

THIR\$TY

Conceived and Directed by
David Diamond and Kathryn Ricketts

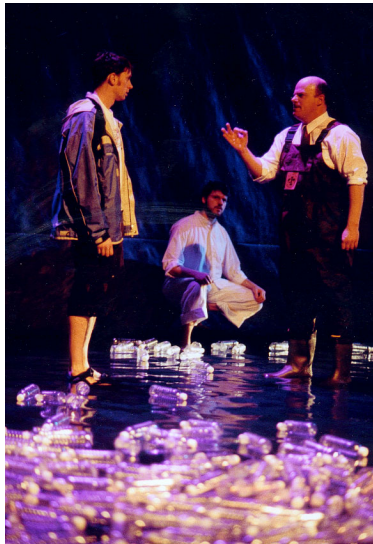


Photo by Daniel J. Collins

Left to right: Noah Lepawsky as Bob, Noah Drew as Witness,
Andrew Johnston as WB

Final Report

David Diamond
Headlines Theatre
#323-350 East 2nd Ave.
Vancouver, BC Canada V5T 4R8
(604) 871-0508 (ph) (604) 871-0209 (fax)
e-mail: david@headlinestheatre.com
web: <http://www.headlinestheatre.com>

PRESS AND PEOPLE QUOTES

"Politics and poetics come together in Headlines Theatre's latest show, **THIR\$TY** ...an excellent and committed cast performs the show in a stage that's five centimeters deep with water, and that simple concept results in some stunning imagery. Kathryn Ricketts' choreography is as sensual as the medium itself, Shane Droucker's lighting is a shimmering delight, and Noah Drew's sound design is as evocative as it gets."

Straight Choices, April 2002

"In a nicely stylized piece of speech and movement flowing with watery images, the ever-contentious David Diamond and his Headlines Theatre manage to expose what's most outrageous about the premise that the world's supply of fresh water is going down the drain -- it's true, it's happening right now and Canada is in complicity in preparing to sell our supply down the river. Diamond worked with choreographer Kathryn Ricketts to turn a deliciously loquacious script into something more than a harangue, and they are largely successful in finding ways to make this agit-prop fast, funny, and furiously angry."

Peter Birnie, Vancouver Sun

"...shimmery reflections that just beg you to leap in and join the water fight...your blood will quickly come to the boil as the all-too-familiar story of Canadian resource extraction unfolds. Seventy percent water ourselves, there a lot to lose. Proudly political, that's what **THIR\$TY** is all about."

Jo Ledingham, Vancouver Courier

"....moments are intensely physical, and the seven tons of water that make up the set distill a complex range of emotions, enhanced by Noah Drew's seductive sound design. In the play's haunting final image (the actors) waltz in water littered with corpses, while the empty bottles float on the surface, providing a whispered percussion. moments of visual, visceral poetry have enough resonance to make you think differently next time you turn on the tap."

Kathleen Oliver, Georgia Straight

"Todd Thomson and writer/choreographer/dancer Kathryn Ricketts are brilliant as the bewildered salmon Sammy and Sally. The dance elements of the performance are powerful throughout, and often add a charge of erotic energy and dark menace to the texture of the piece. **THIR\$TY** (is) one of the most interesting and compelling nights of Vancouver theatre this year; it is also a rich and sophisticated addition to our public conversations about water, democracy and art. It is typical of the courage and vision that has characterized Headlines' work for decades that the company had celebrated its anniversary by taking new risks and bringing yet another provocative and inspired challenge to the complacent. This show, and the events that surround it, should be on everyone's must-see list this season."

Tom Sandborn, Columbia Journal

"Being born and raised in deep "communism with a human face" in former Czechoslovakia, I never cared about politics. It was always for me something I cannot involve, something evil and nasty that happens somewhere else above me and I just have to find the restricted, but hopefully some, free gaps between the restrictions, where I can live my little "innocent" life with my little personal dreams, which won't interfere with the political stuff.

I do not want to be an ignorant anymore. I still do not believe you can change the world with theatre, but you can change people's perception of the world. Your work changed mine. Thank you again, for your awareness, generosity and gift to make these revolutions in people's heart happen."

Marketa, THIR\$TY audience member

For many years now I have been creating final reports as daily journal entries. This has facilitated the reports being very "in the moment". Due to the intensity of this project and the all-consuming nature of the rehearsals/creation period, I was not able to do that and so am now "reaching back" to the very beginning.

My brain working the way it does, its been easier to target things that didn't work well, or as planned, than things that did and so I want to preface this entire report with an anecdote:

A few days ago a courier came to the office. While signatures were being put to paper he looked around and then said, 'you are the people who did **THIRSTY**, the project about water, is that right?' It turns out he is a leader in the Palestinian community in Vancouver. While he hadn't seen the play, he was not only aware of it, but had been able to use the project as a base from which to talk about water issues in the Middle East. This chance encounter is a sign to me of the power of what we have done. Because a cultural event was at the heart of **THIRSTY**, it crossed many boundaries, in ways that we will never know.

