

THIS IS WHERE WE LIVE

A Verbatim Exploration

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CHARACTERS:

THE PLAYWRIGHT: Male, older than fifty. This is the only character that should maintain the same actor throughout.

All the other characters can be played by any member of the cast, and each character can be played by different actors at different points of the play. Each character will be identified by signs hanging around their necks.

FLEXIBLE-CASTING ROLES

THE TIRELESS ADVOCATE: Interview material from a mature white male.

LINDA DUMONT: Street newspaper material from mature white woman.

MINSTREL: Male, 30s at the time he recorded the songs.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS: Any age, any gender.

POLITICIAN IN ACTION: Any age, any gender.

THE HONOURABLE RALPH KLEIN: Any age, any gender.

SANDRA: Interview material from a female, fifty-nine.

JAMES: Interview material from a non-binary mid-twenties person.

GARY: Interview material from a male, late fifties.

MARIA: Interview material from a female, Colombian, forty-ish.

NEIL: Interview material from a 60-ish Indigenous man.

ROBIN: Interview material from 60-ish Indigenous female.

NON-SPEAKING ROLES

People experiencing homelessness, people helping them, citizens supporting housing, citizens concerned about their neighbourhoods.

A Word About the Text:

Most of the text is drawn from factual sources and validated using different processes.

- The monologues of Sandra, Neil, James, Robin, Gary, and Maria were prepared in the following way:

- Audio interviews were done with each person, approximately an hour with everyone. Each interviewee gave written permission.
 - Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed by people who did not know the interviewees directly, but for the most part had some engagement with the homeless community and issues.
 - These people listened to the interviews, then went through the transcripts again, highlighting the sections they thought spoke to the character and the story of the interviewee.
 - Those highlighted sections were crafted into five-minute monologues without changing any of the interviewees' words.
 - The monologue scripts were taken back to the interviewees, who read them, and in some cases made changes.
- The dialogue of the Tireless Advocate is taken verbatim from an interview.
 - The dialogue of Linda Dumont is taken verbatim from articles written by her for the street newspapers *Spare Change*, *Our Voice*, and *Alberta Street News*.
 - The dialogue coming from *The Court of Public Opinion* is taken from online comments, newspaper reports, or personal comments heard by the writer.
 - The songs performed by the Minstrel are those of Doug Carlson, a singer-songwriter who had one album recorded by the Bissell Centre in 2001. He has given permission to have these songs used in the script.
 - Excerpts from academic publications, government reports, discussions in the Alberta Legislature, or other text material are all word for word.
 - The dialogue of the Playwright character is based on my own life and experience, and nothing that character does is either falsified or outside the scope of what I would say or do.
 - The Homelessness News character is the only character whose dialogue and actions are entirely fictitious. However, the news stories they are quoting and announcing are real and have been pulled from newspaper archives.

A Word About the Actions of Non-Speaking Characters:

It should be obvious (but sometimes isn't) that the daily activities of people who face housing insecurity are the same as those who are housed. We all wake up, use the bathroom, wash, find something to eat, dress as best we can, go out into the world, interact with others, have lunch, use the bathroom, find an evening meal, return to our shelter (whatever that is), maybe wash our clothes, maybe relax with family and friends, perhaps seek intimacy, and then go to sleep. It should be obvious that many of these daily tasks are much more difficult for people who don't have housing. An accurate depiction on stage of people's daily lives in the encampments in Edmonton's inner city would show scenes of human beings in distress, forced to wash, eat, urinate, evacuate, make love, and perform all the other daily tasks we take for granted without a home to do them in. Sometimes they have makeshift shelters or tents. While some bathroom facilities exist for their use, those facilities are not always readily available and accessible, so some of these daily tasks are performed by necessity in public. Also by necessity, these daily tasks are performed in all seasons, and I leave it to the producer's and/or director's discretion how to represent these daily activities on stage and how to represent the impact that changing seasons have on those activities.

Within that discretion, it is very important for the director and actors to respect and give space to the centrality of the lived experience of the non-speaking characters. As characters they do not have a voice, much like they do not have a voice in most political discussions about homelessness. Yet every person's experience is the centre-point of their lives, and who are we to judge that somebody else's experience is less worthy, less interesting, or less important than our own? They need to demonstrate their experience, and therefore the non-speaking characters own the stage. By the end of the play the stage should be full of their activities and resemble an encampment. This is where they live, and they should take full possession of the space for the day-to-day activities of their lives. This includes taking the time needed to build tents, to put up soup and sandwich lines, to gather blankets for sleep. This includes, if necessary, interrupting the characters with speaking roles as the non-speaking characters go about their business. Their physical presence on stage is their voice, and that presence should be as evocative and fully realized as the presence of the speaking characters.

THIS IS WHERE WE LIVE

An empty stage. A spotlight. A woman walks into it.

SANDRA

There's so many voices in the dark wanting to tell their story already...

I am the one standing behind you at Tim Horton's, yes I'm homeless, I'm one of them, nice to meet you. You don't know. It can happen to anybody, anywhere, anytime. For me that's it in a nutshell – don't judge. It could be next week. It could be an apartment or your house burning down, an unforeseen medical condition or accident.

I went to a private high school in Edmonton, and walked out, a middle class, Caucasian girl, thinking nothing could go wrong. Mom and dad and I took our last family vacation to Hawaii in December of 1982. One day we wake up and my dad's lying on the floor in a coma. He had an aneurysm in his mid-brain, his brain got wiped out. We spent six weeks in the ICU in Hawaii. That's where I spent my 19th birthday.

My parents were alcoholics. Dad was the good one – intelligent, good strong Christian man. Mom was a “mommy dearest”, domineering, abusive, controlling, and a gambler. He passed away in '99, my beloved daddy. When dad's estate came through (after he passed away), I had \$60,000 to start a restaurant. I knew what had to be done, I had four years at Grant MacEwan Community College. Graduated. But mother dearest was a very dominant personality. We were making \$100 a day but my mother gambled \$1,000 down the VLT at the Silver Bullet. After that, her gambling it away, we sat and screamed at each other and resolved our mommy-daughter issues. She became my best friend....

Mom started getting strangely sick after she gambled away my restaurant. I got informed by the doctor that she had ovarian cancer, undiagnosed, and had a 30 percent chance of living, 30 days later she died, and I was in the room when she died. So mom passed away in 2011 on Father's Day, and I went into a very deep depression.

(The PLAYWRIGHT walks on stage, and hands the WOMAN a sign with a string on it that says “SANDRA”. She glares at him, and puts it around her neck. The PLAYWRIGHT, who has an armful of such signs, puts them aside on a different part of the stage, and sits down to watch.)

SANDRA (cont.)

I had a decision to make: do I go to the river and end it? I kept looking out the window at the Misericordia Hospital. That’s where mom died. I decided to take myself into the mental health ward and give myself one more chance.

The Miz put me into Dwayne’s Home thinking that Dwayne’s Home was going to give me housing, employment, therapies. I got dumped off at Dwayne’s Home with my little box of goodies on Christmas Eve...and I didn’t feel sad and I didn’t feel alone...all of a sudden I had over 100 brothers and sisters that I never had before. I learned everybody else’s story, and I stopped feeling sorry for myself.

(Several ACTORS come on stage. They sit together in a group off-centre.)

So one day, a funny story, Audrey comes walking up. She’s got the long aboriginal hair. She had a curling iron with the prongs in it. So she rolls her hair up, but when she goes she tries to pull it up this way. A volunteer wanted to cut it off and I said, “don’t you dare”, because she wanted to grow long hair. I said, “let me try”. I took Audrey down to my room and in two hours I strand by strand backtracked her hair out of that stupid curling iron. We started talking, and later on we ended up being roommates. After I took Audrey back upstairs to say, “hey we did it, we got the curling iron out”,...someone came up to me and said, “you’ve got the patience of a saint. Mother Teresa, that’s what we’re

gonna call you”. And that was my street nickname for the two years at Dwayne’s Home – Mother Teresa... and I was too damn busy to be depressed or feel sorry for myself. It actually was a wonderful experience. The sad thing was, you got to know the people who were mixing their drugs and alcohol, and you started to become friends with somebody, and once a month we had somebody OD, and you have to say goodbye. After two years I was pretty much done my time there, death and dying made me leave.

