining the native viewpoint ... the piece at centre stage succeeds in making the local issue just as urgent, and preparing its audiences for the court battle ahead (Godfrey 1987).

Yet in some regards, most important commendation for No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints) came in the form of an article by Virginia Cooke in the “multicultural issue” of Canadian Theatre Review (Fall 1988), an impressive emblem of peer recognition at a loftier critical level. She explains its inclusion in this issue:

Native Indians, who significantly refer to themselves as the “First Nations”, were already here with a rich culture and a complex social system. These are points which the play continually emphasizes; it is the white immigrants in No ‘Xya who bring the “other culture” which threatens to destroy the Indians’ way of life. But No ‘Xya is not presented entirely from a native perspective; the creation of the play was “multi-cultural”, or at least cross-cultural. Headlines Theatre personnel worked with both native and non-native members of the community of Hazelton, B.C., and the play reflects both sensibilities ...(Cooke 44).

Headlines does not have the distinction of being the first theatre company in Canada to use the theories and techniques of Augusto Boal. A Quebecois political theatre troupe, le Théâtre Sans Détour, introduced forum theatre to English Canada at a 1983 popular theatre festival, and the “impact of Boal on the subsequent development of popular theatre in English Canada has since been profound... ” (Filewod 1989, 203).
Headlines did join the growing number of Canadian theatre companies who were creating popular theatre --- theatre for, with or by a specific community to explore issues meaningful to them. From the Mummers Troupe in Newfoundland to Edmonton's Catalyst Theatre, companies across Canada were creating theatre for community development, education, raising political awareness, documentation, and community and labour organizing.

The impact of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed was great on the form and function of Headlines' theatre work. Power Plays enjoyed immediate success, and became the mainstay of Headlines work after 1986. Was this change to a popular theatre form a conscious choice for the company in terms of its political theatre mandate? Diamond concedes:

It's theatre that has a purpose. You're using it as a healing tool. You're using it to identify issues in the community. You're using it to build community. It just makes sense. I can't answer why Headlines has gone that way, because I think there has been a strong desire from everybody that Headlines do this. Headlines is a different kind of theatre company. The work has always really been not so much a response, but part of a dialogue. It's never been stuck in a room somewhere, saying 'Oh this will bring them in' (Diamond 1997).

Nevertheless, bring them in they did.
CHAPTER THREE

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: FORUM AND TELEVISION

*Life is theatre. And Forum theatre is a dance of life. On one issue, on one particular incident, on one particular spot, you can dance the life so many times and try out different ideas. Because life is so rich by itself ... but we don't see it, because we've given it a sequence, because we live in patterns.*

*Saeideh Nessar Ali 1997*

*Headlines* enjoyed considerable success with *Power Plays* from the time of their inception in 1985. Following *No' Xya' (Our Footprints)*, the company created theatre with specific communities: a clerical workers' union, alcoholics and drug users in rehabilitation, and people using food banks, among others. The audiences for these *Power Plays* were generally comprised of persons with some particular interest in the target community. Nevertheless, their success kindled the question of whether *Power Plays* could reach out to even larger audiences of the general public.

Fortunately, a suitable vehicle for this exploration soon presented itself. In early 1989, *Headlines* took a production to various locations in the Vancouver area which examined some of the cultural and other boundaries met by refugees in officially multicultural Canadian society. *Sanctuary?* was created from work with refugees from various nations involved with the Sanctuary movement and with sponsorship from Amnesty International. The play was based on some common experiences of these refugees, all of whom had left severe, and often violent, political oppression in their
homelands to seek asylum in Canada. A Vancouver lawyer active in refugee assistance was the only non-refugee actor. Of note, this was the first contact between Headlines and actor Saeideh Nessar Ali, an Iranian professor who had fled to Canada; following this production, she trained to become a Joker and eventually became a prominent figure of the company.

Intense and poignant, ?Sanctuary? reveals the unremitting tension and fear underlying the refugees' decision to escape from their home country, and the danger involved in doing so. Home is shown to be the place of family, friends and domestic rituals, familiar to Canadians in a sense, but also, in contrast, a place with the continuous threat of persecution and death. A final scene demonstrates the interminable bureaucracy and systemic harassment the frightened refugees encounter at the Canadian Immigration Office. The company presented ?Sanctuary? as forum theatre at each performance, with the usual audience instructions on investigating the issues through action.

Reviews were generally enthusiastic; note was made of the "fearlessness of the audience" (Dykk 1989) and the quality of their theatrical experience, "...exciting, vital and valid theatre. And, frankly, dangerous theatre because the more that is learned about a controversial issue such as immigration, the less easy it is to have a pat answer. Seeing ?Sanctuary? challenges you to open your mind, to risk changing your opinion" (Moore 1989). This theatrical experience also received national attention through a Globe and Mail review: "...what the performers lack in stage experience is more than compensated for by the authenticity of their play" (Lacey 1989). Georgia Straight critic Colin Thomas made perhaps the strongest case for this Power Play: "...?Sanctuary? is a fascinating
theatrical experiment, and whether you go because you are interested in politics or because you're interested in theatre, you'll leave knowing the two are inextricably linked" (Thomas 1989).

Yet even before these accolades, Headlines had decided to experiment with the ?Sanctuary? project, and a rough version of the play was mounted at the 1988 Vancouver Fringe Festival. The venture --- a meeting of one theatrical form at the fringe of mainstream theatre with its counterparts --- enjoyed immense popular success, and this inspired David Diamond to further experiment to appeal to a wider audience. But the next experiment took on a distinctly North American twist. Popular theatre intersects with that most popular medium of popular culture: live forum theatre on television.

Not surprisingly, the concept proved to be both innovative and ingenious. Members of the television audience were provided with a toll-free telephone number and invited to participate in a manner that preserves the essence of live forum as much as possible. From their homes, viewers discuss their ideas with supernumerary actors who man the telephone lines; this actor then replaces the regular actor onstage to act out the proposed intervention for a particular character. First names and locations of the contributors are provided at the beginning of each intervention, and the studio audience participates as usual. The Joker responds to the supernumerary actor as he would with any other spect-actor.

?Sanctuary? was broadcast live over the Lower Mainland by Vancouver Community Cable 4, an unassuming but very successful first date in Headlines’
burgeoning relationship with the medium of television. Nevertheless, it was a most impressive debut and received official tribute from the local theatre community in the form of the 1989 Jessie Richardson Award for Innovation in Theatre. The production was also given the Hometown USA Award for Innovation in Television.

Many more interactive theatre/television events were to follow, some resounding successes. Perhaps the most notable television project, broadcast on the provincial Knowledge Network, was Out of the Silence, a play co-produced by URBAN (Urban Representative Body of Aboriginal Nations) in cooperation with the B.C. Association of Indian Friendship Centres. The production developed from a Power Play workshop extended to a three week process, thus allowing the creation of a substantial piece dealing with the weighty issues of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The participants also gave Headlines a mandate to include expanded production values, and this was achieved with assistance from choreographer Denise Brillon, visual artist Richard Thorne and set designers Mia Hunt and Paul Williams.

Striking in its visual imagery, Out of the Silence opens with a powerful scene of three aboriginal individuals, cloaked in ceremonial blankets, sitting childlike in a circle around a raven image. Three other characters dressed in black robes with crosses, and wearing expressionless masks — priests of an impassive church — stand outside the circle surrounding them. One native girl is forced into a sexual act with a priest; the other native children appear frightened, silenced by the “shhh” of the other priests. They huddle together when the assault ends and one begins an aboriginal chant. A priest’s voice
overpowers it, declaring “Stupid Indian”. The residential school experience of many First Nations persons is thus well articulated in theatrical language.

Moving to the present, the next scene depicts a native family plagued by abusive relationships. Some of the abuse is obvious and brutal: the father physically beats his step-son. But the abuse of the opening scene reverberates. Using lighting and sound changes, the father falls to his knees as victim rather than perpetrator, while the other characters circle him hissing “Stupid Indian”, “Good for nothing”, “You deserve it”. Lights come back up to again show the father kicking his step-son, calling the boy “Stupid Indian”. In the meantime, the boy’s mother watches without intervening. But the family also harbors a sinister secret: the father has been sexually abusing his thirteen year old daughter, and everyone refuses to acknowledge or talk about it. The toxic pattern of the opening scene is repeated, bequeathed to the next generation.