The initial impulse to create **THIRSTY** came in 2000 at an anti-globalization conference sponsored by the Council of Canadians. I was researching a previous Headlines' production called **Corporate U**. Wandering through the booths I came across a solitary man sitting at a booth. He was from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and was trying to alert people to the coming issue of water privatization. People were not, at that moment in time, paying very much attention. I picked up a leaflet and was astonished by what I read. It all made so much (non)sense: Having turned everything else we can touch into a commodity, corporations and governments were now starting to privatize water: the essence of life.

This leaflet led to much more reading, to discovering the story of the US based Bechtel Corporation in Cochabamba that became one of the threads of the play, to researching how privatization of water affects fish and to seeking out expertise from many people on how these issues were manifesting now and would likely manifest in the future here in Canada.

The Bolivia connection had a great (and tiny) beginning. Oscar Olivera from Cochabamba, Bolivia, was in Vancouver to speak at the Unitarian Church. Oscar was one of the people who emerged into a leadership role in the Bolivian struggle against Bechtel, the World Bank and the Bolivian Government, around privatization of the water supply in Cochabamba.

Kathryn Ricketts (my co-creator) and I attended and were very impressed by what Oscar had to say. When the presentation was over I made my way to Oscar, through the crowds of people and, through a translator, amid the chaos, explained who we were and that we were interested in including the Bolivian story in the play. Would Oscar help us? Could I have an e-mail address? I am certain that at the time he had almost no idea what I was talking about.....Oscar himself has confirmed this.....but he was very gracious and e-mail was offered and reams of information, photos, music, etc., starting coming. A year later he was back in Vancouver for the opening week of the run of the play, flown in by the Council of Canadians.

The first creative impulse for **THIRSTY** was the water itself. This came from conversations with Kevin Finnan at MotionHouse Dance in the UK who had been my collaborator on **Mamu** six years previous. We had thought **THIRSTY** was going to be another collaboration. Kevin's schedules made this impossible -- leading me to seek out Kathryn Ricketts – Director of Main Dance and Plan B Dance.

The reason to look for a collaborator in general and Kathryn in particular was to open up the potential to create something that was more expansive artistically -- riskier theatrically -- than I could/would create alone. It was time in my own development as an artist to do this again. Kathryn and I set out to create a dance/theatre piece that did not serve up “a little bit of dance and then a little bit of theatre”, but to truly integrate theatre, movement and multi-media visuals. The

feedback from audiences in this area has been tremendous. **THIRSTY** really was unlike anything many people had ever seen.

Of course, Headlines is more than a theatre company -- we are also an organization committed to social justice issues and so there were post-performance discussions, many workshops and other events around the play. Programmed by Sheelagh Davis, Headlines' Outreach Co-ordinator, these provided a very rich envelope that contained the performances. Our hope was that one aspect informed the other -- that, as with the artistic collaboration, this combining created something that neither component could accomplish alone.

I realize in retrospect that **THIRSTY** was affected deeply by my own Forum Theatre work. I no longer believe in the traditional agit-prop model, where the play presents the problem AND the solution. The world is far too complex for that. What this meant for the project was that the discussion sessions really were the second act of the play. **THIRSTY** is not meant to stand on its own. It does not come to a conclusion. It does not present a lot of information. It does not resolve. The role of the play was to take people to an emotional, psychological crisis around the issues – to ring an alarm bell; the role of the discussions and workshops was to provide the kind of detailed information that had no place in the play and also to stimulate "answers" -- suggestions for action -- that also had no place in the play. Why is this? Because any answers the play could provide would be trite.

While I believe this was the right way to approach the project, I also think it caused some confusion and consternation for a portion of our audience. As much as we talked and wrote about the discussion sessions being “act II”, some people wanted completion from the play. This is a source of frustration for me. Here in Canada (or is it Vancouver?) we work inside very tightly defined parameters of what "art" may be and what purposes it may serve. We seem to be ruled by Aristotle's version of the dramatic model, where there must be crisis AND resolution (catharsis). Not all cultures operate in this model and I do not believe it is necessarily a healthy model for constant public consumption. It leads to a diet of cultural events that, perhaps inadvertently, re-enforce the status quo.

Before anything, the funds had to be raised.

The fundraising was brutal. The budget was originally \$184,000, which is what we felt we needed to do the concept justice. Why so high? First, due to Headlines' longstanding commitment to pay everyone involved a real living wage. Second, the size of the

project, the water, multi-media, etc., meant bringing on a larger than usual production team and providing them with production budgets that would let them "fly".

Siobhan Barker, Headlines' Executive Assistant/Production Manager, Sheelagh and I approached 51 Foundations for funds as well as numerous Government sources and mounted an extensive individual donations campaign. We had so many rejections. Why? A combination of things, I think -- the political nature of the production, the ever increasing scarcity of funds, our inability to articulate a project clearly that was not coming out of a community **THEATRE FOR LIVING** process

but had not yet been written like a "normal" script would have been. We had nothing to present. Some funding bodies that were familiar with Headlines' work came on board in faith. Funders who did not know us didn't have a lot to go on, except our detailing of past success.

From Headlines' end, I think we could have targeted possible new funding partners in a more focussed way. As difficult as this has become, no applications should have been mailed out cold. Funding in 2002 is about relationships more than ever. Conversations before the application, during preparation and follow-up to fill in the holes. Its all a function of available resources – time and people, which = money. It costs money to raise money. In the end, other than the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) every organization who supported **THIRSTY** financially had funded Headlines before.