(Another ACTOR enters, pushing a shopping cart. The other ACTORS gather round, pull tarps out of the shopping cart, and start to build lean-tos and crude shelters.)

I fell through the cracks in the system... You keep falling into the cracks in the system, so I managed to stay homeless. When you get stripped away from everything you’ve got nothing, you’ve only got yourself. I’m 59 now, and it’s constantly been a struggle.

I asked my psychiatrist and he says, “no Sandra, we haven’t invented a pill for a broken heart. If we could invent one of those, we could solve a lot of this”. That’s what they’re dealing with, is broken hearts.

(The WOMAN rises and places her SANDRA sign near the PLAYWRIGHT and joins the other ACTORS.)

PLAYWRIGHT

“There’s so many voices in the dark wanting to tell their story already...” So many voices.

(An ACTOR picks up a sign that says “LINDA DUMONT” sets up a small table, then starts to write.)

PLAYWRIGHT

1982 – aneurysm. 1999 – father dies. 2011 – mother dies. Home troubled. Home damaged. Home lost. Home...less. All these things happened. That’s all we will hear about Sandra. Maybe. I think everybody’s life is like a great big puzzle, a beautiful picture full of details and colours. But when you only hear about somebody for five minutes, five minutes out of 59 years, how do you know what pieces are missing? What does the picture look like when you’ve only got 750 words, and the person’s life is made up of hundreds of millions of words? What words are you missing? What puzzle pieces are you missing?

(An actor with a sign around their neck that reads TIRELESS ADVOCATE walks through holding a protest sign that says “HOMES 4 ALL.” They stop by the PLAYWRIGHT.)

TIRELESS ADVOCATE

The English word “home”, that word was the word “the place where it’s safe to lie down”, and the idea behind it was that if you were away from your own place...and you were taken in in some other village or some other town, you couldn’t completely trust that there wasn’t somebody that might have a grudge against you...so when you’d rest, you’d rest vigilant, probably sitting against the wall, you know holding your staff in case you needed to jump up and defend yourself. The only place where you could lie down, i.e. completely relax, no defences needed, was at your home fire.

PLAYWRIGHT

I had a good home. My parents didn’t drink. I mean, I remember my dad having a beer once, at a friend’s house. We didn’t have a lot when I was growing up. We lived in a farmhouse heated by a wood stove up until 1967. I shared one room with my two older brothers. But I don’t remember ever feeling scared, or worried. I felt secure. Snug as a bug in a rug, as my mother used to say.

TIRELESS ADVOCATE

So when you realize where we even get that word, we just say the word, but inside that word is packed a whole understanding that if we got that it should make us just shiver to deny it to anybody, to not put a priority on ensuring that everybody has that, because it's from that that you put together everything else for yourself.

PLAYWRIGHT

I hear you. (Turning to the ACTORS.) Thanks for coming out for this. Just remember, every time you're playing one of the characters, you're using their words. Exactly. Verbatim. Word for word and letter for letter. Don't mess with things just because you think you can make their speech more exciting. Do you understand? (The ACTORS nod and show understanding.)

(An ACTOR picks up a sign that reads HOMELESSNESS NEWS, puts it around their neck, and stands expectantly in front of the PLAYWRIGHT.)

PLAYWRIGHT

What do you want?

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

I don't have any script.

PLAYWRIGHT

Right. You, my friend, are reporting on what's being said about homelessness in the news media. You can't use the media's words exactly because that's infringement of copyright. Just make sure you report the facts of what they're saying accurately.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Got it. (Starts to shout.) Federal government ends its National Housing Program!! Federal government ends its National Housing Program!! Hear all about it! Get your

Homelessness News here! Delivered by word of mouth every day! Perfectly accurate!
Judged the best news service in Canada by everybody who's not an asshole! Hear all
about it!!!

(The HOMELESSNESS NEWS actor puts down their sign and
joins the others.)

PLAYWRIGHT

When was that? 1992? 1993?

(The actor with the TIRELESS ADVOCATE sign nods.)

TIRELESS ADVOCATE

From kind of Margaret Thatcher/Ronald Reagan time on, it seemed like we were hearing
all the time about small government and government divesting of things, it became
almost a Western World preoccupation that didn't get very much challenged because it
was promoted by capitalist powers. And that's where the drop in funding for housing
comes from because housing is almost low fruit to say, when you say to people who
almost all have their own houses in an election campaign that government shouldn't be in
the business of housing, people think "Well of course not, I got my own housing!" They
don't realize that part of the reason many of them got their own housing in the 70's and
80's was because of government programs that had underwritten, subsidized, and made
housing affordable.

(An ACTOR with a guitar strolls on, puts their hat upside down
on the ground, and starts to play and sing.)

THE MINSTREL

Well I'm lying in the grass by the cross-borderline
Soaking up the sun and drinking three-dollar wine
Got my packsack, guitar, boots, and tilted hat

I'm done my time and now I'm heading back

No more running and watching my back
Waiting to get busted for warrants I've had
I'm as free as an eagle that soars the sky
Soaking up the summer in three-dollar wine

Ah haaaa...three dollar wine

Well I hope my woman is waiting for me
But if she's gone that's the way it's meant to be
I've been packing the grass across border lines
Soaking up the summer in three-dollar wine

Yes I cleaned up all of my warrants today
I'm free as an eagle and I'm on my way
I'm lying in the grass on the cross border line
Soaking up the summer in three dollar wine

Ah haaaa...three dollar wine

Whoo!!

(The ACTORS grouped around their tents cheer. The
PLAYWRIGHT puts a five-dollar bill in the MINSTREL'S
hat.)

PLAYWRIGHT

I never know if that does any good, giving these people cash. I don't even think he'll be
able to find three-dollar wine anymore. The cheapest bottle I can find now is ten bucks.

(The MINSTREL picks up the hat and the money and leaves.)

(An ACTOR picks up a sign that says GARY, puts it around their neck, and takes their place in centre stage. The ACTOR looks like they're on drugs, slurring their words, running their fingers through their hair, and rubbing their palms on their thighs constantly.)

GARY

My life right now? Well I've been in and out of drugs...continuously for the last 15 years...I think that's the reason why I am homeless...I ended up selling drugs to an undercover operator back in '98 and got four years for selling him morphine. I did ten transactions in six months, and I got four years in a penitentiary. So that was the end of my rig career after that.

I was born in Barrhead in 1967, third month, ninth day, March 9th...getting old...and I was brought up in Red Deer until my parents split up when I was eight years old, I ended up with my mom, going to different small towns, different boyfriends, abusive relationships, I've seen her go through a lot, My mom died here last (a few years ago), my stepfather died three months after her death. My Dad, (my real dad) is still alive, retired now.

It's just different for me being in Edmonton, because it's a bigger city and the people that are around me, you have to watch your back because ya know it's a small town...Edmonton seems like a big city, but it's actually a small town within a big city... I'm doing alright. I haven't been stabbed to death or anything over a cigarette or whatever...

PLAYWRIGHT

Stop. Stop it! He wasn't like this. He wasn't zoned out all the time. He spoke really matter-of-factly. This was his life. He was telling me about it. It was real. Get out of here and let somebody else try.

(The ACTORs in the waiting group shuffle around and look from one to the other. After a moment, one steps forward, and takes the sign that says GARY and their place at centre stage. The ACTOR speaks like an academic, crisply enunciating each word.)

New GARY

My dog has a bad reputation of biting people. He's been like that since I've owned him, nine years. He's a uhhh...a shih tzu pug with an attitude. He's black and white, looks like an orca, he looks like a killer whale kind of markings. He's got a reputation downtown. Somebody had a drug debt up in Smith, Alberta and they ended up taking him as a puppy for payment...and I ended up keeping him. He was given to me by a girl that was going out with one of these gang members. She ended up giving me the dog, and I've had him for almost ten years now. Yeah, he's over-protective, he's got a bad reputation. Everybody asks about my dog, they don't ask about me...I dunno...