With its heightened production values, Out of the Silence was placed in a venue atypical for the company. It was initially performed at the Waterfront Theatre in Vancouver in the fall of 1991, followed by a short run at the Ray-Cam Cooperative Centre on East Hastings Street. Critical response was favourable both despite and because of the difficult, emotion-laden subject matter, and the play was noted to be “taut, convincing and skilfully presented” (Dykk 1991).

Almost a year later, in cooperation with the BC Association of Indian Friendship Centres, the production embarked on a tour of twenty eight communities in British Columbia. A fund raising campaign provided donations from Headlines supporters, and these were supplemented by funds arranged by the provincial Ministry of Culture. The Out
of the Silence tour concluded with a live television broadcast on December 9, 1992 estimated to have reached up to 100,000 homes. The company tallied 219 phone calls during the course of the one and one-half hour television forum, and they speculate that many people were unable to contact them to add their interventions. Certainly, the television audience was eager to participate in this interactive theatrical experience.

In addition, a separate telephone number was broadcast for individuals who felt they required support or counseling because of the disturbing nature of the subject matter. This support line received forty-seven calls. Following the provincial tour, Headlines was able to return to six of the communities they had visited to train family violence counselors in Power Play techniques. Funding came entirely from the Family Violence Division of Health and Welfare Canada and, with the support of the Native Friendship Centre network, the company subsequently trained close to one hundred counselors in the use of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. In a week-long workshop, the counselors practiced various games and exercises for group-building work, as well as some exercises from the Cops-in-the-Head and Rainbow of Desire series. Many of the counselors reported back to the company that they found the training very valuable for their own work.

Accordingly, this Headlines production garnered well-deserved recognition from the professional theatre community. Actor Sam Bob received a Jessie nomination for his role in the play as the troubled father character. In addition, actor Columpa Bobb, who joined the cast for the provincial tour, accepted the Sam Payne Award for Most Promising Newcomer.
The political implications of taking Boal's *rehearsal for the revolution* out to a wider television audience of the general public are remarkable. This television/theatre collaboration is able to extend the process into many small, remote communities that may otherwise be excluded from this, or any, theatrical event. Audience size is difficult to estimate, but is, as a matter of course, infinitely greater than when the project is confined within the four walls of the designated theatrical space. Television broadcast thus turns a much larger audience of spectators into potential spect-actors.

In Boal's terms, television *forum* involves the first degree of using theatre as language: *simultaneous dramaturgy*. Actors interpret and reveal the spectators' suggestions in theatrical vocabulary simultaneously (noting the delay inherent for the television responders). Actors must thus be prepared to accept any proposed actions, but must always maintain the nature of their character.

The format has inherent limitations. Firstly, the television *forum* has a specified air time that it cannot transgress. This consequently limits the number of interventions that are possible regardless of audience size or response. Television responders have only the opportunity of their telephone call to offer their ideas. While the technique spares the television responders any discomfort of coming onstage, it is also less satisfying in that each viewer's personal quality becomes flavoured by the interpretation and the personality of the company's actor. Indeed, Boal himself identified the major problem of *simultaneous dramaturgy* early in his development of *Forum Theatre*:

*when the spectator herself comes on stage and carries out the action she has in mind, she does it in a manner which is personal, unique and non-transferable, as she alone can do it, and as no artist can do it in place. On stage the actor is an*
interpreter who, in the act of translating, plays false. It is impossible not to play false (Boal 1995, 7).

For viewers at home, even for those who phone in interventions, the experience remains ultimately one of television viewing. The essence of a theatrical event --- the interaction between live beings in a public setting --- is absent. Still, the television format remains conducive to a pedagogic theatrical experience, a method of collective learning, and true to the essence of Theatre of the Oppressed.

That Power Plays received further national attention in the Globe and Mail, a rather conservative Toronto-centered journal, was a critical boost for the company. In his interview for the ?Sanctuary? article, Diamond emphasized that the work is theatre, and "not a form of dramatized propaganda". Once again, Diamond reinforced the role of Headlines: "We're not therapists. We don't cure people and we don't provide solutions. We just give them a vehicle to explore issues of justice and oppression and to make art. But it is art, and that's why it works" (Lacey 1989).

Clearly, Headlines had distanced itself from its agitprop roots, the "dramatized propaganda" of its initial productions. But it continued exploring the political function of its work. The company chose the most pervasive cultural form of the dominant society for experimentation, defying the conventional relation of spectator and performance further by taking interactive productions electronically outside of an actual theatre space. Headlines' adventures were, in themselves, subversive and political acts.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICS OF MONEY

Political theatre, by its very definition, assumes that an examination of its subject can in some way affect the lives of its audience.

Alan Filewod 1987

Following the inception of Power Plays, Headlines did not entirely avoid the conventional theatrical form of scripted mimetic drama with an impenetrable fourth wall. Its two major ventures into this form played in traditional theatrical venues and appealed to the general theatre-going community. Nevertheless, both productions were branded with Headlines’ trademarks: topical, controversial subjects; post-show discussions; information booths and written materials available within the theatre. But both were also marked by outside interference of a political nature. And, although in distinct ways, this interference concerned the delicate and critical issue of funding.

The collision of politics and money sparked Headlines’ first venture into traditional theatre form with the 1993 production of theatre artist/critic Colin Thomas’ play Flesh and Blood. Vancouver’s Green Thumb Players approached Thomas, an actor and writer in the company’s first three productions, to write a show about AIDS that would tour high schools and community groups. Thomas was initially very reluctant to
accept the project: "I didn't think I had a strategy in terms of presenting what I thought was largely a gay concern to a largely straight audience and convincing them, without alienating them, that we should learn from our experiences" (Thomas 1997). As part of his research, he involved himself in a Headlines five-day workshop for people who were HIV positive or living with AIDS (Thomas was neither). By the end of the workshop, Thomas felt that he had a strong connection to the subject; he was convinced not only that he should write the play, but that he could do so, and in a genuine manner.

Thus, Thomas accepted the commission from the children's theatre company, and wrote a script that considered his discoveries from the Image Theatre of the Headlines workshop in addition to the educational material already available to young people about the transmission of HIV. The resulting script has two central characters: a homosexual man with AIDS and his younger, heterosexual brother. The play discusses issues such as unprotected sex (homo- and hetero-sexual) and contains a scene in which two gay men kiss. Additionally, as the homosexual brother fights the ravages of his illness, he is forced to confront his homophobia and his reluctance to care for his ailing lover. Thomas recalled in a Vancouver Sun interview that writing the script made him come to terms with his own homophobia: "It's impossible to grow up as a lesbian or a gay man without absorbing the values of the culture" (Crook 1993).

The play was to be directed by Vancouver theatre artist Morris Panych but, on the day of casting, Green Thumb received word that the provincial Ministry of Health would withdraw its funding if the company proceeded with the existing script. Thomas contacted
the ministry, who declined this script dealing with "social issues" surrounding the disease. Specifically, however, Thomas was left with the impression that this ministry of the politically conservative Social Credit government did not wish to fund a play with homosexual characters. This outraged Thomas, a gay man whose personal and professional life had been touched by AIDS:

_There is an implicit lie in never acknowledging that the experience of AIDS in North America has a lot to do with the homosexual community. A lie that allows you to dismiss all the rest of the material, that says 'they are faking it here', 'they're trying to pull the wool over my eyes—why should I pay attention?' It is really important to respect the audience enough to tell the truth_ (Thomas 1997).

_Green Thumb Players' _ artistic director Patrick MacDonald, who had some dramaturgical arguments with the script, did not support Thomas. The playwright refused to change the script to accommodate either the artistic director or the government ministry, and the commission was canceled.