After far too many rejections we had to decide whether or not we would proceed. In December of 2001 I managed to cut approximately \$20,000 out of the budget by reducing production costs and losing a week of rehearsal, but knew that this was a bottom line limit we could not exceed.

We had to sign contracts with designers and so put riders on them stating clearly that we did not know if we could produce, but in the event of cancellation, would try to partially honour the contractual financial commitments. The design team was very gracious in signing the contracts. We held off signing contracts with the actors and the stage manager until late January 2002. Rehearsals started February 11, 2002.

During this very stressful time the Canada Council agreed that, if we had to, we could access three years of Canadian Creation funds (instead of the agreed upon one year) for this one project. I was aware of how this would be bad planning for the next two years but we were in an emergency situation. In the end, we only ended up using two years, not all three. This vote of confidence gave us the space to continue. Shortly afterward, we got word from CUPE that they would make a sizeable contribution to the project. Actually, between the BC regional and national offices, CUPE gave us more funds than we had asked them for (\$30,000 between the two) -- in recognition both of the company's previous track record, the relevance of the issue we were tackling with **THIRSTY**, and CUPE's involvement in those issues.

Slowly the summit of the money mountain was scaled, with numerous other funders coming on board. If you are reading this it is likely you are one of them.

I want to take this moment to thank all of the organizations who supported **THIRSTY** financially with project funds and Headlines with operating funds. They are:

Operating funds: the Canada Council; BC Gaming Commission; the City of Vancouver; the BC Arts Council; the Melusine Foundation.

Project funds: Canadian Union of Public Employees; Canada Council (Canadian Creation); Mountain Equipment Co-op; Vancouver Foundation;

Vancouver City Savings Credit Union; Columbia Foundation; the Hamber Foundation; the Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation; and the many, many individual donors listed in the program. Without support like this a project like **THIRSTY** simply would not have been possible.

Throughout this time period we continued to be fed a tremendous amount of information about water privatization -- from Bolivia, from Canada and from researchers and activists around the world. Through Sheelagh, Headlines became very connected to the work of many, many groups. Having a permanent Outreach position in the company means opening up a much deeper realm of connection with other community organizations with which we can develop working partnerships. These were instrumental in designing and executing the workshops and discussion sessions around the play and also providing feedback and fact checking for the script as it evolved. Sheelagh has provided her own report, attached.

Script Creation

Kathryn and I made sure that we spent time working together "in studio" before the official start of our writing process. Having agreed to work together, we also knew that in reality, we were embarking on a very risky "blind date" that was going to involve a lot of people, money and trust. She opened up some of the classes she was already teaching and we programmed a special one-day workshop at the Dance Centre, all of these designed for us to start to develop a language together – to try to understand how we were going to mesh our different approaches to creation. In the classes we started to be able to see how we could:

- start from a purely emotional response from an individual to an issue, create gesture and then extend that into group movement
- start from group movement and then imbue the formal movement with emotional content and text
- start from text and, working with the performer, develop stylized individual or group movement that embodied or in some cases counter pointed the emotional, psychological content of the text.

Knowing we could do this together, we started a focussed writing process on May 28, 2001 and finished the first draft on July 20. We worked five days a week in my living-room, initially interviewing people together and listening to tapes I had pre-recorded, watching video, reading, bouncing ideas off each other. We did this for about two weeks, making rough notes on papers on the walls, grabbing phrases, images, sound and light ideas. We have very different approaches to creation. I tend to start with

content, either emotional or issue-based; Kathryn's starting point (often but not always) is form; an inherent difference, I think, between the "actor" and the "dancer" as artists. This is what collaboration is all about.

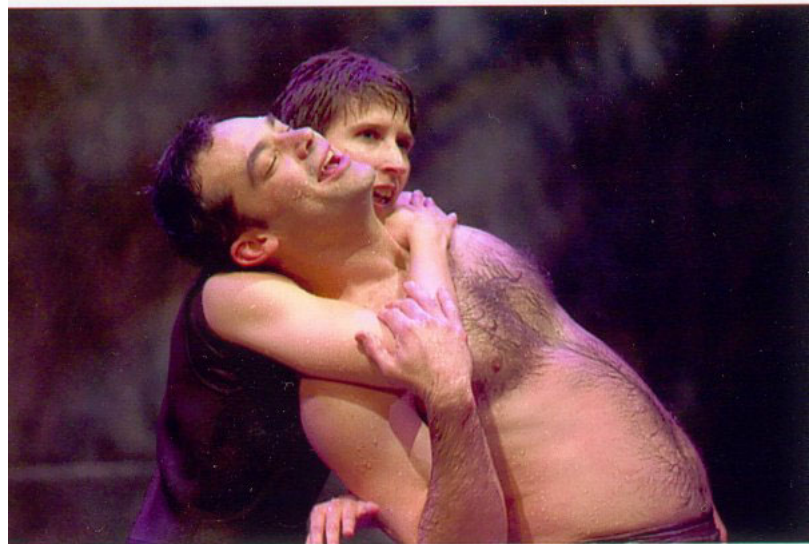
After the first three weeks I pulled out a computer and we started to create script. By this time we had an outline of events – 'signposts' that delineated a rough, non-linear story. We knew we were creating something that spoke in a non-traditional language. It was very poetic. The text could not, we knew early on, convey the complexity of the nuts and bolts of water privatization; that is the statistical information, a lot of historical background. This had to be the role of the workshops, publications and the post-performance discussions. Our task was to distil information into simple human (and fishy) moments that had an emotional resonance – sometimes a surprising and deceptive simplicity.