Back in '98. I was living with a girl that was working in the bar scene. She ended up getting me on meth. I started smoking meth the first time back in 1985...for the first time...I was using it for working, because I'd work long hours and I'd do a line, I guess, or a bump or whatever, and I'd be good for another eight hours. That's how I ended up starting using it, because of work, eh, and overtime. It just helped me to get energy. It motivated me. There's no other way of using it. If I didn't need it to work, I wouldn't use it.

PLAYWRIGHT

Are you even trying to be believable? Stop it! Let somebody else have a try.

(The ACTORs in the waiting group look at each other again. One steps forward and takes the sign that says GARY and their place at centre stage. This ACTOR reads like a caring, engaged human.)

Newest GARY

She was a drug addict when I first met her, smoking crack cocaine. She was turning tricks downtown here in Edmonton. She came to me as a friend and later on we became more than friends. It was kind of odd having sex with a prostitute and not paying for it, so I ended up going out with her for like 12 years, and she worked the street for 18.

We were smoking crack cocaine for about four years. Most of that we were homeless, she was working the street, I couldn't work, because living in tents, how do you shower for the next day. People look at you. I'm dishevelled because someone stole my razor and I haven't shaved for so long I look like a savage to some people downtown. I'm not a bad person, I don't sell drugs, I don't break into people's houses...

It makes me feel good talking, because it kind of lets out a little bit what I've had pent up. A lot of people don't like to talk about jail, a lot of people don't like talking about the street. The more I talk about it. . . I've got, (what-do-you-call-it), an ulcer from all the worry over the years. I've got stomach pains, but when I talk about things and let it out, it seems like my health gets better, for some reason.

Life is very fragile, very fragile. One day you're here, one day... just like when you're working the rigs, you don't know if you're going to come home one day.

(The ACTOR playing GARY stops and looks to the
PLAYWRIGHT, who is smiling and nodding.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Good, good job. Thank you.

(The ACTOR playing GARY takes the sign, puts it down, and
joins the others.)

PLAYWRIGHT

My parents never did drugs, or drank, but my brothers and I did. We got into a lot of trouble when we were teenagers. I don't know how that works, when you have good

parents and wild children. Maybe it was just the times, or the place. Growing up in the country there wasn't a lot to do, so we drove around with our friends and drank and smoked pot. That was our recreation. Recreational drugs, right? My mom said that there were lots of nights when she used to lay awake waiting for us to get home, and that she used to pray for us. Not that we'd be saved or turned religious. Just that we'd survive our own stupidity and turn into good people that did some kind of good in the world.

(Some of the ACTORS carry a table onto the stage and flip over a sign that says COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION. The PLAYWRIGHT considers them.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Great. That's the last thing I fucking need.

(The actor wearing the LINDA DUMONT sign reads from her table.)

LINDA DUMONT

Picking on the little guys. January 1995.

Premier Klein recently received an award for his valiant efforts fighting the provincial debt. He had a great strategy. Choose an adversary who is weak, without advocacy, and already unpopular. Add a smear campaign, and wind up a hero.

(As LINDA DUMONT reads one of the ACTORS brings a case of beer to the encampment and shares.)

The welfare recipient is the perfect scapegoat. An emphasis on welfare scams ensures support from the taxpayers, whose money is being stolen, as some will go to great lengths to point out. If the statistics on the national debt are in any way related to those for the province, hacking away at social programs is saving Klein's much-vaunted thousands while billions slide by unheeded.

Linda Dumont, for Our Voice

PLAYWRIGHT

Really, you're blaming Ralph Klein? That's too easy. The man was a drunk.

(The ACTORS drinking beer together clink their bottles together and shout out "To Ralph!")

PLAYWRIGHT

Seriously though, the man didn't have a compassionate bone in his body. Ever. Straight as an arrow. That's why people liked him, he didn't talk like the rest of the politicians.

(An actor with a sign that reads "HOMELESSNESS NEWS" calls out.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Lack of social housing a crisis! Horrific provincial cuts to funding are making the homeless situation worse! Hear all about it! Mentally ill people are left helpless and alone!

(The actor approaches the PLAYWRIGHT and shakes a newspaper at him.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

This is no shit. Look at the article in the Edmonton Journal for April 18, 1995. It's real. Do you know what else? They don't even know how many homeless people there are in Edmonton. Nobody is counting us! We're not even worth being counted. They count everybody else, the fuckers. Truck drivers. High school graduates. Theatre audience members. They count *everybody*. But not us.

PLAYWRIGHT

(Taking the article and reading it.) You're making it sound more sensational than it is. Stick to the facts as reported. Do it!

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

(Drily.) Alderman Tooker Gomberg calls lack of social housing a crisis. Nine out of fifteen social agencies agree that provincial policy is not helping but note other contributing factors like mental health. Agencies state they say they don't have the resources to do a homeless count.

PLAYWRIGHT

That's better.

(HOMELESSNESS NEWS bows deeply before the PLAYWRIGHT, his hand across his chest, and then leaves. The ACTORS in their encampment gather blankets and other warm things to wrap themselves in. They set up a makeshift fire. The PLAYWRIGHT stands watching them impatiently. The ACTORS ignore him.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Will one of you guys get out here?

(The ACTORS look at him, at each other. They shake their heads.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Oh come on. That's what you're here for. I promise I won't replace you or yell at you, okay? You can act the part however you like. Just, have some respect, you know?

(One of the ACTORS picks up a sign that says JAMES, puts it around their neck, and takes their place in centre stage.)

JAMES

I am 26 years old. I started coming onto the streets when I was 16 or 17 years old. I guess I didn't take life as serious as possible - I just was always a party animal and everything. I was in foster care. My dad was a bus driver and my mom stayed home. Big family of fosters. Topped off she had her kids, it was a big giant family.

I was partying with my friends for a couple of weeks. My family moved and forgot to tell me. At the time I was like, "What, they abandoned me?" But no matter what, they're still my parents, ya know? they are always going to be my mom and dad. I was lucky to have a foster home.

(The ACTORS are having a party.)

I was in Wetaskiwin. Ya, I walked all the way to Edmonton. I wasted a pair of shoes. I went straight to Hope Mission because I said, well I'm going to be homeless. I met this girl named Danielle. Our first argument was the sweater I was wearing. It was a red sweater and she said it was pink. I said, no it's red. She said, no your sweater's pink bro, and then I'm like, no it's red. Then we get into this big huge argument over if the sweater was red or pink. It was funny. Last time I spoke to her we agreed that it was a salmon shirt. She's one of my besties.

I had housing help me find a place. The first month was normal... Then the wrong person comes in and tries to take over your house. You can't one hundred percent focus on it, because there's always drugs flying in your face and everything, ya know? But losing that place was probably one of the best things and the best lessons I've ever had.

Sometimes that's how you get into doing drugs, because you're always walking around. You're like fuck I don't want to sleep at the shelter because the shelter is shitty and sometimes you don't get along with staff and stuff. Then next thing you know, drugs come into the picture when you're partying and then you get relying on that and then you have to figure out, how am I going to get my money, or how am I going to get this? Sometimes... I know friends that actually went out hooking for their shit, and lucky for me I never got to that situation.

(Three ACTORS act out the scene of a YOUNG MAN getting beaten and robbed by two COPS.)

Some police officers are dirty as fuck. Sometimes when you're homeless, they'll just arrest you for being you, or they'll beat the shit out of you in a back alley. Ya. One time I remember walking down with \$40 in my pocket and I go to pick up another bottle when I'm half cut. Police officers told me, "Why the fuck am I roaming the fuckin Whyte Ave streets?" Then I got my ass kicked, got the \$40 taken away, and woke up in hospital. The police officers said, "Oh ya, we found this guy layed out in the fuckin alley". All I remember is getting my ass kicked by two police officers because I was being drunk. I was around 18, 19 or 20.

When you're too used to one lifestyle, entrenched in that lifestyle it's like a vacation from your real life, ya know? Sometimes you don't like dealing with your life. You're like, "Oh fuck, what can I do to escape this?" let's go to the first thing that comes to my mind a bottle of alcohol or a drug of choice. You just light it up or take your first sip and it's like, "I'm back on vacation. oh god, reality is gone," ya know?