Subsequently, Thomas submitted the script to Toronto theatre company _Theatre Direct_ (a company that specializes in new plays for young audiences). The company mounted several productions of _Flesh and Blood_ for teenage audiences in Toronto, and their reaction was boisterous and generally positive. Still, the script's content provoked a negative response from some. Thomas recalled how a few parents of teens in an outlying town complained to their school board because their children were booked to see the production; the school then canceled their booking. This angered many of the teens, however, who in turn enlisted their parents to appeal to the school board on their behalf. In the end, the board established a situation of negative permission, and all but of a few of
the teens attended the production. For Thomas, they proved to be: "... a fabulous audience, partly because they had fought to be there".

Despite this success, Thomas had difficulty getting *Flesh and Blood* produced in Vancouver. Finally, it was good fortune, auspiciously from his own flesh and blood, that allowed a Vancouver production: Thomas' own brother gave him $30,000 to do this work. Endowed with this cash, Thomas approached *Headlines*, and the play was produced through them. The production was directed by Jane Heyman, with a set by Marti Wright, costumes by Barbara Clayden, sound by David Epp and lighting by Gerald King. Actors Scott Bellis, Vincent Gale, Robert McQueen and Jillian Fargey composed the cast.

From a political standpoint, *Headlines* was an apt supporter for this important educational work discussing controversial subject matter. *Flesh and Blood* marked several firsts for the company. It was their first previously-produced play (with productions in Los Angeles and Chicago in addition to the Toronto run). It was also their first production directed by someone outside of the company. But *Flesh and Blood* did have post-show discussions, a *Headlines* trademark, with speakers provided by AIDS Vancouver, The Positive Women’s Network and Vancouver Persons With AIDS. Some funding for the production was provided by Terra Housing and by Health and Welfare Canada (AIDS Education Department).
Unlike the *Theatre Direct* productions, *Headlines'* production of *Flesh and Blood* was aimed at a general audience for its run at the *Vancouver East Cultural Centre*. Thomas claims this was due, in part, to the experience in Toronto:

*I really would have liked more high school audiences, but you've really got to have the structure in place and be willing to invest the work in it. Because with *Theatre Direct*, those were very sharp productions, got very good reviews, but were very difficult to sell. They had to sell it a classroom at a time ...figure out who the sympathetic teachers were in the school—sell them—they'd bring their class. It wasn't marketed for young audiences here* (Thomas 1997).

*Flesh and Blood* received mixed reviews for its Vancouver run. The *Province* critic found the production "charming. ...Not only charming but funny, too, as well as controversial" (Doruyter 1993). Yet the *Vancouver Sun* critic, though "profoundly moved" by the script, noted that: "The play's structure already has a distancing quality, with subtitles for each section that remind us we are watching the manipulated reality of the theatre." Thus, the director's objective to limit sentimentality in the production left the reviewer uncomfortable, "further distanced from the grief and anger associated with such explosive subjects as AIDS and shattered families..." (Crook 1993). Nevertheless, this same critic declared that the play "...will likely move people who know someone with AIDS and educate those who don't."

The production also received recognition from Vancouver's professional theatre community. Director Jane Heyman was nominated for a *Jessie* award for her work on *Flesh and Blood*. Actor Vincent Gale accepted the *Sam Payne Award* as Most Promising Newcomer for his role as Allan, the younger brother.
*Mamu: The Currency of Life* marked *Headlines'* next venture in producing scripted theatre for a general audience. Mounted in the spring of 1994, *Mamu* was the company's pinnacle in terms of production values, and arguably one of its most artistic and critical successes. *Mamu* resulted from a writing and directing collaboration between David Diamond and British theatre artist/choreographer Kevin Finnan, a creator of *Headlines'* initial *Power Plays* work, and then co-director of Britain's *Motionhouse Dance Company*.

Particularly topical to British Columbia, *Mamu* explores the delicate and precarious balance between economic and environmental concerns. The play came in the wake of mass civil disobedience (and subsequent criminal arrests) over logging of old-growth forests at Vancouver Island's Clayoquot Sound in the summer of 1993. During a visit to the area, Diamond and Finnan had a serendipitous meeting with a biologist who described the plight of the *marbled murrelet* (nicknamed *mamu* by biologists), a species of sea bird that nests up to fifty kilometres inland in old-growth forests, and thus facing the danger of extinction. The perfect theatrical metaphor had been found.

*Mamu: The Currency of Life* tells the story of lawyer Harvey Havaliddle, the oldest junior partner in a major law firm and a lonely single father of a ten year old boy. His son, interested in environmental issues, takes Harvey to a talk on the endangered *marbled murrelets* given by Susan Brachy, a biologist who is Harvey's old acquaintance and potential love interest. Susan asks Harvey to defend her in a trespassing lawsuit brought against her by Transnational Logging Corporation, who want to impede her study of the birds, and he agrees to consider her case. But his own law firm has taken on the
logging company's case against Susan, and Harvey is assigned to prosecute it, with strong suggestion that his promotion is attached to doing so. The lawyer is impressed by arguments made by both the biologist and the logging company executive.

The production employs strong visual images and physical theatricality to demonstrate both the external conflict of the situation and Harvey's internal turmoil. The latter's conflict is physically played out in daydream and dream scenes. During discussion with Susan, Harvey arises to dance his daydreams with a bird-masked actor; his nocturnal dreams are larger and more intense. Harvey is attached, by Bird and Beetle, to a stage fly with a huge, billowing white cloth onto which images of nature are projected; in another dream, he becomes stuck in scaffolding, immobilized in this symbol of man-made construction. Strong performances were given by the cast, in particular by Joey Lesperance and Archer Pechawis. Live soundscape by David Rimmer, props, costumes and masks by Melody Anderson and Barbara Clayden, as well as lighting by Gerald King were used to evince the shift in consciousness.

In this high energy production, six actors played a total of eighteen characters on Susan Madsen's gorgeous two-level set. Reflecting the thematic conflict, the main set featured a large steel and copper representation of an old growth tree. A system of ropes and pulleys allowed the actors to swing around, simulating flight by birds and humans. In one brilliantly inventive scene, these harnesses were used to create a helicopter flight over old growth forest, with slides of the same projected in the background. Through the course of the show, Tim Matheson's slidescape contrasted the startling pristine beauty of the forests and other elements of nature with tall, sterile office buildings.
As usual, high production values came with a high price tag. Costs were largely offset by a $50,000 grant from the Vancouver Foundation\textsuperscript{18}, and an agreement was made that this funding body would not influence the content of the dramatic production. Indeed, this bargain was maintained.

Nevertheless, \textit{Mamu} became distinguished as one of \textit{Headlines}' few experiences with sponsor restrictions. Although the script and performances were not compromised in any way, the audience-driven discussions following each performance, thought by \textit{Headlines} to be an equally important part of the theatre experience, strongly felt the presence of the funding body. Because the forestry company MacMillan Bloedel was a contributor of funds to the Vancouver Foundation and represented on their Advisory Committee, a condition was placed on the grant that the forestry industry be represented in these discussions. Diamond concedes that funding thus constricted the discussions, and offers this example:

\textit{There were two nights when we were talking about breaking the law; industry was there for one, but not for the other night. The night they weren't there, the discussion was 'We all know there are times when it becomes necessary to break the law. If that wasn't true, women would never have gotten the vote. So, we know it is necessary to break the law. How do you do that and be safe?' It was a very valuable conversation. Much more valuable than 'should we or should we not break the law?'}

Post performance discussion topics were scheduled in advance and advertised. Other topics included:

- \textit{Logging practices: past, present and future}

\textsuperscript{18} The Vancouver Foundation manages endowment funds established by individuals, businesses and non-profit organizations. Interest accrued from these funds is distributed in the form of grants to various community agencies, in particular those with mandates regarding arts and culture, children and families, youth, health and welfare, and the environment.
- What do we mean by 'sharing the forest'?

- Is sustainability possible?

- First Nations, industry, unions and the environmental movement: Do we want the same things?

