

## **Quest for Communitas:**

Using the carnivalesque aesthetic to co-design a transformative rite of passage with high-school dropouts— a generative exploration.

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# ABSTRACT

Quest for Communitas:

Using the carnivalesque aesthetic to co-design a transformative rite of passage  
with high-school dropouts– a generative exploration.

Alexandre Franchi

The Province of Quebec has a staggering high school dropout rate of 19% for boys and 12% for girls. Often, efforts to help these young people are mostly focused on remedial school work. As such, they fail to fully address some key psychological elements of adolescence and early adulthood. For this project, I therefore decided to look at the problem by considering adolescence as a transitional or liminal phase from youth to adulthood, one necessitating special recognition by the larger community. I also considered the adolescent brain's propensity for risk-taking and its desire for heroic stories as means to discover the world during this liminal period. This led me to look to rites of passage, play, theatre and the aesthetic of the carnivalesque as means to create humorous, and symbol-laden ways for the youth to engage with the world.

The research took the form of eight (8) day-long sessions, structured like a rite of passage, focusing on rituals that were co-designed with a group of high school dropouts attending a youth center in Trois-Rivières. We used Future Workshops Participatory Design principles and Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors as means to encourage free and authentic contributions from the participants. The work was at times filmed in order to provide participants with a method for self-analysis crucial in their ritual design. Beyond increasing participants' self-esteem and sense of belonging, this project provides educational designers with new play-based ideas for engaging youth as well as a carnivalesque approach for participatory design.

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And to my new friends: Annabelle, Charlie, Daly, Dan, Cloé, Mathis, Max, Valérie – the eight co-designers who embarked on the quest. Eight individuals who had the courage and vulnerability to face the ecstasy and terror of their own existence in the hopes of living more joyful lives – and help others do the same.

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# PREFACE

In his 1872 essay *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche outlined his philological theory that the clash of two great opposing forces—the Apollonian and the Dionysian—was at the root of all art. The Apollonian stood for the artistic drive of image making that represents hidden truth, restraint, knowledge, and our limits as human beings. The Dionysian represents transgression, madness, ecstasy, and a direct access to truth (Nietzsche, trans. Kaufman, 1967).

For Nietzsche, these two artistic forces—which originated from nature itself—achieved a state of perfection in Greek Tragedy, which served as ritual in which humans connected with them. The Greek spectators, by peering into the abyss of the human condition and celebrating it, fervently came to terms with the meaning of their own existence. They found self-affirmation, not in an idealized or utopian world to come, but in the ecstasy and terror of life that was celebrated in the performance of tragedies. For Nietzsche, a balance of the Apollonian and Dionysian is required for humanity to thrive. Still, according to Nietzsche, these two powers, united briefly in Greek antiquity, were separated with the triumph of rationality in Western culture (the Apollonian). I believe that this triumph of “rationality” has continued into our modern world through the importance we place on productivity, scientific progress, and ‘Apollonian’ design.

To attempt to restore some sorely needed balance to the human experience, this work, dear reader, is a work of Dionysian design.

Sociologist John Law wonders if, in order to know some of the realities of the world, we might not need “methods unusual to or unknown in social science” (Law, 2004, p.2), forms of “knowing as embodiment” (p.3). Among other things, he points towards methods as “poetics of interventionary narrative” (p.3). Design theorist and philosopher Tony Fry links *care of the self* with the future of our species and planet. He quotes philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in saying what we are ‘flesh of the world’ and that “for the self to sustain anything, first it has to sustain itself” (Fry, 2011, p.113). This research-creation project seeks to devise poetics of interventionary narrative for young people – the flesh of the world - to sustain themselves.

In that sense, ours is not a project that sounds or looks like “traditional design.” On a general level, one could say that we designed a human experience. Call it a workshop, a rite of passage, or even, a cathartic narrative adventure. On a more specific level, we could argue that we co-designed rituals that address specific tensions within individuals. However, after reflecting on the project, I would venture in saying that we designed the beginnings of a carnivalesque method. Stems, or codes of human behavior, that can be applied to, or woven into, the existing instructional design of educators when dealing with youth. A method that could also facilitate participatory design endeavors through new forms of “knowing as embodiment”; and, it is my hope, also be applicable transformative game design - which brings me to my next point.

As you probably have noticed in reading the abstract, this project ambitiously brings together insights and methods from design, games, theatre, ritual, film, and the carnivalesque. It tries to do several things at once. This is because the project is not entirely selfless: it is also very selfish. For in addition to being a work of participatory design with young people, Quest for Communitas is also my “immortality Project,” as philosopher Ernest Becker would put it. A hubristic personal endeavor of creating a transformative and carnivalesque social game - a form of Live Action Role Playing game (LARP) or Dungeons and Dragons for real life, if you will. A game where we could be the hero of our own lives, battling our inner monsters, with the help of a community of like-minded humans that use subversive humor to attain a truer, freer self. In short, a life quest. But a quest laced with humor, joy, and the rapture of being alive.

How the present research might fit into this “grand” idea will be explored in the conclusion of the thesis. I mention this idea now because it permeated and coloured my research. It led me to frame our creations as deeds, challenges or ritual spells, with the ulterior motive of one day creating a game, THE game. Call it the bias of a man seeking to transform his escapist fantasy-based habits into joyful collective pla

# INTRODUCTION

## The Problem

According to 2020 data from the *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur*, high school drop rates in Quebec were a staggering 19,1 % for boys and 11,8 % for girls. Although research shows that low self-esteem and a lack of a sense of belonging in the school are predictors of student demotivation and dropping out high-school demobilization and dropping out (Mbikayi & St-Amand, 2017; Bardou et Al., 2012), studies also reveal that once a young person drops out of school, he or she is more likely to experience low self-esteem and suffer from social exclusion later in life (C.O.M.P.E.R.E.S., 2013 and C.R.É.V.A.L.E., 2013). In an interview conducted with Marie-Claude Touzin and Jessica Durand – social workers who help high-school dropouts at the *Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi Trois Rivières* (CJE) – I learned that the young people they work with are often caught in a downward spiral of low self-esteem and alienation that greatly hamper their quality of life and ability to return to school.

The goal of this research-creation is to explore play-based methods for breaking this downward spiral of low self-esteem and alienation through the design of a transformative experience for youth out of school. It is my hope that this research will provide educators and social workers with new tools to interact with and assist young people, in addition to encourage government and private funders to invest in such novel modes of intervention. But more importantly, I hope that this project will give struggling young adults a starting point to re-engage with the world on a path to self-motivated transformation.

Though I did not drop out of high school, the plight of young people who struggle with self-worth and finding their place in the world is something that touches me deeply, as I have personally wrestled with these issues since early adulthood. In addition, in my practice, I use filmmaking as a personal cathartic mode of expression. This project is therefore a culmination of my quest for well-being by processing past traumatic experiences through the arts.

## **An accidental discovery during filming of Happy Face**

More specifically, this project builds on my last film in which I worked with disfigured non-actors suffering from social phobia. That project ended up helping a number of disfigured participants achieve catharsis through a carnivalesque rehearsal process in which they re-enacted their traumas through narrative – thus blending reality and fiction with real-life positive effects. To my surprise, it was the carnivalesque humor that permeated the rehearsal process, which enabled the non-actors to freely and joyfully explore the more difficult aspects of their lives.

In *Happy Face* (Franchi, 2018), I worked with disfigured non-actors to craft a story revolving around society's obsession with beauty. In order to get the disfigured participants to overcome their social phobias and feel at ease in front of the camera, we conducted what I recognize in hindsight as a rite of passage. First, we isolated ourselves for several days and swore an oath to the film (a separation from daily life, of sorts). During those isolated days, we conducted a series of acting exercises and improvisations revolving around their fears of the gaze of others and the insults they received in their daily lives. During this time (a liminal period between being in-society and being immersed in creating the film), roles were reversed as the disfigured participants played at being their own tormentors, insulted each other, and imagined a world where their faces would be the norm. Throughout this time, humor and laughter co-existed with tragedy and tears. Liberated from the normative constraints of daily life, participants explored different ways of being, of responding, and of coping with the gaze of others. The film's rehearsal process echoes anthropologist Victor Turner's insights into the transformative powers of rites of passages.

Through this process, the group bonded and the participants developed the confidence to meet the crew and act in the film. Once the film was completed, the disfigured actors were invited to a public screening at the 2018 Festival du Nouveau Cinema in Montreal. They were now actors (a new life status, of sorts). Proof of the transformation that work on the film catalyzed in a number of participants hit me years later, when I learned that some of them had started creative practices, while others had decided to engage in volunteer work with patients who had undergone facial reconstruction surgery. Others still had started travelling, which they never did previously.

What is especially relevant from this experience to the current project is that during preparation for Happy Face, the ‘raw material’ used to build acting and group bonding exercises was directly taken from the fears, tensions, and traumas of the participants. But it was done using laughter and humor, which seemed to help accessing and playing with difficult emotions.



*Figure 1 - Happy Face film teaser (Franchi, 2018)*

**Please click on image or link below:**

<https://vimeo.com/alexandrefranchi/happyfacetaser?share=copy>

### **Connecting with youth and high school dropouts**

In 2019, Happy Face won the Prix Collégial du Cinéma Québécois (PCCQ) an award bestowed by the Cegep theatre and film students of Quebec for the film that had had the most impact on them during that year. Following this recognition, I was contacted by Marie-France Touzin, a social worker at the CJE Trois Rivières, to screen the film and discuss it with their students – a group of high-school dropouts ranging from ages 15 to 35. The film’s irreverent mix of tragedy and humor stuck a chord with the audience. After the screening, Marie-France told me that a couple of students had decided to start therapy based on our group discussion – something the social workers had been encouraging unsuccessfully for months. I was invited back to the CJE Trois Rivières for more workshops and started to develop a relationship with the staff.

One day, Marie-France told me that she had tasked a group of her students with researching rites of passages, as the CJE was looking to provide a graduation ritual that would give its clientele a sense of belonging and pride. I told her about my immortality project – of creating a quest game based on myth, to give young players a sense of real-life heroism and foster community. During our discussion Marie-France and I realized that the notions of belongingness and self-esteem or self-worth were at the root of both of our endeavors. We then agreed to collaborate on a joint project that would involve creating a rite of passages with young people at the CJE – a smaller quest, of sorts. Smaller and more manageable than my grand idea, but still connected to it. For that was going to be my proposition to the would-be participants:

**“I am pursuing a personal adventure in which I seek to express and process my oppressions and traumas using art, ritual and humor with the goal of leading a more joyful life – who wants to embark on this exploration?”**

And thus, Quest for Communitas was born.

The project would be conducted at the CJE with the goal of breaking the downward negative spiral in which some youth were caught. Perhaps it could even lay the foundations, or ethos, for my immortality project. It was a win-win for the CJE and myself. But for the project to take off, it would have to be – most importantly – a win for the young adults attending the CJE.

# CONTEXT

## 1. How Adolescents and Young Adults Navigate the World

In addition to specialized school programs offered within public schools for students experiencing academic difficulty, there are several organizations in Quebec that help young people who have or are at risk of dropping out of school (ex: YMCA, l'Ancre des Jeunes, Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi, etc.). Most of these programs, however, aim to reinforce or are based on school curricula; many are focused primarily on helping participants with homework. Others teach participants specific skills sets and pro-social attitudes to help facilitate their transition to the workforce (e.g. interview skills or confidence building workshops).

The Carrefours Jeunesse Emploi (CJE) are community organizations whose mandate is to accompany and guide young adults between the ages of 16 and 35 in their social and economic integration by promoting a path to employment, return to school, and/or personal recovery. They do so by providing counseling, social services, other psychosocial supports, and teaching services to youth. The CJE programming can be understood as a 'lighter' version of school, with workshops designed to interest the youth in a career path, or centred on specific skill-based activities.

As I found out in my interviews with social workers and young people attending the CJE Trois Rivières, most participants are wrestling with some form of trauma, or trauma related anxiety or learning disability (ex: loss of a parent at an early age, various forms of abuse and assault, being extracted from their family at a young age by social services, etc.). In preliminary problem-defining interviews I conducted with 15 participants, all voiced that they struggled with anxiety and most from social phobia. The age of these young adults ranged from 17 to 35.

Individual social workers and animators work hard to connect with these young people. But it was nonetheless my impression, and that of the CJE social workers I interviewed, that existing programs could appeal more intuitively to adolescents if they used insights about how the

adolescent brain works. Indeed, research shows that adolescents and young adults display idiosyncratic traits and characteristics that help them engage with the world and navigate change or difficult situation (Bangsund, 2018; Romer, Ryna & Theodore, 2017; Cyrulnik, 2016). Aside from some sport activities in some YMCA programs, I found no school-related programs for adolescents or young adults that involved a form of play. Nor did any existing programs address the ways in which leaving school removes young people from development rituals or rite of passage that mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

**Adolescents need, and use, humor to navigate new or stressful situations.**

In his study of high-school students, Bangsund (2018) shows that humor played an important part in coping with environmental anxiety and strengthening group cohesion. Similarly, Cameron et al. (2010) emphasize how humor helped ‘at-risk’ adolescents in an urban setting navigate complex, socially sensitive situations in order to be able to better relate to their peers. Sanford and Eder (1984) observed middle school (mostly female) students during lunch hours, noting that the student employed a variety of humor forms when exploring taboo and other sensitive topics. Together, these and other studies highlight the fact that humor often helps youth with exploring topics linked to the self or personal insecurities.

This existing scholarship is corroborated by my own experience presenting *Happy Face* (Franchi, 2018) to groups of teenagers and young adults. During post-film discussions with these audiences, at the CJE and beyond, I found that young viewers opened up and discussed their physical insecurities most candidly while discussing the humorous and grotesque aspects of the film. This observation echoes the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin on the grotesque and carnival laughter in *Rabelais and his world* (1984), in which he argues that the carnivalesque aesthetic mode fosters creative freedom of expression within a group. I explore Bakhtin’s arguments in greater detail in the theoretical framework below.

## **Adolescents need intensity and risk-taking, and often seek these in groups**

Romer, Ryna & Theodore (2017) show that adolescents' propensity to engage in risk-taking behaviours is not simply a result of impulsivity. Rather, it is an expression of a healthy desire to learn about the world. Brain-imaging studies have also shown that the adolescent brain is more sensitive to the rewards of peer relationships than the adult brain (Albert, Chein & Steinberg, 2013). In recent years, one way in which this dual need—for risk-taking and peer relationships—has manifested is in popular viral challenges on social media. Examples include the Blackout Challenge or the Skull Breaker Challenge. Burgess et al. (2018) show the need for social belonging is one of the main reasons for why so many young people engage in these challenges. Moreover, as Juárez-Escribano (2019) demonstrates, the adolescents most predisposed to engage in viral challenges are those who also have the highest need for acceptance by their peers.

## **Adolescents need heroes**

Neuropsychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik (2016) and counselling psychologist William Nicholls-Allison (2020) both write about the need for adolescents to have heroes—role models who use their unique abilities to improve the world around them. More specifically, Nicholls-Allison shows that identifying with heroes can help adolescents overcome hardships and limitations, and can have the same well-being benefits as group therapy.

Linking the need for heroism to the appeal of games, Przybylski, Weinstein et al. (2012) found that players were more motivated to play and emotionally involve themselves in games that let them explore ideal aspects of their selves that might not find expression in everyday life. Likewise, Cyrulnik argues that constructing a personal narrative of “epic journey” (*une épopée*) is not reactionary fantasy, but a healthy and realistic way for youth to engage with the challenges they face in their own realities.

Research also shows that the need for heroes is also present in adults. Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker addresses this in his book *The Denial of Death* (1973). As Becker notes, there is a natural human urge to pursue “immortality projects,” in which we create or become part of something that we feel will outlast our time on earth. Given that numerous high school dropouts seek the support services of CJE and other organizations in their adult years, the need to have heroes might still be relevant for the CJE’s young adult clientele.

Aside from in focused therapeutic settings that encouraged play, such as drama therapy, I could not find, in the field of education, examples of structured group-based activities aimed at helping high-school dropouts with their self-esteem and sense of social exclusion through play that involves psychological risk-taking or exploring heroism. In order to find these, one must to look outside of the field of education, to cultural studies of rites of passages and Live Action Role Playing (LARP) games.

## **2. What’s Available to Help Young People Navigate the World**

### **LARP Games as heroic community builders**

In 2009, I shot *The Wild Hunt*, a feature film set in a medieval re-enactment community called The Duchy of Bicolline. The Bicolline community owns land near Shawinigan, Québec and is considered a medieval LARP. A LARP is a form of role-playing game where participants physically portray mythical, fantasy, or historical characters and engage in heroic adventures as those characters.

Upon visiting Bicolline, I met many young people and seasoned “larpers” who gravitated towards the game from positions of social marginality. These larpers found in the larping community a safe haven when they played on the weekends, and a group of friends that spilled over into their day-to-day life during the week.

Over the past 10 years, academics have increasingly studied LARP games and its link to human psychology. Bowman and Beltrán (2012) have explored connections between Jungian active imagination, archetypal psychology, and role-playing. For Beltrán, archetypal psychology offers a superior framework to understand LARP than “current scientific models such as cognitive, psychodynamic, or behavioural psychology.” She notes that, “LARP is the West’s solution to addressing the need to connect with other roles and states of physical and emotional being—essentially, to ‘live’ myth” (2012, p. 96). Bowman meanwhile suggests that LARP could be a way to engage with archetypes of the unconscious. Psychotherapists such as Elektra Diakolambrianou are increasingly studying how certain points of the LARP design process can transform into formal psychotherapeutic tools (Diakolambrianou, 2018). Additionally,LARPs are played in groups, and they often involve heroism and humor. It is for these reasons that LARP offers a relevant and exciting cultural form to keep in mind for our present project with young people.

### **Modern rites of passages**

While LARP and games in general are under-explored avenues of research in the scholarship on youth intervention, the importance of rites of passage is already widely acknowledged as central to adolescent development. Historically and across cultures, rites of passage have been an integral part of a young person’s journey toward adulthood. Thus, they have been a major component in the development of self-esteem and a sense of community (Turner, 1974). Indeed, Coopersmith (1975) and Rosenberg (1989) found that modern rites of passages, if conducted properly, will show a statistically significant increase in self-esteem in young people that undergo them.

Psychologists Blumenkrantz and Goldstein (2010) write how adolescence acts as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood, and argue that “in the absence of meaningful community-based rituals, youth will define and create their own marker events based on peer or media values, many of which may be destructive both individually and communally” (p.43).

Additional research in the field of developmental psychology demonstrates that a lack of clear rites of passage in the American context reflects an ambiguity about when and how one becomes an adult in modern society (Arnett, 2000, 2004), and that in response adolescents desperately seek public markers and community approbation to validate their entry into adult status (Blos, 1979; Elkind, 1984). Within the context of public education, Sharon Spry Dukes (2018) shows that implementing rites of passages as part of a school's extracurricular activities will instill a sense of belonging to the school—particularly for those students on the brink of dropping out.

But what about the young people who have already left school? Where can they find group and peer belonging if they have already left the educational system? Could a new locus for social belonging be found by creating a new rite of passage at the CJE? One that addresses the transitional period of adolescence and being outside of school? The social workers and myself hoped that the present project might answer some of these questions.

### **3. Personal Context: How I coped with Death Through Humor**

In 2010, I was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease that gave me 50% chances of survival and left me handicapped and out of work for more than a year. Trying to come to terms with the sudden peril and the nightmarish aftermath, I made a little 4 min film recounting my medical misadventures – *Franchi is Back* (Franchi, 2011). The film was a way for me to tell my story to the world and show that I still had creative energy. The humorous tone of the film, the use of costumes as I disguised myself into my Doctor, and the grotesque images of surgery made the film viral. But more importantly, the film was a personal ritual.

*Franchi is Back* was a joyful creation where I tried to shed my existential fears of physical handicaps, of being made irrelevant in my industry, of death.

The subversive tone, DIY visuals, and life-death tension of *Franchi is Back* provided a preview to the CJE social workers and potential participants of what our research-creation was aiming for. We did not have the time and resources to craft such a film for each participant. But we were going to attempt to craft a narrative with similar stakes and vitality with young person in the quest.



*Figure 2 - Franchi is Back short film ( Franchi, 2011)*

**Click on image or link below to view video:**

<https://vimeo.com/141913250>

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to design our own transformative experience with the young participants of the CJE Trois Rivières, we have to understand the nature of rites of passages and other transformative activities humans have designed since the birth of culture. For this section, I encourage the reader to set aside their Apollonian mind; and entertain the notion that rites of passages, theatre, and games may have more than we think in common. All three of these forms may be understood as people's conscious structured attempts at connecting with our chaotic unconscious mind, repository of evolutionary and collective wisdom.

Part 1 of this section deals with rites of passage. Part 2 and its subsections delve a bit deeper into how rite of passages, having later evolved into theatre, are cultural mechanisms that humans developed to grasp the great dramas of their existence, process their meaning, and impart that wisdom to others. Part 3 examines the links between rites of passage and games; and explores how games, through the concept of psychological resonance, can be transformative. Part 4 introduces us to the aesthetic of the carnivalesque, a set of fluid notions that often defy logical categorizations given that they emanate from the chaotic side of our nature. Our Dionysian side.

## 1. Some basics on rites of passage

According to anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, rituals that mark the transition from one life stage to another are called rites of passage. In his essay "Liminal to Liminoid, in play, Flow, and Ritual" (1974), Turner identifies three phases that constitute a rite of passage:

1. **Separation:** in this phase, participants are separated from their everyday lives and enter into a "sacred" time and space. This is accompanied by a ritual that marks the break (e.g. shaving the hair of new recruits in the military).
2. **Transition (also called the liminal phase):** in this phase, participants pass through a period of ambiguity where the standard codes and processes of society are dissolved

and re-arranged (note that “limen” means “threshold” in Latin). This involves a leveling process where signs of the pre-rite status and identity are removed (e.g. absence of names, use of masks and uniforms, etc.). This is also a phase where people experience *communitas*: an unstructured state in which all members of the group undergoing the rite of passage present as equal, allowing them to share a common experience and thus create a bond.

**3. Incorporation (or re-integration):** participants are re-integrated into society, with a new status (for example, as graduates of a university). For the rite to be complete, it is necessary for participants to be recognized in their new status by the larger social group.

### **On communitas and creativity**

Victor Turner observes how through the shared experience of liminality (in the transition phase), communitas creates powerful bonds between participants who feel a “pure potentiality where everything trembles in the balance” (Turner, p.75). Crucially, this experience of communitas is linked to the free play or out of the ordinary activities that characterizes the liminal phase, during which new symbols, models, and paradigms surface “as the seedbeds of cultural creativity” (p.60). Rites of passage can thus provide participants with a sense of agency by subjecting them to experiences where their “human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity” are liberated from the “normative constraints” of everyday social life (p.76).

## **2. From rites of passage to theatre**

In his introduction to *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (1982)*, Victor Turner observes that everyday life is characterized by “social dramas” where a rupture has occurred in the normal functioning of society. This rupture can be anything from a minor transgression to a murder, something passionate or planned, or a political act to challenge existing power structures. In these moments, the emotional climate of the group is charged, and the rupture becomes a crisis.

To those who have an interest in maintaining the social status quo (e.g. elders, legislators, clerics), the preferred course of action is most often to activate "remedial machinery" to resolve conflicts and stitch up the social fabric in a way that restores the status quo. Often this is through the performance of a ritual celebrating the most common values of the community, including trials, divination, or precautionary sacrifices: a collective bonding activity, of sorts.

For Turner, the mode of crisis recovery in modern society, containing the germ of self-reflexivity – a public way of evaluating our social behaviour – has migrated from the domain of tribal law and religion to the arts. Turner thus argues that performative genres such as “theatre, including puppetry and shadow theatre, dance, drama, and professional storytelling,” serve as media to “probe a community’s weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known ‘world’” (Turner 1982, p.11). In advancing his argument, Turner draws on philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey’s notions of *Ausdrucken* of the *Erlebnis* – to squeeze the meaning out of what has been lived – through experience or adventure. **An experience, an adventure, a test, a ritual passage – each expose us to a peril, a fear, a risk. Through the highly symbolic, creative, shared experience of ritual, we live through a crisis and actively perform its drama in order to digest and integrate its meaning.**

This mode of crisis recovery could also be applied to ourselves, where we probe our own weaknesses, call ourselves into account, and suggest remedies for our troubles.