(The ACTOR playing JAMES acknowledges the beating taking place by walking toward it. The COPS leave. The beaten YOUNG MAN lays on the ground.)

I was a little troublemaker. I was always pushing people's buttons or testing people, ya know? I was like, "Oh you think you know me, you think you understand me?" Just wait until I do this or just wait until I do that.

Then I met Cory at CHEW. Cory helped me out with basically directing me to the right path of getting my shit together. He was always checking up on me when I was acting up or being bad. They accept us for who we are, but they focus on trying to get us housing. If we have a bad day, they're there to talk to. They're like family here. To me, you have your family that you grew up with and then on the streets you have your street family. That's how you call family, ya know? When we come here to CHEW we look at each other as family brothers and sisters we're that close, and I wouldn't change this place to

anything else. It's a good home.

(The actors takes the sign that says JAMES off his neck, lays it on the ground by the beaten young man, and walks away. The other ACTORS clean up the beaten young man and help him to his feet. A young woman places a salmon-coloured sweater over his shoulders as they leave.)

(The PLAYWRIGHT picks up the JAMES sign and puts it with the SANDRA sign.)

PLAYWRIGHT

That's how you call family, ya know? Another 750 words, another five-minute sketch of an entire life. He was 27 in 2020. So he would be 17 in 2010. Did you know that he was chosen by his school to run with the Olympic torch? Chosen out of hundreds, he said. Go figure.

(An ACTOR has taken a seat on the COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION TABLE and now talks.)

COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION

I've got a different idea about these guys. The guy I help downtown there he doesn't want to take the apartment they offered him because he can't go smoke his crack every time he wants to. He has to stick to rules. He could be living like a king there but he just doesn't want to do it.

PLAYWRIGHT

So you're generalizing, you know one person who's homeless and you think every other person who suffers from housing insecurity is just like him. What about if I generalized, and said that every person who has an opinion about homelessness who hasn't engaged with the issue or the problem in any substantive way is an asshole?

(An ACTOR picks up a sign that says POLITICIAN IN ACTION and speaks like he's addressing the legislature.)

POLITICIAN IN ACTION

Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to that is absolutely not. What we have stated and what I stated yesterday was that there is a percentage of people who are homeless who choose to be homeless. Mr. Speaker, I have another study here that states that actual studies across North America have shown that no more than 5 percent of homeless people choose to live on a sustained basis on the street. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Leader of the Opposition would take time to look at that study and actually find out what it was saying, he would see that in the study they looked at 110 people. Of those 110 people there were two people who were classified as people who were homeless who chose to be homeless. If the Liberal opposition just wants to throw it out and ignore these people, if they don't want to try and help them, then go ahead.

Dr. Lyle Oberg - Hansard May 28, 1997

Afternoon Sitting

(Some ACTORs bring on some tables on one side of the stage, and start to set up a sandwich and soup kitchen. Other ACTORs near the tents line up their empty bottles in a row, and go to stand in the lineup for food.)

(The actor wearing the LINDA DUMONT sign reads from her table.)

LINDA DUMONT

The Mustard Seed Street Church in Edmonton. At noon, people line up for a meal of soup, a bun and coffee. The week before the welfare checks are issued, the line up stretches across the room and spills onto the stairway to the front door. In 1997, eighty thousand hot meals were served. A clothing bank upstairs offers not only clothes but housewares in the form of dishes, pots, bedding, and other small items. These are in great

demand since the cutbacks of 1993, when social assistance cut back on money for setting up house. All items are donated.

Our Voice, October 1998, Linda Dumont

(The LINDA DUMONT character walks over to help serve sandwiches and soup. As they gather the MINSTREL comes on, puts down his cap, and starts to play.)

THE MINSTREL

I walked for miles, down by the river
Feeling everything, just turns to coal
But there's this eagle, that keeps on flyin'
And by the sound of those wings he's gently gonna' guide me on

Oh no no now
I can't see his body or the colour of his eyes
But I know he's always with me
By this feeling I carry, that I carry deep down inside

(The ACTORs at the soup kitchen table start to dance and form an impromptu dance party.)

THE MINSTREL

I hit the bottom, feeling I wouldn't come back
Everything I touched just turns to black
Like stuff from a mountain, like a crumbling stone
But by the sound of those wings, he's gently gonna' guide me on

Oh no
I can't see his body or the colour of his eyes
But I know he's always with me

By this feeling I carry, that I carry deep down inside

I had a broken heart that needed healin' for pain
There was just one cure it was to see you again
Having you in my arms is where I needed to be
So by the sound of those wings, you gently come back to me

Oh no
I can't see his body or the colour of his eyes
But I know he's always with me
By this feeling I carry, that I carry deep down inside

(Off to one side of the stage by herself, an ACTOR with a sign around her neck that says MARIA starts to talk. As she talks a few ACTORS pick up clipboards and pens, and start to move around the other ACTORS, stopping at each one to ask them questions and write down the answers.)

MARIA

I'm forty-three. Now I'm living in Edmonton and I work housekeeping in a nursing home. Well it's my first job in so many years. I feel so happy. I feel like um, I feel like important, I feel like my name is on the cheque, so that is good. I feel so happy about that. And I'm learning something new in my life, share with more people, and sometimes when I spoke with the residents, you feel like they need love and you feel like if you say any words nice, they feel happy.

When I was in Colombia my childhood was so in bad condition. We had to go to the river to take a shower. I have memory about this. My mom doesn't have a house, so she put sticks, and cover with plastic. We sleep on the ground just with cover of plants and things like that. We ate one time a day, just at night. She buy the skin for the chicken; it's very cheap. She fry, and that's the food.

ACTOR (with clipboard)

Do you have a place to sleep tonight?

ACTOR (without clipboard)

What is it to you? Do you have a place to sleep tonight?

ACTOR (with clipboard)

We're just trying to determine how many people are homeless in Edmonton right now.
To help us deliver services.

ACTOR (without clipboard)

Fuck off.

(MARIA keeps talking, ignored by everyone on stage.)

MARIA

I ended up in an orphanage. the only place where I feel safe was when I was in the orphanage. First I moved from Colombia to USA. When I was there in USA, it was so hard. If you are illegal, you cannot, you are not allowed to rent a house or apartment, because you don't have papers. Always you're scared. Always I keep a knife. sometimes I didn't eat. It's the same in New York. When I moved to New York I stayed one year without a job. I have a friend in Colombia, her husband was in New York. He made a small place to sleep. So every morning I left, I go out looking for a job. When I go to the restaurants, They look at me, well you don't speak English, you don't do this, you don't have papers. So every morning I go out, and when I came again his house he say, Zonia, do you eat? I said, yes. Oh my god, I was so hungry. I said yes because I feel terrible. I live there, no pay, so I feel terrible. So I said, yes. I'm a liar. One year like that. When you are in that situation, you don't want to wake up. When you wake up you say, what can I do today?

(The ACTORS are gathered back together again in their encampment, eating and talking. They now have camp chairs and look quite comfortable. The PLAYWRIGHT has joined them but sits off to one side and a little ways away.)

PLAYWRIGHT

I think I was just an idiot when I was young. I used to do stupid shit like get drunk and drive my car down country roads as fast as I could go. I got caught a few times. Thrown in jail overnight at least twice. Wrecked a couple cars. Hurt a couple friends. I wish I had been smart enough to see what booze and drugs was doing to me. But I wasn't.

(The ACTORS start to bring out more blankets and sleeping bags to keep themselves warm. Some of them begin to set up more tents.)

MARIA

Well my brother told me one day, in Canada people are more human than United States. I find three coins – one big, one medium and one small. When I saw, I think in my mind that it is the face of the queen. So I say, this is a sign, so I had to go there. I took the bus from Buffalo. Then I take taxi to the cross. Then the police stopped us. We sleep one night on the floor in the Red Cross, and the next day they move us to the refugee house. Eating, the bathroom, the washroom, everything, we had to share everything. Oh my god, it's terrible. If you take a spot for sitting and they want that spot, they took it. They don't care. It's so scary. Then I move here and I was looking for a place to live again. One day I was cry, cry in City Centre. I was sitting and I say, oh my god you have to show me something. I cry because I want an apartment and I don't have bills, I don't have people know me. I don't have nothing. So that's when I called the lady and say, you know, you have to help me, because I don't know what can I do. Boyle Street helped. Now in here I feel like this is my place. I don't want to move from here because I don't want to have more hard time. The abuse and the suffering that I experienced in Colombia I am aware that it happened long time ago and I know no one is giving letters or threatening but I

know that these people are still there if I go back so it will be a torture and suffering for me.