- Clayoquot and the political process

_Mamu: The Currency of Life_ opened its three week run at the _Vancouver East Cultural Centre_ on May 12, 1994. Critical response was very favourable. The play received national attention in a _Globe and Mail_ review: "a delight, full of humour, energy and theatrical invention. ... a little didactic at times ... but David Diamond's and Kevin Finnan's dynamic staging make the story fly — literally" (Dafoe 1994). The _Vancouver Sun_ critic noted the production as "a bold, ambitious and breathtakingly imaginative play that deals with a serious subject in a way that's both entertaining and thought-provoking" (Crook 1994). This same writer also reported a weakness of the "dynamic staging", indicating that the complicated multiple roles left actors often "out of breath after racing from one character to another." Several reviews remarked on the play's balanced approach to its emotionally charged and political subject matter. It is worth noting that the production was never taken outside of the urban centre of Vancouver; in small communities whose viability is dependent on the logging industry, _Mamu_ would likely have received a chillier reception.
Indeed, the script is didactic in places, occasionally using discourse to make its points when theatrical expression, through dance and movement, could have done so in a less heavy-handed manner. This was particularly true for some scenes with the Bird characters, who spoke unnecessary lines of dialogue and whose plight might have been more successfully described in movement alone. Instead, assigning qualities of thought and speech to these characters actually detracts from the peril the birds are put in by thinking, speaking humans.

Yet, unlike other *Headlines* productions for general audiences, *Mamu* presents many sides of a complex argument. In the end, lawyer Harvey's choice is dominated by his financial and career concerns, and he decides to represent the logging company. Symbolically, this father chooses immediate material concerns for his son over an environmental legacy for the next generation. But in the course of the play, Harvey's character develops so that the audience sees him as an ordinary man with many and complex factors to consider, neither a fool nor the true enemy. Nevertheless, *Mamu*’s politics are clear in that it certainly favours the side of environmentalists. Strong messages about the need and methods of protest and civil disobedience are given (although in a much more subtle manner than in the company’s agitprop productions) and respectable, hard-working people are shown considering this option.

Rather appropriately and conclusively, the *Pender Harbour and District Wildlife Society* nominated *Mamu: The Currency of Life* for a *Canadian Healthy Environment Award* from Environment Canada. *Headlines* was awarded this on June 5 1996, *World*
Environment Day, in Ottawa. Diamond hoped the award would inspire an offer of funds to co-produce a remounting of the show, but no such money has yet been forthcoming.

Even before these two plays, the company encountered sponsor restrictions, albeit in a far more benign form than the politically motivated ones noted above. In 1990, Headlines was approached by Dennis Putnam, then District Principal for the Arts for the Vancouver School Board. Putnam had seen the company's work and believed it would be of value in schools; after some discussion, Headlines was made resident theatre company of the Vancouver School District. Funds came from the federal Secretary of State and were provided for a three year pilot project.

Yet the funding came with conditions, and the sponsor determined that the theatre projects should be concerned with the issue of racism. The Power Play workshops were taken into sixteen of Vancouver's eighteen high schools, and proved to be of great benefit. But it became apparent to the company that racism was not the only issue the students were dealing with at their schools; other issues, particularly about violence in its many manifestations, surfaced during the workshops as those of primary importance to the students. The funding stipulation soon left Headlines in a compromised position. Faithful to the political function of their work, the company always insists that workshop participants are best able to identify their own life issues, and thus reject imposing a topic.

Eventually, Headlines found their position untenable. Coincidentally, the Secretary of State funding for what had clearly been seen as a seed project expired. The company expected that the Vancouver School Board would now produce $2,000 per school for the
project. Dennis Putnam had retired in the meantime and his position was eliminated, so there was no one person to coordinate arts activities. Teachers, and indeed the Vancouver School Board itself, praised the work of *Headlines* as a powerful way for students to explore race relations and wanted the work to continue. But the Vancouver School Board insisted there was no money for the project in their budget; it became up to each individual school to purchase any programs outside the core curriculum. The Board hoped that *Headlines* would attempt their own fund-raising, but the company refused and their situation as resident theatre company terminated at the end of the 1992-93 school year. *Headlines* continues to work in schools, but not within the Vancouver district.

Every theatre company is reliant on grant funding. An investigation into any type of political or popular theatre must involve an examination of not only the creators’ intent, but also the agenda of those people or agencies who provide the funding. The *Canada Council*, which maintains a “hands-off” policy in artistic decisions (including programming), evaluates the work of not-for-profit theatre companies using peer juries. And since government funds have flowed increasingly “towards the largest institutions and the most conservative programming”, it appears that the *Canada Council* and its peer juries indeed have their own agenda to support a particular kind of theatre (Wallace 143). Withholding or discontinuing grant funds is an effective method of steering the political direction of theatre companies and their productions.19

---

19 Robert Wallace raises questions about the *Canada Council*, its peer juries, and their politics and agenda in his provocative essay “Producing Marginality: Criticism and the Construction of Canadian Theatre”, found in his book of the same name. Full discussion of these questions would be complicated and lengthy, and will not be attempted in this paper. Hopefully, these questions will someday be further examined in another student’s thesis.
Theatre companies have also become increasingly reliant on grants from the private sector, especially corporate sponsorship, as public funds become scarcer. The Canada Council supports this new direction in theatre funding (Wallace 147).

Competition for corporate subsidy is tough, and corporate tastes influence artistic decisions: “Ostensibly free, corporate subsidy comes with strings attached; corporations usually restrict subsidy to safe, conservative commodities that uphold mainstream definitions of ‘universality’ and ‘artistic excellence’” (Wallace 144).

Headlines has never been a recipient of corporate sponsorship. The company’s mandate to produce socially relevant theatre sometimes makes their work less than universally appealing, and their left-wing political bias is contemptible to the bastions of free-market capitalism. As well, since Headlines does not attract the kind of audience that corporations seek to put their logo in front of, there is little possibility of return on the corporation’s money. David Diamond insists that he would never tolerate the kind of restrictions that would attract corporate funds.

Producing both Flesh and Blood and Mamu became political acts for Headlines not only because of their topical, controversial content. The company was able to bring these productions to fruition, despite attempts by funding bodies to influence whose story could be told and what story could be told, with very limited compromise. This was no small feat for a small theatre company heavily dependent on outside funding. And a feat that underlined Headlines’ commitment to producing socially relevant, political theatre.
Politics are not separate from our lives. We are politics. Of course, it’s a very radical political theatre that we do. And that’s the reason that we don’t get too much support, because radicality doesn’t get too much support. Because it speaks the heart and the truth. And we don’t play dirty games.

Saeideh Nessar Ali, 1997

Power Plays have been the mainstay of Headlines work since 1986, and the company has carried out over one hundred and eighty of these workshops. But the company did not simply repeat a formula for each workshop. Their popular theatre work evolved from the time of its inception, diversifying to incorporate Augusto Boal’s later work --- the Rainbow of Desire.

Boal’s work in Europe uncovered a developed-world experience of oppression hugely different than that of Brazilian peasants. Rather than immediate, external, physical and material concerns, the European participants identified oppression in terms of psychological and metaphysical issues, sometimes expressed in terms such as “emptiness” or “hopelessness”. Boal observed his original theories and techniques as inadequate for these issues, and undertook adapting and inventing techniques to address these internal oppressions. As a result, Boal devised Cops-in-the-Head and the Rainbow of Desire, “...a collection of theatrical techniques and exercises designed to harness the power of ‘the aesthetic space’ (the stage) to examine individual, internalized oppressions and to place them in a larger context” (Jackson xviii).
Boal astutely contends that the "great general themes are inscribed in the small personal themes and incidents". Each small incident of life and each level of social organization, down to its smallest, "...contain all the moral and political values of society, all its structures of domination and power, all its mechanisms of oppression" (Boal 1995, 40). No individual is immune to the messages and values of the society in which they live. *Theatre of the Oppressed* is effective when each scene is generalized enough to resonate in the observers, so that what is being discussed is the society in which the individual situation occurred:

*The Theatre of the Oppressed is the theatre of the first person plural. It is absolutely vital to begin with an individual account, but if it does not pluralise of its own accord we must go beyond it by means of analogical induction, so that it may be studied by all the participants.* (Boal 1995, 45)

The objective of the *Rainbow of Desire* techniques is perhaps more therapy than political activism, but the two are not exclusive. As with his earlier work, *Rainbow of Desire* is intensely physical. *Image Theatre* is the basis for the work: "The initial apprehension is of the body; discussion of the ideological implications of the images follows upon that apprehension" (Auslander 124). Most techniques begin with an improvisation based on a real-life situation.