Later in his career, Turner came into contact with experimental theater and artistic director Richard Schechner. Through Schechner’s influence, **Turner came to equate experimental theater with performed or restored experience in which meaning emerges by reliving an original experience. This form then becomes an object of wisdom that can be communicated to others,** allowing them not only to better understand themselves, but also to better understand the time in which they live.

## Theatre as transformative experience

Several drama theorists and playwrights have integrated the idea of theatre as a transformative experience into their work. For our purposes, we will look at Jerzy Grotowski and Antonin Artaud, in terms of their philosophy; and Alejandro Jodorowski and Augusto Boal, in terms of their methods.

Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, active in Poland and in the U.S. from the late 1950s to the 1990s, sought to revive the ritual function of theatre. He advocated a theatre in which **"the spectator thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of myth"** (Grotowski, 1968, p.49). Grotowski took archetypal and mythical stories as inspiration for his plays set in the present. He sought to create an experience that touched upon the sacred by: a) getting his actors to achieve a trance-like state; and b) creating a stage layout where actors and spectators would be interwoven within the space – thus immersing spectators in the play. In short, Grotowski wanted to restore the ritual and mythical dimension of theatre.

In his collection of essays entitled *"le Théâtre et son double"* (1938), theatre critic Antonin Artaud coined the expression "Theatre of cruelty" as resurrecting the idea of the total spectacle. He advocated that the bulk and the extent of the spectacle address the whole human organism (and not only our faculties of analysis).

**The long habit of entertainment shows has made us forget the idea of a serious theater, which, shaking all our representations, instills in us the ardent magnetism of images and finally acts on us like a therapy of the soul whose passage will not be forgotten.** (Artaud, 1938, p.102)

Artaud draws our attention to how images (symbols) act on us like a therapy, in so doing he gestures to the transformative potential of theatre beyond mere entertainment. Taken together, Artaud and Grotowski advocate using mythical stories, mixing spectators and actors, addressing the entire body, and using powerful magnetic images in theatre. In short, they argue for incorporating classic elements of ritual.

On a more community level, this tradition of theatre as transformative experience has continued in the work of Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist Augusto Boal through the Theatre of the Oppressed, a series of theatrical analyses developed in the 1970s. Boal sought to transform audiences into active participants in the theatrical experience with the aim of promoting social and political change. He argues that **a collaboration between actor and spectator allows spectators to perform acts that are socially liberating.** Augusto Boal transform spectators into "spect-actors." Boal's emphasis on social change is particularly relevant to my work at CJE, given that personal transformation rarely occurs in a vacuum. The relationship of a person to their external environment is intimately linked to the relationship to the self.

On a more individual level, Filmmaker, comic book screenwriter, and shaman Alejandro Jodorowski has developed his own brand of theatre counseling which he calls Psychomagic or poetic acts. Basing himself on symbolic action (re-enacting a personal story or trauma with symbols), Jodorowski constructs with his "clients" a sort of ritual-like performance destined to process or overcome a particular drama or oppression the person is living (Jodorowski, 2015).

### **The links between theatre, ritual and drama therapy**

What Jodorowski has done with rituals as part of his shamanic practice, others have sought to incorporate within the frame of modern psychotherapy. Existential psychiatrist Irving Yalom (1980) advocates the use of rituals in therapy to help patients dig deeper in their existential condition and their issues. He talks of ritualistic encounter techniques, such as guided imagery and psychodrama, and points to accessible milestones such as birthdays and anniversaries (which are also rituals). Since then, drama therapists have increasingly accepted ritual in their practice.

For drama therapist Steve Mitchel, drama therapy is a process where clients are helped in creating their own healing rituals where **"the ritual is not the change itself, but the preparation for change, the container for ventilating and letting go of negative emotions. It is also a symbolic process which offers the client an image of change that will inspire continued work outside the group"** (Mitchel, 1992, p67).

Because this is a work of research-creation, we will not start from a pre-established therapeutic script with the intent to heal. Our intent is to explore; and besides, I am not a therapist. However, some aspects of drama therapy linked with the use of the camera, are of particular relevance to us and will be discussed in the Methods section of this document.

In these modern times, theatre is unfortunately not the preferred mode of entertainment or catharsis for young people. In this age of constant social media distraction and online activities, young people are fond of games, be they computer games or Tik-Tok challenges. However, games also include powerful images and archetypal stories, and may even include engaging the entire body, as Artaud advocates, if we consider virtual reality. Given that games involve the notions of fun, pleasure, or joy – a key element of our Dionysian nature - their transformative potential provide a useful lens for our research-creation.

### **3. From rites of passage to games**

Although we are not designing a game per se, game design is a vibrant contemporary field of research that can prove an invaluable resource in designing an activity for young people – and envisioning future iterations of this project within a mode suited for that demographic. Besides, it is easy to notice that the same verb applies to theatre and games: to play. Moreover, many games involve heroism, risk-taking, and humor – hence their popularity with young adults or adolescents. Additionally, games share a number of characteristics with the liminal phase of rites of passage.

In his book *Man Play Games* (1961), Roger Caillois builds on the theories of Johan Huizinga, published in *Homo Ludens* (1938). Caillois identifies 6 core characteristics of play:

- 1) Play is free, not obligatory.
- 2) Play is separate from ordinary life. It occupies its own time and space. (This aligns with the liminal phase of a rite of passage that Turner identifies).
- 3) Play is uncertain. The results of play cannot be pre-determined.

4) Play is unproductive. It creates no wealth and ends as it begins. (One could argue that it creates a different form “knowledge” about life than ordinary routines, the same way as the carnivalesque can be a seedbed of creativity, as we will see below).

5) Play is governed by rules that suspend ordinary laws, behaviours, and norms. (This too aligns with the liminal phase of rites of passages, where re-combinations of normal life and norms are possible).

6) Play involves make-believe that confirms for players the existence of imagined realities that may be set against 'real life'. (This brings us back to myth, storytelling and theatre).

Caillois elaborates that we can grasp the complex nature of games by referring to two types of play: *ludus* and *paidia*. *Ludus* is a game with a fixed set of rules (like board games), while *paidia* is a game where boundaries are ill-defined freedom (such as Minecraft, improvised games, and Dungeons and Dragons). Though those two types of play can be seen as existing on a structured-unstructured continuum, it is clear that theatre games and LARPS are closer to *paidia* than *ludus*. Could we not, then, envision rituals or a rite of passage as a *paidia* game where *communitas* would give the players a sense of agency over their own lives by liberating their creativity

### **Games as transformative experiences**

The Department of Game Design at Uppsala University, have been investigating how games impact the lives of designers, players, communities, and the broader society at large. They view games not as distinct from the “real world,” but as valid and meaningful experiences that can have real-world implications and lead to personal transformation. Rusch and Phelps (2020), identify four high-level guidelines to inform transformative game design: (1) ritual theming (i.e., liberation, transformation, and commemoration/celebration); (2) metaphorical approach; (3) contextual mechanisms that promote a readiness for change and processing; and (4) psychological resonance.

Ritual theming provides a direct link between games and the structure of rites of passages, insofar as the former's emphasis on liberation-transformation-commemoration mirrors the latter's separation-transition-incorporation structure.

A metaphorical approach involves working with mythical stories and paying attention to using symbols or objects that have meaning for us and for others.

Contextual mechanism that promote change means preparing players for the experience with an introductory session and ensuring a proper debriefing session to process the transformation that occurred.

Psychological resonance is a concept that was developed by psychiatrist Erik Goodwyn. It is an important idea for our research as it harkens back to the notion of social drama as the building blocks of theatre or rites of passages. Psychological resonance is a deep recognition of existential or archetypal themes that humans share. Psychological resonance is what makes a story or a ritual be repeated from generation to generation or even across cultures. Stories, memes, songs, or fairy tales stay with us over time are said to possess psychological resonance. Popular games and Tik-Tok challenges might also possess some form of psychological resonance.

### **The importance of Psychological resonance in transformative design**

Goodwyn (2016) asserts that "Psychological resonance is defined as a characteristic quality that can be applied to any image, ritual, or narrative, that describes its mental 'stickiness', its tendency to spontaneously emerge, and / or its intergenerational staying power" (p.37).

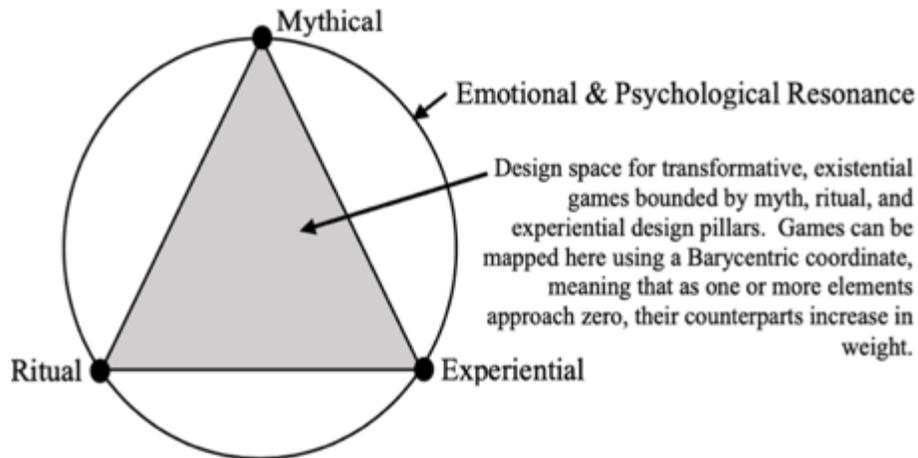
By studying fairy tales, legends, and their staying power across generations and geographical locations, Goodwyn (2016) lists the following nine (9) criteria for psychological resonance:

I propose that the most resonant expressions are likely to have some or all of the following (Goodwyn, 2016, pp.37-39):

1. Minimal counter-intuitiveness (Barrett, 2007), meaning that they have only a few unusual or strange elements and so stand out, rather than have too many or too few counter-intuitive elements. Examples: talking animals, flying carpets, dragons (...)
2. Emotional evocativeness (Panskepp, 1998). Examples: stories involving basic human attachments or evoking basic emotional responses such as fear, anger, lust, and so on.
3. Sensual vividness, with a tendency toward extremes. Examples: castles of gold, mountains of crystal, brilliant lights, absolute darkness, and so on.
4. Indeterminacy of time and space. Examples: “long ago in a far-away land” – evocative of an oceanic feeling.
5. Biasing toward middle-level categories. Examples: “sword” rather than “weapon” (too abstract) or “quillioned pattern-weld blade with Brighthampton scabbard and cross” (overdetailed)
6. Low complexity of characters and motivations. Examples: the most beautiful in the land, the king, animal gods, the thief, and the beggar.
7. Rhythmic and prosodic/musical elements. Examples: “magic mirror in the wall.”
8. Simple plots with reversals and/or irony. Examples: nothing is as it seems, plot twists, the slow animal beats the fast animal, and so on.
9. Apparent interconnection of events. Examples: things always occurring “just in the nick of time”, and so on.

Pertaining to transformative games, Rusch and Phelps propose a framework for designing games that achieve psychological resonance with the players. Their framework rests on 3 foundations: 1) goals of existential psychotherapy; 2) channeling the evocative power of myth and ritual and 3) experiential design. This framework is expressed in the following Figure 3, below:

**Table 1 - Mapping a Design Space for transformative, existential games**  
(Rusch & Phelps, 2020, p. 2)



Existential psychotherapy is a useful notion because it deals with the universal concerns of the human experience. Existential therapy is interested in the most fundamental human anxieties, those which are related to the ultimate stakes of our existence, including death, solitude, meaning (or lack thereof), and choice (Yalom 1980, pp.8-9). Transformative experiences are often connected to how we deal with these aspects of existence. Designing a game, narrative, or workshop that revolves around exploring such existential issues and anxieties could be akin to working with social drama as narrative material for theatre as rite of passage, in the sense that the activity deals with key life issues that are important to the people involved.

Going back to my film *Happy Face*, the film achieved some psychological resonance, for the non-actors, because the making of it incorporated channeling ritual, considered the experience of the non-actors, and dealt with themes that were of existential importance to them. The film also achieved psychological resonance with an adolescent public, because they struggle with issues of self-esteem related to their physical appearance – an existential anxiety for them at their stage of their lives.

Regarding myth and ritual, Rollo May (1991) writes that “myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world” (p.15), whereas Joseph Campbell (2004, p.xix) adds that “ritual is simply myth enacted: by participating in a rite, you are actively participating directly in the myth.”

Rusch & Phelps go further, arguing that when ritual is used in psychotherapy, the myth that is being lived comes from the patient's personal history. The patient knows the codes and short-hands to their own life story – they are their only audience. The same goes for Jodorowski and his clients when he devises poetic acts with them for their personal transformation.

However, when designing for an audience or strangers, it is another matter altogether. Rusch & Phelps note that it is crucial for the designers to contextualize the themes or narrative used for symbolic action in a way that supports transformation. In such cases, the designer/storyteller must specifically translate between narrative and actual transformation to ensure psychological resonance for the gamers or audience. It is in this that our project differs from psychomagic acts or drama therapy: we have the participants who will conduct their own rituals or psychomagic acts; and we have the CJE community, the “audience”, who will witness those acts. And we want the audience to connect with the participants of our research; and perhaps be moved enough to consider embarking on their own personal quests. In the case of a co-design activity such as ours, the designed rituals will come from the participants' stories, just like in ritual-based psychotherapy or personal poetic acts. But for these rituals to be psychological resonant to others (to the other participants, to their community), not only will they have to be contextualized and communicated properly to others; but they will have to be drawn from the participant's existential anxieties – from their truest and innermost selves.

For anyone who ever has tried to conduct a workshop with participants, young or older, it is clear that getting people to open up about themselves is a delicate endeavor, particularly if one wants them to delve into their existential anxieties and oppressions. Shyness, cautiousness, and psychological resistance are all factors that might prevent participants from bringing their stories to the table. When Rusch & Phelps (2020) discuss contextual mechanisms that might promote change in game design, they talk about warmup and debrief activities. However, in our present case, we may require something more than a mere warmup activity.

Recognizing this concern, the question becomes: how do we ensure that young participants feel the same ease and freedom to “play” with their anxieties as when playing other types of games? How can we create conditions that invite the same sense of freedom and potentiality – or *communitas* – that one might feel in the liminal phase of a rite of passage? Put another way: How can we design our workshop to invite high school dropouts to freely and creatively revisit the very anxieties, self-esteem issues, and experiences of alienation that are at the root of their suffering?

Based on my personal and professional experiences—particularly working on *Happy Face* (2018) and *Franchi is Back* (2011) - I believe that the carnivalesque aesthetics provides the emotional space to achieve these aims.

#### **4. The Carnavalesque sense of the world**

By carnivalesque, we refer to the medieval form of comedy that Mikhaïl Bakhtin analyzes in *Rabelais and His World* (1968). Broadly defined, the carnivalesque refers to the public spirit of carnival rendered into literary or artistic form.

From an anthropological standpoint, carnivals were reversal rituals marking the end of Winter and of the shortage of food. They were a celebration of fertility and renewal where social roles were reversed and rules about acceptable behavior were suspended. Carnivals were a time of debauchery, joking, and symbolic renewal during which chaos replaced order. Carnivals, in this sense, were transformative experiences – a sort of rite of passage from Winter to Spring, from darkness to light. It is interesting to note that the origins of carnival date back from the Roman Saturnalia or the Greek Dionysian festivals. And as mentioned in the Foreword, Dionysus represented ecstasy, theatre and madness.

In medieval times, carnivals were celebrations during which the authority of church and state were temporarily inverted during the chaotic and liberating period of celebrations.

Set rules and beliefs were ridiculed and transgressed and cleared the way for new ideas to enter the collective public discourse. Bakhtin surmises that the Renaissance was made possible by the spirit of free thinking and impiety emanating from carnivals.

Still according to Bakhtin, the popularity of carnivals dwindled in Europe following the eventual replacement of feudalism with capitalism. As a result, the “spirit” of carnival found its way into the literary form. Carnavalesque literature, just like carnivals, tore down oppressive forms of thought and cleared the way for creativity and humanity’s constant yearning for emancipation.

Bakhtin states that the totality of popular festivities, rituals, and other carnival forms are deeply rooted in the human psyche on both the collective and individual level. These historically complex and varied forms have, over time, developed into their own symbolic and sensuous language which expresses a carnival sense of the world. According to Bakhtin, this language cannot be verbalized or translated into concepts, but can be transposed into artistic language, such as literature or other art forms.

As a literary and artistic genre, the carnivalesque can play an important role in helping adolescents navigate the hold that existential anxieties, oppression, or restrictive social norms can have over them. This is due to what Bakhtin identifies as carnival’s three main intertwined characteristics: it is ambivalent, grotesque, and universal.

1. **Ambivalent**, meaning that Carnival praises and degrades; nothing is sacred and nothing is truly worthless; the potential for reversal inheres in everything. This also leads to the dialogic nature of the carnivalesque: there is not one voice of authority, but always two sides to reality.
2. **Grotesque**, meaning that Carnival reduces or desecrates everything that is abstract, intellectual, and spiritual into the basic bodily functions that all humans and animals share (eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, sex), thus bringing everybody to the same status.

3. **Universal**, meaning that people in the carnivalesque are both spectators and actors in the experience; everybody laughs at, and with, everybody; no one is exempt (Bakhtin, 1984). This characteristic also leads to free and familiar interaction between people as well as the acceptance of eccentric behavior.

According to Bakhtin, two ambivalent images are added to these characteristics of carnival: fire, that destroys and renews the world, and carnival laughter. Fire destroys, but then allows for renewal and rebirth – making space for new life. Carnival laughter is akin to ritual laughter, a laughter directed at some higher force or power such as the sun or gods. Modern science shows that laughter has psychological benefits, such as reducing anxiety and depression (King, 2016). But there is more to laughter than that. Bakhtin sees carnivalesque laughter as another means to challenge existing power structures in society.

Though it is a powerful form of emancipatory expression, the carnivalesque sense of the world is as fluid and elusive notion. It's lack of structure makes this genre difficult to include in the design of any project. However, I believe that the carnivalesque - with its emphasis on laughter, profanation and eccentricities - is crucial for my project involving young adults.

One could easily imagine a scenario where the liminal phase of rites of passages, with its upending of everyday rules, as a carnivalesque representation of the social order. The carnivalesque esthetic can be a powerful way to get young participants to desacralize their anxieties by using ambivalent (or dialogic) voices to play with imagined version of themselves through reversal, to laugh at their own situation, and to ridicule their oppressions in order to free themselves from their power. Furthermore, could not the joyful abandon of a carnivalesque infused research creation lead to a form of *communitas* between the participants?

# RESEARCH QUESTION

How may the “carnavalesque sense of the world” be expressed and practised with young people at risk of social exclusion for the purpose of co-designing a transformative rite of passage that will foster *communitas* between them?

## **Sub Questions:**

How can key aspects of participants’ personal dramas and existential anxieties be contextualized in the design of the rite of passage’s re-integration phase in order to maximize the activity’s psychological resonance, both to the participants themselves and to other spect-actors?

Given the shifting and chaotic nature of the carnivalesque and of performance work, what elements of this research-creation can be replicated or re-designed? In what form and across what media?

# METHODOLOGY

For a complex project such as this, we needed specific methods to address the different phases of our research creation. This chapter contains four sections, each dealing with different methods necessary for our project. Methods to 1) structure the activities of the overall quest; 2) encourage different modes of expression from participants, and 3) ensure survival of the project (the continued interest by the participants over the long duration). Section 4) deals with the use of the video camera, my artistic mode of expression, and details how the video camera was a methodological tool instrumental in all aspects of the project.

## 1. Methods for structuring activities

Blumenkrantz & Goldstein (2010) have identified 20 elements required for an effective rite of passage, enumerated in *Twenty Elements in an Architectural Structure for Youth & Community Development through Rites of Passage* (please see Figure 4 on next page). These 20 elements formed the basic structure of our activities as we worked to include as many as possible in the research. Though time and financial constraints prevented us from incorporating all 20 elements; we were, however, able to weave the following notable ones into our design:

- A focus on story for each participant
- A paradigm shift is needed for each participant
- The rite must happen in the home community
- Rituals
- Adversity or psychological risk
- Play
- Non-ordinary states of reality (through dance and yoga; magic mushrooms were a no go)
- Change in appearance that reflects new status
- Demonstrate one's new abilities or attitudes to the community
- Celebration and recognition to the community

**Table 2 - Twenty Elements in an Architectural Structure for Youth & Community Development through Rites of Passage (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010)**

<b>Principle/Characteristic</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<i>Paradigm shift.</i>	Adolescent development is connected to a community development process rather than being seen solely as an intra-psychic phenomenon. Interventions are ecological rather than individually oriented.
<i>Community values and ethics.</i>	The hallmark of a community--based rite of passage strategy is the creation of intentional, inclusive community dialogues to address what are the values and expectations that youth must carry forward to insure the future success of the community. There must be deliberate structures that allow these community discussions to occur so that some consensus about essential expectations for behaviour and values emerge. This process must precede the creation of experiences that foster youths' understanding, appreciation and commitment to these expectations.
<i>Program success relies on relationships</i>	Meaningful outcomes ultimately depend upon the quality of the relationships between youth and adults, and between the adults and the "program." Positive outcomes only occur when people within a setting are intimately connected to the creation and/or adaptation of a strategy. It is only then that a strategy can be implemented with sufficient commitment and creativity to make it a success.
<i>You can only bring someone as far as you have been yourself</i>	If relationships are key, then those who are initiators of youth's coming of age need training and professional development to build their personal awareness and resources. Individuals need to undergo their own initiatory experience and rite of passage to aid his or her transition to maturity to be an effective initiator of youth.
<i>It must happen in the home community</i>	Children grow up, by and large, in communities that are defined by geographic boundaries and real live interpersonal interactions. Connection to an actual geographic place, especially when there is deep contact with nature and a psychological sense of community is critical to a sense of self and security for children. Effective rites of passage establish a safe place for intentional conversations to occur between citizens of the community, youth and adults.
<i>Rites of passage create expectations for socially appropriate behaviours.</i>	Coming of age in a rites of passage experience involves creating and supporting intentional environments that transmit essential values and ethics that guide and inform expectations for socially appropriate behaviours.
<i>Rituals represent a detailed sequence of actions that are regularly followed.</i>	Ritual, as part of the Rites of Passage experience can set a tone and impact climate in ways that help to create a productive context for learning.
<i>Adversity or personal challenge.</i>	Experiences that challenge the individual emotionally and/or physically and which present opportunities to learn new values and/or skills.
<i>Silence.</i>	Children and youth grow up in a cacophony of sound that makes the "call to adventure," the internal alarm clock awakening them to the coming of age process almost inaudible. Silence helps a young person develop an internal dialogue for narrating and making sense of what is going on around them.
<i>Stories, myths or legends.</i>	Stories passed down from previous generations that convey morals or cultural values.
<i>Connection with nature.</i>	Experiences that help individuals realize and appreciate their connection and interdependence on the natural environment.
<i>Time alone for reflection.</i>	Time intentionally set aside for a person to reflect on his/her personal values, actions and beliefs.
<i>Connection with ancestral roots.</i>	The opportunity to learn, value and appreciate one's connection to those who went before and the values and ethics their heritage embraces.
<i>Play.</i>	The opportunity to help individuals find their "bliss," those activities that they can immerse themselves in with great passion, and from which they receive unbridled joy.
<i>Giving away one's previous attitudes, behaviors, etc.</i>	The coming of age process through rites of passage includes the giving up or giving away of some aspect, e.g., behaviour, attitude, cherished item, that characterized their former status. This process conveys a reality that change – leaving something dear in the past behind – is an integral part of the transition.
<i>Non--ordinary states of reality.</i>	The use of sanctioned behaviours such as vision quest, meditation, yoga, movement and dance, play in 'in the zone' with sports and hobbies to experience non--ordinary states of reality.
<i>Obligation to service to the larger community.</i>	Through the initiatory process, adolescents are oriented to recognize that service to the community is an essential part of becoming a fully functioning adult in society.
<i>Changes of appearance that express/reflect new status.</i>	As recognition of their transition to a new status, initiates may adorn themselves with some external symbol that symbolizes this attainment. This might include special cloths, adornments, and badges etc. that are awarded during public rites of passage.
<i>Opportunities to demonstrate new competencies &amp; status.</i>	Opportunities for participants to demonstrate publicly newly acquired skills and status.
<i>Celebration of status.</i>	Community celebrations in which the new status of initiates is recognized and acclaimed.