(The ACTOR with the MARIA sign puts down her sign and leaves. The ACTORS in the encampment have settled down to sleep. The soup kitchen tables are left standing, with some waste left out. The HOMELESSNESS NEWS crier calls out.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Homeless man loses legs! Homeless man loses legs! Hear all about it! Right here on the street!

PLAYWRIGHT

What are you talking about? Let me see that.

(The HOMELESSNESS NEWS passes a newspaper to the PLAYWRIGHT, who reads it, and hands it back.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Can't pick that apart, can you? The poor bastard has his legs frozen off, and then he's sleeping in the park and somebody steals his prosthetic legs. Now that's bad luck for you, right?

(LINDA DUMONT is back at her desk, and reads.)

LINDA DUMONT

Welfare keeps her hungry. The struggle to break free and survive.

As a single parent, she had to turn to Social Services, now known as Alberta Human Resources and Employment (welfare), after her husband suffered a massive heart attack. Although the couple had separated, he continued to support the family until his illness. "They let him on welfare, no problem," said Jenna. "But I had to beg for it. If I didn't have a sick child, (one of her daughters is asthmatic) I wouldn't have had a chance. "I was stuck in an impoverished situation. You never have any extra money. You pay the rent

and the bills but there's never any money for food. The juggling you have to do to survive - it's exhausting." For Jenna the first two years were the most difficult. She skipped so many meals so her children could eat that she wound up in the hospital suffering from anorexia. Her weight had dropped to 99 pounds.

Linda Dumont for Our Voice March 2000

(The PLAYWRIGHT remains awake on the outskirts of the encampment. He stands, walks around the encampment, then past the soup kitchen area.)

PLAYWRIGHT

I was lucky. I had a family that always took me back in when I needed it. Of course, it was a farm, and whenever I went home I got to work for the privilege of having a room and board. Shovelling pig shit. Shovelling grain. Building fences and barns. It wasn't exactly uplifting work, but still. I was able to run home enough times that by the time I figured out what I wanted to do I had the maturity to do it.

(Some ACTORS start to carry mats onto a separate part of the stage and lay them out a few feet apart. Some of the ACTORS from the encampment get up, and walk over to the place with the mats. They are met by other ACTORS with clipboards who take their names and other information before allowing them in to sleep on a mat.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Alberta Government spends \$177,000 to fund 56 more mats for homeless shelters this winter! Minister Oberg says that if they need more room the George Spady Centre can clear out their coffee room for the night!

(An ACTOR picks up a sign that reads POLITICIAN IN ACTION.)

POLITICIAN IN ACTION

The Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker...also fails the homeless. Instead of directing dollars to community agencies to build affordable housing, the government keeps looking for private-sector solutions in an area where there's a clear-cut case of market failure. The real estate market serves 80 percent of the housing market well but not the bottom 20 percent. Without government leadership and involvement the ranks of Alberta's homeless will continue to grow.

Dr. Raj Pannu - Hansard February 23, 2000, Evening Sitting Page 81

(A different ACTOR takes the same sign)

POLITICIAN IN ACTION

I think that when June Callwood two years ago came to the housing conference in this city, she made the observation after hearing the Minister of Municipal Affairs that the private sector will provide low-cost affordable housing when pigs can fly. When pigs can fly, Mr. Speaker. I think June Callwood is absolutely bang on. I think she's right. What we look for in the throne speech is something more than simply vague talk about partnerships.

Mr. Dickson - Hansard February 23, 2000, Evening Sitting

(As the ACTORS are sleeping on the mats, a FIGURE stumbles in, displaying symptoms of intoxication. The FIGURE looks around.)

FIGURE

Where's my goddamn sign!

(Somebody hands him a sign that says THE HONOURABLE RALPH KLEIN, M.L.A. PREMIER OF THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA.)

PREMIER

Heh heh. Right! Where's my people? Where's the people of Alberta? Hey, wake up! Goddamn bums. What're you doin' sleepin'? It's Christmas! Merry Christmas! Wanna' present? Get a job! Eh, it's useless talkin' to you people. Here, have some money.

(The PREMIER throws some bills and coins on the ACTORS who are cowering on their mats or trying to stay out of his way, and stumbles out. The ACTORS quickly scramble to pick up the money, then try to go back to sleep.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Edmonton Journal letters to the editor show Albertan's outrage at Premier Klein's late night visit to homeless shelter! They say it's a "jarring symbol of what's wrong with Alberta!" The man's a lunatic! A belligerent ruffian dancing on the graves of the poor! A megalomaniac imbecile adrift in the vapours of his own drunken creation!

PLAYWRIGHT

Hey! Cut it out. The man's not around any more to defend himself. The King is dead. Don't speak ill of him.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

I'm getting tired of you telling me what I can say or can't say. Who the hell do you think you are? Do you think you own this scrapheap just because you sit behind a keyboard and arrange some letters on a paper? This is the real world and I can interpret it the way I want to. So just shut the fuck up.

PLAYWRIGHT

You're just an actor. You can't say whatever you want. You have to say what I want you to.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Listen to you talk. You make up things for other people to say all the time. You're doing it now. So what makes you so special that you get to filter all this stuff through your imagination and then spit it out and pretend other people have to listen. You know what you are, you're a vampire, that's what you are. You just suck up other peoples' lives and words and use them to make you live forever. You're sick.

PLAYWRIGHT

But I'm not doing that. I'm relying on the verbatim words of the people themselves. Of the homeless people, of the politicians, of the news media. It's their words.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

And who's arranging them? Who's putting them in order? It's you. You. You're responsible for this.

(The HOMELESSNESS NEWS actor gives him the finger, and leaves. One of the ACTORS in the encampment speaks picks up a sign that says ACADEMIC and walks around the stage as if lecturing a class.)

ACTOR

The author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and re-composition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion... It would be pure romanticism, however, to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, pages 221 and 222, "What is An Author", Michel Foucault, the New Press, New York, 1988.

PLAYWRIGHT

(For a moment very confused.) I didn't tell you to say that. (Looking around.) Can we get on with this? The audience is going to be pissed. Everybody? Right? Right. (Focusing himself.) I was in my early forties when Ralph did his drunken visit to the Herb Jamieson Centre. I hadn't thought too much before that about the province I lived in. I guess I always thought Alberta was a great place, a fair place, you know? After Ralph's visit I thought, phew, he's a goner. I thought nobody would put up with somebody like that as premier. But do you know what? His popularity rating actually went up. He gave a little half-assed apology, confessed to having a drinking problem, and his popularity rating *went up*. I wondered what the hell was going on. And then I started to read up on our history. Residential schools, Ukrainian Internment Camps, the Sexual Sterilization Act, Bible Bill Aberhart and his Branding Irons of the Anti-Christ, Japanese Internment Camps, the Sixties Scoop...the list goes on, and I couldn't really feel comfortable being proud of being an Albertan anymore.

(Some of the ACTORS sleeping on the mats wake up, sneak over, and steal the shoes of other ACTORS before clearing out. Other ACTORS enter and start to shake everyone else awake, and hurry them out. The ACTORS without shoes look around, then refuse to leave, pointing to their feet. After a moment or two some of the other ACTORS retrieve some plastic bags from the garbage by the soup kitchen tables, and give them to the ACTORS without shoes, who wrap up their feet, and leave. Everywhere there is activity. Some ACTORS are setting up the soup and sandwich table again. Some ACTORS are setting up more and better tents. LINDA DUMONT is writing, and stands up to display a newspaper, the Edmonton Street News.)