Over time, it became increasingly clear to *Headlines* that Boal's original *Theatre of the Oppressed* work required some modification for use with Canadian participants. The company incorporated Boal's later work into its own, and in 1994 organized its repertoire under the umbrella *Theatre for Living*. The focus of the work then became
using theatrical language for people to investigate ways to get what they do want (rather than ways to stop what they do not want).

**Headlines** has several Theatre for Living options available to the public, each with individual goals and time frames. The company promotes these as follows:

I. *Rainbow of Desire*: a one-day workshop that combines a half-day of group building work with an exploration of the internal voices of fear and desire that complicate relationships with others and become obstacles to achieving goals. Each workshop participant explores these voices in relation to another person in their life, but it becomes an exercise in group consciousness.

II. *Cops in the Head*: a one day workshop with a half-day of group building work; these exercises also explore the learned internal voices which complicate relationships and prevent goal achievement. The voices of parents, bosses, teachers, and so on, who influence how people behave, listen, and interpret are explored.

III. *Image Theatre*: workshops which range from one to three days in duration. Image Theatre techniques are used to explore issues of external oppression. These workshops are suitable for those who are not able to bring their project to performance due to lack of time or desire, but who still wish to explore problems of oppression and possible solutions.

IV. *Power Plays and the Forum Theatre Process*: a six-day workshop which uses group and trust building exercises to prepare people to explore incidents of external oppression in their lives, generally focused on a specific, identified issue. Either the

---

20 See glossary.
Rainbow of Desire or Cops in the Head is incorporated with Image Theatre techniques to create short plays on particular, relevant issues. Fifteen to thirty participants are required to build and perform these plays to an interactive audience in a Forum Theatre presentation. Further exploration of the problems and possible solutions occur through the creative interventions of the audience.

Soliciting, booking and organizing workshops was largely the task of Workshop Coordinator Saeideh Nessar Ali, who held this position for six years until her departure from the company in February 1997. To say that Nessar Ali succeeded at her job is an understatement; at the time of her retirement, *Headlines* was booking workshops fourteen months in advance. As well, she functioned as a workshop facilitator and *Joker* for a period of six years, and has been instrumental in keeping *Headlines* financially and artistically viable. Nessar Ali’s strong belief in the political nature of the company’s work motivated her:

*It is my personal belief that if you want to make a political change in your society you have to take an action. Theatre is about action. It’s not about talking. The expression of real art is done by people like us who go in and say ‘Tell us your story’. We give them the opportunity to express or tell us their story using non-verbal language. And that is the reason it is so powerful. Because it is theatre* (Nessar Ali 1997).

*Headlines* undertakes a *Theatre for Living* workshop with any community at their invitation. Often the invitation comes after a community hears about or sees the company’s work. But Nessar Ali also reached out to communities, usually by telephone, to let them know what *Headlines* could offer them. Regardless of how contact is initiated, of prime importance is making sure that the community understands what the work can
give them as theatre, emphasizing its therapeutic value while stressing that it is not a therapy program. *Headlines* often gets inquiries where the community's issue is not clear, as Nessar Ali explains:

*They want to use theatre. And they ask what we can do for them. I tell them we can do lots for them, and ask them 'What is your concern? Why have you thought about theatre? What is the burning issue in the community at the moment?'. You try to understand that first, and then say 'this is what can be done' (Nessar Ali 1997).*

The community's individual needs and capacities must then be established. Sometimes sponsors have time limits which restrict the six-day workshop to five days, the minimum time the company promotes for taking a workshop to *forum* performance. Nessar Ali acknowledges: “*It is not true that you can’t do it, but you don’t get the satisfaction of the theatrical language in four days. It’s very hard*."

The sponsors can specify the focus of the workshops, but all else is determined through the experiential work of the participants. No projects are rejected outright, but it is sometimes not possible for the company to do what the potential sponsor wants within the time limit they suggest.

Most of the research about the project is done through these initial conversations with the sponsor. The company is especially interested in finding what the focus is for the community as well as some specific facts about the issue. Otherwise, research is limited as Diamond explains:

*But beyond that, I don’t think it serves the community or the piece for me to do research. The raw material is in the room. And it’s actually counter-productive. If I come in with preconceptions, I’m doing a great disservice to them. So I just need to come in ready to surf. Everything I need is right there and you can’t start the work until you start the work* (Diamond 1997).
The full, one week workshop costs the sponsors a basic fee of $3,500. Sponsors must arrange their own funding, but are given ideas on where they might apply for moneys. Sponsors are also responsible for the costs of hotels, per diems, car rentals, gas and so on, in addition to whatever costs they may incur for renting work space, hiring counselors and other incidental expenses. Workshops are never provided for free; experience has taught the company that the work is more valued by everyone involved when it comes for a price.

At least fifteen participants are required for the full-week workshop, and a maximum of thirty is set. While it is possible to function with fewer than fifteen, Image Theatre work becomes more challenging and frustrating for the participants when they must be a part of most of the images, allowing less of a mirroring effect. Indeed, it is essential to make the setting conducive to good Image Theatre work, since some fundamental theatricality is revealed when these images are animated. As well, some of the games and exercises require larger numbers to be truly fruitful.

As might be expected, the six day workshop is the preference of the company. This allows a five day workshop process to build the plays, with one final day for rehearsal in which the participants can use the stage and focus on the theatricality. On this final day, their plays are blocked, rehearsed, props and costumes added, and the Headlines staff function in a traditional directorial role.

The Theatre for Living workshops follow a somewhat structured sequence. But because every group of participants, and thus every workshop, is unique, particular games
and exercises are selected according to each group's particular needs. The company starts and ends each workshop day with a group circle. The opening circle is to let the participants know what they will be doing that day and give them an opportunity to say whatever is on their minds, perhaps something left over from the previous day's work. The closing circle is somewhat more crucial and allows the participants the occasion to close the day's work for themselves. Participants are encouraged to speak about what they are personally experiencing, and how they feel the workshop in general is proceeding. Self-censorship is discouraged at all times and no dialogue is permitted.

In the general sequence of events, group building and trust development exercises always precede the Image Theatre or other exercises which explore the issues of oppression through the animation of images. Finally, core improvisations are made from which the theatre plays are built. At this point, the role of the Joker changes from workshop facilitator to theatre creator and director; the Joker uses various rehearsal techniques to assist the participants with play-building by developing characters and dramatic action, establishing a focus, layering the oppression, and so on — all the while remaining true to the intent of the original piece. In the role of a traditional theatre director, the Joker blocks the play in preparation for the forum.

Over the course of the workshop the facilitators fine-tune the process, often immediately in response to the previous exercise, or at the end of the workshop day in response to the participants' comments during the closing circle. The facilitators must be sensitive to the issues that are being revealed and to the dynamics of the group. It is, in the words of Nessar Ali: ".... about accommodating them into the process which enriches
what they want to achieve. It’s not about dragging those people — those twenty or thirty people — through a process just to make the process happen” (Nessar Ali 1997).

Because of the issues that the *Theatre for Living* workshops deal with, *Headlines* frequently requests that counselors be present throughout the process, always insisting that the company does not fill this role. Workshops with issues such as domestic violence or sexual abuse always have this back up available. *Headlines* demands that the counselors be local and culturally appropriate, and thus available to the participants even after the theatre company has packed up and left, leaving the issues exposed. The counselors normally take part in the group and trust building games, but not in the exercises that lead the participants deep into their issues. This is usually when their help is needed and so they remain available during this period; in addition, the counselors should not take focus off the participants’ issues by suggesting what they think their issues should be (or, indeed, by bringing their own to the group). These counselors are also available for audience members during and after the *forum* performance. The workshops have proven, not surprisingly, to be a valuable learning experience for the counselors themselves.