We knew we had four stories to intertwine:

1. The struggle of the people of Cochabamba, Bolivia, against privatization of their water by a partnership between their Government and the Bechtel Corporation, brokered by the World Bank. This is embodied in "Victor", the Bolivian character in the play and the Bolivian Chorus.
2. The struggle of fish (two salmon named Sally and Sammy) against a form of water privatization that we don't readily think of: the notion that in "owning" the water and turning it into a commodity, we can divert it, pollute it, remove it and not affect other life forms in and around it.
3. The nearly invisible struggle in Canada – not the Walkertons – but rather how we as Canadians take water for granted, are living well beyond our means, hydrologically (and other ways) – how we believe we have an endless supply of fresh water (it is central to our identity) but don't, and how, through recent trade agreements, we have become extremely vulnerable to losing control of our water. This is embodied in "Bob", the Canadian character in the play.



Paulo Rebeiro as "Victor" Photo: André Lanthier

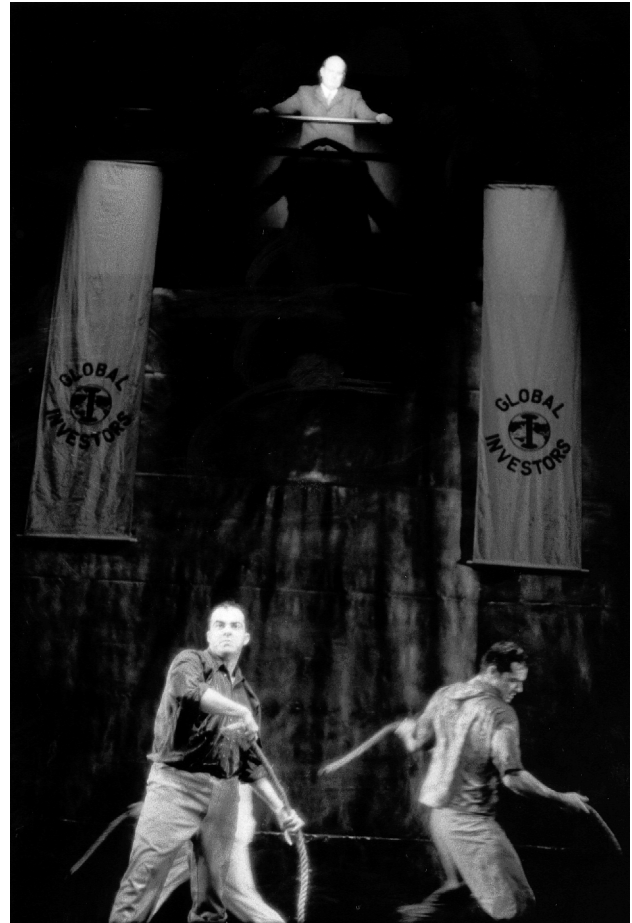


Todd Thomson as "Sammy" and Kathryn Ricketts as "Sally" Photo: André Lanthier

4. What links the first three together? A philosophical shift that pervades every thread of our lives: That the private sector 'knows best', can 'do it better'; that water, along with everything else, can and should be commodified, as it is the only way to force people to appreciate it and conserve. This concept does not, however, take into account the differences between using water to drink in order to stay alive or grow subsistence food, and keeping a manicured golf course green in the desert. And so the philosophical shift takes us to a place where those with money will be able to afford clean water and those without will not. What water gets used for becomes irrelevant. This is embodied in the character of WB, Bob's American Cousin and the CEO of the corporation at the centre of the Bolivian privatization project.



Kathryn Ricketts and Todd Thomson as "Sally" and "Sammy"
 Photo: Daniel J. Collins



Left to right: Paulo Rebeiro as "Victor, Todd Thomson as "Bolivian Chorus" (above) Andrew Johnston as "WB". Photo: Nancy Bleck

What makes water different from other commodities like VCRs and cars? Water makes up approximately 70% of our bodies. If there is an "essence of life" it is water. When we commodify water, we commodify life. AND, if we look at events unfolding around us (in Bolivia and other parts of the world, recently here in the Greater Vancouver Regional District) when government and the private sector work together to try to commodify water this tends to be done behind closed doors, with

no public consultation. Hence, as we commodify the essence of life, we also decrease our access to democratic process. **It is these two principles that are at the core of the play.**

And so by mid-summer of 2000 we had a rough first draft. An odd document, it was half dialogue and half stage direction. Of course, it needed to be this to contain the movement, the images, the sound, light and slides and video that we wanted to integrate into the play.