Unfortunately, there were some elements of Blumenkrantz & Goldstein's structure that we were unable to incorporate into our research. These were:

- Connection to ancestral roots or myth
- Silence
- Time alone for reflection
- Connection to nature
- Service to the larger community

**Note:** According to Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, it is necessary for the leader/guide of the rite of passage to have gone through the process themselves, as one can only take others where one has already been. In my short film *Franchi is Back* (2011) described earlier, I went through the process of narrating my anxieties and oppressions in a carnivalesque fashion, just like I had done in my feature film *Happy Face*. It was therefore crucial that the participants see that I also had explored existential themes through the same carnivalesque lens that I would soon encourage them to use to probe their own anxieties. So too had disfigured non-actors, who had all the reason in the world to be camera averse.

## **2.Methods to encourage participant expression**

### **Drawing, roleplay, selfies, and videos**

Drawing one's oppressions, roleplaying, and taking selfies and videos were the basic "visual" modes of expression used throughout our process (Hanington & Martin, 2012). The goal was to give participants several means other than words to express themselves.

### **Future workshops**

Drawing on Robert Jungk's Future Workshops Participatory Design principles, I planned to co-design the experience/ritual with the group of young people (Jungk & Muellert, 1987). Future Workshops were developed in the 1970s by Jungk. They revolve around small groups deliberating future solutions to current problems. The process unfolds in three stages: critique (determination of the current problem), fantasize (imagine solutions to the problem), and implementation. In our case, the critique focused on participants' existential anxieties, and the fantasy phase pertained to their ideal state of being. The participants' *implementation* of the solutions involved trying out – i.e. *living* – the ritual/rite/experience they designed.

## **Theatre of the oppressed: games for actors and non-actors**

In order to help the participants identify and express their anxieties or social dramas in a playful way, I turned to Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal, 2005). The book provides a repertory complete with explanations of Boal's drama exercises. Boal refers to these as "gamesercises" because they mix the training and "introversion" of exercises with the fun and "extroversion" of games. Boal's book served as the basis for the exercises we designed with the youth.

Boal's method relies on four principles: 1) Knowing the body (the individual "body" and the collective "body"); 2) Making the body expressive; 3) Using theatre as a language; and 4) Using theatre as discourse. Knowing we lacked the time to delve deeply into those four principles, my goal was to focus on *gamesercises* that enabled participants to express anxieties and oppressions *as well as* their ideal or heroic fantasies. This approach was chosen in order to mirror the critique and fantasy phase of the Future Workshops.

Given my cultural status as a filmmaker (the participants had all seen some of my films at the CJE), I was to play the Joker. The word "Joker" had, in Boal's mind, the same significance as the "Joker" playing card, a card with more versatility than the other cards. For Boal, the Joker plays different roles in imaginative games, including potentially as director and workshop leader.

**Note:** Given that I don't have a theatre background, for this project, I sought the advice of theatre educator, actor, and Coordinator of Acting for Media at George Brown College, Anna Mackay Smith. Anna had helped me work with the disfigured non-actors on my film *Happy Face* (2018). She understood the need for humor while dealing with personal and sensitive subject matter. Anna contributed by suggesting acting exercises in clowning and for getting one's personal story out.

## The Carnavalesque as method

As we have seen earlier, the carnivalesque is an elusive aesthetic. The carnivalesque is shown by example, practised, shared, and celebrated – It is not something we can learn conceptually. It is something all people began developing in childhood, but for most it gets diminished over time with socialization. My experience with it as an artistic style has been through the theatre-based rehearsal exercises for *Happy Face* (ex: role reversal, laughter, and use of the grotesque to remove inhibitions and help participants bond). The films of the British comedy ensemble Monty Python are also great examples that have, over the years, accustomed me to the carnivalesque.

Film professor and theorist Ellen Bishop, in her analysis of Monty Python's film *The Holy Grail* (1975), argues that the Monty Pythons brought back the carnivalesque spirit to popular culture through a novel reimagining of the grotesque, ambivalent, and universal nature of existence (Bishop, 1990). Throughout this project, I strove to infuse every workshop or interaction with the participants with the absurd, Dadaist, carnivalesque style of Monty Python, hoping to create a space outside of the ordinary—a liminal mental space conducive to creativity.

On a more concrete level, the basic characteristics (ambivalence, grotesque, universality) of the carnivalesque were directly applied to all of our activities whenever we hit a wall (be it a lack of inspiration, opening up, or playfulness).

**Ambivalence:** given the dialogic nature of carnivalesque, we applied a principle of reversal to everything we did. For instance, if a participant who loved singing was too shy to sing in front of the group, they were asked to sing badly on purpose—i.e.; the inverse of what one tries to do when singing. If somebody tried to explain a serious mental health struggle, they were asked to try to explain their situation as a capricious child would.

**The Grotesque:** vulgarity and profanity were encouraged – not directed towards others, but towards ourselves or our anxieties. So was clowning and laughter, even when discussing difficult subject matter.

**Universality:** Whenever a participant performed, the others would be encouraged to echo the participant's words or emotions, so that there were no spectators.

By using this method, the group quickly achieved a state of comfort, playfulness, and openness. Perhaps the carnivalesque could be called a method-booster instead of a method, as it was something worked into existing activities like an aesthetic lens or style worked into a narrative.

### **3.Methods to ensure the survival of the project**

#### **Conditions needed prior to start of research-creation**

Based on my dealings with the CJE social workers and board of directors, Concordia University's Ethics Committee, and based on my previous experience in dealing with non-profit organizations which helped marginalized groups, I devised the following list of pre-conditions needed to increase the power of the experience for a project such as ours, as well as its feasibility (these are non-exhaustive conditions):

- A group of participants devoted to the activity in terms of time and mental space.
- A group of participants who have already experienced the tone or nature of the project before embarking on it (by going to an introductory session).
- A win-win situation for both the participants and the researcher following an honest negotiation.
- A clear consent process where participants can withdraw at any time
- A dedicated space where the activities will take place. This is the base, the "castle," the "bat-cave" where the bulk of play and work takes place.
- In the case of working with an organization (a youth or community centre), buy-in from leaders and staff at all levels.
- Resources for participants in case they experience psychological distress during the project (ex: therapists, social workers).

CJE students are paid, through government grants, to attend classes at the CJE. In our case, since the project was approved by the CJE board of directors, participants were paid to partake in our activities in lieu of regular classes.

This was a near-ideal scenario since it ensured that the participants who embarked on our adventure would have no monetary reasons to leave. However, steps needed to be taken to make sure the project did not fizzle out over its six-month duration.

### **Callon Latour actor-network methodology for securing institutional and participant support**

In addition to the complexities of getting university ethics clearance for such a project, there was the very real matter of getting approval from the CJE's board of directors and, after this, ensuring that CJE social workers and other staff supported the project over its duration. The problematization, *intéressement*, enrollment, and mobilisation of Callon Latour's model (Callon, 1986) provided an invaluable methodological approach to ensure that all stakeholders at 'obligatory passage points' supported the project. Following the Callon Latour model therefore meant ensuring that the director of the CJE (Sebastien Morin), the principal social worker involved in the project (Marie-Claude Touzin) and other social workers kept believing in the project. As we will see later, in the research-creation section, my failure to properly secure buy-in at all organizational levels of the CJE jeopardized the completion of the project. Broadly, three main stakeholders were involved in the project: the director and board, the CJE social workers, and the participants.

**Director and board:** The CJE's goal is to help young people finish high school degrees and improve employability skills. When pitching the project to the director and board, I downplayed its grotesque and carnivalesque aspects, and emphasized the employability skills that theatre and cinema would cultivate. These include self-confidence, presentation skills, and knowledge of creative industries.

**Social workers:** Social workers at CJE want to stimulate and motivate the young people they work with. They want to broaden their horizons and empower them to discover new things.

Most of them have studied novel ways of engaging with youth; however, they seldom get to experiment with these approaches in their day-to-day work, given the very controlled nature of government-funded CJs. To the social workers, therefore, I pitched the project in all its chaotic glory, as an opportunity to engage with clients on a radically different level than what they are used to. I also aimed to show how the project would require minimal extra work on their part.

**The participants:** Since the participants were essentially volunteers who, at any moment, could return to their regular classes, the pitch to them was rather simple. It involved detailing why I was interested in the project as a means to deal with my own anxieties. This meant opening up about my own quest for wellbeing in our modern world. It meant showing them my very personal films and explaining why I made them – namely, to try to process the hardships of life. I was explicit with potential participants that I was on a quest to be the hero of my own life by wrestling my demons. I wanted to have fun, to be subversive, and for others to join in the madness. Using Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation (1969), my interactions with the participants revolved around rungs 6 and 7 of the ladder (Partnership and Delegated Power). Specifically, I sought to give power to participants and to be open to the unexpected paths the project could take. This was a bit idealistic, as I soon realized that in practice I was still going to “direct” the project. Participants were still, however, free to choose their own roles and character arcs. Our negotiation even went as far as giving them official (and key) creative positions in our project such as production manager, costume designer, makeup artist, and music director to boost their CVs.

In every culture that conducts rites of passages, the members of the community have an idea of the types of activities and hardships involved in the rite. Though some rites’ liminal phases are shrouded in secrecy, potential participants have an inkling of what they’re in for. Young people joining a Karate school, though not knowing the exact nature of the training, will expect rigorous physical exercises, sparring, and drills. For a new rite of passage such as ours, no one knew what they were in for. It was therefore crucial to give potential participants an introductory session that included some of the games and exercises they might encounter during the actual research-creation: a realistic preview, of sorts.

The willingness to embark on the adventure was a critical element in ensuring that participants stayed until the end. Before we began the research creation, I gave an introductory workshop to give a grounded idea of what the project could entail. I then made sure that every participant present had the desire to explore something new in order to embark on a process of change. This had to be validated by signing an informed consent form. Thanks to this introductory session, and to the effectiveness of CJE staff in supporting me, the participants entered the first session knowing they were in a safe environment in which to share their personal stories and feelings.

“ First of all, do not forget that my clients all suffered being dominated by their double. If they came to me, it was precisely because they felt bad in their role and sensed a completely different nature in themselves than the “original.” The process is founded, then, in a client’s real desire to change. (Jodorowski, 2015, p. 50)

#### **4.The video camera as multi-faceted methodological tool**

The video camera as a methodological tool was part of all three groups of methods that ensured transformative structure, participant expression, and project survival.

##### **The video camera as part of the project’s structure**

On a micro level, the video camera helped structure each day. Time was set at the end of each workshop day to “play” with the camera—to perform both with it and in front of it. As we will see in the Research Creation section below, I structured each day as a small rite of passage. With a separation ritual at the beginning (separation phase), unusual games and exercises in the bulk of the day (liminal phase), and use of the camera to film and watch whomever wanted to express themselves (commemoration phase).

On a macro structural level, I also used the camera to create stress. Eagleman (2015) shows that adolescent stress levels are much higher than those of adults when they are being watched. Knowing this, I used stress production (provided by the use of the video camera) as a way to induce risk and risk-taking, albeit psychological, in the design of our rite of passage – thus fulfilling one of the twenty structural elements of Blumenkrantz & Goldstein (2010).

### **The video camera as method for participants self-expression**

This application seems obvious. However, given its mirror-like qualities, the camera was also a means for participants to express themselves through design as they prepared their personal transformative rituals. And here we have to briefly touch upon drama therapy and video therapy scholarship. Indeed, according to psychologists and drama therapists, the camera is the ideal transitional object, providing patients with a means to observe their patterns at a distance in order to bring about personal growth (Alders et al., 2011). Additionally, using a video camera reduces resistance to therapy, given that video segments are usually seen as engaging, culturally relevant, and fun (Cohen, 2012). More importantly, Brawner (1993) and Molinski (2015) observe that the camera provides a safe space for clients to experiment with new identities, and that the collaborative nature of filmmaking can help with group affiliation and belongingness. A film set becomes a form of family, and participants end up looking out for each other. Without intending it to be a potent therapeutic tool, the camera turned out to facilitate expression, and design of the rituals, which helped maintain participant interest in the project.

### **The video camera in ensuring the continuance of the project from start to finish**

By regularly showing participants and social workers edited portions of our filmed activities, I soon realized that participants wanted to see more and do more. Some started talking about putting together a documentary. Others showed the clips to their family members. The social workers started talking about the project with their colleagues and recounting how much the participants were opening up in front of the camera (as opposed to their talk therapy sit down sessions).

In this sense, the video camera furnished regular and compelling evidence of the positive impact that involvement in the project was having on participants. Moreover, the video camera has helped produce a record of our research creation that can be drawn on when designing potential future iterations of the project. It also provides useful promotional material; for example, the small trailer we edited as a summary of the research has been shown to the CJE and the board. Such documentation could be used to seek fund for further research or a second iteration of this project; design is iterative, after all.

### **The high cultural status of cinema as intéressement for participants**

In tribal societies, or in societies where established rites of passages exist, there is a general consensus on how the rite is to be administered. In our culture, everybody more less knows what happens at a school graduation. The same is true for a belt examination in a karate dojo: all students know about the skill level, or aura, of the Sensei – usually they attend the school based on his or her reputation. The same goes for a tribal society where all the members know of the Shaman’s reputation and power. For the replication of a project such as ours in the future, it is key that the one who plays the Joker benefits from some sort of status vis à vis the participants.

In our case, the fact that I was a filmmaker with some reputation helped get potential participants to listen to what I was proposing to do – and to believe that I could genuinely bring such an atypical project to fruition. The CJE uses my film *Happy Face* as mandatory viewing to all new participants. Additionally, the social workers and I had agreed we would do an introductory session with some CJE students, with the aim of seeing who might be interested in the project. For this I had prepared a sample of my film work (excerpts, trailers, etc.) and remarks about how I had transformed my existential fears and anxieties into artistic form with the participation of non-actors as well. I talked about how some of my films were rites of passage, and how humor and the carnivalesque were means to free myself from tensions I was feeling.

After sharing these reflections, I proceeded to describe my research-creation project, but did so by using the very theories that I was studying: ritual, the carnivalesque, and experimental theatre. What resulted was a series of theatre exercises, roleplays, and discussions that gave potential participants an accurate flavour of what the larger project would entail.

# Research Creation

This chapter is divided into 4 sections:

**Section 1** provides a summary of the work completed and results of the research; including guidelines on how the carnivalesque was practised. This section also showcases the trajectory of a participant, Valérie, whose ritual was the most complete.

**Section 2**, the longest by far, provides a chronological description of the exercises and games conducted during each of the 3 workshop Phases, including the final ritual performance. This section includes:

- findings and outputs, in the forms of challenges and rituals, that the participant designed.
- how the carnivalesque was practised in each specific case in order to creatively facilitate a freer expression and collaboration of participants in our Quest for Communitas.

Throughout the section, the reader will also find links to an **Ethnographic Journal** describing, in great detail, all the activities of each workshop day, should they wish to dive deeper into the work.

**Section 3** Lists important design considerations that impacted the research creation. Such as structuring each day like a mini rite of passage, and designing for psychological resonance.

**Section 4** gives an overview of the feedback we received from the participants, their peers, their social workers, and the visitors of the Quest for Communitas exhibit as part of the Master of Design graduation project vernissage.

## SECTION 1 - Summary of the work completed

### Overview of the work and results

Our research creation workshop took place between September 2022 and February 2023. It consisted of the following:

- 8 full-day sessions in Trois Rivières conducted with the participants.
- 7 half-day solo studio work sessions in Montreal where I reflected on the work through a carnivalesque lens.
- Dozens of video calls via a Discord channel between the participants and myself.
- Video, drawing and photo outputs that were used in the final ritual and MDes Exhibit.
- An Ethnographic journal detailing each day's activities.
- A ritual-performance by the participants in front of their community (the CJE staff, social workers and other youth) on February 08, 2023.

**SPOILER ALERT: According to the CJE social workers, youth observers, and the majority of the participants, the project was a “success” in that it was moving, powerful, created bonds between participants, and built confidence.**

Of 11 initial participants, 8 remained involved in the project over the full six months (September to February). As CJE social workers report a youth retention rate for other CJE projects around 25-50%, this participant rate is excellent.

The ritual performance that the youth created was emotionally charged and cathartic for the CJE staff and other youth observers – everybody felt a sense of pride and belonging after what they had witnessed. Some social workers even cried. The CJE youth attending were impressed by the courage of their peers who performed. In the weeks that followed the ritual-performance, the social workers found that the youth who had witnessed the ritual performance were more willing to address difficult topics plaguing them, which aided the social workers in doing their jobs.

As for the eight co-designer participants, in addition to finding the confidence to share their vulnerabilities in front of others, the youth became closer and more cohesive as a group. Friendships were formed, former enmities were turned into mutual respect, even into love. For some participants, a transformative catharsis occurred that, in some cases, gave them renewed confidence to tackle some of the difficulties they faced on an everyday basis.

### **The 3 Phases that comprise the general structure of the workshop**

As I tried to cast a wide net in crafting this research-creation, many games, activities and exercises from various sources were explored, some more successfully than others. At times, the process seemed murky and the participants admitted not knowing where we were going – a feeling that I shared. But taking a step back and reflecting on the process, I realize that my reflexes as a film writer and director provided an intuitive gameplan based on storytelling and catharsis.

In a good story, the protagonist faces an obstacle that creates a conflict and prevents them from attaining their goal. The character then has to dig deep within themselves to find the resources to face and surmount the obstacle (McKee, 2005). Our work consisted of identifying and representing the obstacle, the goal, and making sure that the “audience” (other participants, the CJE community, and the participants themselves) understood key elements of the story to feel the tension represented by the conflict (the obstacle that prevents the goal). This simple mechanic echoes Augusto Boal’s work on oppressions (the conflict), ideal states (the goal), and performance (Boal, 2005). It also echoes Future Workshops critique-fantasy-implementation phases (Jungk & Mullert, 1987). The critique phase being akin to a story’s conflict, the fantasy phase to a character’s goals, and the implementation being akin to a character’s action to overcome their conflict.

In short, the participants had to relive a part of their story and transcend it in front of others, in an act of personal and public courage. The courage came from tackling one’s personal wounds (or oppressions) and the heroism was “doing it for real” in front of a public (or community).

The eight (8) day-long sessions with the participants were structured in three (3) phases:

Phase 1 – Expressing our story through oppressions, fantasies, & symbols:

Days 1 and 2 were spent trying to bring out the story, ideal/goal, the oppression/conflict of each participant. In addition to getting the participants to tell their stories, I found ways for them to express their oppressions & anxieties, as well as their ideal and fantasy states in various ways. This was done through drawing, role-playing, taking photos and making videos. The key here was to work on both the negative and positive emotions.

Day 3 was spent working with symbols and examples of ritual acts, so as to allow participants to experiment with what held meaning for them and get them to develop their own ritual language to express their stories, oppressions, and ideal states brought forth in Workshop days 1 and 2.

Phase 2 – Designing, prototyping our cathartic personal ritual with others:

Days 4,5, and 6 were spent using the video camera to help participants gain distance from themselves (through viewing their drawings, photos and videos captured in Phase 1 of the project) and design and test rituals to transcend their oppressions (resolve their conflicts). The participants, with the help of their peers, tried different ritual ideas and continued to explore their story.

Phase 3 – Preparing and enacting the ritual-performance in front of community

Days 7 and 8 were devoted to the final preparation and enactment of the ritual-performance in front of the entire CJE. We ensured that as many elements of the rite of passage were included in the design of the event, and that the participants stories were communicated to the audience.

Our Quest for Communitas can be metaphorically summarized with the following quote from anthropologist Joseph Campbell, whose writings about the hero's journey have inspired countless filmmakers:

*“The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there is something lacking in the normal experience available or permitted to the members of society. The person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a coming and a returning” (Campbell & Moyers, 2011, p. 277).*

The “adventures beyond the ordinary” constituted the bulk of our workshop activities. The “coming and returning” was the ritual-performance in front of the participants community.

### **The Example of Valérie**

Before going on, I encourage the reader to view the video portrait of Valérie documenting her work throughout the research-creation. The final ritual design by Valérie was one of the most complete in the sense that it gave a clear sense of her story, oppressions, and ideal states. Additionally, Valérie made use of psychologically resonant symbols and included the carnivalesque in her ritual – for a heightened cathartic effect for her and the observers. Using Parker and Horton's (1996) classification of rituals, which groups rituals into three categories (celebration, liberation, or commemoration), we can say Valérie's ritual was a liberation ritual. Liberation from the negative influence of her brother on her life.

In Valérie's case, she uses the act of cutting a rope as a metaphor or symbol for cutting ties with her brother negative influence (her oppression or conflict). Valérie then proceeds to change into the party outfit of a 12-year-old, and jump around and shout what she wants in life, while holding up a vision board showing photos of her life goals for all to see - happiness with her children, stable job, love etc. During that phase, the other participants and the Joker (myself), encourage the spect-actors to sing and shout with Valérie to echo her joy (her ideal state or goal).

The video helps convey the context and tone of what Quest for Communitas ended up being. It is also useful to share at this juncture of the thesis, since the video illustrate how the carnivalesque was practised. Please click on the image below to view the video:



*Figure 3 - Valérie's work and ritual*

Please click on image or link below to view video:

<https://vimeo.com/alexandrefranchi/valerieportraitfr?share=copy>

Password: Quest

### **A note on finding the practise of the Carnavalesque**

The carnivalesque's ambivalence, grotesque, and universal qualities were a "booster" or a facilitator for getting participants to play with their existential anxieties and states of joy. In short, the carnivalesque provided a way for the participants to access the raw power of emotion that was buried deep within themselves. In other words, connecting them to their Dionysian sides.

Bakhtin (1984) states that the carnivalesque aesthetics and carnivals help humans liberate themselves from oppressions. Although he mostly meant external oppression coming from political and social authorities; I have found, during the course of this research, that Bakhtin's insight also applies to internal oppressions, such as shame, shyness, or personal-judgement.

Additionally, the carnivalesque was also a way for participants, and other CJE students when they later witnessed the ritual performance, to connect with each other and “play” together.

In the next section entitled 2) chronological description of the workshop phases and activities, I will single out, with the use of a coloured section of the text, the instances where the carnivalesque was practised in our activities. Each coloured section will point out how the carnivalesque, with its subversive power, helped, aided, constructed, created, loosened, and encouraged the participants in getting them to explore a truer or freer version of themselves, and do it together in *communitas*. To that effect, each key carnivalesque attribute will have its specific colour:

**AMBIVALENT:** red for the power to radically sacralize or degrade anything it touches

**GROTESQUE:** yellow because it is the color of pipi

**UNIVERSAL:** green for the colour of nature, of the earth, and harmony

Some, if not most, activities will feature two or three colours – signifying that several attributes are at play. Given the fluid and chaotic nature of the carnivalesque, this is to be expected. Additionally, I will single out the rituals or challenges that were discovered by the participants, and mark them with the appropriate colour to signal which carnivalesque attribute they harness. When a specific theatre exercise is linked to the carnivalesque (like the Clown Exercise, for example), I will also mark it with the appropriate colours. That way, the reader will get a clear sense of how the carnivalesque aesthetic was practised during our research creation.

**Note on Ambivalence:** Ambivalence, or reversal, is the ability to turn everything on its head. Bad news will be laughed at and celebrated. A fragile moment will be aggrandized. A personal ability or quality in which we take pride will be laughed at. Carnivalesque ambivalence desacralizes our ideas of performance, success, and anything linked to the ego. For our group, it also allowed us to take what we considered shameful, weak, or ugly, and bring it out to be shared by others. I wanted to remind the reader of this very particular characteristic here, as it ended up being crucial in our research-creation.

## SECTION 2 - Chronological description of workshop days & activities

The Ethnographic Journal detailing the activities of each workshop day is presented in **Appendices A through I** of this thesis. Going through the Appendices, or clicking on the [links in blue](#), will provide the interested reader with detailed descriptions of the exercises performed, participant reactions, and personal reflections and adjustments on my part.



Figure 4- The participants (from left to right)  
Pauline, Mathis, Cloé, Christelle, J.C., Annabelle, Daly, Max, Charlie, Dan.

Note: Pauline, Christelle, and J.C. would later leave the project.  
While Valérie would join the group on day 2.

Within each phase, I chose to include a chronological description of the activities we performed (a day-by-day account) as the order of the exercises and games contributed to getting the participants to feel more at ease with themselves and each other. In this section, I also list some of our findings and illustrate them with video examples.