Cultural barriers do exist, but these are partly overcome by requiring that *Headlines* presence in a community is by invitation. During the process of *No’ Xya’ (Our Footprints)*, Diamond was adopted by the Gitksan people and given the native name of *Apleexw*. He shares this name with all First Nations communities, but reinforces what is of most importance:

*I say to them clearly: “This isn’t about me being native.” And this happens with everybody — you need to explain to them that “I’m coming in with a technique,*
something I know how to do, but you are the experts in your lives, and together we’re going to make theatre” (Diamond 1997).

Almost all workshops are conducted in English, and generally all participants have little difficulty with the language. The company has done some workshops in schools with Cantonese-speaking participants and translators, but this is an exception.

The list of Headlines clients for its Theatre for Living work is impressive in its size and scope. Although they are available to work with the private sector, most of their work has remained within the public sector. Nevertheless, their clients include a wide range of organizations: the Y.W.C.A., Department of Health and Welfare Canada, Public Service Alliance of Canada, Amnesty International, and Simon Fraser University.

Headlines does not limit its Theatre for Living work to individual projects. Reclaiming Our Spirits, a 1995-96 province-wide project, was one of Headlines’ largest. Lisa Charleson, of the Native Families in Crisis organization, contacted Nessar Ali about conducting a workshop on problems encountered by First Nations people as a result of their experiences at residential schools. The discussions went on for a period of eight months before Charleson committed to engaging the company for a workshop in an old residential school on Meares Island. They aimed much of their discussion at finding a clear focus, since the residential schools had been closed for almost twenty-five years.

Headlines conducted the original workshop on Meares Island in March 1995, co-joked by Diamond and facilitator Jacquie George. Two plays were created; the first, developed with the help of the Nu-Chah-Nulth elders, is a historical piece describing the
residential school experience with incidents of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The other, a modern-day play, shows the residential school bequest in the form of alcoholism, domestic violence and sexual abuse. In a *Vancouver Sun* interview, Lisa Charleson discussed the workshop’s effect on the community:

*Part of our dilemma, especially with all the media attention to the residential schools issue, is that it’s not enough to just expose the problems. This has helped us move and start saying: “What are we going to do about it?” That’s the gift of this kind of theatre --- it gives us the ability to see that it’s possible to heal. ...We’re such a visual culture --- we express ourselves through dance and other non-verbal activities --- so this really fits* (Crook 1996).

Following the workshop, Diamond and Charleson conceived the *Reclaiming Our Spirits* project. Originally, their idea was to tour the two Meares Island plays to appropriate communities around the province; based on their success at Meares Island, however, they decided to tour the workshops instead. *Headlines* staff created a special package, including a video, to introduce the program and sent it to First Nations Band offices around British Columbia.

The project proved to be a popular one as the residential schools issue was receiving much media attention, and many Bands felt the time had come to finally address it. The Provincial Residential Schools Project of Health Canada, the Kakawis Family Development Centre and the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (the only native government to include residential school issues in land claim negotiations) provided funding. Each community also contributed $6,000 to the costs. *Headlines*’ initial budget was around $300,000, but was eventually pared down to $180,000. The project took place over a one and a half year period, with nine workshops conducted in eleven communities. Admission
to the forum theatre performances was by donation, and proceeds were given to support local follow-up healing programs.

Just how successful are the Theatre for Living forum plays as theatre?

Dramaturgically, the work is not evaluated in a formal method. Indeed, the company is under intense time pressure to create a piece of drama — making the play on the fourth or fifth day of a workshop. The ultimate aim is to take a group of non-actors, some of whom may not even have seen theatre before, to performance. The facilitators work to make the dramatic conflicts clear and simple enough so that barriers to interventions from the audience are not established. But much attention is also paid to making sure there is some complexity to the situation and to the characters, avoiding caricatures of both the oppressed and the oppressors and adding intricacies of conflict which lead to a crisis. As with most play-building from improvisational work, pieces sometimes fall easily into place. Diamond describes one of those serendipitous discoveries made at a Reclaiming Our Spirits workshop in Creston:

The centre of the historical play was this priest at a residential school who made the boys kneel and pray until the rain stopped, which took a very long time. And in the modern-day play, it was winter and the husband throws his wife out into the cold to teach her a lesson. When we saw them together --- wow! So we asked if it had to be winter out; maybe it could be pouring rain out instead. Now the last thing we hear in the first play is 'I told you to pray until the rain stops'. And the first thing we hear in the next play is 'I wonder when the rain will stop?'. There's this wonderful moment of 'it's still raining'. That kind of thing is extremely satisfying for everyone (Diamond 1997).

At other times, however, pieces fall where they will and the drama itself is weak, a less satisfying experience for the audience (although not always so for the actors). Some
combination of strong story-line, actor readiness, and, in particular, the experience and expertise of the Jokers are required for the theatrical alchemy to occur. Headlines has at times employed facilitators with little theatre experience and their work has varied in quality. The final theatre product is, however, always an important consideration for Headlines; to whatever extent possible, considering time and funding restraints, costumes, props and a set are added to enhance the theatre experience for the participants and audience.

Indeed, no formal approach exists for the evaluation of each project and Headlines relies on whatever verbal or written feedback it receives from its clients. The company requests that the sponsors make contact with them a week or two after the workshop to provide some response. As Diamond explains, this is a major part of their assessment:

*We get stories back, and they’re very rarely negative. Really rarely. We get stories about families reconciling, about people leaving abusive relationships, about people putting themselves in for treatment. I think the proof of the work is what happens later. Sometimes theatre companies form. Sometimes a community realizes that it doesn’t have a crisis centre and makes one* (Diamond 1997).

Any formal evaluation of *Theatre of the Oppressed* work in terms of its effects, therapeutic and otherwise, on individuals and groups is a complicated task, and one that Adrian Jackson believes is doomed to failure:

*... as we are often dealing with unquantifiable changes which resist statistical analysis; the observable changes are qualitative. Participation in this work seems to bring with it some ease in the context of a dissatisfaction* (Jackson 1995, xxiv).
**Theatre of the Oppressed** was never meant to provide solutions; rather, it sets out to provoke the exploration of possibilities. Boal’s pedagogy “…never delivers the finished article to its audience to be digested whole… People certainly leave with things to do, the job is only started, there is no doubt about that --- but that is as it should be. **Being over-protective can be patronizing**” (Jackson xxiv-v). Diamond also acknowledges this difficulty in evaluating *Headlines*’ work, and defends the lack of a formal process in another important way:

> We are not a social service agency, and if I start, or anybody here has to start, calling back at a week, two weeks, a month, six months --- we’re going to go out of our minds. We’ve done over one hundred and eighty Power Plays. That’s not our role (Diamond 1997).

Nevertheless, Diamond does write a report about each project. These reports began as a way to share information with other members of the company and as a preparation for reports to funders. The core of each report is a daily journal of the project which allows Diamond to record his thoughts on it as the project unfolds. Once the project is completed, Diamond returns to these journals to analyze the events with more objectivity, and adds to or edits them if the reports will be sent out. The privacy of individuals and groups is always secured before reports leave the company.

Questions also arise about the political effectiveness of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and thus *Theatre for Living*, techniques. These techniques are employed to examine problems where the solution is unknown or multi-faceted. As a tool for political organizing, this form of theatre has limited potential; agitprop theatre is much more
effective where the enemy and the solution are easily identifiable. *Theatre of the Oppressed*’s results may be tangible only in the personal arena: “To measure this work in terms of activism, as if clear measures of political efficacy were objectively possible, fails to acknowledge subtle, but significant, shifts in participants’ critical faculties and socio-political outlooks” (Schutzman 145).

Because Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* does, however, place the individual in a larger social context --- for example, as an individual aboriginal person and as part of a social category Aboriginal Person --- its techniques: “...point the way to awareness of the society’s politicization of gender, class, race, family, and/or psyche” (Schutzman 153). *Theatre of the Oppressed* work always requires that participants extrapolate from the theatre process tactics that can be used in real life, “...whether one defines real life in therapeutic or political terms. ...How people choose to relate politics and therapy is in itself a political stance...” (Schutzman 153).