Throughout the writing the fundraising and community outreach had been continuing. I stepped back into the office once again to participate in this, taking a short time away from the script, wanting to develop some distance. Kathryn and I knew that the script needed more work and, her schedules being what they were, I was going to have to do most of the re-writing.

The script went through three more drafts in between the summer of 2000 and February 2002. My two main concerns during this time (relating to the script) were deepening the identities of the characters and their relationships to each other, and also keeping abreast of events in the news. The first draft was long on imagery but short on narrative. We had fallen into a “trap” that I very often warn people against: we had allowed the form to over-ride the content. The characters were not “real people”. They were doing and saying things because the playwrights wanted them to, not because they needed to. The play was image driven, not character driven. This is not to say that story can’t be told through Image – it can, of course – but the story at the centre needs to be clear and compelling. I believe that we solved this to some degree, but not entirely. We created a form (the water, the slide and video images, four threads that begin independently and then intertwine) that is very strong. Its strength, to a degree, dictated the manner in which the characters could relate to each other.

Our continuing operating dilemma: From August 2000 to February 2002, Headlines had, of course, to continue normal operations. Seven other projects happened in this time period: the yearly international THEATRE FOR LIVING (TFL) training sessions, ongoing work on Language Reclamation with the Passamaquoddy Nation in Maine USA, an anti-bullying model was developed in a school in Richmond that has become our main stage project for this year, the very successful “Reaching Across” events in response to 9-11, anti-racism work in Burns Lake and a workshop and lecture in Singapore. I mention these because the level of activity Headlines must engage in, in order to pay salaries, is an ongoing challenge. The yearly main stage project cannot cover operations. Operating grants do not cover operations. The ongoing TFL workshops bring about \$50,000 a year into the company, without which we could not operate. The catch-22 has always been, and continues to be that doing 15 – 20 projects a year is a huge amount of work, that requires more staff. Yet, we are doing as much work as we are in order to sustain staff at the current levels. We could not have raised more money for **THIR\$TY** than we did. We could not have done more projects in the year, and done **THIR\$TY**. In fact, I believe that needing to do so many other projects building up to, during and directly after this project has over-extended staff. Around and around we go. Considering that operating grants are not going to rise, what do we do? Suggestions welcome.

The auditions

We did extensive auditions for this play. I used to be an actor and hated the 10 minute audition slot and so we worked against this. Over 50 resumes came in, applying for 5 roles in the play. We could audition about 20 people. We vetted the resumes. Auditions were in two parts: a group movement session each day with that day's actors, and then a 30 minute slot in which we did individual movement, read from the script, improvised text and movement and chatted. We knew we were not looking for dancers, but rather actors who were willing to commit to their bodies – to “be” in their bodies and use them to communicate in extreme ways, integrating speech and movement. We did a round of call-backs with 10 people and cast five roles (four men and a woman). Noah Drew had been hired to do sound and perform early on. The others were Andrew Johnston, Noah Lepawsky, Michelle Olson, Paulo Rebeiro and Todd Thomson.

Of course we had numerous design meetings in the months working up to rehearsals. We knew we had a big pool of water, but what was the set? We posed the designers a “problem”: We knew we couldn't, but, if we could, we would flood the theatre. The water is endless. It is the world we live in. After batting around numerous ideas and drawings, Yvan Morrisette and Barbara Clayden came back with a 50' x 20' by 2" deep pool, with translucent moveable screens that we could project on and through. The water extended almost from wall to wall at the Roundhouse. We had our environment and it was very rich.

February 11, 2002. The first day of rehearsals. We had assembled a wonderful production team. They are listed in the program attached to this report.

One thing that Kathryn and I knew, but that I think no one else understood the ramifications of, was that while we had done some physical work together, we had not done that work with this cast. The first week had to be a lot of movement work, in order to discover what physical language we could speak with this group of people. We had a script, but a lot of the play was going to have to be discovered in the rehearsal hall. We were going to have to discover the language of the play together, in front of and with the cast. It is rare for a play to have two directors. Even more rare that these directors have to engage in a “public” discovery process. The first week of rehearsals was very scary for all of us. At the first end-of-week discussion the cast were very honest about how lost they were, they couldn't see the “whole” – how was it going to fit together – WAS it going to fit together? At the closing night party, the Stage Manager (who was very happy at how it all turned out) confided in me that for the first two weeks she thought nothing AT ALL was going to work. She just couldn't see it.

By the end of the second week lights started going on for some of the cast members. Their bodies were getting stronger doing dance classes every day and the movement vocabulary was starting to live inside them. As this started happening we started to be able to integrate movement and dramatic scene work. Then the pool arrived.

We had to have the pool by the beginning of the third week of the five week process. The water was so integral to the production – how we moved, what the water did to the actors' bodies, how the water was a character in the play. It was beautiful. What none of us had considered, though, was how cold it was going to be.