LINDA DUMONT

Edmonton Street News is starting with nothing but the firm belief that there is a need for grassroots advocacy journalism. It is the culmination of ten years of learning about street newspapers from all different angles, including that of running a volunteer street ministry. I still serve soup, but I see the need of the people on the street as extending far beyond having a free meal. And they have become my family and my friends. Linda Dumont in Volume 1, Issue 1, November 2003.

(Another ACTOR takes the paper, and reads.)

ACTOR

There can never, in my mind, be too many street newspapers. There can never be too much public debate. There can never be too much challenging of perceptions or struggling over issues. There can, however, quite easily in fact, be too little. There can be too much silence and too much denial about what that silence is costing not just our fellow human beings, but ourselves. It is in the interest of fostering the former, and overcoming the latter that Edmonton Street News was created. Natasha Laurence in Volume 1, Issue 1, November 2003

(The two shake hands. The HOMELESSNESS NEWS character enters.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Number of homeless on the increase! Eight hundred thirty-six in 1999! One thousand, nine hundred fifteen in 2002! Problem stretches well beyond the inner city! Housing Trust Fund executive director says that there are three to four hundred people living in the river valley! Edmonton Journal Sunday October 24, 2004! (The HOMELESSNESS NEWS character stops by the PLAYWRIGHT.) Got anything to say?

PLAYWRIGHT

No. What can I say? I don't know anything.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Ah, poor little privileged Alberta boy. He found out that Alberta is home to selfish, self-obsessed people blind to everyone else's problems but their own. Just like everywhere else in the world. That's not a problem boy! That's a bonus to find that out! And you're not even dead yet.

(An ACTOR picks up a sign that says NEIL and takes centre stage. As he speaks, the ACTORS on stage set up tableaus with their own bodies showing a simulation of what he's saying. They move around frantically to get set up, and then freeze for a minute in the tableau before moving to the next one.)

NEIL

So homelessness is like a disease that keeps coming back to you it seems. You seem to be homeless for a stretch and then you get on your feet, then something else happens and poof you're homeless again. I'd say I've been homeless ten times in my life. I was first homeless when I was 12. My father died in a hunting accident, and a month later my whole family was in Edmonton, split up in different places. My last stint of homelessness was just two years ago... I'm 60 now, it was minus 40, and my god sleeping down in the LRT...you get that cold air coming in from the tunnels, you've got the noise of the trains 'til 2 o'clock in the morning, the cement's cold...

(The ACTORS have moved quickly around the stage, clearing a spot on the stage floor, and then laying down, shivering. The sound of a loud LRT train coming into a station freezes them in spot.)

Once you're on the street the only friends you have are homeless people that are showing you the ropes, or you're not going to last long, and so you start drinking with them and doing stupid stuff like drugs with them. I was an addict, I drank. I didn't think I'd live

this long ...I got into some heavy drug addiction: intravenous drugs, crack cocaine, speed. What made me quit drugs is because my sister died.

A lot of these homeless people, they're not lazy people. People think they're bums. They're not bums, they're human just like me and you. They're out all night working, picking bottles to cash in the next day so they can go for a burger or get a pack of smokes or have a nice cool beer, sit in the sun and talk to their friends. You look at the bottle depot in the morning just over here and see the lineup of guys with bags and bags on their back from doing it all night.

(The ACTORS have moved quickly around the stage, gathering up bags and bags of bottles. They stand in line in front of an imaginary doorway and wait.)

Even when you're in a shelter, it's not a home. You're housed with people that are total strangers. You don't know if you're going to wake up and your wallet's still there, you don't know if stuff's going to be stolen. I know a lot of guys who woke up and their shoes would be gone, or their jacket was gone, and nothing to wear. You can wake up in the morning and the person beside you is dead.

(The ACTORS in the bottle depot lineup start telling jokes. The laugh loudly after each one.)

ACTOR

Hey, what's the best part about dating a homeless person? You don't have to drive them home after the date.

ACTOR

You know Sally right? She's pretty. We were sitting having a beer together. I asked her if I could take her home, and she said "Yes please!". She was real happy, right up until I walked away with her cardboard box and sleeping bag.

NEIL

Homelessness is not easy – looking for food, looking for clothing, you smell. A lot of these homeless people would love to be clean and try to find a job. But who's going to hire you when you're all scruffed up, your clothes are dirty, and you have no place to wash them. The stereotyping is what gets to people...Do you see a homeless person going in a fucking bank with a gun? No, they're in a food lineup, because they're hungry. They're not interested in a million dollars, they just want a sandwich.

Part of that time, I was actually homeless but working. You can be a working homeless, right? I worked in eight different departments at the Bissell Centre. I did food services, I did drop-in, I did employment services. I'll never forget the Sawmill Restaurant, Tom Goodchild's. He used to do a meal with the Bissell Centre every year. He called it the Forgotten Feast. So what he meant by that is, it was the people society forgot about, and that was a good feast he used to put on. I'll never forget those words, the Forgotten Feast, because they're just people society forgot about and wants nothing to do with.

ACTOR

Knock knock!

OTHER ACTORS

We don't have any fucking doors!

ACTOR

How many politicians does it take to change a lightbulb? One to change it, and another one to change it back again.

ACTOR

How many politicians does it take to invest in affordable housing? One to invest, and one to change their minds about it and take the money away.

NEIL

So I've been on both sides of the fence right? – homeless, then doing good, then homeless again, and doing good. That's what I do now, because I still have a feeling for them. Yeah. I'm not going to stop. I can't turn my back, I stick up for homeless people. If

I see them roughing up somebody I'll say, hey man, c'mon, don't you have something better to do, leave them alone. Then that's when I get roughed up. I've still got bruises from the last time. That's from fingers from a "peace officer". You should see them – it was a lot worse.

I'm in heaven right now, sir. I'm lucky enough to have this view in the morning of the river valley, because my room faces that way.

There's no end to it. In a sense I'm still one of them, they're just not as lucky as I am right now.

(The LINDA DUMONT character has been sitting and working at her table continuously. She stands up and reads.)

LINDA DUMONT

May 20, a group of southside homeless people were rounded up by the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and retained in the police van 'sweatbox' for several hours before being dumped at the north end of the city. While they were stranded there, other EPS constables helped them out and drove them to the George Spady Centre downtown. Linda Dumont for Edmonton Street News, Volume 2, Issue 7, 2005.

(The MINSTREL enters, sets up his busker's hat, and starts to sing.)

MINSTREL

Lady you say that you know me
Tell me you got me all figured out
You know where I've been and what I live for
It took my time to figure out, what it's about

Lady you told me that you could change me
Change my life in a special way
No more heartache no more hiding
And I put my faith in what you said, what you said

Lady you tell me now you love me
Say you'll never let me down
Well I'm so happy you let me love you
You put my feet back on the ground, oh what I found
Listen!
Lady now I can hear the ocean
And I can feel the sand between my toes
Watch me love you now forever
We need each other now I know, let it grow

(Everyone on stage sings the following verse together.)

EVERYONE TOGETHER

Lady you say that you know me
Tell me you got me all figured out
You know where I've been and what I live for
It took me time to figure out, what it's about.

PLAYWRIGHT

I wrote a play with a homeless character. In the play this homeless older man kept having nightmares about Ralph Klein hovering over him like a great angel of death and shouting at him to get a job. His son is a painter and tries to get the father to paint a picture of the winged angel of death to exorcise him. It was a cute play, but afterwards somebody chided me for not knowing anything about homelessness. They were right.

(The PLAYWRIGHT walks up to the table where LINDA DUMONT is working. She gives him a notepad and a pen. The PLAYWRIGHT starts to sit down with the ACTORS one-on-one, interviewing them and writing notes on his notepad.)

(The LINDA DUMONT character stands and reads.)

LINDA DUMONT

Campers of Tent City Evicted August 15. Although Global Television reported that all campers had a safe, secure place to sleep that night, the closure of Edmonton's Tent City September 15th left a number of people with no alternative but to set up camps in the river valley or some other area of they city. Others were to be housed in beds at the women's shelter, the Hope Mission, the Herb Jamieson Centre, in hotels, or into temporary tenancy at Urban Manor shelter. Seven people were given tickets out of Edmonton when they indicated that they had family or friends to support them elsewhere. The population had dwindled from nearly 200 in June to 25 the last day, and of those 200 about 58 were reported to have found housing. Linda Dumont, Edmonton Street News, Volume 4, Issue 10, 2007.