# Workshop Phase 1 – Expressing our story through oppressions, fantasies, & symbols

## Day 1: Learning carnivalesque self-expression

*(Please see [Appendix A](#) for a detailed description of the activities)*

### A few exercises and rituals to get into the carnivalesque spirit

We started with an [Opening Ritual](#) in order to **separate the participants from ordinary life and enter a carnivalesque space**. In the ritual, a soft music was played, Palo Santo incense was burned, and the participants solemnly counted down from 10 to 1. During the countdown, I dressed up as my alter ego, Designer Docteur F. This disguise created laughter and relieved the tension the participants felt at jumping into the unknown with a middle-aged stranger – me. I could read on their faces “okay, this is going to be fun, absurd, and relaxed.”

#### **AMBIVALENCE**

Having the “expert” (be they designer, accomplished filmmaker etc.) dress in a ridicule disguise degrades the image of authority normally associated with someone running a workshop. In our case, it allowed for a freer interaction between myself and the youth. This was particularly powerful with these participants given that they often interact with social workers, psychologist, government employees – authority figures all invested with power over them.

We then proceeded to **tell our stories in a communal way** with – [Getting to know you #1](#) – an exercise given to me by theatre professor Anna Mackay Smith. In this exercise, each participant tells their life story in 3-4 minutes and then fields very specific and personal questions from the rest of the group in an effort to know. Most questions are selected from a pre-generated list, but participants can pose their own depending on what they want to find out about the storyteller. This is a great way to encourage group bonding and interaction. I made sure to state it was important that the life story must include what oppresses us and what gives us joy.

It was crucial for me to lead by example and, as the first volunteer, to explain candidly my weaknesses and struggles in life. This encouraged participants to ask me candid questions. My truthful and uncensored answers set the tone for the rest of the participants. But more importantly, it desacralized and removed the traditional student-teacher power dynamic often found between social workers, psychologist, educators and young people. Here, we were all equals in our fragilities and joys.

We then conducted [A Round of rhythm and movement](#) (Boal, 2005). This exercise requires participants in a circle to physically imitate the person standing in the middle who will start to move and utter sounds (no speech permitted). Each participant took turns to be in the middle. The exercise helped show me who the outgoing vs shy participants were. When a shy participant faltered and said “I don’t know what to do”, everybody imitated their hesitation in unison – thus creating a bond between everybody. Although this exercise already incorporates an element of universality in its original design. It was its grotesque potential that we came to revel in.

GROTESQUE	UNIVERSAL
<p>When we conducted A Round of rhythm and movement a second time, I decided to start by making burping noises and somewhat gross gestures (picking my nose, twisting my nose into a pig snout etc.) the participants all imitated me. And, when it was time for the next participant to start, they took it up a notch. Charlie started smelling his own armpits and that of Annabelle’s – leading to a similar imitation from all of us. This led to a crescendo of grotesque. A very freeing moment accompanied with laughter and joy. If everybody is ridicule and grotesque, then no one really is.</p> <p>We decided to rename the exercise <a href="#">Ridicule’s Embrace</a>. This activity became a ritual that became more and more outrageous every time we performed it. It also served as separation ritual on a few occasions.</p>	

Please see the video link below to see how Ridicule's Embrace evolved:



Figure 5 – Ridicule's Embrace ritual spell

Click on image or link below to view ritual

<https://vimeo.com/alexandrefranchi/ridiculesembrace?share=copy>

Password: Quest

After discussing with the participants the theories behind rites of passage and the carnivalesque (a concept that not everyone readily grasps), we performed a very simple and powerful [Clown Exercise](#) that embodied the carnivalesque. Again, this exercise was given to me by my friend and acting teacher Anna Mackay Smith. In this exercise, a person performed a mindless or useless 'trick' or 'skill' in front of the group (ex: picking one's nose, checking the time, combing one's hair). However, they must perform this act with great pomp and confidence, as if they were a prima donna. As soon as the 'skill' is performed, the audience must erupt into wild cheers and applause. When doing the **Clown exercise** on day one, I started things off by picking my nose and licking my fingers – introducing a notion of grotesque into the mix. However, most participants opted to do non-grotesque actions – such as checking the time, bending down, adjusting one's glasses – eliciting wild applause from the rest of the group.

AMBIVALENCE	UNIVERSALITY	GROTESQUE
<p>The participants were bewildered to report that the exercise made them feel good – even confident and empowered – even though the specific action they had performed was insignificant. This ambivalent and universal (and at times grotesque) exercise led participants to ponder the locus of their self-confidence or lack of it, which were not necessarily products of outward action or validation. Some participants reported that doing this exercise made them feel better than they often do in their day-to-day lives.</p>		

The Clown Exercise is so complete in its embodiment of the carnivalesque that I believe it constitutes a ritual in itself. I will therefore frame it as such for future uses:

Clown Exercise (Celebration Ritual)	Ambivalence	Universality	Grotesque
<p>1-In front of a group of friends, perform a useless skill or trick with pomp and importance as if you were the best in the world.</p> <p>2-Once the trick completed, the friends applaud and cheer with explosive joy and admiration.</p> <p>3-Each friend takes a turn at performing their trick and receiving praise.</p>			

### Acting and drawing out oppressions and anxieties

In the [Siren song exercise](#) (Boal, 2005), we then proceeded to manifest our oppression/anxieties with sound and movement (ex: a groan, a cry, a shout, curling up into a ball), with the caveat that participants could not tell anyone what the exact feeling was. After doing this, participants grouped themselves according to which sound/movement they felt most connected to. To our collective surprise, we realized that although people had uttered different sounds in different ways, each person tended to gravitate to others that had similar oppressions or anxieties. For instance, all participants who were manifesting generalized anxieties, myself included, formed a group together. All participants acting out loneliness gathered in another area of the room. This exercise opened the door to expressing ourselves in different ways – with gestures, sounds, subtle signs – and confirmed that others are receptive to those signs.

We continued on that train of thought by [drawing out our oppressions](#). Each of us producing a drawing that would use in the research-creation by getting participants to explain, or discuss the drawing in front of the camera. I also asked the participants to send me **selfie photos** of themselves being both joyful and depressed.

### AMBIVALENCE

I encouraged the participants to look bad or goofy in some of the photos where they appeared depressed. This, in addition to reversing the tendency to always produce carefully crafted aestheticized images, desacralized what oppressed the participant. This prompt produced very unique and personalized images of the participants that captured their inner self and fit with their drawing.



Figure 6 - Charlie selfies and oppression drawing

The drawings combined with the selfies, once enlarged and printed, were to later serve as emotionally-charged self-portraits that would be used in ritual design work. In the images, the participants became carnivalesque representations of the characters in their stories.

### First participant carnivalesque outputs: Dreadbane and Armpit Challenge

To end the day with a form of *incorporation*, we engaged in some [Play with the camera](#). Both outputs of that day (the drawings and videos) stemmed directly from the earlier exercises on oppressions and the grotesque. When I asked the group who would want to express themselves on recorded video, Daly jokingly mentioned that she wanted to yell and curse at her crippling anxiety. Great idea. Why not try and record such an act, I suggested? And since I also suffer from anxiety, I performed the deed first. This encouraged Daly to do so too. Others followed, and most felt some relief after screaming at the top of their lungs pretending that the camera, or an unseen audience, was their anxiety. For most participants that felt oppressed by their anxiety, the action of screaming at it and cursing it was a reversal of power. What Daly had done was akin to a ritual of liberation.

I later came to call this activity **Dreadbane**, giving it a Dungeons and Dragons style to fit my personal tastes. The participants did not object. Although I suspect that a French name would have to be collectively found in the future. The Dreadbane ritual goes as follows:

DREADBANE (Liberation Ritual)	Ambivalence
1-With your friends as observers, you stand in front of a representation of your anxiety or oppression (it could be a photo, item, or symbol) or in front of a camera. 2-You then proceed to tell your oppression what's on your mind. You can shout, scream, sing, curse. 3-With each expression or outburst, your friends cheer and encourage you.	



Figure 7 – Dreadbane Ritual invented by Daly  
To view Ritual click on image or link below:  
<https://vimeo.com/813742190> - password: Quest

On the more joyful side, Annabelle and Charlie decided to do a grotesque armpit smelling contest in front of the camera. This idea had originated earlier in the day during Ridicule’s Embrace and the Clown Exercise, and later became the **Armpit Challenge**. The Armpit Challenge is a celebration ritual of grotesque nature. It celebrates our bodies, its smells, its life.

ARMPIT CHALLENGE (Celebration Ritual)	Grotesque
1-In a group of friends, without telling the others what’s going on, two people proceed to smell each other’s armpits while describing the smells with exaggerated gestures and grimaces. 2-A higher level of this challenge can be repeated in a public space with strangers surrounding the duo.	

Please click on the image below to see the first iteration of the Armpit Challenge.



*Figure 8 – Armpit Challenge by Annabelle and Charlie*  
**To view Armpit Challenge, click on image or link below**  
<https://vimeo.com/822607673> - password: Quest

Though not all participants had the confidence or desire to perform in front of the camera, I made sure to retain carnivalesque universality during this activity by having a “loose” camera that often turned from the performer to the audience, which prompted reactions of all kinds. This blurred the lines between the traditional stressful ‘standing in front of the camera’ and being a passive, stress-free spectator of others in front of the camera. Everybody ended up being filmed, whether they were performing or not, and this helped into removing the fear of the camera.

### **Notes for Day 1**

Day 1 was generally considered a success by the social workers, participants and myself. We left the day elated by our activities and the potential they held. However, there were two challenges that I foresaw would impede our work. The first is that the work we conducted took much longer than I had planned. This was due, in part, to inexperience on my end; and also, by the constant interruptions the participants faced – either by the CJE administration (for job search counselling or other pedagogical affairs) or by coffee and cigarette breaks the participants requested.

The other challenge came from the geographical distance between myself (Montreal) and the participants (Trois Rivières). Given that our day-long sessions were to be several weeks apart for this research creation, I realized it was crucial to be able to interact with the participant at regular intervals (several times a week) in order to keep the momentum. After all, rites of passages must happen in the home community (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein 2010). We decided to start a Discord Channel between Docteur F, myself, and the participants. That way we would be able to exchange videos, texts and audio files on a continuous basis.

## **Day 2: Leaning in fragile and tense moments**

(Please see [Appendix B](#) for a detailed description of activities)

Day 2 continued the work of Day 1 in delving deeper into each participant's story, oppression and ideal. However, the day was marked by many interruptions and the introduction of a new student, Valérie - a mother of 3 who was a bit older than the rest of the participants. Given that I wanted every participant to have the same level of knowledge and understanding, I had to take time out of the planned schedule to go over what we had done on Day 1 with Valérie. I also gave her an overview of the theories we were playing with. Because of this, I had to skip some crucial exercises on the idealized states of the participants.

### **Laughter and fragility**

After an Opening Ritual, we engaged in a session of [Laughter Yoga](#), (Kataria, 2005) an over-the-top exercise where participants engage in simple daily gestures while laughing out loud (ex: shaking hands, talking on the phone). Laughter yoga is a therapeutic method developed in the mid 90s by Dr. Madan Kataria, a generalist doctor, and his wife Madhuri, a yoga professor. This constituted a great way to separate the participants from their ordinary lives and get the group in the spirit of the carnivals. The participants abandoned themselves to the riotous exercises and felt the physical benefits of laughing – cheeks flushed, heart racing, smiles etc. However, I knew that for more subtle exercises, most participants (save for Charlie and Annabelle) were still a bit self conscious and shy to fully abandon themselves.

To palliate to that, I introduced the concept of the [Beau Moment](#), (Gates, 2011) from the Gaulier School of Clown in France. Mr. Gaulier, himself a renowned clown and actor and student of legendary dramatic mime and pedagogue Jacques Lecoq, describes a way to explore that fragile, sweet moment of shyness we experience when performing in front of others. He considers how to take the drama and weight away from the paralyzing moment, how when we are in front of an audience that is not reacting to our performance, we feel shy (or destroyed). Clowning, Gaulier

argues, teaches us to stay with that uncomfortable feeling and not flee from it: that moment of fragility and vulnerability is a Beautiful Moment (un Beau Moment). To remain mindful of this insight, the participants and I agreed to use the phrase “Beau Moment!” in our exercises, to be shouted or spoken by the performer whenever they felt overwhelmed or shy during an exercise, and then repeated by the others.

Ambivalence	Universality
This idea of singling out a moment of frailty, the Beau Moment, is another example of carnivalesque ambivalence: it involves taking something fragile and “weak” and bringing it out in the open, as opposed to burying it. It is also an example of carnivalesque universality, since spectators echo what the performer is feeling. By using this notion in our workshop, some of us were able to explore frail and delicate moments in front of others and feel supported. I don’t know if The Beau Moment is a ritual per se. However, it is a magical notion that, once known by people in a group, can be called up to powerful results.	

### **Future workshops, but without words or flipcharts**

I then conducted a more straightforward [Future Workshops](#) session. I asked participants to list what was wrong with their lives (critique stage) and envision what life they would like to have or how they would like to ideally be (fantasy stage). Participants talked while I wrote their insights on a flipchart. This method was too cerebral and did not prove effective.

When asked about their oppressions, the group listed a mix of issues: anxiety (generalized and performance), social pressure, social media harassment, patriarchy, academic pressure, standards of beauty, and so forth. In many ways, the issues were standard subjects of stress and anxiety for young people. The ideal states the participants wished-for revolved around freedom, self-confidence, and enjoyment of the present moment. The participants also said they wanted to laugh, scream, and do improvisation during the workshop.

Their desired outputs might be a film, a ritual, a musical comedy, a mini theatre performance, some clown act, zine or songs. I noted everything down on a flipchart and tried to funnel the discussion on a few issues that felt common, but the discussion died down. My attempt at conducting Future Workshops felt like a failure. The participants had reverted to their classroom mentality of sitting down with a low level of energy. The issues the participants listed- words on a flipchart, really – were not linked to their personal narratives or any strong emotions. The process was too analytical.

Indeed, Future Workshops seem to have been designed for the workplace context, or to elicit citizen participation when faced with a common ‘external’ problem, such as a city policy or a managerial decision that went against the wishes or best interests of the group. In our case, although all the participants were high school dropouts seeking to pursue their studies – a seemingly common problem – they were each in this predicament due to very different reasons. Specifically, they each had their own individual traumas, oppressions, pasts, and reasons for having left school. Most of these reasons had by now been internalized, and the participants each struggled with their own demons.

I abandoned the flipcharts and called for Augusto Boal’s **Siren Song exercise** we had done the previous day, but this time around, everybody wore masks. As I hoped, the masks enabled the timid participants to express themselves more freely and to stay with the uncomfortable feeling of their oppressions. This allowed me to film the exercise by setting up the camera on the tripod, while I still participated.

It dawned on me that the expression of oppression in the Siren Song exercise was akin to critique phase of future workshops. A critique of the state of the self. Intuitive and embodied. If the participants manifested their oppressions in non-verbal terms, and also manifested their ideal states of being, also in non-verbal terms, and then designed a ritual destined to let go of the oppression and attain this ideal state – could that not be a form of personal future workshop?

Indeed, getting participants to talk about having self-confidence or enjoying the present was nowhere near as powerful as getting them to relive a moment where they acted with self-confidence and felt positively as a result.



*Figure 9 - Marie France (the social worker) in the masked Siren Song.*

With our oppressions fresh in our mind and bodies, we then broke into pairs for another exercise to bring our story into the world

### **Refining our story into something “tellable”**

We then engaged in a new activity entitled [Retelling each other’s story](#), where participants formed pairs and learned about their partner’s life story, oppressions, and how their oppressions have impacted their lives. Each participant then presented their partner’s story to the group. The stories were much shorter and poignant than the first day when each participant recounted their own story. This stems from the notion of tellability or narrativity (Baroni, 2007), in which a story’s noteworthiness is dependent on the nature of specific incidents deemed significant or surprising by the storyteller themselves – a notion that prompted me to come up with this exercise.

I also noticed that the “retold” stories were more psychologically resonant with the group than the stories told the day before. Overall, the new stories had simpler plots and focused on emotional evocativeness rather than personal details, two characteristics of psychologically resonant tales (Goodwyn, 2016). Through this exercise, we got at the core of each participant’s story and oppression, which formed the basis of a personal tale that could be retold and transcended with a specific heroic act.



Figure 10 - Participants retelling each other's stories.

## Notes for Day 2

This day felt like a failure as we did not get as many video outputs as the first day. Additionally, I wanted to move beyond oppressions and into the territory of fantasy and joy, time ran out. The recap for Valérie and several long interruptions by the CJE Staff derailed our schedule. Specifically, I wanted to do a powerful exercise that was the exact opposite of the Siren Song: [The Child’s Dream](#) (Boal, 2005, p166), where participants aim to move around and sound like their ideal selves. Luckily, as we will see further below, the carnivalesque provided with other opportunities for participants to experience a state of ideal, fantasy, and joy.

### **Day 3: Working with symbols**

(Please see [Appendix D](#) for a detailed description of activities)

This workshop day was spent introducing participants to the various symbols they could work with in designing their rituals. We also explored different costumes and characters that these symbols could evoke. We discussed Jodorowsky's poetic and [Psychomagic acts](#). It was interesting to note that Jodorowski, in his shamanic rituals, uses items that are quite simple to understand and that have symbolic links to the human experience: they include a coffin, honey, plants, soil, seeds, alcohol, clothes, precious metals, family pictures, fire, and water. These items have sensual, intuitive, and emotional qualities that are often present in stories, art, and psychologically-resonant fairy tales, according to Goodwyn (2016).

In order to give a tangible example of symbolic play and ritual, we invited a former CJE student, Eric Marleau, who had embarked on a path to becoming a symbolic clown to join us for the day's workshop. Unfortunately, Eric Marleau's workshop was a bit underwhelming as he is only at the beginning of his training. Nevertheless, the idea of symbols and their power had been sown in the minds of the participants, who started considering symbolically-charged items for their final ritual performance. As a result, some participants ended up incorporating family photos, clothes of loved ones, fire, and gold rings into their rituals.

The outputs at the end of each day's video play varied. Some participants played with costumes, while others engaged in conversations. I realize now that I should have prepared more exercises with symbols for the participants to explore during the day, and that we should have filmed some work with the symbols during video play as opposed to clowning around, as participants were already comfortable engaging in the latter.

### Notes for Day 3

In retrospect, I realize that introducing participants to symbols, different types of rituals, and psychomagic acts should have taken place throughout the entire Phase 1 of the workshop – i.e. a little exposure each day – rather than all during the third day. Aside from a few exceptions, young people are not familiar with how certain rituals and symbols can hold meaning and power for them, and how to weave them together. They use symbols every day; however, few have consciously reflected on how they could deliberately weave these symbols into their lives.

In order to co-design their own rituals with powerful symbols, I came to realize, participants needed to have the opportunity to experiment with symbols (objects, clothes, gestures, sigils etc.) to discover for themselves which ones resonated with them personally. It would have been more beneficial to begin this work on day 1 and to incorporate such items in the video play that the participants engaged in at the end of each workshop day.



*Figure 11 - Max embodying the rapper lifestyle, which he hates, in ambivalence.*

## Workshop Phase - 1.5 Solo Studio Time for Carnavalesque Reflection

(Please see [Appendix C](#) and [Appendix E](#) for detailed descriptions of the activities)

The solo work I conducted in my Montreal studio around Workshop days 2 and 3 enabled me to take a step back and reflect on the process of guiding the participants in creating their rituals. These sessions helped me to move away from seeking productivity and high achievement and to instead more fully embrace a carnivalesque way of conducting the workshops. Through my Docteur F persona, I worked out a DIY look for the project, moving away from over-aesthetized video production. As I reflected on where the workshops were going, it was important that the feeling of play, grotesque, ambivalence of the carnivalesque permeated the work. With this in mind, I decided to blow up the drawings and selfies of the participants and stick them on the studio wall. I also adopted Docteur F's unique brand of speech delivery to use in the filmed instructions I would send the participants in between the workshops.



*Figure 12 - Docteur F, my designer alter-ego, reflecting on the process in studio.*

## **A project on the brink of failing**

It was also during this time that I realized that the geographical distance between Montreal and Trois Rivières was detrimental to the project. The weeks separating each day-long session had taken a toll on participant involvement and motivation. Several participants – Pauline, Christelle, and J.C.— had left the project. Pauline’s commitments as a young mother and to her regular studies were too much for her to devote time to our project. Christelle was not comfortable with revealing fragile parts of herself. J.C., who was serving part-time in a youth detention center when he was not at the CJE, moved to another city. I was afraid the project would falter and fail. This fear became a panic with the additional news that our main champion of the project at the CJE, Social worker Marie France Touzin, was leaving her job.

I now understood why rites of passages had to take place in the community of the participants. This led me to push for more interactions on our Discord channel, and to group the next three workshop days within a single week (as opposed of conducting them days apart) to achieve some kind of momentum. I also set a deadline for the final ritual-performance day with the remaining social workers that were involved with the project. In short, I had a gun to my head, and the only way to deliver was to utterly let go and let Docteur F take over.

## **Workshop Phase 2 – Designing & prototyping the personal rituals**

By workshop day 4, we were down to eight (8) participants. Of the 8 remaining participants, Daly, Cloé, and Valérie had left the CJE to attend other adult education centers. However, they were still interested in pursuing our Quest for Communitas, though they could only come in the afternoons of the workshop days. This meant that we had a reduced number of participants for part of the day. This, however, turned out to be a good thing, because it enabled us to devote sustained focus to each participant while crafting their ritual.

The day structure for Phase 2 was going to be looser than for Phase 1. The goal here was to focus on one participant at a time and get them to design and experiment with some ritual based on their story, oppressions and ideals. Naturally, things did not go as planned, but I felt that I needed to push the participant to make the jump into their personal rituals. To help in this, I decided to dress as Doctor F more often than not – that way my push was going to be fun and absurd.

### **The Video Feedback Method in Ritual Design**

During these 3 workshop days, I showed on a television the drawings, selfies, and video performances that were previously recorded for each participant. While watching their outputs, each participant and I commented and discussed what would be the best ritual for them “in the television.” Through this technique, widely used in drama therapy, the participants were able to achieve distance from themselves. This enabled them to design a ritual to help the person whose case they were viewing – i.e., themselves. As Robert Landy (1986, p.136) notes, “In drama therapy, video technology provides a means of instant feedback, self-perception, and self-analysis.

As a naturalistic projection of the self, it is a direct confrontational device that allows a person not only to see an image of himself in present time but also to speak to and analyze that image.” This proved quite effective for the participants who were willing to embrace that process.

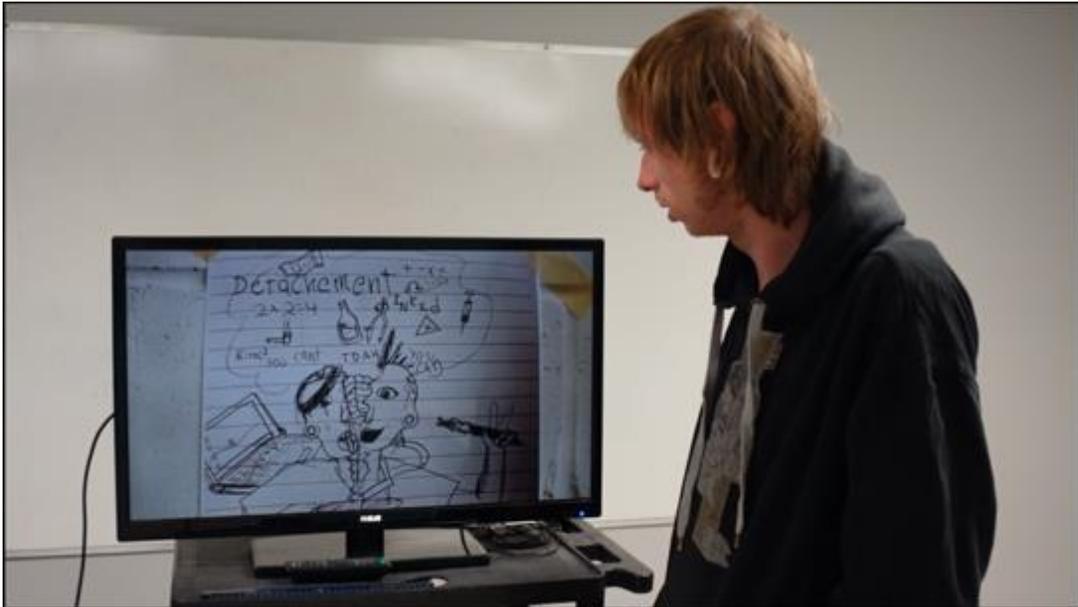


Figure 13 - Charlie explaining his drawing of his Oppressions

It's a feedback loop, really. Doctor F (who is filming), the participant in the TV (or their drawing), and the live participant who is commenting on what's playing in the TV. This setup removes the camera shyness of a formal interview as the participant is no longer the subject of interest. They are commentator, analyser. And so, they can participate with Doctor F in devising a narrative for themselves – the version of themselves in the TV, that is.