Indeed, the political effectiveness of *Theatre for Living* work is decided by each individual participant in how they choose to use, or not to use, the tools that this theatre makes available to them. Participants discover that they can act --- confront a sibling, call a women’s shelter, seek the assistance of a union --- to change their circumstances and the way they view themselves and the world. The action can be small and yet have tremendous repercussions. Even finding that your own story is worth telling can be a very subtle, yet very political, revelation on a personal level. *Headlines*’ theatre thus always creates pure political potentiality.
CHAPTER SIX

TODAY'S AND TOMORROW'S HEADLINES

“It’s truly theatre in the moment. Theatre without a net. And unlike straight improv, it’s always about something that’s really important to that group of people that night”.

David Diamond 1997.

Today, Headlines remains a thriving professional theatre company. Its work reaches out to many tiny and remote communities throughout British Columbia, many of whom would never otherwise have the opportunity to take part in a theatrical event, many of whom would never otherwise see their own stories being told. The company maintains a strong commitment to producing socially relevant theatre, and will continue to pursue its Theatre for Living work. Headlines will also continue their ventures with live interactive forum theatre on television, a format which has proven to be highly successful for them.

Yet the future of Headlines promises to be one of change and innovation. For many years the company sought out suitable people and paid them on a workshop basis to train as facilitators; Diamond has decided to stop this training at present, a huge outlay of time and resources for the company. Past experience showed that few individuals stayed with the company, in part because full-time employment doing theatre work was not always available; most refused the office work necessary to make up the hours. Saeideh Nessar Ali returned to Headlines on a full-time basis early in 1998, and theatre artist Carmen Aguirre continues to do freelance work as a facilitator, so this personnel
requirement is well covered. The company will offer training sessions in *Theatre for Living* techniques for groups of the public; the first was offered in the summer of 1998.

The company will also conduct their own experiments in form and function. Diamond has recently developed a theatrical model called *Your Wildest Dream*. In these workshops, participants distill individual images of oppression into a single group image; this image is photographed and displayed. Then the same process is followed to produce a single group image of *Your Wildest Dream*; this is also photographed and displayed. The remainder of the workshop is spent using *Theatre for Living* techniques for a non-linear exploration in images of the spaces between the two original images. As with other *Theatre for Living* work, the goal is to have participants use theatrical language to help them transform their own lives.

Diamond envisions a different model of working in the future:

> *It's going to be developing a pool of artists --- choreographers, visual artists, who knows what --- who I can take with me into the community situations and get them acquainted with the work. It's not that we train them; it's about them learning what it's like to do community work. And using what they do in support of what I'm doing in the community. I'll learn from them, they'll learn from the experience, the community will get a larger cultural experience. It will be good for everybody* (Diamond 1997).

One of *Headlines'* first ventures into collaborative work was with *DanceArts* *Vancouver* project *ICE: beyond cool*, an exploration of the mystery of teenage suicide conveyed in a *dance theatre* format. Although *ICE: beyond cool* was not a *Headlines'* project as such, the production was strongly flavoured by the work of the initial *Theatre for Living* workshops, held with high school students in September 1995 and led by David
Diamond. A creative team of adult professionals further developed the resulting themes, images and dialogue to performance: conceiver, producer, and choreographer Judith Marcuse, playwright John Lazarus, composer Graeme Coleman and director Jane Heyman.

Notably, the *Rainbow of Desire* work proved seminal to the production, kick-starting the expressive process, and was especially suited to those teenagers lacking verbal eloquence. Playwright John Lazarus recalls that some of the teenage participants were "excited by the expressive possibilities in the work and the liberating nature of showing relationships by means of body gestures rather than spoken anecdotes" (Lazarus 1997).

The workshops were videotaped and provided much of the raw material for the professional creative team.

Specifically, Lazarus claims that some *Cop-in-the-Head* exercises "evolved into the concept of a chorus of inner voices which became an important motif in the show". In fact, the main character Sara developed from an improvisation by one young female participant, in which a negative inner voice tells the girl to commit suicide. In the course of writing the script, Lazarus turned the voice into a more neutral one, a voice that suggests suicide as only one possibility. Lazarus took these inner voices further in the script. *ICE*: *beyond cool* follows the turmoil of the main character Sara in fine detail through the device of a shadow character, Inner Sara, who expresses Sara's inner thoughts and feelings. The playwright discovered that the teens "*spoke in a very natural, direct kind of poetry*" when they did image work, more so than when they attempted to create realistic dialogue. This "poetry" was employed in the show's choral work.
Fittingly, *ICE: beyond cool*, two years in the making, was taken to young audiences on their own turf. This contemporary combination of dance, music and theatre, capturing the quiddity of modern teenage angst, was performed in the rotunda of Vancouver’s Pacific Centre shopping mall during the month of October 1997. The company used this most unconventional space well, with a stage built between two escalators. The escalators moved actors on and off the main set, and several scenes took place on these moving set pieces. An upper level of the mall was also used as a stage area. The production was fast-paced and *in-your-face*, the stage space well employed to create the sense of poignancy and enhance the intervals of febrile terpsichorean energy. A wide cross section of age groups comprised the audiences, and a *talk back* session, with the actors, production creators and professional counselors, was held after each performance. The production was very well received by large audiences of youth, and universally praised in the press.

*Headlines*’ next venture in this new direction took place in late summer of 1997. Their involvement was as part of the larger *Positive +*, a multidisciplinary art project initiated by Vancouver’s *Grunt Gallery*, and co-sponsored by other local arts bodies such as *Video In, Roundhouse Community Centre, Helen Pitt Gallery and Gulf Islands Film and Television School*. *Grunt Gallery* director Glenn Alteen initiated *Positive +* as a forum for Vancouver artists to respond to the impact of HIV and AIDS. A call was put out to artists, and the project evolved to encompass numerous independent works in many media, including video, installation pieces and public works.
Headlines’ contribution entailed engaging a group of eighteen HIV positive (including some AIDS diagnosed) men and women in the Theatre for Living process over a four day period. Instead of working towards a theatre piece for performance, the focus became on using theatrical modes of expression to create living tableaux, which were then captured on black and white film by professional photographer Donna H. Hagerman. The collaboration was a first for both Headlines and the photographer, an experience of artistic experimentation and development for both. Diamond described the process as “...a theatrical exploration of issues around HIV and AIDS using their bodies, hopes, dreams, experiences, fears and desires” (Gold 1997). The photographs then became part of a larger Positive + exhibit at the Roundhouse Community Centre, the site of the workshop. The exhibit also included Nhan Duc Nguyen’s gorgeous and eloquent installation/work-in-progress Joss Paper Boats, as well as works in a variety of other media submitted by individuals through Vancouver’s AIDS associations.

The exhibit was striking and Headlines’ own artistic experiment was the very human face of it. The photographic images were often abstract, but engaging enough to invite viewers to create their own story, and certainly every viewer did. There were powerful images of alienation, isolation, ostracism and fear. Yet just as powerful were the poignant images of support, courage, and of reaching out to others, a testimony to the many meanings of Positive which were discovered. The workshop participants, a very diverse group who had volunteered for the project through community associations, reported great satisfaction from the theatrical exploration. All acknowledged, however, that they had reached a certain level of acceptance in regards to their HIV or AIDS which
let them be comfortable enough to do the workshop in the first place. Participants received a small honorarium at the workshop’s completion.

Early in 1997, Headlines devised an innovative approach for taking their Theatre for Living work, usually limited to specific communities, out to the general public. The company hosts Rainbow of Desire Cabarets at Vancouver’s Havana Gallery on the last Friday of every month. The initial cabarets began as a performance series called Safe Sex; audience members chose one personal story about a sexual encounter and explored the negotiation of safer sex using Rainbow of Desire techniques. Subsequent cabarets did not have a designated topic. In these, audience members offer stories to work on, and the group votes on the one it most relates to.