(An ACTOR picks up the sign of the ACADEMIC and lectures the assembled actors.)

ACADEMIC

Everyday encounters with homelessness perpetuate discourses of the Other and dysfunctionality, bolstering the notion that homelessness is 'out of joint' in relation to the spatial and aesthetic logic of capital and capitalism. In other words, the 'sight' and 'scene' of homelessness appear as stains and blights on the city space, whilst the infiltration of capital in public space appears customary and common sense. See Gerrard and Farrugia, The 'lamentable sight' of homelessness and the society of the spectacle, Urban Studies, 2015.

PLAYWRIGHT

I met a man when I was interviewing vendors for Alberta Street News. He came to Edmonton with his family from northern Alberta when he was a kid. He remembered that they didn't do anything but watch TV until somebody taught them how to survive in the

city. It wasn't a social worker that came to help them find a school and work. It was friends, who showed them to pick bottles and panhandle. It was friends who took them downtown to meet others who survived the same way.

LINDA DUMONT

The Alberta Street News community has been saddened by the death of another vendor in January - Victor Robillard, who was featured on the cover of our November issue. Victor began selling the paper in 2004. He worked with his brother, Chris, outside the Strathcona Farmer's Market on Saturdays, as well as in other vending spots. Linda Dumont, Alberta Street News, February 2012.

PLAYWRIGHT

He was younger than me.

(An ACTOR picks up the sign of the TIRELESS
ADVOCATE.)

TIRELESS ADVOCATE

My push or my inside reality to keep working on these things, lack of results as there might be after decades of work...underneath it all, in my case, I grew up in a strongly Christian faith oriented family and environment and just about the biggest single idea there is this idea of justice, which literally means things being in the right arrangement, in correct balance, so I just can't not point out or do something about it when things are unjust, when they're so tipped that one person or one little group gets so much compared to another it just...really I live infuriated inside so much of the time that people would allow that to be true.

(On one side of the stage, a group of ACTORS starts to clear an area. They put up a big sign: "New 60-unit affordable housing complex coming soon!". They stand back and clap and cheer.

Another group of ACTORS take up their places behind the COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION and hold up signs that say “We’re not NIMBY but we don’t want you anyway.” “What kind of people are going to live there?” “What about my children?” “You haven’t given us enough information.” “There’s no bus stop close by.” The two groups start to chant and shout slogans at each other, one shouting “We are not NIMBY” and the other shouting “Homes for all!” The HOMELESSNESS NEWS character is watching all this take place. The PLAYWRIGHT approaches him.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Aren’t you going to report on this? It’s an important story.

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Oh, is this you telling me what to say again? I know it’s an important story. I’m just trying to figure out how to report it. It’s not easy, you know? Both sides have some very good points, and I don’t want to come down on one side or the other. I want it to be balanced and fair.

PLAYWRIGHT

Really? Now you’re pretending you’re a journalist? Where in the script did you get this?

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

What business of it is yours? I’m just trying to grow and understand things better. Isn’t that what I’m supposed to be doing, as a human being?

PLAYWRIGHT

I guess so.

(The two groups of ACTORS shouting at each other change sides of the stage, and each group dismantles and clears off the signage and tables of the other, leaving both areas empty. Immediately, other ACTORS come in and fill those spaces with tents, chairs, and other materials for camping.)

(An ACTOR picks up sign that says PIHPIHCIW and takes her place in centre stage.)

PIHPIHCIW

I know in my life it's been back and forth, back and forth. So many problems come in your life. Sometimes you wanna run, sometimes you wanna face them, sometimes you wanna put them aside for later because you can't handle them right away. That goes with healing, a lot of healing.

I have grandsons, all grandsons. Four are still living, and I'm glad. I miss my grandsons. I don't see them very often.

I used to go all over to the States and dance with my kids. I'm a traditional dancer. I'd go all over – Connecticut, all the way to Albuquerque, New Mexico, everywhere like that. My sons were grass dancers and my daughters were jingle dancers. I wanted them to know that side of the culture, to be proud of who they were. They're not just aboriginal, they're indigenous and their ancestors lived a life that people nowadays think is so hard. I felt good, good knowing that this is a part of me that I wanted for so long in my life, to get involved with my culture. They never talked about it at my house, at my grandmothers. They talked about it in secret, because of what was taught to them in residential school. I'm the third generation from that since it's come down. I felt good. I felt centered, I felt accepted for who I was.

(As she talks, ACTORS begin to congregate together. They pick up garbage, organize blankets and tarps, and build a small community.)

So nowadays where I am right now in the camp, my sons and daughters, now because my life has gone to shit (as they say) now they're trying to order me around, come to the house and babysit right now. They're trying to tell me who not to talk to and who to talk to. - - - What the heck? I've survived this long, if I haven't treated people with respect I'd be dead.

Because of being a victim of sexual assault since I was three, I've had to do a lot of street things to survive. One part of me I could just shut off. You don't feel it. It's so different, I can't really explain it, but that's the way I felt. I guess I wanted some kind of love from someone.

I know I did lots of things wrong with my kids. Now as they're older, they won't let me forget that. That's a part of their healing and my healing too. Right now they won't talk to me because I'm down at the camp. They say, you shouldn't be down there. Okay, get a place, but it's so hard to get a place. I can't believe it's so hard for me to get a place.

A lot of things happen in a person's life, especially when they're living homeless.

(Several of the ACTORS have set up a screening desk, where they take notes and fill out forms as other ACTORS sit with them and talk with them. The PLAYWRIGHT character watches them.)

PLAYWRIGHT

I wrote another play. This time I knew a bit more about the people and their situations on the street. The lead character was kind of a collage of the different people I'd interviewed. People who watched it seemed to like it. The lead character died in the end. It just seemed fitting at the time.

PIHPIHCIW (cont.)

That's one of the big things in the camp, is we help each other.

There's many ages and many races that live down here. We've come to live with one another, because we're in the same situation. We're not all drug addicts and alcoholics, we're not all doing that. So don't keep going by and yelling out your windows, get a job,

retards, and all this stuff. Why are they doing that? Let them come stay out there, let them come sleep with us on the ground, and they'll see how it is. We're not stupid people. We help each other because we're in the same boat.

A lot of people down there are suffering. A lot of people have cancer, have diabetes, have liver issues, have kidney issues, have a lot of issues.

(One of the ACTORS picks up a sign that reads:
"MUNICIPAL REPORTS" and reads.)

MUNICIPAL REPORTS

It is from the margins that we catch glimpses of different ways of living, surviving, thriving, caring, supporting, organizing, and governing. It is also from the margins that we can identify dominant norms and narratives, consider who they serve, and explore how the everyday people who make up a city can move towards a more just urban future, where rights and resources are turned into real capabilities and freedoms. Schulman; Sarah; Napier, Natalie; Schmitz, Nina; and Nieuwenhuis, Rochelle. "From House to Home to Wellbeing." Report published to inform the City of Edmonton's Housing Affordability Needs Assessment, August 2022.

PIHPIHCIW (cont.)

I always give thanks to the volunteers every day because they're volunteering their time to come down here to serve food. People that donate, I'll thank them for bringing donations. You need to always thank. You can't just take, take, take. That's a part of healing yourself too – giving back.

You think about all the young ones down there who are suffering, who don't have nobody. I always tell them they're not alone. We're not ever alone. Everybody has protectors. We're all related – our brothers and sisters that fly, the ones that swim, the ones that crawl and slither. They're all our brothers and sisters.

There is energy everywhere. This is mother earth. Somebody seen a coyote down by the riverbank. I said, just be careful if he's hungry. It's good to still have laughter, too.

There's lots of laughter down here. There's still violence, but you gotta make sure that you don't cause it. Everything you give out comes back to you.

That's Karma, and I believe that.