The process was, at times, repeated in a loop; meaning that the participant and I would explore a particular ritual together and test that ritual (be it singing about one's oppressions, or shouting a positive affirmation). The test would be filmed and then shown again in the television for the participant and the others to experience. This method enabled us to see where catharsis was properly communicated, how the participant felt, and how to improve the ritual to reflect the participant's reality.



*Figure 14 - Dan watching himself comment as he watches his photo. Meta meta inception!!*

### **Other participants as Carnavalesque Chorus**

While I worked one-on-one with each individual participant, the other participants (usually 3 or 4) would sit in the background. If the participant exploring their ritual would get stuck, we would invoke the carnivalesque universality by encouraging the others present to echo, sing, or shout mantras or affirmations to their colleague. When I was working with a particular participant on their ritual, having the rest of the group nearby, in a semi state of relaxation proved very interesting. That way, the participant who was the focus of the exercise did not feel like they were the center of attention. The others were there, in the space, ready to jump in and help. But there was no pressure for the main participant to do figure out something in front of them. It was a good way to function as it allowed for trial and error. By the end of each day, we would have a full group (the participants attending other centers having arrived). At this point, we would recap and show the newcomers what had been accomplished earlier in the day. Often, we would re-enact the ritual by asking everybody to participate in collective gesturing, mantra repeating, or singing.

## Day 4: Max and the Call of Catharsis

(Please see [Appendix F](#) for detailed descriptions of the activities)

A very powerful example of using carnivalesque ambivalence in our project came from Max, who in the morning of workshop day 4 received the news he could no longer attend the CJE and pursue his educational goals – his government funding had been cut off. Max was shattered and could not see a future. I filmed him explaining his situation. I then asked Max if he wanted to try something new. He agreed.



Figure 15 - Max talking about how shit his life is and relating it to his Oppression drawing.

Max stated that he had no more juice, that his life was shit. I asked Max to get up and raise his voice, a little at first, and then outrageously. I encouraged him to shout out that “his life was shit” but to do it as if it were a good thing, like a celebration. To help celebrate what was plaguing Max, I asked the other participants who were present to repeat what he was saying. I then pushed Max to shout at the top of his lungs and even laugh out loud at his predicament.

## AMBIVALENCE

In a move of ambivalent reversal, we proceeded to have Max say out loud all the things that were wrong with his life – but to say them proudly, as if they were a badge of honor. The reversal somehow enabled him to let out the negative emotions that were oppressing him and discover something about himself.

Max started punching in mid-air and cursing at his situation. This built into a crescendo of Max screaming and laughing at the top of his lungs while the rest of the group repeated his every shout like a mantra. After Max ended his rant, he was dead tired. But somehow, he felt relieved, as if he could think clearly. We called Max's ritual the **Call of Catharsis**.

### The Call of Catharsis (liberation Ritual)

#### Ambivalence

#### Universality

- 1-Surround yourself with a few trusted friends and stand in the middle.
- 2-As you move and walk around the room, say out loud all that oppresses you.
- 3-Focus on a few key phrases and repeat them loudly and proudly while your friends encourage you by repeating the phrases like mantras.
- 4-In a crescendo, and by adding laughter and cheering sounds, repeat the key phrases under the encouragements and imitation of your friends (you can punch in thin air, curse, shout, or scream).
- 5-When you are too tired to continue, go lie down and let thoughts come up.

After Max performed the Call of Catharsis, he went to lie down on a table and started to talk about his father; about how the man used to berate Max and his brother when they were kids. About how the man always put pressure on Max and his sibling, and how it had caused Max to be hard with himself all his life. All of the sudden Max found what his final workshop ritual would be– a liberation ceremony linked to his father and all the foul things he said to him when he was a child. Max was going to regurgitate all the insults his father had thrown at him.

Please click on the image below to view a portrait of Max on that day as he discovers the Call of Catharsis and ultimately performs his ritual about his father in front of other CJE youth:



Figure 16 – Portrait of Max's work and rituals during the workshop

**Please click on image or link below to view video**

<https://vimeo.com/822605144>. Password: Quest

## Day 5 : Annabelle finds the Protection from Self-Poison Ritual

(Please see [Appendix G](#) for adetailed descriptions of the activities)

When I showed Annabelle her oppression-drawing in the TV and asked her to talk about it, she mentioned her dark thoughts and all the derogatory things she tells herself daily – her self-trash-talk. After asking her making a list of these negative thoughts, I asked Annabelle to recite them to the camera and then showed the results in the TV. The effects were chilling on Annabelle. She would never say such things to another human being, and yet, she says them to herself.



*Figure 17 - Annabelle describing all of her self-trash-talk.*

Then, I asked the group what qualities they knew Annabelle to have. The words courageous, loyal, kind, a good listener came up, along many others. I asked Annabelle to write them down, since she seemed to have a hard time remembering all the hardships she survived and the progress made in her life. To commit these positive traits to memory we decide together that Annabelle should sing a song where she lists her qualities would be a great way to remember.

I got Dan and Mathis to be backup singers in a song Annabelle made on the spot. A song that lists all of her qualities, and where the audience or backup singers echo each positive trait that Annabelle mentions. it was great fun, and Annabelle confessed to being on the verge of crying with joy.



*Figure 18 - Annabelle singing with Dan and Mathis as backup.*  
I dressed Dan as a banana to get him to experience the grotesque.

Ambivalence	Universality
<p>This time, ambivalence was used not by trying to sanctify a negative emotion (as we did for Max), but by finding the opposite of Annabelle’s oppressive thoughts and bringing it out into the world. The backup singers, in universal fraternity, repeated Annabelle’s qualities as she sung them, ensuring that Annabelle heard from someone else how great she was. And this seemed to have a great impact on her.</p>	

Annabelle had found her ritual. She was going to sing a song in front of the entire CJE on our ritual-performance day, and the entire “audience” would sing along with her for maximum positive impact.

Using Parker and Horton's (1996) classification of rituals, we could say that Annabelle's was a celebration ritual – celebrating her qualities in the face of her invading dark thoughts. We ended up calling her ritual 'Protection from Self Poison'.

Protection from Self-Poison (celebration Ritual)	Universality	Ambivalence
1-Record your self-trash talk (audio or video) 2-Surround yourself with a group of friends and make them listen to the trash talk. 3-Ask your friends to list your qualities and immediately compose a song with the words. 4-Sing your qualities out loud with your friends acting as chorus and repeating the words. 5-For more cathartic power, wear a wig or a silly costume		

Please click on the image below to view a portrait of Annabelle as she progresses through the workshop until her final ritual performance with the entire CJE singing with her.



Figure 19 - Annabelle's work and ritual

**Please click on image or link below to view video:**

<https://vimeo.com/alexandrefranchi/annabelle?share=copy&password:Quest>

### Mathis tries the Call of Catharsis spell – to mixed results

Mathis is the most soft spoken of all the participants. He always seems in a good mood and never appears anxious. Mathis' drawing, in which he is represented with a hat standing next to a wall and blocked by other people, was presented to him in the TV. Mathis explained to me that when people pressure him too much, he simply avoids the situation and leaves. The only example he could give me of such a situation was a recent one involving a CJE professor where Mathis felt pressured and not heard, resulting in anger.



Figure 20 - Mathis and his oppression drawing

I tried to get Mathis to stand up and retell the story, thinking that the Call of Catharsis that had been so powerful with Max might help. Mathis put on a wig and it seemed to help him express himself more freely. I got him to move and to describe his fleeting anger. The other participants encouraged him and repeated his words to amplify what he was feeling – to very subtle results. By the end of our little exercise, Mathis had managed to take a roll of tape and throw it on the ground (to our collective applause as Mathis never displays any anger or frustration). Mathis admitted that it felt good. It was not much in terms of catharsis, but it was a start.



*Figure 21 - Mathis trying to call forth the rage within, to limited results.*

An hour later, at lunch break, Mathis came and sat opposite me while I ate. He told me, and the others present, that as a kid, he'd be prone to bouts of anger and rage. And that one day, his parents, took out all of his toys from his room and let him sit there in the empty space. Since then, Mathis never got angry again. He also does not care about anything, it seems. Whenever he feels tension, Mathis withdraws and lets it slide. In his own words "he does nothing." I suggested to Mathis that perhaps a good ritual might be for him to let some anger out and learn to say what he wants. To express himself. He said he would think on it for his final ritual.

## Day 6 : Daly, Valérie and Cloé find their rituals by helping one another

(Please see [Appendix H](#) for a detailed descriptions of the activities)

If you watched Valérie's portrait at the beginning of this Research Creation chapter, you'll have noticed that Valérie's ritual had two parts. Part one, where she cut the cord linking her to her symbolic brother; and Part two, where she dressed up as a little girl, held up her vision board and sang and shouted her life's wishes. This ritual was one of the most complete as it incorporated Valérie's oppression and ideal state. It is interesting to note here how this ritual came to be.

### Valérie discovers the Manifest Mantra Spell

When Valérie explained her drawing, she said she "needed to cut the chord with her toxic brother" as he was dragging her down. This called for a good old Alejandro Jodorowsky-style psychomagic ritual of cutting the cord, literally. I asked Valerie if she could find a shirt belonging to her brother – arguing that the item would carry symbolic power – that one of the participants would wear to play her brother. Valérie believed she could. Valérie's ritual would in part consist of being tied to someone dressed as her brother and cutting the cord repeating the following mantra of her own choosing: "I love my brother, but I must cut the cord."

That day, Valérie had also brought with her a photo vision board she had completed in another workshop some time ago. On the board were photos representing her and her children finding wealth, happiness, a home etc. In discussing her predicament, I realized that Valérie craved the joy of being a little girl: shouting, dancing, demanding what she needs and wants. A far cry from her day-to-day life where she has to single-handedly take care of her children AND her brother.

#### **Ambivalence**

Why not, then, have Valérie behave like a little girl? Why not have her sing and shout demanding her life goals be met, as a capricious 12-year-old would? In a reversal of behaviors, I asked Valérie to behave as the opposite of what she is: a responsible mother.

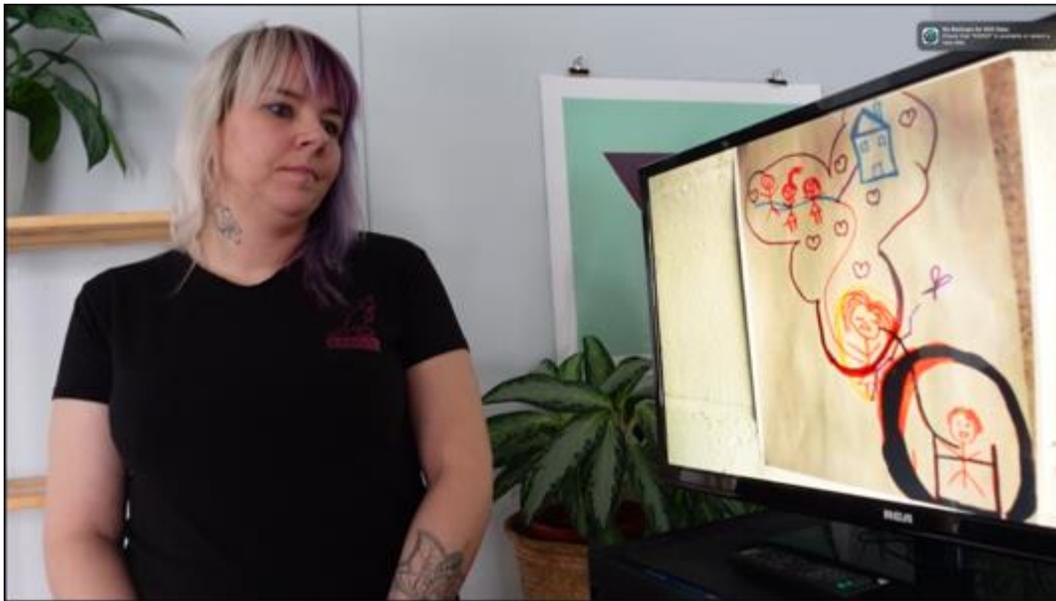


Figure 22 - Valérie talking about cutting "the cord" with her brother.

When it was time for Valérie to prototype (try out) the joyful part of her ritual – prancing around like a little girl singing and shouting – she hit a block. Getting anyone who’s not a trained performer to shout out their wishes and to dance and prance around like a 12-year-old does not come naturally. Valérie uttered the **Beau Moment** words several times. Words that we repeated to encourage her to continue.

### Universality

To remedy Valérie’s hesitations, I got Cloé and Daly to act as backup vocals and energy enhancers. Daly got to play Valerie’s oppression, weighing her down like a heavy burden; and Cloé, with her booming singing voice got to repeat Valérie’s words, encouraging her to shout and sing even louder. It worked! When Daly and Cloé marched around while repeating Valérie’s mantra “I love my brother, but I need to cut the cord”, it enabled Valérie to enter into a space of letting go of ridicule without fearing it, without judgement. And so, when the time came for the final ritual performance, Valérie knew the intensity and abandon she could reach when repeating her mantra or singing her life’s wishes.



Figure 23 - Daly impersonating Valérie's Oppression.



Figure 24 - Cloé and Daly backing Valérie up by marching around and shouting her mantra.

## Cloé discovers that “allowing yourself to suck” is liberating

Given the social phobia she acquired after her abusive relationship, Cloé rarely felt safe and carefree in public, much less at night. Yet, it was her dream to be able to sing in front of a room full of strangers. Cloé’s ritual was going to involve burning some photos reminiscent of her former abusive relationship (a liberation ritual); and, on the fantasy side, sing in front of the entire CJE student body.

I asked Cloé to try and sing for us, but she was unable to, making excuses that she was not ready, or that she forgot the lyrics of the song she’d wanted to sing. I put forth a challenge to her: “what if you sucked ? What if you sang that song with the sole purpose of singing it badly, out of key?” Cloé was bewildered. This was contrary to everything she felt about singing. Nevertheless, she tried it and sang in front of us, in a loud voice that was out of key. Cloé liked it. Somehow, she still felt the elation of the performance.

Ambivalence	Grotesque
That little reversal trick enabled us to set the basis of Cloé’s ritual. She would sing in front of the entire CJE – but she would sing badly. By internalizing this advice, Cloé came to be at ease to sing in front of others. When her goal was to sing badly, it was easily met. However, in singing badly, she sang loud, had fun, and let out emotions – in short, her singing was cathartic. Most participants were reminded they were “allowed to suck” when encountering performance anxiety. By de-sacralizing or degrading the notion of performance, Cloé and others would find freedom, joy, and self-discovery.	



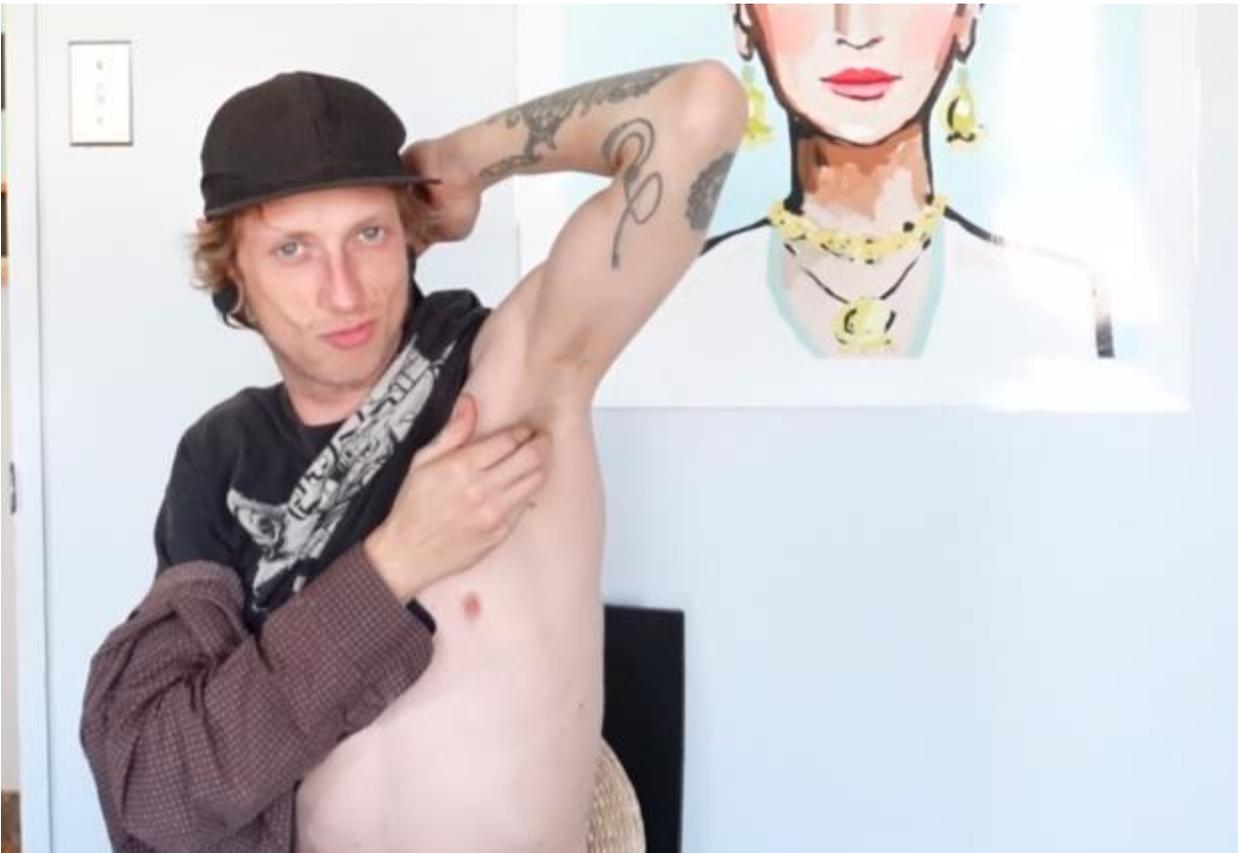
*Figure 25 - Max, Charlie, Annabelle, Mathis and Daly accompanying Cloé (center), as she sings... badly.*

### **Ready for the final Ritual-Performance**

Workshop days 4, 5, and 6 were very productive. By the end of them, the mood was high again and 6 of 8 participants had their rituals mostly figured out. The two that remained unsure what to do were Dan, a very analytical and logical person who had a hard time seeing the “use” of the carnivalesque; and Charlie, a gifted musician and artist who suffered from acute ADHD and whose daily actions and traits aligned with the carnivalesque already. Dan and Charlie were the two extremes of the group in terms of personality and orientation towards the project.

I don’t exactly know how the concept or name of doing a ritual-performance on the last day of the workshop came about, but we were all in agreement with it by the end of Phase 2 of the workshop. We knew, as per rite of passage theory, that a form of commemoration would need to take place in front of the CJE community at the end of our research creation. We also knew that doing a pure performance (like a play, or song) would not do. Aside from Charlie, none of us were performers. And though we had come to accept that “it’s ok to suck”, subjecting ourselves to performing something mediocre in front of other teenagers and young adults was going to be counter-productive.

We wanted to do something powerful and meaningful, for ourselves, while involving others to partake in it. For some reason, the name of ritual-performance emerged. The idea of each participant doing some psychomagic act linked to their current oppressions and Docteur F, as master of ceremony, ensuring a bridge between the participants and the other CJE students and staff, felt like the most natural thing to do.



*Figure 26 - Charlie daring you to do the Armpit Challenge at your next social outing.*

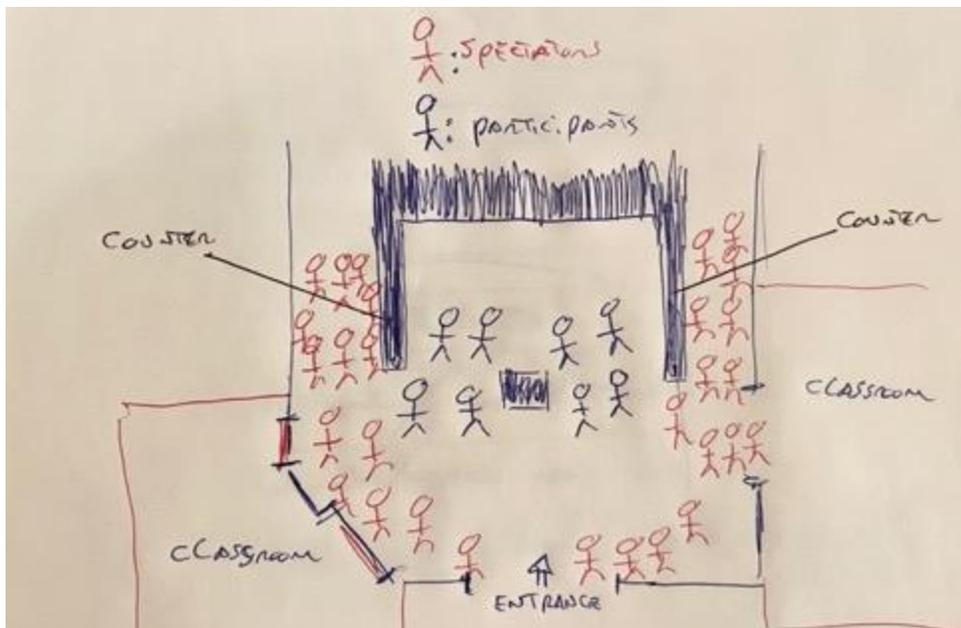
## Workshop Phase 3 - Preparing and enacting the final ritual performance

### Day 7: dealing with the stress and setting up the space

(Please see [Appendix I](#) for a detailed description of the activities)

On workshop day 7, we collectively set up the ritual performance space and finalized the program for the following day. The entire CJE community, along with friends and family, had been invited to the ritual day with the express note that this was NOT going to be a passive watching of a traditional performance, and that their responsibility as invited guests would be to participate and encourage the 8 ritual-makers.

In setting up the space, it was important for us to blur the lines between actors and spectators in order to enhance the ritual function of the event (Grotowski, 1968). We chose to conduct the event in the entrance lobby of the CJE, at the crossroads of the classrooms, kitchen and lunch room of the students. The participants would be in the center, while other students would be standing, and scattered all around.



*Figure 27 - Floorplan of the ritual-performance space at the entrance of the CJE.*

In order to reduce stress and anxiety among participants, we held a yoga session on workshop day 7. This session, which incorporated some elements of the carnivalesque in breath work, brought the group together in collective physical intensity and sweat. The session was given by Yoga teacher and friend Nathalie Salvas. None of the participants had yoga training, and I made sure to tell Nathalie to make the session challenging. It was a way to instill an additional element of hardship in the rite of passage (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010).



*Figure 28 - Cloé and Valérie cursing me for getting them into yoga.*

The yoga session inspired Charlie to do a ritual centered on calmness (the opposite of his usual agitated state).



Figure 29 - Post-yoga Charlie feeling zen for the first time in a long while.

As for Dan, it was collectively decided that since he could not find a ritual for himself, he would have to perform a medley of what the other participants did for their rituals (dancing, singing, acting goofy etc.). Dan had a hard time believing in the benefits of the carnivalesque, which he only saw as “goofing around”, but priding himself on being a tough guy unafraid of ridicule, he accepted.



Figure 30 - Dan being overly analytical and blocking himself from the carnivalesque.

## Day 8: Ritual performance day

(Please see [Appendix I](#) and [Appendix J](#) for a detailed description of the activities)

The day was designed to have the same structure as a rite of passage, with a separation ritual destined to bring the entire assembly (participants and visitors) into a realm outside of the ordinary, a liminal phase comprised of the participants' rituals, and re-integration phase where the participants would be welcomed back with the visitors and CJE social workers through a shared activity involving food and coffee. In order to have a proper liminal phase where the rituals took place, we set up strange lighting, eerie music, and incense burning.

The event started at 10:30 am and ran for slightly over 90 minutes. Once the CJE community had been gathered, the participants arrived wearing masks (thus marking them as apart from the community). I explained the premise of my research to the visitors and briefly discussed the key theories. Following this introduction, I dressed as Docteur F and informed the visitors that they were encouraged to sing along, cheer, and otherwise support the participants:

**“We are pursuing a personal adventure, a Quest, in which we seek to express and process our oppressions and traumas using art, ritual and humor with the goal of leading a more joyful life – we ask for your help by encouraging us in what is to come”**

We then conducted an **Opening Ritual** countdown with all present, followed by a collective **Ridicule's Embrace** where all observers and visitors were encouraged to imitate the movements of the participants as they each took their turn in leading the group.