Lynnette Candy, Assistant Stage Manager, with a very tiny net, cleaning lint from clothes out of the pool. Photo: David Diamond

None of us were prepared for the hidden layers of what doing a play in water meant. The pool materials are very thick, industrial pool liner. We constructed a “splash guard” around the pool, which proved to be not big enough and will need to be extended for any possible future production. A chlorine-based product went into the 1,000 gallons of water so nothing would grow in the pool. We changed the water, which took a full day, once a week. Still, by the end of the week we were finding that the surface was getting slippery. What was it? Oil from the actor’s bodies! We bought a large squeegee and squeegeed the pool every day. Part of the costuming is a MOUNTAIN of towels, as well as duplicate costumes for some characters who need to appear dry in the midst of the play. Headlines now owns a small, used clothes dryer and a professional wet vacuum, that had to be used a few times a day in the rehearsal hall, and at intermission in the theatre as the construction and performance of some scenes created a tremendous amount of splash.

The cold. This was the most difficult aspect for the actors. There was no way to heat this much water. We cranked the heat up in the room and the church where we were rehearsing agreed to keep it on overnight. We figured that once we got into the theatre some of the water temperature issues would be solved because the theatrical light would help heat the water. Right? We all knew as performers how hot it gets onstage.....wrong. Just too much water. Worse, in the rehearsal hall there were rooms underneath the gym we were working in, which meant that heat came up through the floor. In the theatre the pool was on a masonite floor, with plywood and then concrete underneath. We investigated pool heating units, coils that we could place in the pool overnight, nothing was viable that was not going to either cost many thousands of dollars, or have to be ordered specifically for us and arrive as we were ending the run of the play.

We investigated the hot water tanks at the theatre. The rain in the play (yes, we made it rain in the theatre!) was warm, as we were able to run hoses from the kitchen for the rain. Could we run hot water into the pool before the play every night? We were told this was impossible, as the water tank held 45 gallons, and this wouldn’t make a dent in the water in the pool. On matinees, though, the water was **extremely** cold, and so our technical director did run water from the “rain” tap into the pool before the show one day near the end of the run– and found that, contrary to what we were told by the theatre’s technical director, it ran hot for as long as we wanted it to – we ran hot water

into the pool for almost two hours and didn't run out of hot water. We did this for the two remaining matinees. The cast were extremely grateful.

About a week after getting the pool (so, two weeks before moving into the theatre), we lost a cast member. This was a mutual agreement. She found dealing with the water to be too difficult. Of course this was a major bump in rehearsals and, after a short but intense discussion it was agreed that the most efficient thing to do was to put Kathryn into the play. The cast were relieved by this decision (the other option was to bring in a stranger, having spent 3 weeks building an ensemble and physical language). We also knew, though, that Kathryn was not going to be able to span acting and co-directing completely. I was, to some degree, losing my co-director. Kathryn was great – she rose to this challenge – not a small thing, as she had never acted before, although, of course, is a seasoned dance professional.



Kathryn Ricketts as "Bolivian,
working the water."
Photo: Daniel J. Collins

Kudos and heartfelt thanks must go to the cast, who not only rose to this challenge, but were in cold water for 6 weeks (3 of rehearsal and the 3 week run) – and who have all expressed a desire to tour!

And so the creation process was very rich. Once we got over the first two weeks of language development critical mass started to build. We all started to see how the parts fit into a very complex whole. We were experimenting with new ways to tell a story, where an image had equal value to text; where the text needed to seem "everyday" and have the layering exist in characters' subtext; where sometimes the way to forward the story was through symbolic movement, or having a sailboat brave the waves of a lake.

I want to tell one story, one out of many, that encapsulates the magic of this time:

In my living-room a year earlier, Kathryn and I had fantasized a moment, near the end of the play, when WB would dump hundreds of plastic bottles into the pool. "We can do this"I remember saying. In rehearsal one day 100 plastic bottles arrived and I said to Yvan, (one of the designers) "we are going to need A LOT more bottles". He rolled his eyes – they were hard to get. Off he went and a few days later came back with 200 more. Working the end of the play, we dumped the bottles into the pool for the first time. "Shhhhhhh.....listen!!!" – none of us were prepared for the sound of all these bottles, bobbing on the water, hitting against each other. Noah Drew (sound) recorded the sound of the bottles and the image and sound became a very powerful element of the end of the play. Its this "imagining" and being able to make it real on stage that is at the heart of the magic of the theatre. So many people have commented on this image (one of many) that Kathryn and I "dreamt up" a year earlier in my living-room and that a team of people made real.

And so we moved into the theatre for three days of technical rehearsals, integrating light, sound (a lot of the sound cues had been set in the rehearsal hall), slides, video, rain, with the physical bodies of the actors, image, the front of house displays and post-performance discussions.

Elizabeth Kidd at the Roundhouse Community Centre put together "Freefall", a display from various artists that dealt with many aspects of water. This meant that the entire lobby area was filled with art from both professional artists and children. Headlines (Sheelagh) co-ordinated the portion of the lobby closest to the entry doors to the theatre. Here there were harder information displays on the situation in Bolivia and worldwide. Sheelagh also co-ordinated all the post-performance discussions and day-time workshops. There are written reports here from Sheelagh Davis (Outreach) and Irwin Oostinde (Publicist) that will detail the work of these two aspects of the project. There are also box office reports put together by Siobhan Barker (Production Manager).