These cabarets, perhaps one of the most successful methods of democratizing the theatrical, and the therapeutic, process by making it available to an entire community at large, are still continuing one year later. Turnout varies; the company has found it a difficult event to sell to the public since it involves no actors or script and often has no specified topic. Those cabarets with sponsors (such as Little Mountain Neighbourhood House and SUCCESS, the Chinese immigrant group) have had great response. The cabarets have attracted a small but loyal following, and others who find themselves at these events leave surprised and pleased. Finally, the cabarets allow Diamond to experiment with techniques in an environment with lower stakes than their other Theatre for Living work.
Funding continues to be a matter of great concern for the company. *Headlines* receives ongoing operational support from the City of Vancouver, the Government of British Columbia through the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, and the Melusine Foundation in addition to funds from the Canada Council. Despite being almost eighteen years old, the company’s operating grant from the Canada Council has been frozen at $32,000 per year for several years, and provincial funding at $21,500 per year (the second lowest of any theatre company in the province.

For Diamond, this low level of government funding reflects the validity the cultural sector bestows on the work. *Headlines* has found the social service sectors of government to be quite financially supportive of their work, but less so the cultural sectors, who, he believes, have been reluctant to accept how essential *process* is in this theatre work. In Diamond’s estimation, the company’s work is viewed as group therapy, rather than artistic creation, by the conventional theatre funding administration.

It was much to Diamond’s satisfaction then that, after ten years of doing *forum* theatre, *Headlines* was finally able to have an assessment of their work carried out for the *Canada Council* by popular theatre specialist (and UBC Associate Professor) Jan Selman in late 1996. Diamond expounds:

* ... for me, an assessment of the work isn’t coming to see a two hour Forum Theatre. An assessment of the work would be of the process, because the process is the product. You can’t separate the two. There’s been a really deep reluctance from the cultural sector to deal with that* (Diamond 1997).
This attitude is gradually changing as *Headlines* becomes better known for doing theatre work that is significant to an increasing number of people, work that makes a connection to the community.\(^{21}\)

Despite their limited funding, *Headlines* has never shouldered ongoing debt. The company will post a deficit for the 1997 fiscal year; this is in part due to taking a financial loss on one particular production. But the company still maintains an accumulated surplus despite its purchase of office property late in 1997, both situations made possible because Diamond had saved $4000 every year for seventeen years. The savings were achievable by limiting his own salary, which has only now reached the sum of $600 weekly.\(^{22}\)

*Headlines* is a member of the *Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance*, a group of theatre professionals, theatre companies, development educators and community activists. The CPTA members initially maintained contact through the biennial national festivals it held beginning with its formation in 1981; these festivals no longer occur on a regular basis. In addition, David Diamond and Sherri-Lee Gilbert of *Headlines* founded the

---

\(^{21}\) In its report of July, 1998, the Canada Council supported the quality of the work, particularly noting the relevance of its programming to its mandate, and assessed *Headlines* as setting the standard for forum theatre practice in Canada. The company’s contribution to the development of theatre in Canada --- by developing Canadian stories and through its collaborations with specific communities and the theatre community --- was acknowledged. The Canada Council found *Headlines* to have significant impact on the general public through its work with various communities, and increased the grant level of the company by 33 percent.

\(^{22}\) Diamond believes that the B.C. Arts Council’s twenty-seven percent funding cut to the company (double that of any other theatre company) over the 1997-1998 season is in part due to his having saved money. At the time of writing, the company had received a grant freeze for the 1998-1999 season; no written reason was supplied to the company. Diamond has appealed directly to the minister responsible, who is investigating the freeze, particularly in light of the company’s recent large grant increase from Canada Council.
Alliance for Popular Culture in British Columbia, a multi-disciplinary group of artists involved in popular cultural work in 1989.

Headlines also holds a membership in PACT (Professional Alliance of Canadian Theatres). Diamond has been forthright in raising issues and expressing his opinions, in particular about how English Canadian theatre has failed the public. Some other members have been annoyed with him; others have quietly expressed their gratitude for having the subjects raised and discussed. Despite the vast expanse in approach to theatre between Headlines and a major regional theatre like the Vancouver Playhouse, Diamond believes they have much to learn from and share with each other, and that many ways exist for diverse theatre companies to support one another.

In addition to the various awards received throughout the years recognizing Headlines' work, David Diamond received the City of Vancouver's 1996 (Individual) Cultural Harmony Award. The award is given for the promotion of harmony amongst various cultures and mainstream society; selection criteria include the amount of effort and risk involved, as well as the degree of originality exhibited.

This thesis demonstrates that since 1980, Headlines Theatre Company has been a small but robust force in the Vancouver theatre community, and across the province as a whole. The company's work has injected some much-needed vitality into the enervated mainstream theatre scene. Headlines has, in the tradition of popular theatre across Canada and the globe, brought theatre to the entire democracy, rather than just its elite. It has
made the theatrical experience accessible — physically, financially and culturally — to a wide number of communities.

This thesis has also shown *Headlines* to be an active and innovative political theatre company. The company's work, from its beginnings in agitprop theatre, has always been political in content. *Headlines* has adopted and adapted the theories and methods of Brazilian director Augusto Boal to create a postmodern political theatre; in this theatre, the personal is the political. This evolution to a popular theatre style — creating theatre with a particular community to empower that community and enable it to change — has made the company's work political in form and function. Their process disrupts theatre's conventional relations and democratizes this art form; non-actors of a specific community tell their own stories, create theatre that is meaningful to them. Forum theatre's estranging effect provokes the audience into considering and questioning our constructed, but naturalized, ruling order, and spectators are invited to act upon it. *Headlines*' work has always invoked action outside of the theatre, action to transform reality on a personal, and thus political, level.

With its commitment to socially relevant theatre, *Headlines* has received some recognition from the mainstream theatre community. The company has garnered its fair share of media attention, both locally and nationally. It is also in the academy that the work of *Headlines*, and other popular, political theatre companies, must get their well-deserved recognition as valid, vital theatre.
GLOSSARY

Cop-in-the-Head: a specific exercise in Boal’s therapeutic techniques. It is also the term originally used by Boal to designate the entire series of Theatre of the Oppressed exercises that address internalized oppressions. The cops-in-the-head are fears that persist after an oppressor no longer has any “real” power over the person.

Dynamization: activation of the spectator, whether to bring a still image to life or to intervene in a forum scene.

Facilitator: facilitates participation in workshop games, exercises, and rehearsal techniques either as the Joker or as an assistant to the Joker.

Forum theatre: a Theatre of the Oppressed technique that begins with the enactment of a scene in which a protagonist tries, unsuccessfully, to overcome an oppression. The Joker invites the spectators to then replace the protagonist at any point in the scene where they can imagine an alternative action which could lead to a solution. The scene is replayed numerous times with different interventions, resulting in a dialogue about the oppression, an examination of alternatives, and a “rehearsal” for real life situations.

Image Theatre: a series of wordless exercises in which participants create embodiments of their feelings and experiences. Beginning with a selected theme, participants sculpt images onto their own and others’ bodies. These frozen images are then dynamized, or brought to life, through a sequence of movement-based and interactive exercises.

Joker: the director/master of ceremonies of a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop or

---

performance. In *Forum theatre*, the Joker sets up the rules of the event for the audience, facilitates the spectators’ replacement of the protagonist, and sums up the essence of each solution proposed in the interventions. The Joker is not tied to an allegiance to performer, spectator, or any one interpretation of events.

**Rainbow of Desire:** a specific exercise in Boal’s therapeutic repertoire, and the original name for his entire body of therapeutic techniques.

**Simultaneous Dramaturgy:** an early version of *Forum theatre* in which the spectators are invited to intervene without entering the playing space. At the moment when the scene enters a crisis, the spectators verbally offer alternative solutions which the actors enact on the spot. Thus, the audience members ‘write’ and the actors perform ‘simultaneously’.

**Spec-actor:** the activated spectator, the audience member who takes part in the action. There are meant to be no passive spectators in *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Spectators have the choice to physically participate or not, so there is always potential involvement.
WORKS CONSULTED


_______. 1996. Interview by author, September 13, Vancouver. Electronic mail.


_______. 1998. Interview by author, April 21, Vancouver. Electronic mail.