Once this was one, we picked names randomly out of a plastic brain to determine which participant would go next with their ritual.

### **The ritual-performance structure: planned, but with chaos**

For each participant, we tried to follow the same structure. Another participant would explain to the crowd what the ritual-making participant's problem or oppression was. During that time, Charlie played soothing and meditative music, while the participant in question prepared themselves (putting on a costume, makeup, wig etc.). Once everything was in place, the ritual-participant would conduct their ritual. Either by speaking out loud what they were doing, or by letting Docteur F do it for them.

Whenever appropriate, Docteur F would play his role of Joker and get the crowd to cheer, repeat or encourage. Sometimes, as a Joker, Docteur F would change the script and ask the ritual-participant to go further than they had planned. This happened several times, when Docteur F felt that the participant could push it a notch further. For instance, in the case of Cloé, Docteur F asked her to sing another song in addition to the KISS song she had planned to sing badly. The song in question was a Portishead song she loved. Cloé was shocked at first, but then took up the challenge and sang it a cappella, and properly. This impressed everybody, most of all, Cloé herself.

Once the ritual comes to an end – after cheers and claps from the assembly – each participant showed the object they wanted to burn and explained the meaning and power of the object to them before putting it into a chrome garbage can I had brought.

The entire event was very emotional. At times, there were tense silence; at others, people were wildly cheering. As I was filming Max's ritual involving his father, I noticed that some of the teenage boys were very silent and absorbed by what was going on. At other times, I caught social workers crying.



Figure 32 - Max completing his ritual.

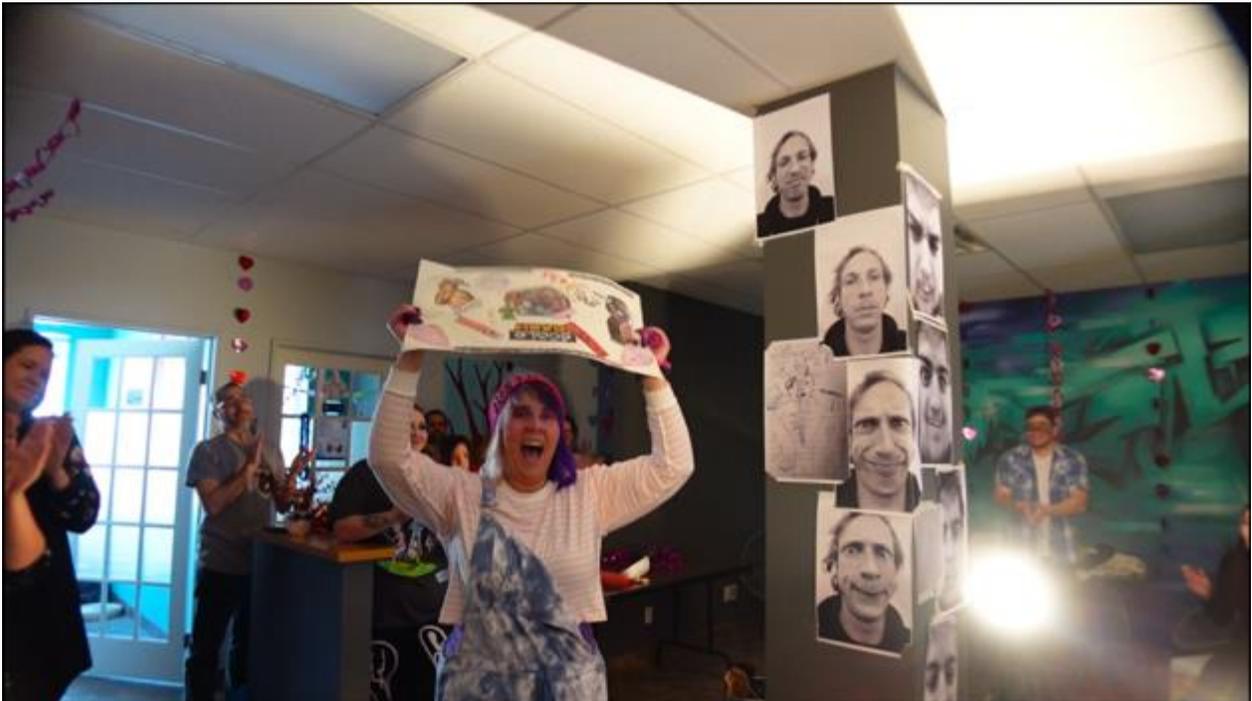


Figure 31 – Valérie acting like a little girl and shouting her life goals.

### **Carnavalesque Fire as ritual fire**

Once all participants had finished, they isolated themselves by going outside the CJE and each burned an object of emotional or symbolic value they were letting go of. This closing ritual served as a final bonding activity in *communitas*. The participants then rejoined the rest of the CJE community and offered a healthy snack to the visitors in thanks for their support, as well as mingled with them over coffee and treats. This reuniting with friends and family served as means through which participants were reintegrated into their community at the ritual's conclusion.

Once the event was concluded and everybody returned to their classrooms, I took the participants to lunch and gave them each a bracelet with the word CACA written on it – a carnivalesque sign of our new group and community. The mood was high and from the animated discussions recounting intense or funny parts of the ritual-performance, I could tell that it had been a powerful and joyful moment for the participants.



Figure 35 – The fire burning the symbolic objects.



Figure 34 – Dan and the Bracelet of Belonging.



Figure 33 – The participants and Docteur F for a post ritual photo.

## **SECTION 3 - Design Principles that Facilitated the Research-Creation**

Looking back at the eight (8) full day sessions leading up to the ritual-performance, it becomes clear how the practised carnivalesque greatly enhanced, or even made possible, the work of the participants as they delved into the most painful parts of their lives while still retaining a sense of joy and creativity that helped them devise their cathartic rituals. However, there were also vital workshop structural elements and ritual design features that were key in ensuring group cohesion, participant interest, and transformative power of our rite of passage. Here is a summary of what these were.

### **Structuring each day like a rite of passage**

The workshop days that were the most productive in terms of output, group cohesion and overall satisfaction were the ones that we structured like mini rites of passage. These were days that began with a separation ritual that we called the Opening Ritual (the solemn countdown where I gradually dressed as Docteur F, and invited the participants to step into another realm). The bulk of the day then became the liminal or transition period where we experimented with various exercises and activities (clowning, theatre, drawing, singing etc.) The commemoration or re-integration phase took the form of playing with the camera and recording various performances from willing participants. These performances were sometimes re-enactments of earlier exercises, or new spur of the moment ideas where the participants expressed themselves viscerally on the themes covered earlier in the day. By watching these recorded videos as a group (our mini community), we all bonded in the laughter and comments that the videos elicited.

### **Securing and maintaining participant engagement through making**

Another key factor in securing participants engagement was harnessing the various skills and talents they possessed in crafting the rituals and final ritual performance. Charlie, being a talented musician, often provided the soundtrack to our antics.

Annabelle said she loved making disguises; and so was in charge of getting costumes for everyone from the CJE's stock room. Daly wants to be a makeup artist; she was therefore responsible for creating makeup on those who wanted it. Even an analytical and skeptical participant like Dan contributed to the process. He ended up being the production manager of the project at the CJE. Making sure the rooms were available, coordinating with the social workers etc. The act of crafting parts of the rituals, in addition to strengthening group cohesion, ensured participant involvement and care in what they were doing.

### **The Joker always goes first**

Unlike drama therapy, where the psychologist remains an observer, it was key in our activities, that I – the moderator, designer, or Joker – jumped first into the most difficult or sensitive exercises and drama games. By leading by example, I was able to set the tone for the exercises and show the intensity of emotions I wanted the participants to attain. But most importantly, by going first, I erased the distinction between the participants and myself. We were all part of the same group in universal kinship. I was the first one to show my fragilities and the first one to be ridiculed. This allowed the participants to dive into the exercises without feeling judged or studied by an external authority figure.

### **Neither fatigue, nor shyness, nor fear prevents participation in the workshop**

On day 6, Daly was dead tired and stressed out that day. She had started a new vocational school to become a beautician that same week and her energy was low. Watching her oppression drawing in the TV, Daly talked about her family situation. How her father, after he left her mother for another woman when Daly was 14, gave priority to that woman over Daly – creating a deep hurt in the teenager that she was. I tried to suggest potential rituals to try, but Daly was practically falling asleep and her anxiety seemed to sap her motivation. I therefore decided to move the focus away from her and onto Valérie and Cloé who were present that morning. Daly was to be

“off the hook”, but only if she helped out the others in their ritual explorations. Daly agreed and ended up greatly helping Valérie and Cloé, in addition to finding what her own ritual would be.

This principle was also applied to “shy” participants that were not included to perform in front of the camera. Without being abrupt with them, I simply used the carnivalesque’s universality in getting them to somehow help out or collaborate with their more outgoing peers. On Day 1 of the workshop, when filming Charlie’s Clown exercise, I turned the camera to Mathis and asked him what he thought of Charlie’s performance. A bit frozen at first, Mathis answered candidly. He was a bit reluctant to perform in front of the camera, but he was open to being interviewed on the spot. On Day 2 of the workshop, I got Cloé to work the camera and film me performing an exercise. By the end of the workshop, Mathis and Cloé were more comfortable performing in front of the camera. This design principle ensure that everybody progressed as a group, leaving no one behind.

### **Channeling negative tension between participants into for cathartic power**

It would have been utopian to believe that all participants would get along with everyone else in the group at all times. Naturally, there were some tensions between participants. However, instead of ignoring or burying these tensions between, we brought them forward and wove them into the design of the rituals. For instance, Valérie harbored negative feelings towards Dan because he had dismissed her anxieties with her brother as trivial and easily fixable. After discussing this with Dan and Valérie, it was agreed that Dan would play Valérie’s brother in her ritual. Valérie’s negative feelings towards Dan, and Dan’s belittling attitude towards Valérie’s predicament, fuelled the dramatic tension between them, thus making the act of cutting the cord so much more charged.

## Ambivalence

A negative tension between Dan and Valérie, which could have been harmful for the cohesion of the group was reversed and used to boost Valérie's ritual. The negative emotions became a force which helped the ritual attain cathartic power – thus becoming a positive force.



Figure 36- Valérie feeling tense before trying to cut the cord linking her to her brother (represented by Dan whom she disliked).

### Oppressions, Ideals and powerful symbols – the key to cathartic rituals

The participants who were able to viscerally express their oppressions in public, and then to inhabit their idealized fantasy self in front of their community, were the ones whose rituals had the most cathartic power. Moreover, the power of the ritual increased whenever the object burnt after the final event was linked to the oppression of the participant. This was the case for Cloé, Annabelle, and Valérie who all included oppression and joy into their rituals and burnt items loaded with emotion. By comparison, Daly, Max, and Mathis did not incorporate an ideal or fantasy element in their rituals - as a result, they felt incomplete and did not have as much of a joyful impact on them or the observers. The following Table summarizes the ritual of each participant:

**Table 3 – Summary of each participant's final ritual.**

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Oppression</i>	<i>Ritual</i>	<i>Group Joy/Ideal enhancement</i>	<i>Items that were burned</i>	<i>Visitor Reactions</i>
<b>Daly</b>	Anger at her father and stepmom. Others.	Tells her father how he hurt her feelings when she was a teenager (Max, her boyfriend, plays her father)	N\A	Gameboy unit from her teenage years.	Rapt silence from the crowd.
<b>Cloe</b>	Phobia of being in public based on abuse by ex-boyfriend	Walks with her back to the crowd and has strangers touch her back. Then, sings in public.	The group singing along with her.	Photos of the jail where her ex-boyfriend was incarcerated.	Rapt attention. Cheering. People sang with Cloé and she even got the courage to sing another song a cappella.
<b>Annabelle</b>	Negative trash-talk to self. Dark thoughts.	Her trash talk is broadcast through the TV, for everyone to see and hear. Annabelle then sings aloud her qualities.	The group repeats Annabelle's qualities.	Favorite Pink Floyd sweater that she wore in her darkest times.	Rapt attention when hearing the trash talk. Everybody got into it. Wild singing and cheering.
<b>Max</b>	Feels held back. Feels the weight of the world on his back.	In front of a photograph of his father, Max shouts back at the photo all the nasty things his father said to him as a kid.	N/A	Rings that his late father gave him.	Total silence from the crowd. Especially the young men. Intense emotion.
<b>Mathis</b>	Flees a situation whenever anger arises.	Lets his anger out and practices saying that he wants to be heard	Crowd repeats Mathis' mantra	A favourite book as a kid.	Polite applause and cheering.
<b>Charlie</b>	Hyper aware of people. Anxiety.	Conducts a public meditative yoga routine in silence	N\A	One of his first guitars.	Silence. Charlie was sweating, and we could feel his tension.
<b>Dan</b>	Anxiety. People annoying him.	Performs a series of carnivalesque actions the other participants chose for him (song, dance etc.)	N\A	Cigarette.	People laughing and encouraging him.
<b>Valerie</b>	Her brother's parasitic demands and encroachment on her life. Her darkness.	Cutting the umbilical cord connecting her to her brother. Being a 12-year-old wishing for the best things in life by singing and chanting.	Crowd encourages her in cutting the cord and repeats her wishes.	Her brother's shirt (that she stole).	The crowd went wild with encouragement for Valérie to cut the cord. They also repeated her wishes with her.

## Keeping psychological resonance in mind

Throughout the entire process, careful attention was paid to ensuring that the conditions necessary for psychological resonance were present for each participant narrative when enacted in the final ritual-performance. In addition to enacting a way to surmount their existential anxieties in a ritualized fashion, participants were encouraged, among other things, to prioritize simple plot points over complex stories; engage in rhythmic singing and the repetition of key phrases whenever possible; and use objects of symbolic value (Goodwyn, 2016). Whenever this was done, I noticed that the CJE staff and other students were more inclined to follow and be emotionally involved in the ritual being enacted. This was the case for Valérie with her mantra “I love my brother, but I want to cut the cord.” This was also the case for Annabelle with the song she sang which listed all of her qualities. I can still hear this song in my head: “Je suis généreuse..!”



*Figure 38* - These transformative design principles are approved by Docteur F!

## **SECTION 4 - Feedback from participants, CJE Staff and Other Youth**

It is important to note here that despite these positive outcomes, the goal of the research creation project was not to “cure” participants or to bring about an immediate change in them. As mentioned previously, the aim was to provide a starting point to a path to self-motivated transformation. Our goal, if participants were open to self-change, was to find images and symbols within their stories that resonated with them, in order to set in motion a transformative process (Campbell, 1991). As Jung noted, “The auditor experiences some of the sensations but is not transformed. Their imaginations are stimulated: they go home and through personal fantasies begin the process of transformation for themselves” (Bonnett quoting Jung, 2006, p.27)

### **Feedback from CJE staff and other youth present at the ritual**

On April 14, 2023, several weeks after the final ritual performance, I went back to the CJE to conduct semi-structured interviews with the employees of the youth centre and some other young people who had attended the event – other students of the CJE (the semi structured questionnaire that I used to guide our discussion is included in [Appendix K](#)).

The seven (7) CJE employees and social workers who met with me were interviewed as a group. They were impressed by the courage, vulnerability, and sensitivity of the participants. They were proud of what they witnessed, which increased their own sense of belongingness within the organization. Some of them were quite moved and even cried during the culminating ritual. Our project inspired the social workers at the event to promote more projects of the sort in the future. Some more seasoned social workers spoke of the rites of passages that some youth centers used to offer in the 1980s and 1990s, and regretted that today everybody is looking for quick fixes such as half-day workshops or online training. In short, they found our activities very pertinent to the predicaments of the young people they work with.

The social workers talked about doing a similar workshop over a week, and added that it would help if all participants were at a similar stage of emotional and mental stability, as some youth arrive at the CJE in acute crisis. Such a program could be a capstone project undertaken towards the end of their CJE stay, for example.

Some teachers and social workers told me that the ritual-performance shook some of their clientele (youth) as in engaged directly with sensitive and triggering subjects. They would have liked to be warned ahead of time to prepare the visitors for what was to come. This generated debate as other social workers liked the fact that it was surprising and destabilizing. All agreed that after the ritual performance, the CJE youth were more open to discussing difficult personal topics. In parting, some social workers expressed the desire that I share some of the exercises I did with the participants, for further interventions on their part.

Later that same day, I met with a small group of CJE students who had witnessed the ritual-performance. When asked to describe what they witnessed in one word, the following came up: reassuring, deliverance, acceptance, a show, grandiose, a theatre play, emotional, sad, and funny. The group identified the most memorable rituals as those from Max, Annabelle, Cloé, Valérie, and Mathis. They said that including the audience in the ritual (through the countdown ritual and Ridicule's Embrace) brought a positive overall vibe to the event. They said that what they witnessed made them go from sadness to laughter and vice versa, and that experiencing those shifts gave them a feeling of not being alone. It encouraged them to open up more in front of people they did not know. Most youth said that they talked about the event amongst themselves and at home with their families in the days that followed. Some of the interviewees stated that they would like to participate in such a rite of passage in the future. However, another one, a young woman, said that she could not, as opening up in front of others like that would make her feel too vulnerable. CJE youth also said that such an activity would be ideal at the beginning or end of their CJE stay.

Overall, the CJE students I interviewed liked the event, were moved by it, and were impressed by the participants and their courage. When asked if they too would embark in such a workshop, the interviewed youth were unsure, it seems they did not think that they had it in them to open up towards others in such a way – much less in front of a camera. I told them that the 8 participants were initially like them and only bought into the project gradually. This reinforces the methodology of doing an initial introductory session with potential participants before embarking on the actual project.

### **Feedback from the 8 Quest for Communitas participants**

As for the 8 participants, 6 of them managed to come to the MDes Exhibit vernissage and saw members of the public (mainly friends and university students) interact with their research creation. It was a second commemoration of sorts. Sadly, Daly and Max were not present. At the vernissage of the exhibit, the participants told me that other CJE students who had contacted them since the ritual performance to express their admiration.

Ever since the ritual-performance, I have been communicating with a number of the youth through our Facebook and Discord groups. Charlie, Mathis, and Annabelle are still at the CJE and pursuing their studies. Dan started university as an adult student in teaching English as a second language. He and Cloé are now in a relationship and very much in love, despite having been antagonists before. Max tried to attend university as an adult, but was overwhelmed and quit. He's now trying to integrate into a new vocational school. Daly's funding to attend makeup school was cut, which depressed her. She is now trying to find another program in cosmetics in which to enrol. Both Max and Daly are struggling. Valerie, on the other hand, seems happy and has given birth to a 4<sup>th</sup> child according to her Facebook posts.



*Figure 39 - Valérie, Annabelle, Cloé, and Dan attending the MDes Vernissage of Quest for Communitas*

### **Quest for Communitas, the film**

After seeing roughly edited versions of Max's Call of Catharsis and Annabelle and Valérie's portraits and ritual, the participants expressed the desire that our research creation footage be turned into a documentary film or web series. They would like for our quest to be seen by other young people, particularly in Quebec. They seem comfortable enough in sharing their fragilities with others, sensing that witnessing the ritual-performances could also help them. I take this willingness as a sign of increased self-confidence. And when I watch some of the faces of the participants as I edit the videos of their rituals, I catch a glimpse of a wide-eyed joy in some of them – of knowing looks and joint chuckles – one would be inclined to call that communitas.

# CONCLUSION

In this research creation project, I aimed to explore new and unorthodox ways to break the downward spiral of low self-esteem and alienation plaguing young adults who had left high-school. This was done by co-designing a transformative rite passage using the carnivalesque aesthetic with 8 attendees at a youth center in Trois-Rivières (CJE).

By sharing their life story in a re-tellable way, learning to identify and express their oppressions and ideal states (through drawings, roleplay, photography, and camera work), the 8 CJE participants were able to pinpoint a crucial moment of their personal story that needed to be understood, processed, and surmounted. Using various symbols (objects and images) that held meaning for them and were psychologically resonant, the participants each crafted their ritual and performed it in front of their community in a ritual-performance that got CJE staff, teachers, and other youth involved in a festive carnivalesque fashion.

To do this successfully, the participants first had to take a step back and analyze themselves and prototype their rituals. This was achieved by using the video camera as a mirroring tool. When participants saw themselves 'played back' on screen, they were able to talk reflectively about themselves in the third person, enabling them to gain perspective in order to try out different ideas for their final ritual.

Working with the grotesque, universal, and ambivalent characteristics of the carnivalesque aesthetic was key in enabling participants to surmount various psychological barriers and explore a different way of being in the liminal phases of our project. Importantly, the carnivalesque ensured this was done in a state of joy. The ambivalent characteristic of the carnivalesque was practised at every step of the workshop, from day one until the commemoration phase of the rite of passage. Getting participants to desacralize important notions for them, or getting them to sanctify or elevate trivial matters, enabled them to gain the emotional and mental freedom to experience their predicament differently. This helped participants achieve an embodied new perspective.

The combination of ambivalence with carnivalesque universality turned out to be quite powerful. Getting participants to support each other in their fragile moments as well as their joyful ones - by echoing each other's feelings much like a Greek Chorus - enabled emotions and ideas to flow freely and intensely, and permitted the participants to have the strength to face, and work with, delicate and often painful emotions in their ritual designs.

At several points during the research, a state of great bonding and playful creativity was achieved between the participants – a state of *communitas*. This state permitted possibilities and permutations of the self, thus allowing participants to engage in an idealized or fantasy-like state of being which gave them ideas on how to tackle their everyday struggles. During the final ritual-performance at the youth center, this state of *communitas* was experienced again, bonding the group together and giving participants a sense of self-worth that was witnessed and shared by peers, teachers, and social workers.

### **Relevance of the work**

It is my belief that this work might provide new ways for social workers and educators to engage with youth at risk of social exclusion. This was corroborated by follow up interviews I conducted with social workers, youth who had witnessed the ritual performance, and the 8 participants of this research. Some of the rituals such as *Dreadbane* or *Call of Catharsis* could be worked in workshops dealing with youth suffering from anxiety, for example. Some of the carnivalesque applications we found could be woven into the design of existing workshops or intervention methods destined to encourage young adults to open up about difficult parts of their lives.

In the field of theatre, the carnivalesque is already embedded in some of the exercises and methods used by directors to craft or design a story with their actors. However, in the field of design, we believe that the carnivalesque applications we have explored could themselves become a series of tactics (or recipes) to facilitate participatory design – a booster, of sorts, helping to liberate emotions and foster outside-the-box thinking.

Such a carnivalesque “method” could be an add-on to existing methods such as Future Workshop and other participatory design methodologies. Additionally, combining the carnivalesque with a focus on ritual and narrative psychological resonance, could ensure that the designs aided by this new Bakhtinian method “stick” with the populations who were part of the co-design process and resonate with future populations who will interact with the designed “objects.”

### **Future Considerations**

Moving away from the field of youth education and intervention, the work of this research provides interesting avenues to explore within the field of transformative game design.

Aside from producing a documentary film or web series, questions about how to reach young people with such a project invariably turn towards the spaces where they congregate on the web. Places such as YouTube or Tik-Tok, among other channels. Could some of the rituals or challenges enacted during our project – Dreadbane, Armpit Challenge, Ridicule’s Embrace, Protection from Self-Poison and Call of Catharsis – be repeated by groups of friends, filmed, and shared on social media? Which ones would be the most psychological resonant ones, able to “catch on” and “stick?” Could these activities form the basis of new communities? Could viral challenges become transformative? So far this research creation work has been analog. However, I envision my next area of research to be centered around finding the familiar digital interfaces that could support such work. Dr. Rilla Khaled, my co-supervisor, is making the case for Paratopian design - design that makes complex social and cultural questions playable. Could we make parts of Quest for Communitas playable?

### **Dreaming about THE game**

Going back to the hubristic social game idea I briefly exposed in the Foreword of this document – my immortality project - could we not imagine grouping some of the ritualistic and carnivalesque activities we devised into the structure of a LARP game?

A game whose transformative goal would be to get the players to engage with, and surmount, their anxieties and oppressions? Could the rituals and challenges that were co-designed here, form the basis for an exploratory quest; where new players, by going through something similar to what the 8 participants went through, discover something about themselves? And subsequently create new psychologically resonant rituals that grow and strengthen a new Dionysian community that lives in between real life and social media. Could we not envision an evolving game, multi-platform and multi-realities, destined to make us peer into the terrors of our modern existence and the rapture of being alive? To recall our earlier quotes from Fry (2011) when he linked the care of the self with the future of our world: a game whose first levels would center on sustaining the self – the flesh of the world - and whose higher levels would perhaps sustain the species and the planet.