Feedback from the public is that they found the daytime events (where there was time to get into issues in more depth) to be very informative and helpful. There has also been good feedback, generally, about the discussion sessions, although, of course, due to the nature of them being limited to one hour after the play, they sometimes felt short. Facilitators did a good job of moving the discussions along, rooting the discussions in the experience of just having seen the play and also of helping people get onto list serves etc., so that they could plug into concrete networks. Guest speakers were, most often, very informed and generous with their knowledge.

It was fascinating to hear what people took from the play during these discussions. It was so varied. Some highlights that I remember are:

- That the fish gave us the beauty, wonder and innocence of water. That although we sometimes think of Nature as being able to combat the effects of humans, we, in fact have to take responsibility for our actions on earth.
- That Bob (Canadians) have inherited the most precious of things from "mother", and that we do not understand the responsibility of this, and because we have a desire to live beyond our means, we are ready to sell that precious inheritance away.
- That people who seem to have no power can unite (Cochabamba) and take control of their communities against insurmountable odds.
- Many mentioned how amazing it was for them to simply be at a cultural event that was about something so vital and also so well produced; how nurturing it was to be presented with art about centrally important issues.
- There were times when audience members complained about the play being "anti-American". When this happened, invariably, other audience members defended the play, saying it was simply presenting a real picture, both of the relationship between Canada and the US, and US foreign policy.



Left to right: Noah Lepawsky as "Bob" and Andrew Johnston as "WB"

Photo: Andrée Lanthier

Selling the play

We pretty much sold out the last five nights of the three week run. Still, it was very difficult to know how to market this project. Certainly knowledge of it was broad based. I think, though, that the profile it achieved was more "political" than "artistic". **Sold tickets** overall average 42% of the originally budgeted 147 seat house.¹ Overall attendance, including complimentary tickets, was 65%. 42% paid attendance might seem OK in some instances. I don't think it is for this project. I think it indicates that there are lessons to learn about how we presented the project to the public through the media and networked performances through community partners. The run spanning Easter week-end (while it has relevance) does not wholly explain the numbers.

It is hard to get people into the Roundhouse. It was the only theatre, though, where we could put this particular project. They accepted the water. The space has an identity problem and continues to struggle with the schism of the Vancouver Parks Board running a theatre. This is the tip of a complex topic but I think it would be good for the Performance Centre to be administratively severed from the Community Centre. This could allow for street advertising in more overt ways, lighting that would indicate the building was open in the evening, and a streamlined bureaucracy vis a vis access to the theatre. If it was easier for theatre companies to produce at the Roundhouse, if it was less expensive, if there was real lobby space, box office services, etc., more companies would produce there. As that happened, an identity as a theatre would/could emerge.

Certainly the current situation with the BC Government didn't help attendance. We opened the show amid massive cuts to every sector. People were either losing their jobs or afraid they were going to lose their jobs, or their daycare subsidies or health coverage or many other items that cut into disposable income. Proof of this is that attendance was high on almost every show where tickets were 2 for 1. There were also, I think, other factors.

I want to make it clear here that this is not meant as a criticism of staff who worked on the project. Headlines created something very unusual and we were all "prototyping", that is, inventing structures and systems on the fly, as it were. As always there are successes to build on and failures to assess.

¹ We reduced the number of seats upon arrival in the theatre to 131 due to sight line problems.

It was very hard to get the media who covered the play to focus on the innovation of the artistic collaboration, or on the powerful theatrical images. Any interviews I did I would try to “steer” in that direction, but the focus always seemed to be the politics of the issue. At best we could talk about the pool of water or the longevity of Headlines and this being the 20th Anniversary production. I don’t think any of these necessarily bring people into the theatre. A “hot show” brings people into the theatre.

One aspect of what happened is that to some degree we live in a time of specialization and Headlines has been labeled. I have been having a lot of conversations with people about this since **THIRSTY** closed. We live in a culture that has created artificial separations between art and politics. I think that ALL theatre production ANYWHERE is political – many don’t see it that way. When Headlines produces a project, because it overtly has a point of view, it is immediately labeled as “political theatre” and, by some sectors of the media and the theatre community, dismissed. We at Headlines need to understand this better. Ironically, we needed to work to subvert the image of being a “political” theatre company. It ghettoizes the work and limits coverage. We needed to find a different way to write about what we were doing. This is something I am just realizing now, coming out of this artistically very rich play.

Also, the entire project got way bigger than any of us thought it would. This happened both with the play and with the workshops. We had a finite amount of money, though, and even though apprentices were brought in from the Carousel Theatre program, due to the size of the workload we were short-staffed. The lesson here is either to be able to raise more funds to hire more people with a project of this size, (which we could not have done) or to keep a lid on projects so that they remain manageable. In the end, I think that the variety and number of events around the play, while impressive, did not serve the project in some ways.

I am thinking about simple numbers here, not who saw the play. While I think numbers could have been better, the audience was also VERY broad ranging from the hard core activist crowd, to the theatre crowd, to people from the business-sector, some of whom were pro water privatization (they spoke in discussions), to tourists who were drawn in by the advertising. One woman flew in from Tennessee to see **THIRSTY** (!!) -- she had found it on the web and was doing a thesis on blending theatre, dance and social activism!