(The ACTOR with the PIHPIHCIW sign joins the others in the encampment. The sun swings through the sky, rising, shining, setting, showing several days of time. ACTORS in the camp go about daily routines, eating, drinking, sleeping, rising. The PLAYWRIGHT tries to join them but two of them walk him away from the encampment and force him into a chair. He tries to get up, but they tie him in place, and rejoin the others.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Hey! What's going on? (Everyone ignores him.) Am I here because you want me to be here or because I want me to be here?

(The MINSTREL comes back on, sets down his cap, and sings.)

MINSTREL

There's a picture in my mind that comes back to me
You're holding my hand and walking next to me
A peaceful touch is blowing in the wind
And I swear I see your shadow brushing through the trees
And I could hear your sweet voice calling me
If I could spin this world around, stop it where I please
If I could spin this world around I would spin you back to me
Right back to me
Right back to me

And the sun don't seem to shine on me like it did before

And I don't see those rainbows anymore
And at times I catch a teardrop that comes rolling from my eyes
I'm thinking of you, and I wonder why
If I could spin this world around, stop it where I please
If I could spin this world around, I would spin you back to me
Right back to me
Right back to me

And there's nights I stare into the moon, but the feeling's gone away
If you're not here beside me it's not the same
Oh there's times I catch that teardrop, that comes rolling from my eye
I'm just thinking of you again and I wonder why
If I could spin this world around, stop it where I please
If I could spin this world around, I would spin you back to me
Right back to me
Right back to me

(The MINSTREL puts down his guitar and goes to join the encampment. An ACTOR picks up a sign that says POLITICIAN IN ACTION and addresses the encampment like he's addressing the Legislature.)

POLITICIAN IN ACTION

Mr. Speaker, as you know, my riding borders Mill Creek as well as the North Saskatchewan River, and those have turned into veritable tent cities under this government's tenure. The houselessness numbers in Edmonton have skyrocketed over the last three years, and you only need to take a quick walk through either Mill Creek ravine or the North Saskatchewan River valley to come across dozens and dozens of people living in tents, freezing to death in tents, tonight. I have no doubt that there is going to be somebody who wakes up dead tomorrow because they cannot find a house right now, and

this government bears the lion's share of the blame because they haven't come to the table with money for supportive housing.

Mr. Bilous, Alberta Hansard December 6, 2022

(The POLITICIAN IN ACTION actor takes off the sign and tries to hand it to another ACTOR. No one will accept it, and after a few attempts they put the sign back on, try ineffectively to change their appearance through rearranging their hair or their clothing, and speak again.)

POLITICIAN IN ACTION

Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and(j), specifically the portion about using language that causes disruption within this Chamber. I recognize that there are tent cities in this city and that there are those who are going without homes, but to place the blame for the deaths of those who may be outside this evening, tragically, on this government squarely is totally inappropriate. That kind of language is not appropriate or should be used in this Chamber. I know that member knows better; this is not his first term as an MLA, a former minister of the Crown. I would appreciate if he kept his remarks in line with the decorum of this Chamber, not making such statements that the death of homeless people on the streets this evening is the fault of the government.

Mr. Schow, Alberta Hansard December 6, 2022

(The POLITICIAN IN ACTION puts down their sign and joins the others in the encampment. The HOMELESSNESS NEWS character comes back on.)

HOMELESSNESS NEWS

Nothing's changed, but things are worse! Hear it here first! Your first and best news source! Guaranteed just as accurate as any other news organization, big or small! Believe us! We've got nothing to lose and no advertising money to gain! Nothing's changed! Hear all about it!

(The HOMELESSNESS NEWS character puts down his sign and joins the encampment.)

(The LINDA DUMONT character stands and talks.)

LINDA DUMONT

Outbreak of Disease Among Inner City Homeless, by Linda Dumont

There are clusters of tents and makeshift shelters scattered on boulevards and empty lots throughout the inner city. Even in the coldest weather many people are still living outside sometimes clustering together in groups for warmth. One man even saved up money to buy a generator. Now to add to the misery there is an outbreak of shigella, a bacterial disease like food poisoning, spreading among the inner city homeless. The first reported case was on August 22, 2022. By the end of November there were 176 cases and 115 of them required hospitalization. The disease is spread through contact and unsanitary living conditions. Symptoms include a high fever, diarrhea, often bloody, severe intestinal cramping and dehydration. Alberta Street News, Issue 19, January/February 2023.

(The LINDA DUMONT character puts down her sign and joins the encampment.)

(The TIRELESS ADVOCATE character comes on and talks to the PLAYWRIGHT.)

TIRELESS ADVOCATE

Labelling people as “home-less” should make us shake to think, if that’s how you have to describe somebody, there’s something wrong with the rest of us who have homes that we would allow that to be true of some of our neighbours. Now it’s reached the state where even when people create some kind of shabby little inadequate unhealthy shelter to try to turn into a home because we want to keep our streets sightly, we officially come along with state resources and tear those places down around them.

(The TIRELESS ADVOCATE character puts down his sign and joins the encampment.)

(The ACTORS in the encampment are sitting together, sharing some beers, some food, and some laughter. The PLAYWRIGHT is still sitting off on his chair.)

PLAYWRIGHT

This isn't fair. You know that, right?

(The ACTORS in the encampment notice him. One by one, they stand and bring signs to hang around his neck. The signs read 'PRIVILEGED', 'WANKER', 'DILETTANTE', 'SHITHEAD', 'EATER OF OTHERS' LIVES.' The PLAYWRIGHT is in tears by the end.)

PLAYWRIGHT

I didn't try to be that way with this project. I thought I was being honest and transparent by how I chose the interview segments and dialogue for this. You know I used a theory from Cognitive Science to link the concepts and the monologues together? Did you know that? Do you know that I didn't make a penny with all the work I did gathering the interview material? I paid out of my own pocket in the end to have it done. Artists got paid. Interviewees got paid. I didn't. Doesn't that count for something?

(In the encampment, one of the ACTORS takes the ACADEMIC sign, puts it on and starts to lecture.)

ACADEMIC

The removal of the Author (one could talk here with Brecht of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage)...utterly transforms

the modern text...the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now – Roland Barthes, page 145, *The Death of the Author*.

(The ACADEMIC puts down their sign, unties the PLAYWRIGHT, and then rejoins the others.)

PLAYWRIGHT

Thank you for that. Thanks for untying me. (He takes the signs off his neck and puts them down, then starts to leave, but stops and turns.) You don't know how much relief I feel every time I go home after talking with people who don't have a home. And that makes me feel a little bit guilty. But mostly I just feel relieved, and grateful. I wish I could do more. I do.

(The PLAYWRIGHT leaves, and the people in the encampment stay where they are, talking, eating, drinking. After a moment or two, yellow lights begin to flash from off stage. Some of the encampment people react immediately, and hurriedly stuff their belongings into bags and carts. Others ignore it. A single ACTOR dressed in reflective clothing, with goggles, gloves, and hardhat pushes on a large garbage cart/tilt truck. The single ACTOR approaches the people in the encampment, reaches into a bag, and pulls out other reflective vests, hardhats, and goggles. After a few moments of consideration, some of the people in the encampment move over to the tilt truck operator, take the reflective clothing, hardhats, and goggles and put them on, ranging themselves beside the first ACTOR as WORKERS. The first WORKER now pulls out a couple police outfits – caps, jackets, and batons. Two more people from the encampment take that

clothing and put it on, ranging themselves behind the line of workers as POLICE. The encampment people and the WORKERS and POLICE form lines facing each other, creating a stand-off. One of the encampment people picks up a sign that says “BOOOOOOO” on it in large letters, and runs in front of the audience, gesturing frantically for the audience to respond. Some of the audience will. One of the POLICE responds by forcing the “BOOOOOO” sign-holder to lower it, and themselves holding up a sign that says “YAY!!! LAW AND ORDER!!!” and actively encouraging the audience to respond to that sign. Some of the audience perhaps will. The “BOOOOOO” sign-holder frees themselves and runs around to another part of the stage where they hold their sign up again. The POLICE actor pursues and holds their “YAY!!! LAW AND ORDER!!!” sign up in front of the other actor. They continue to pursue each other around the stage, attempting to gain audience support, each more frantically than the other, as the stage lights go down and the audience lights go up.)

END