According to anthropologist Victor Turner, rites of passages are a means for a tribe or community to reinforce its shared values. In the case of the present research, this “tribe” does not yet exist. What then, would be these new values? What would be this community’s name? Where would it reside? So far, we have seen that our carnivalesque project provides a starting point for these values: everybody must participate as there are no actors or spectators; nothing is too sacred, nor too insignificant; in order to attain joy, one must free oneself from what oppresses us; only through collaboration and support in exposing our frailties can we begin this process of liberation.

Personally, I have always felt a kinship with Don Quixote, an idealistic knight who, wanting to do good, ended up a source of ridicule by chasing windmills. Don Quixote was also deeply humanistic man who dreamed the impossible dream. He is now immortal; a copyright-free figure of our collective mind who uttered one of the most famous quotes of literature: *“Freedom, Sancho, is one of the most precious gifts that heaven has bestowed upon men; no treasures that the earth holds buried or the sea conceals can compare with it.”* The land of Don Quichote, LA MANCHA, would be a great place to start for those who seek to be part of this carnivalesque community.

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# Appendices: Ethnographic Journal Documenting the Research Creation

Appendices A through J are transcripts from an ethnographic journal I held for the duration of the research-creation. These notes were taken in the hours or days following each session with the participants. They contain descriptions of the exercises and games conducted, personal thoughts and lamentations on what worked and what did not, as well as ramblings and brainstorming. I have included them here to assist anyone (myself included) attempting to conduct such a project in the future.

Appendix A – Workshop Day 1

Appendix B – Workshop Day 2

Appendix C – Solo studio time 2.1 & 2.2

Appendix D – Workshop Day 3

Appendix E – Solo Studio time 3.5

Appendix F – Workshop Day 4

Appendix G – Workshop Day 5

Appendix H – Workshop Day 6

Appendix I – Workshop Day 7

Appendix J – Workshop Day 8 (final ritual performance)

Appendix K – Post-Feedback Semi Structured Interview Questionnaire

## APPENDIX A: Workshop Day 1 - Friday Sept 23, 2022

Supplies needed for Future Workshops and rituals: a Bluetooth speaker, incense or Palo Santo, a set of Dungeons and Dragons dice. A room where people can sit, stand and move around. Ideally, a space with tables along the walls and a circle of chairs in the middle. Notebooks, pens, markers, flipcharts, tape. Camera with small monitor. TV where we can play back things from the computer. And of course, a group of open-minded participants.



*The participants (from left to right): Pauline, Mathis, Cloé, Christelle, J.C., Annabelle, Daly, Max, Charlie, Dan.*

### Goals of the first day

The first day objectives were to break the ice with the participants, build trust, set workshop parameters and gauge their comfort level with the camera, or any other mode of expression for that matter (dance, singing etc.). In short, try a bunch of stuff and see what sticks. But also orient our work on the Oppression/Heroism axis

I arrived at 8:15 am. Coffees were made, cigarettes were smoked outside by the participants. By the time the social workers gathered the group. It was around 9:00. I soon realized that during a normal day at the CJE, some students leave early, others have meetings with psycho educators or social workers, and some are absent due to illness, part time job interviews and the like. The youth often want coffee and cigarette breaks. And I don't blame them. They're sitting in neon-lit classrooms, some windowless, having to do math, English, and French exercises.

### **Opening ritual and getting to know each other**

We started with a short **Opening Ritual** The goal of this ritual is to put the group in a different state from ordinary life. Additionally, this little activity introduces the very notion of a different, or liminal, place.

#### **Opening Ritual (duration: 5 min)**

- Stand in a circle with the group
- Play slow rhythmic music on a speaker
- Burn Palo Santo or incense
- The Joker describes in one word how they feel. Then, each participant does the same.
- The Joker explains that they will count down from 10 to 0 to mark leaving day-to-day reality and entering a special space where the "work of the Gods" can begin. **A place where imagination can run free and where we can suspend the rules of daily life and invent new ones. It is important to countdown slowly so that everybody counts down out loud.**

**IMPORTANT: At the end of the countdown, the Joker can don their disguise if they have an alter ego to play with. This is a move of carnivalesque reversal, signifying that** reality is allowed to be topsy-turvy – where the "instructor" or authority figure can be a clown. It usually elicits laughs from participants and puts them at ease to explore something different.

When we stood up in a circle to speak out in one word how we felt, I said I was "nervous". The participants used a mix of the following words to describe their state: anxious, curious, and tired.

When I counted down, everybody counted down with me, mildly amused. This is when I put on the costume of Doctor F., eliciting bewildered looks and laughter from the participants.

We then moved to a storytelling and ice-breaking exercise given to me by my friend and actor Anna Mackay Smith, who is the coordinator for acting for Media at the George Brown College, in Toronto.

**Getting to know you exercise # 1 (duration: 90-120 min)**

Sitting in a circle, each participant tells their “story” in a few minutes. The rest of the group then asks 3-4 questions taken from a predetermined list of questions. These questions do a bit deeper than the usual small talk. Questions such as: *which moment of your past would you like to relive? Or, what’s a bad habit you’d like to get rid of?*

The Joker starts first. If no one volunteers to go after the joker, the joker can pick or roll a dice. If picking someone is the designated method of selecting the next participant, this will be repeated (ie: each participant will pick the next one). If the dice are used, then that will be the method of selection. I found out that, intuitively, randomness or having their peers choose who goes next seems to work better than having the moderator choose.

Please see in the table below for a complete list of questions.

**IMPORTANT:** It is key that the Joker starts first and that they do not shy away from describing their challenges, failings, weaknesses and frailties – just to show by example that it is ok to talk about one’s “flaws” in the group (as a show of trust with sensitive information). This will encourage others to open up about their fragile side and not hide behind a façade of performance or bravado.

#### Getting to Know You Questions To Ask

1. What would you do this upcoming year if money (And COVID) were no object?
2. Where would you love to spend a vacation?
3. What are your two best traits?
4. What activity do you most like spending time on?
5. Whose advice would you follow and why that person?
6. Who or what can be a new source of inspiration for you?
7. What will you do (or not do) to achieve your goals and dreams?
8. What do you want to spend less time on?
9. What is your biggest wish for the upcoming two years?
10. What do you do for your health?
11. In which area(s) do you want to develop yourself?
12. To what are you least looking forward?
13. To what are you most looking forward?
14. What would you like to do that no one expects from you?
15. What habits will you nurture and/or develop in the next year?
16. Who do you want to give more attention to?
17. What will you do for the first time in your life (in the future)?
18. Which bad habit do you want to get rid of?
19. On what do you want to devote more time?
20. In what area of life have you developed the most?
21. Rate the past year on a scale of 1 – 10 with ten as the best possible score?
22. What topic do you like to talk about most?
23. What are you most grateful for?
24. Who or what has inspired you?
25. Who or what surprised you the most?
26. What was one of your best decisions?
27. What was the best compliment you received?
28. What has kept you up at night?
29. What are the three things that gave you the most energy?
30. What was your most exciting experience?
31. Who did you admire the most?
32. What makes you laugh?
33. With the knowledge you have now, what would you have done differently?
34. Who would you like to thank?
35. What has made the biggest impression on you?
36. What is the most valuable lesson you have learned?
37. What did you want to achieve this past year but didn't?
38. Which personal achievement are you most proud of?
39. What moment in your life would you like to relive?
40. How has your cultural background influenced you as a person?
41. What are some of your family traditions? Holidays? What do you feel when you think of them?
42. Who in your family has influenced you the most and why?
43. Where were you born? Where were your parents born? Grandparents?
44. Brothers and sisters? Tell us about them?
45. What is the first memory you have when you think about your childhood?
46. What are some quirky things about your family?
47. If your parents were born in another country, what traditions or values do you have that come from their country or are not common to Canada?

Naturally I started first with my life story, describing the hardships I underwent, my current challenges and my goals and dreams. I did not censor myself or omit details that showed my weakness of character. I talked about my addictions and failings with candor. I knew entering the workshop that the participants were impressed or awestruck by my films. However, by the end of my narrative, they had a different view of me – as someone fallible.

When Dan finished his story, I selected a particularly pointed question to answer to encourage others to ask a similar question. This elicited reactions from the group - playful Ohhs and Ahhs as gossip was asked for and shared. After a while, the group started veering off the script of questions and inventing their own, destined to dig deeper in the past of the other participants - making loud Oohs and Ahhhs when a question was tough or very private. It was done in good spirits and a playful sense inquisitive gossip emerged. A couple of participants, Julien and Mathis, remained shy and declined to participate. This exercise took way longer than expected. For a group of 11 people, the exercise took nearly two hours, which is very long. For future iterations, I recommend breaking that exercise into two 1-hour sessions on the same day.

## **Carnavalesque Universality – everybody participates**

Given that participation in this project is purely voluntary, if someone does not want to participate, I found that it was best not to insist.

However, towards the end of the exercise, I sometimes asked the shy person if they wanted to try again, and they often did (having seen the fun that was felt from the activity, they were now willing to try). In the end, all the participants told their stories. They really opened up about their past, their challenges and what they were after, answering candidly the questions from the list.

## **A round of rhythm and movement**

I then followed with a great physical icebreaker exercise is taken from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

### ***A round of rhythm and movement***

Taken from Games for Actors & Non-Actors. (Boal, 2005)

The participants form a circle. One of them, the moderator, goes into the middle and makes any kind of movement, as strange or unusual as she likes, accompanied by a sound and in a rhythm of her own invention. All the others imitate her, trying to reproduce exactly her movements and sounds, in time with her. Then, still making her movement and sound, this leader approaches and stands opposite someone in the circle, challenging them to take her place; this person goes into the middle and slowly changes the movement, the rhythm and the sound in any way she likes. Everyone follows this second leader, who then challenges a third person and so on.

The person who goes into the middle can create any rhythm of body and sound she likes, as long as it isn't something she does in her daily life. There must be no fear of the ridiculous, the grotesque, or the strange. If everybody is ridiculous, no one is!

Everyone else must try to reproduce everything they see and hear, as precisely as they can – the same movements, the same voice, the same rhythm... If it is a woman who is in the middle,

the men in the circle must try not to produce a 'masculine' version of the movement, but to reproduce exactly what they have perceived; and vice versa.

In the act of trying to reproduce someone else's way of moving, singing, etc., we begin to undo our own mechanisations. By our reproduction, we try to understand and make an exact copy of the exterior of the person in the middle, in order to gain a better sense of their interior.

The group really went all out with this exercise. Overall, everybody really let loose except for Julien, Mathis, and Pauline. Mathis tried something subdued for only a few seconds and then pointed at someone else. Pauline did not know what to do and laughed shyly. I then decided to imitate her shy laughter, and everybody followed. When this happened, Pauline laughed harder. Unsure at the beginning of the day if she would continue with the project, she later said that she wanted to see it to the end. Julien left the room. I later found out from Julien that he had acute generalised anxiety and often suffered panic attacks. He told me that when it was too noisy, he left to calm himself down. The social worker subsequently told me that he was on the spectrum of Autism. Julien never came back to our workshop. However, over the next few weeks, I would have chats with him in the corridors of the CJE and he would enquire about our activities. I got a sense that he would have wanted to participate, but that it was too much for him at this stage of his life.

### **Ridicule's Embrace**

*A round of rhythm and movement* is an exercise that gets better whenever it is repeated by the same group. This brings forth the notion of REPETITION for carnivalesque, chaotic and subversive acts. Each time we did this exercise again in the following weeks, as a warmup, the group became more exuberant and had more fun – bonding through the absurdity of it all. It became our little ritual. Our first ritual. I've later renamed the Boal exercise *Ridicule's Embrace* as we shifted the focus of the exercise on being ridicule and getting everybody around us to be ridicule with us.

# Ridicule's Embrace

## Ritual Spell

Level: 3rd  
Casting Time: 2-5 minutes  
Range: 20-foot radius  
Components: V, S, M (a small bell or whistle)  
Duration: 1 hour

Description: The caster starts making strange and unusual movements and sounds, which the group imitates with exactitude. At one point, the caster points to another player to lead, and everyone imitates the new leader. As each player takes their turn, they shed their inhibitions and embrace the the grotesque and the strange - gaining newfound courage and connecting with the others on a primal level.

*Click on image or link to view ritual*

<https://vimeo.com/alexandrefranchi/ridiculesembrace?share=copy>

*Password: Quest*

## **Making sure the participants know the theory behind the project**

After the physical exertion and fun of what would become Ridicule's Embrace, the participants *wanted* to sit down. It was time to have a discussion on the theory underlining this research-creation. Some participants and I had previously discussed these notions. However, there were new participants who were not there at the pre-research day that I had conducted in the Spring. I wanted ALL the participants to know as much as the theory that I was working with in order for them to contribute and to understand the method behind the madness.

I conducted a short 20-30 min lecture on the theoretical section for this thesis. Starting with Rites of passages by Victor Turner - linking the theory to social dramas and modern rites such as graduation. I followed with Blumenkrantz & Goldstein 20 elements needed for a rite of passage, explaining that we were going to try and incorporate as many elements as we could from their framework in our quest.

We then discussed Mikhaïl Bakhtin's definition of the Carnavalesque sense of the world. Stressing that this is not a notion that can be explained or understood with words. That the carnivalesque is a notion that is felt. The Carnavalesque notions remained murky intellectually for the participants. I then proceeded to make burping and farting noises that made everybody laugh, thus illustrating the notion of the grotesque. That seemed to help their understanding. I ended the lecture by showing scenes from films or sketches where the carnivalesque was present.

### **Useless amazing skill: our first clown exercise**

To illustrate one aspect of the notion of carnivalesque reversal, we performed a simple Clown Exercise that was given to me by my friend, actor and educator at George Brown College, Anna Mackay Smith.

#### **Clown Exercise (duration: 20 min)**

In this exercise, one participant stands in front of the group that acts as an audience. The participant then performs a trick/skill with pomp and confidence, as if they were the best in the world. But it has to be a useless skill, like flicking one's hair, or checking the time. The rest of the group then erupts in cheers, applause and praise.

When asked how performing that exercise feels, people will usually respond that it feels great, as they truly feel the warmth and encouragement from the others, even though they did something insignificant. The group can then discuss this in our performance driven society and how we desperately seek rewards and achievement as opposed as other outcomes.

I started the exercise by going first and picking my nose, to wild cheers. The participants really embarked in this exercise and said that they loved receiving praise even it if was for something silly. They literally "felt the love" even though they knew it was pretend play. The personalities of each participants were revealed through their "silly skill." More importantly, the participants smiled, laughed and felt the utter pointlessness of the exercise which illustrated a key facet of the

Carnavalesque sense of the world: REVERSAL. The reversal of what is mastery, what praise is given for, of success etc.

### **Two rules: oppression and fun**

I followed with a short explanation of what Future Workshop methods of participatory design were. Namely the critique phase, fantasy phase and the implementation phase. I told the participants that there was no pressure for “success” and that we are going to play and explore. That I did not know the shape of what we will make but since we are making a prototype, a test run, it might not yield what we expect. Our creation could be a film, performance, ritual, or game for others to play.

The participants were open to the murkiness of the end-goal of our project, though a bit confused. I reminded them that our research-creation project was going to be a generative exploration, an experimentation.

When I asked them what they wanted to get out of this, they said that it would help them discover something about themselves. Maybe overcome some of their fears. That was good enough for me.

It was time to go to lunch. I left the group with the following question: What happens if we create something together by using our life stories, our wounds, our worries? Could it help us discover something? Could it help others do the same? I referred back to my films that they saw earlier that day (cancer in the case of Franchi is Back, disfigurement in the case of Happy Face). I concluded by saying that there were only 2 rules to our quest. The first rule is that we needed to work with our existential anxieties, our hopes and fears, in order to achieve psychological resonance – making our narrative “stick”. And that this work was going to start after lunch. I got wide eyed looks of stress and terror from the participants. I then gave them the second rule: that whatever we did, it needed to be silly, stupid and fun.

### **Bleak Lunch break**

Lunch was generously offered by the CJE: Pizza and fruit drinks. I realized that most of the young people attending the center ate lunch at the nearby greasy spoon restaurant. Empty carbs, sugar and processed meat. Not the best sustenance to “care for the self” as Tony Fry would put it. I also realized that these young people stay seated for nearly 7 hours a day without any physical activity. How can someone with ADHD or anxiety properly learn if they do not exert themselves?

After lunch I forced a digestive walk around the CJE building. A bleak building in the middle of nowhere.



*The CJE Trois Rivières is housed in this architectural wonder designed for human flourishing.*

After

I. The notebooks were to be used for journaling. We then put flipcharts up on the wall for note taking and brainstorming. Marie-Claude, the social worker assured me that our room would be dedicated to the project and that whenever we come back for further workshops, our setup will be intact. This was great news, as it meant we would have our own liminal space to work in.

**The Siren Song: acting out our oppressions and connecting with others**

After lunch we embarked on a powerful exercise from Augusto Boal. The idea here is that our anxieties and oppressions take another shape than speech or an unspoken mental image. With drawings, songs, or theatre play, we seek to give our oppressions a tangible shape in the world.

**The Siren Song**, from Augusto Boal's Games for Actors & Non Actors -

“A very delicate exercise in which each participant thinks of an oppression she has actually experienced or is still experiencing. Then everyone closes their eyes and assembles in the middle of the room. Whoever wants to start utters a sound (a cry, groan, shout, lamentation, etc.) which must be the translation into sound of the oppression she has in mind.

The moderator takes this first person by the hand and leads her on a journey around the room, eventually stopping in a corner. Same with the second person, who has started a different sound. Three or four others follow, each in their own way, with their own call. It is important for the moderator to choose quite different sounds to inhabit the four corners of the room.

Then the four let loose their cries together. Those remaining in the middle listen to the four and each choose the sound which best suits their own oppression; four groups form. After this everybody opens their eyes, and they make four circles, and, in their separate circles, each person recounts to the others the oppression she was thinking of, the episode which was in her mind. (paraphrase this part)”

I started out the exercise by acting out my own oppression – a series of gesticulations accompanied with small wails of worry to show my crippling anxiety. Then everybody went and acted out theirs. Once the exercise was completed, the participants were split into 4 corners/groups. We were all astonished to discover that, without talking, we had grouped ourselves with individuals sharing similar oppressions.

1) Cloe, Christelle, Jean Christophe, and myself all were oppressed by anxiety.

- 2) Marie-Claude (the social worker) and Charlie were oppressed by wanted to stop worrying and shedding the weight of worrying.
- 3) Max, Dan & Annabelle were oppressed by the pressure to help or deal with others and their problems.
- 4) Pauline, Mathis and Daly were oppressed by some form of loneliness (although this group was not as clear cut as the others).

### Drawing out oppressions

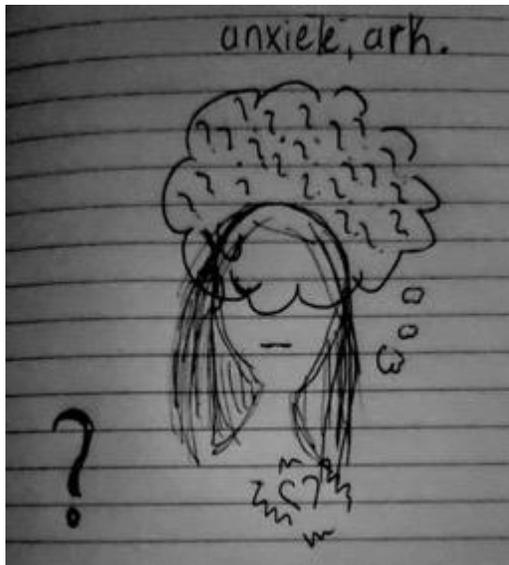
The entire group was impressed by the power of the Siren Song, myself included. I then showed them a drawing that represented my anxiety and asked them to draw out the oppressions that they had expressed in the exercise. I mentioned, that this was going to be a process that might be repeated several times during the workshop, so that there is no need to worry about “getting it right.” The participants were also asked to take self- portrait photos with several facial expressions ranging from serious to absurd. Most participants drew very expressive depictions of their anxieties and took a range of photos, for the exception of Dan, who drew stick figure faces and Pauline who had to leave early to get her child from daycare.

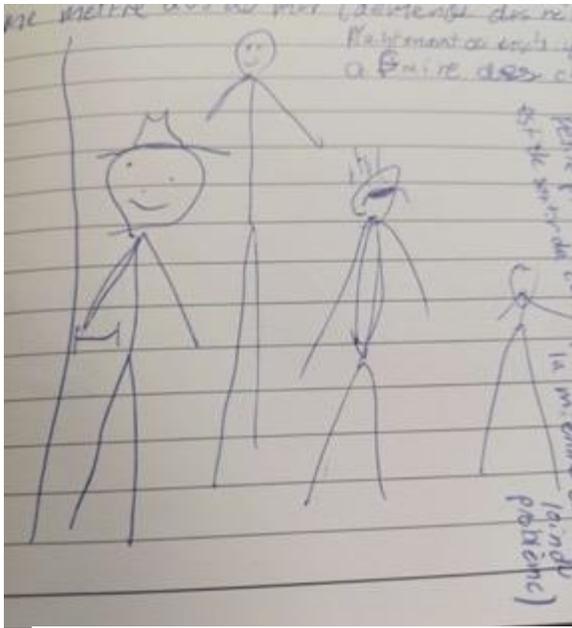


*Charlie self-portrait and oppression drawing*

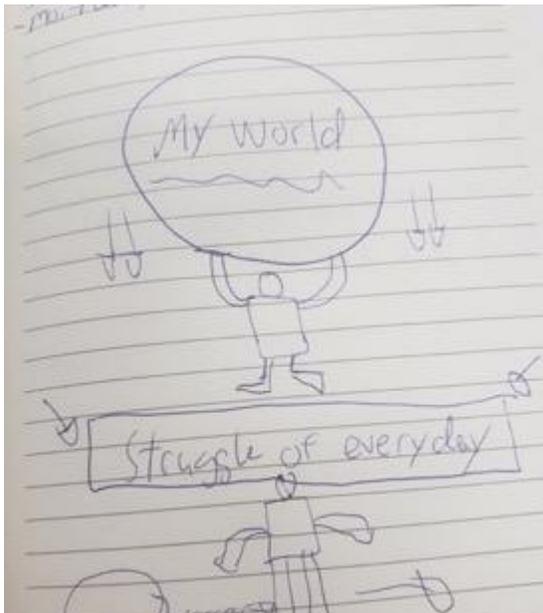


*Cloé self-portrait and oppression drawing*  
*Daly self-portrait and oppression drawing*

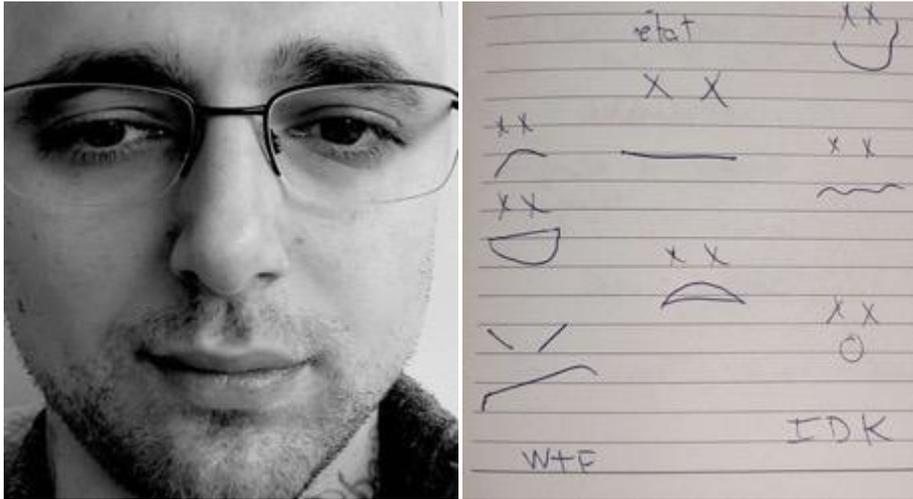




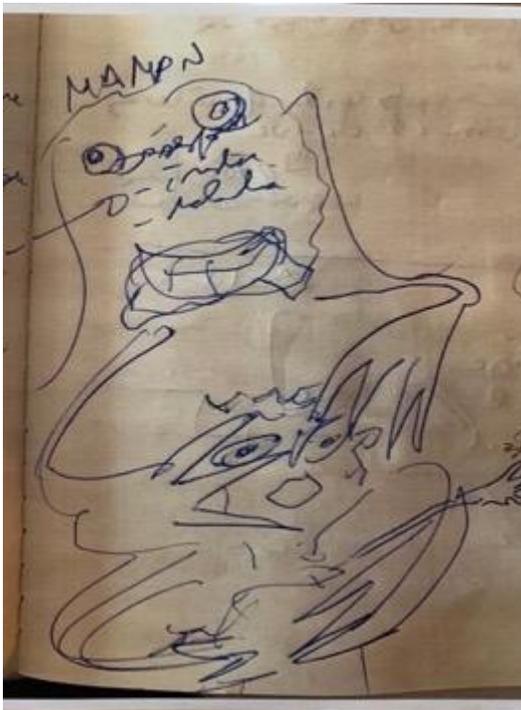
*Mathis self-portrait and oppression drawing*



*Max self-portrait and oppression drawing*



Dan self-portrait and oppression drawing



My own self-portrait and oppression drawing



*Annabelle self-portrait and oppression drawing*

### **Playing with the camera**

The day was drawing to an end. And before everybody left, I wanted to record some of the work we had done. It was time to setup the camera and gauge our comfort level in front of it.