A lesson here, if we tour, is to urge community organizers to limit the events around the play to post-performance discussions and lobby displays. The inevitably limited core of organizing activity and energy will need to focus on the play.

Also, as mentioned earlier, I think we could have been more straightforward with people at intermission that the event was not over. We had to give them a break between the play and discussion because we could not bring microphones out until we had cleared all the splash away and, really, I don’t want to TRAP people into staying. However, my instructions to facilitators for the announcement at intermission could have been to acknowledge that the play is not meant to stand alone and that the full event includes the discussion. More people might have stayed.

The web cast

Siobhan did a great job navigating the negotiations with Canadian Actors' Equity Association so that we could web cast the full play. This had never been done with a fully professional production in Canada. We did web cast **Corporate U** last year – it was the first live Forum Theatre web cast, but it had a non-professional cast.

Mike Keeping directed. Mike has directed all but one of Headlines' live Forum telecasts. This was different as SHAW's relationship to Community TV is very different from ROGERS'. Mike had to organize this without SHAW people, although the station did loan us some key equipment. We had three camera people and two boom mikes. Mike and I did a rough storyboard together. They had one rehearsal at the evening show on April 5 and then we went live to the web on 1pm on the 6th. This was all done with a volunteer crew.



Left to right: Mike Keeping and Jeremy (Roundhouse technician)
Photo: Daniel J. Collins

Scott Nelson from IndymediaVancouver.org took the TV signal, digitized it, and sent it to the Indymedia server in Seattle, from which it streamed. We sent out e-mails announcing the web cast starting weeks before the event.

Not as many people saw the web cast as I had hoped. We think just over 200 logged on. This is very experimental stuff. The way it was put to me, that has made some sense, is "how many times do YOU watch things on the web?" the answer is never. I don't have ADSL or Cable, which is what one really needs to get a clear picture. We did stream for 56k modems, but there is no way to get anything but a jerky image doing this. We have got e-mails, though, from Japan, eastern Canada and the US, from people who watched. The better the technology gets, the easier it will be to view. The web cast was an important and ground-breaking thing to do.

Equity has given us permission to make a 30 minute promotional video, and also to keep a full length archive of the play. I am considering putting the 30 minute version on our web site, if we have the megabyte space.

What did we accomplish?

A number of people who really enjoyed the project have said to me that even if they hadn't liked it, the fact that it happened was something to celebrate, the theatre/dance collaboration, the risk-taking was huge, and that we need more of this in the theatre in

Vancouver. I think this accomplishment is not to be under-estimated. But of course we did a lot more:

We brought people together who may never have shared the same space (in a theatre) to experience a rich cultural event about the commodification of the essence of life. This, we know, created deep reflection and resonance that carried on for days, weeks beyond the event for many people.

We helped build alliances and networks of people who are concerned about the same issues.

We linked worlds that are still, even in our evolving global consciousness, kept separate: the worlds of Bolivia, the natural world and Canada, and provided a forum in which these worlds could inter-relate both through art and through discussion. Our hope of course is that art + discussion = action.

We took another step to understanding how with even our limited resources, we can reach around the world, by owning the technology of the world wide web.

We celebrated Headlines' 20th Anniversary with a project that continued to do what Headlines has been doing from the beginning: stretching the boundaries of theatre.

Do we tour?

This is a really big question right now. Decisions about this have to be made in the next few months, if we are to go after key funding at the Touring Office of the Canada Council, Foreign Affairs, foundations, etc. I estimate a budget of approximately \$350,000 to tour in Canada and some of the US. The touring Office of the Canada Council needs a tour to touch at least three provinces.

The set is designed to tour, although there are, obviously, issues around working with 1,000 gallons of water. The pool needs a redesign to have wider splash zones outside the pool and a more effective splash-guard inside the pool. This is easy to accomplish. We need to find a way to heat the pool. A harder task.

Two parallel tours would need to be booked, bringing community organizations together with venues who were willing and able to host the production. The play would be a magnet, bringing people into the theatre to focus on action around local water issues.

A question for me is should THIR\$TY tour? We have already had expressions of interest from the BC Interior, Ontario Public Interest Research Group and an anti-privatization organization in San Francisco. There is no question that the issues are important and the play communicates about those issues in an innovative way. Artistically, though, is it a strong enough production? I don't have enough distance from it artistically yet to know the answer to this question. Administratively, can we raise enough funds to support that large an undertaking? I want to have deeper conversations with Headlines' staff and Board, also with potential partners: CUPE and the Council of Canadians about this. We will need very strong commitments both financially and organizationally from community partners if we proceed.

The \$\$\$

The **THIR\$TY** project had final expenses of \$158,063 and income of \$158,461. We were left with a small surplus on the project of \$398. This is a little miracle, of course.

I hope this report answers questions you might have about the project -- from conception through creation and performance to final budgets. If you have any other questions or comments, please don't hesitate to call or write or e-mail to me at the address on the cover sheet.

A script is available on request, as is archival video for private viewing (no paid admission).

Sincerely,

David Diamond
Artistic and Managing Director/Joker



Left to right: Todd Thomson, Paulo Rebeiro, Andrew Johnston,
Noah Lepawsky, Noah Drew, Kathryn Ricketts.
Photo: Daniel J. Collins