#### **Playing with the camera**

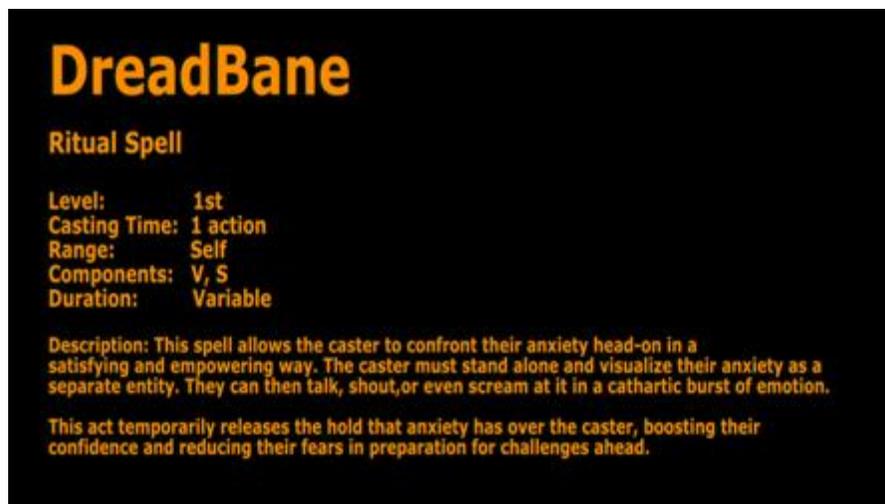
The camera should be set up and presented as an optional tool to play with. Basically, this is a loose exercise where people are invited to try and play with the camera. They may repeat a clown exercise or express themselves in any way they wish. This will contribute to creating a relaxing atmosphere in front of a rolling camera.

The idea is that the joker goes in and out in front of the camera, then turns it towards people as they speak, asking them questions interview style etc. Some participants may choose to perform something in front of the camera. While others may choose to turn the camera on the Joker and ask them questions. The idea is to collectively determine how to use the camera as a group, and for individual participants to gradually acclimatize to it.

As the participants discussed their anxiety, I suggested that they “speak” to their anxiety. What would they want to say to her/him/it? Would they talk sweetly or scream at it? Charlie and Dan volunteered first. Charlie acting out profound despair, while Dan telling it to f\*ck off. Whenever a participant performed in front of the camera, the group was encouraged to applaud their courage.

### **Dreadbane: 1<sup>st</sup> level ritual spell**

Daly, who had mentioned earlier that she wanted to punch her anxiety, agreed to try and enact that in front of the camera. Jean-Christophe volunteered to act as her anxiety and agreed to be slapped in the face, to general laughter. This exercise became a mini ritual called **Dreadbane** – a way to temporarily shed off the weight of anxiety.



*To view Ritual click on image*

*password: Quest*

## Armpit Challenge

Towards the end of the period, Annabelle and Charlie improvised something rather grotesque by smelling each other's armpits. The mood was playful and the rest of the group clapped and cheered wildly at the absurd and grotesque display. This became the **Armpit Challenge** – a grotesque activity for two friends to perform in public, with varying levels of difficulty.



*To view Armpit Challenge click on image*

*password: Quest*

For future iterations of this workshop, the Joker or moderator should encourage participants to create their own “challenges” or mini rituals.

## Day 1 Reflection

### Adjusting to the rhythm of the CJE

We had to finish at 15:30. Earlier than I was expecting to (I was hoping for 16:30). In addition, we had to be interrupted by the visit of a political CAQ candidate ahead of the Election. The CJE is apolitical, but wants to expose the youth to their citizen duties by inviting political candidates from ALL parties ahead of elections.

Cloé had a massive headache and had to leave early, and so did Pauline. Some of the participants had to absent themselves during the day in order to go fill out government forms (the CJE gives

them courses, but also coaching on job seeking and getting government subsidies). Additionally, quite a few of the participants drink vast quantities of coffee or smoke. Bathroom or smoking breaks are often requested. All this greatly reduced the actual time I was envisioning with the participants. I was also too ambitious with the number of activities planned. I will have to adjust this.

Most of the participants forgot their notebooks – so much for journaling. I also realized that I needed to research some drama therapy theory on how to run sessions like these. This conflicted me as I am no therapist and our research-creation is NOT a therapeutic process; rather, it is a collective exploration. So, to have a predetermined script might defeat the purpose of discovering things.

The idea came to setup a discord channel to continue the conversations and work during the week. On the channel, I could ask them to post their drawings and other acting exercises that we might individually do; or exchange our own personal hacks or remedies for their oppressions. I could start with mine for anxiety

I also asked the participants to send photos, self-portraits, of their faces. With the goal of printing them in large format for future work.

I believe that the day's goals were met. The ice was broken, some trust had been established, the future workshop parameters had been set and we had begun to experiment with playfulness in front of the camera. But more importantly, we had expressed our Oppressions and anxieties through the Siren Song and our drawings.

To confirm this, Marie-Claude, the social worker, seemed pleased with the involvement of the participants. I left feeling peaceful and satisfied. I like doing this work However, I can't shake the feeling that I still don't know where all this is going to go.

As a last note, I realized that the project is too ambitious. There is no way that we can do all 20 elements of the rite of passage. Not at the speed things go at the CJE (a para governmental organization). I will have to let go of some things.

### **Allowing ourselves to suck**

During our playing with the camera, I made sure to find ways to film the participants who were less comfortable to perform in front of it. This might have taken the form of a discussion where I turned the camera on them as they spoke, or simply asked them to discuss how shy they were – but to do it in front of the camera. The idea, aside from the universality of it all, was to move away from performativity and embrace doing something badly. Embrace failure. In short, applying the ambivalent characteristic of carnival to our image-based performance driven society.

I believe that it is important to come back often to this topic, in order to free ourselves from judgement and truly embrace the joy of playing.

## APPENDIX B: Workshop Day 2 - Friday Sept 30, 2022

I must warn you, dear reader, that Day 2 was a shitshow.

After the relative success of Day 1, I was ill prepared and had too ambitious goals. In short, I lost a focus I had not yet well defined. For this 2<sup>nd</sup> session, I wanted to further work on the oppression or “problem” of the participants as well as starting to work on their ideal or heroic selves. In short, and in keeping with the Future Workshops method, I wanted us to define our “problem”, then move to what ideal state we wanted for ourselves (a sort of heroic state).

In terms of delving deeper into the carnivalesque, I wanted to explore Ritual Laughter.

In terms of structuring our rite of passage, I wanted go over the 20 elements from the Blumenkrantz and Goldstein list and see which ones we could incorporate into our quest.

I also wanted to try working with masks for our oppressions in order to see if it might help some participants were able to delve deeper, or let go of their shyness.

Basically, I wanted to try many different things and see what sticks. However, these techniques (ritual laughter, mask work, future workshops) require a lot of preparation, expertise and time.

Needless to say, that the day did not go as planned. It was also cut short because a minister from the CAQ government was coming to the CJE to meet students. Jean Boulet, Minister du travail, also a deputy for the Trois Rivières Region. This seemed to unnerve a good portion of the students.



*Ministre du Travail Jean Boulet, CAQ*

Though we were supposed to start at 8:30, we ended up starting at 9:30 because some participants were late. Additionally, there was push back from some of the students regarding the CAQ minister's visit and the social workers had to explain that the provincial government funds the CJE and so, although they were an apolitical organization, they still allowed visits from all parties.

11 participants were present in addition to the social worker. Julien left, but we got a new participant, Valérie (mid-thirties, is a single mother of three.) Daly was going to be leaving the CJE to attend makeup school; but she assured us she would still try to get dispensation to keep coming to our workshops.



*Valérie self-portrait and oppression drawing*

## Ritual Laughter and Laughter Yoga

I felt that we needed to start with something radical and exciting. We started with our countdown separation exercise and then moved on to the topic of laughter, which is very present in carnival.

I gave a short talk to illustrate how laughter spanned all cultures and timelines. With this, I was hoping to convince the more cerebral participants like Dan and Max, that the carnivalesque could have some benefits to them. After explaining the science behind the benefits of laughter (even if not spontaneous) AND pointing out that ritual laughter was used in ancient Greek Cultures and East Indian cultures we launched into laughter exercises.

**Laughter Yoga Exercise** (participants stand up and form a circle)

REF <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQmmYYV1EnU&t=5s> **Dr. Madam Kataria**

BREATHING: a) In-breath with fists towards us and out-breath extending arms outwards, tongue out with a booming "haaa!" b) We redo it, but this time we laugh on the exhale.

HANDSHAKE LAUGHTER: shake hand of the next person in the circle and laugh.

CREDIT CARD BILL LAUGHTER: we look at a pretend credit card bill and laugh (or cry laugh) depending on how steep the bill it.

CELL PHONE LAUGHTER: pretend talk on the phone and laugh out loud obnoxiously.

NAMASTE: we do the namaste salute while laughing.

POINTING FINGER: we wiggle a finger at our neighbour with an "I know what you did, you little devil" attitude and we laugh.

MONSTER LAUGH: claw hands on each side of face, tongue out and menacing demon grin with big laugh out loud.

GROUP LAUGHTER: Everybody in the circle converges towards the center with a "hééééé!" and then reaches upward with their arms, jumping up and down with laughter. We do it 3 times. This is fun.

DON'T KNOW WHY I AM LAUGHING: we walk around the room laughing with the body language of "I don't know why the hell I am laughing".

ONE MINUTE LAUGHTER CHALLENGE: everybody laughs for 1 straight minute. It's long, but we all revert to the previous exercises to give us something to do while we laugh.

Everybody participated in laughter yoga. The new person, Valerie, was a bit skeptical at first, but she got into it. This builds exercise built upon Ridicule's embrace and the clowning exercises.

### **No one walk-ins mid Rite of passage**

Given that there was a potential new participant, Valérie, I gave a summary of the project and answered her questions. I explained that this is not a process where one walks into midpoint. In order to have a certain cohesion "esprit de corps" the participants need to be there from the beginning.

I also asked the participants to describe what they remembered from Day 1, and what were their preferred exercises. The clowning exercise was a favorite. The recap took longer than expected, but it was important that ALL participants, including Valérie, have the same knowledge of the project and the theories behind it.

During the recap, Charlie was quite disruptive (interruptions, clowning around, going off topic etc.). I later found out that he's got severe ADHD and that his medication causes him to have highs and lows. This led me to further reflect on how to get shy people to participate in a group where there are very outgoing persons that take all the attention.

In our group, on one end of the spectrum, there is Charlie – willing and able to engage in ridicule, clowning etc. Charlie is part of a band called Le Grand Carni-bal. During their concerts he wears a grotesque bloody pig nose and is called Glouton (gluton). Charlie naturally embodies part of the

carnavalesque. It is not a challenge for him to perform or show vulnerability. At the other end of the spectrum, there is Pauline. She is a recent arrival from Africa and is shy and quiet. It seems that she is afraid to appear ridiculous and to show weakness. There are several others like her in the group; namely Mathis, Valérie, Christelle and Daly. And these participants, when faced with the outrageous behavior of other participants who are more extraverted, tend to stay in their shells as they compare themselves. I have seen this in many groups in the past (classrooms, parties etc.)

It was time to address this issue and to short circuit it. To break the age-old paradigm of *shy vs outgoing*. To make it ok to be shy and to freeze. To make people understand that the goal was not to be outgoing. That being “outgoing” was not a currency that had more value. Part of our quest was to explore our weaknesses and fragilities. And who better than clowns to show us the way...

### **The Beau Moment – wisdom from the Gaulier school of clown**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/18/arts/television/philippe-gaulier-clowns.html>

I shared with the group an article from the founder of the Gaulier School of Clown. Mr. Gaulier, himself a renowned clown and actor, describes a way to explore that fragile, sweet moment of shyness we experience when performing in front of others. How to take the drama and weight away from the paralyzing moment.

How when we're in front of an audience that's not reacting to our performance, we feel shy (or destroyed). But that clowning teaches us to stay with that uncomfortable feeling and not flee it. That moment of fragility and vulnerability is a Beautiful Moment (un Beau Moment) and that if we stay in it and dance with it, the audience will react to it positively as it echoes their own human vulnerability.

We then all agreed to use the phrase “Beau Moment!” in our exercises. A phrase to be shouted or spoken by the performer whenever they felt overwhelmed or shy during an exercise. This, for me, is another example of carnivalesque reversal. Taking something fragile and “weak” and

bringing it out in the open, as opposed to burying it. It is also an example of carnivalesque universality, by having others, the spectators, echo what the performer is feeling.

The Beau Moment was a great finding. It ended up being used by every participant (including myself) throughout the process. And whenever a participant would freeze, be shy and utter the magical phrase, everybody instinctively repeated the words as an acknowledgement of what was happening – thus giving a moment of encouragement to the floundering participant. And in the majority of times, it worked! The participant managed to continue.

### **Future workshop Failure**

Conducting a future workshop properly requires time and careful planning. In fact, the goal of the entire activity, whether it be a day or several days, SHOULD be the process that Robert Jungk outlined. In the case of the present research, I wanted to try future workshops as a method amongst a few others. I did not want to spend 3 full days with the participants in plenary sessions, sitting around a table talking and writing items on flipcharts. This is why, the results were underwhelming.

Nevertheless, I tried to run a plenary session with the following question: ‘What is your problem...?’ ‘What is your oppression...?’ And then follow up with ‘what would be your ideal state of being...?’ To conclude with a brainstorm of what they wanted the output of our adventure to be. The results are summarized in the table below.

<b>Critique phase</b>	<b>Ideal phase</b>
<p><b>When asked what their Oppressions were:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Generalized anxiety (I am going to die)</li> <li>-Performance anxiety (income/housing)</li> <li>-Social Pressure</li> <li>-Their personal spaces being invaded</li> <li>-The pace of life being too fast</li> <li>-Life</li> </ul>	<p><b>What would be their ideal state to be in:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Better enjoy the present moment</li> <li>-Have self-confidence</li> <li>-Have Freedom</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social media harassment</li> <li>-Little negative voice in their head</li> <li>-Patriarchy</li> <li>-Standards of Beauty</li> <li>-Academic Pressure</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Implementation phase</b></p> <p><b>What they wanted to do during our workshop:</b></p> <p>Laugh</p> <p>Scream</p> <p>Impro</p>	<p><b>Implementation phase</b></p> <p><b>When asked what they wanted the output of our adventure to be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A short film</li> <li>-A ritual</li> <li>-A musical Comedy</li> <li>-a mini theatre performance</li> <li>-Some clown act</li> <li>-A Zine</li> <li>-Songs</li> </ul>

I was struggling with the discrepancy between the fact that the implementation phase was directed towards our common activity whereas the critique phase was related to each individual when the clock struck 12:00 and all the participants got up to go to lunch.

**A bit of mask work to free emotions**

After lunch, we had the visit from the CAQ minister, which lasted longer than expected, and the participants were fidgety. They had been sitting down and listening for too long. So we went back to Augusto Boal’s Siren Song exercise that we had explored in Day 1. But this time, I had the participants put on masks, with the hope that some of the shy individuals might feel more free to express themselves.



The

*Marie France (the social worker) participating in the Siren Song with mask.*

exercise was a success as emotions ran much higher than on the first day. People sighed, screamed, moved around. Even Valerie, the newcomer, was able to let out a bone chilling scream while crouching down and clutching her head. The whole experience was very visceral and I felt that whatever the participants, myself included, were expressing in that exercise had to be the building block and lynchpin of our quest. It had to be woven in some kind of narrative.

### **Retelling each other's problems – a way to bring out the story**

I decided to group participants in pairs and had them discussed their oppressions with each other and take notes. Then each participant was to present to the group what he or she remembered or noted down from their partner's tale. The exercise was going to be filmed.

Remembering Baroni's (2007) notion of tellability (sometimes referred to as 'narratibility' or 'reportability' in which a story's noteworthiness is dependent on the nature of specific incidents deemed significant or surprising by storytellers, I had the hunch that by having the participants tell each other's stories, we would get at the core of a concise relatable story from which to work from for our future activities. A personal story that could be told, modified and transcended.

I filmed the presentations and everybody was comfortable doing it in front of the camera. Probably because each participant was not the center of attention, they were talking about someone else. The presentations went well and took a long time to go through everybody. It is from this exercise that I later derived most of the footage to structure the portraits of the participants I exhibited at the end of the year.



*Top left: Charlie presenting Pauline. Top right: Annabelle presenting JC*

*Bottom left: Christelle presenting Cloé. Bottom right: Your humble narrator (Alexandre) presenting Daly*

### **Playing with the camera**

As the end of day was nearing, we played with the camera. Charlie, Daly and Cloé decided to act out behavior of people that annoyed them. In the case of Cloé, it was her ex-boyfriend who had been abusive towards her, resulting in some deep trauma and her fear of going out in public. It was clear for Cloé and myself that her rite of passage would revolve around those issues.

The last item of the day was to say goodbye to Daly who was going to leave the CJE to attend a technical makeup/beautician school. Given that Daly's boyfriend, Max was part of our group, Daly

wanted to keep coming to our workshops. The CJE was going to arrange dispensations with her new school in order to enable her to do that.



*Daly on her last day at the CJE*

## Day 2 Reflection

Day 2 felt messy and scattered. My attempt at conducting Future Workshops was a failure. Future workshops seem to have been designed for situations related to the workplace, or citizen participation when faced with a common 'external' problem: a city policy, a managerial decision etc. A common problem facing a group of citizens. In our case, although all the participants were high school dropouts seeking to pursue their studies – a seemingly common problem – they were all in this predicament due to very different reasons. They each had their own individual traumas, oppressions, past and reasons for having dropped out of school. And most of these reasons had now been internalized. They were struggling with their own demons. Perhaps the dichotomy of Oppression vs Heroic Self in Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and non-actors is akin to future workshops, but for the self. A way to manifest our critique of ourselves (in non-verbal terms) and to also manifest an ideal vision of ourselves. The implementation phase would then be to devise our own ritual to achieve this ideal phase.

Although we further explored the carnivalesque with the ritual laughter, we did not get to revisit the 20 elements of rites of passages; and, more importantly conduct any Augusto Boal exercise.

In Games for actors and non-actors, Boal describes several exercises – The child's dream (p166), the opposite of myself (p168), among others – which guide participants to playing idealized versions of themselves. Some of these exercises are quite complex and require a lot of time. Perhaps there is a way to access an idealized version of oneself through simpler avenues, like the clowning or laughter exercises we already performed. Where participants seem to feel present, free, and confident; albeit for a brief moment.

## **The Child's Dream (p166)**

### **The child's dream – what I wanted to be when I grew up**

Half the group write their names on pieces of paper together with the name or description of the person, hero or mythical figure they dreamt of being when they were children; the other half of the group watch.

First, the participants move around the playing space using only their bodies to show the main characteristics of the characters they are playing. They must reveal what fascinated them about this dream when they were children, using only gesture, facial expression and movement, all playing at the same time, but without at this stage relating to one another.

After a few minutes, the Joker tells them to look for a partner. Then they start dialogues with their partners, but without saying anything which will obviously reveal who their characters are.

After another few minutes of this, the Joker tells them to change partners, and the new couples engage in a dialogue, each person maintaining and developing his own character. Then after the same period of time, a third partner is chosen.

When this is over, the Joker reads out the names of the participants one at a time, and those in the group who were watching the game, as well as those who were playing it, must describe the characteristics they saw in that person. They should not try to guess the actual name of the childhood aspiration (Superman, Mother Teresa, Pelé, Grace Kelly, etc.), but rather try to describe how the person they were watching behaved, because this will reveal what he really wanted to be or what capacity she wanted to develop in herself, using the name or image of someone real or fantastic as the vehicle for that aspiration.

Two examples. In Zurich, a man wrote 'Tarzan'. The comments of the participants showed that he wanted to be superior, a leader, a commander, a chief, high above all others – those others being in this case, the animals. In New York, two young women both wrote down the same

name – Cinderella. One of them showed narcissism, beauty, cruelty; the other, a Puerto Rican as it happened, chose to show the moment when her Cinderella had to go back to the kitchen – all this woman wanted was a few hours of happiness.

This game is effective because somehow it reveals characteristics and aspirations which the participants still cherish. After the first half of the group has acted out their childhood dreams, the second half do the same.

## APPENDIX C: Solo work in the studio - Day 2.1 & Day 2.2

Montreal, Oct 21 to 25, 2022

Between my visits to the CJE in Trois Rivières, I spend time in the studio trying to figure out what to do next. But instead of turning that time into academic work sessions, I ritualize and play with the process. And why not? Why shouldn't carnival spirit permeate the whole adventure? After all, "one must walk the walk, and not just talk the talk."

I do two big studio sessions between my 2nd and 3rd visits to Trois Rivières - hence the names 2.1 and 2.2. I put blown up selfie printouts of Docteur F. and I film the whole thing. I do this because I love clowning around in front of the camera. Playing the buffoon, "le pitre", as my school teachers used to say. However, it never occurred to me to film the entire thing because I was a filmmaker. Strange.



I imagine that if a musician or a dancer would be running a workshop with a group of young people, they would use studio time to engage in their art to further explore the themes evoked in the preceding days.



This is a space where reality and fantasy intertwine. Where Doctor F and Alexandre engage in dialogic discourse. I often put on music - reggae, to relax, to take the pressure off the hubris that this project is going to be something revolutionary. While I am in Docteur F garb, I feel less anxiety about the “success” of this project. About making it. This prompts me to reflect about my own ritual regarding my anxiety. In this case, my anxiety linked to film and the arts.



Docteur F is a character that was made up during my battle with cancer to humorously portray my doctor at the time – when he was giving me the odds of survival and amputation. I instinctively created him as a frank, carefree, relaxed and competent person (with a low voice and a Germanic accent.) I now realize that he embodies, albeit in a comical way, an idealized version of myself. I don't have a thing for Germanic accents; however, I do associate the northern Germanic Europeans with steadfastness and rigor – two traits that I find lacking in myself; and whose absence probably contribute to my overall stress.

I'm lucky enough to have access to a studio with large windows overlooking Mount Royal. At sunset, the view is magical. One evening, Lil' Simz's song *Point & Kill* has me dancing with abandon. A certain Doctor F way of being is born. Beautiful images are created, without Photoshop retouching or overworked lighting. Strangely enough, it makes me want to make beautiful images on film again. Me, the narrative humor storyteller, who always had insecurities about the hyper-stylized Instagram aesthetic so prevalent these days. I feel I am in a space where creative freedom is returning. Where the joy of making something filmic is present – regardless of career or income preoccupations and stresses (two of major worries for me). I am dressed as Docteur F as I do all this. Perhaps he is a carnivalesque idealized version of myself?



What if some of our alter egos could be represented the Critique Phase or the Ideal Vision Phase of our being? A personal Future Workshop, of sorts. How could a future iteration of this project guide participants to discover and nurture their oppressions and heroic selves into characters, their monsters and fairies, that would help them navigate the storyline of their lives? Could this be akin to character creation in a LARP on our own lives? A joyful idea worth developing.



In the meantime, I film and send a video giving the participants a bit of "work" to do while they wait for my next visit:

- Dan is to make sure the group is present on Discord and receives my messages. Dan the organized, Dan the motivated. Lieutenant Dan as his profile name suggests.

- Cloé, who has a little experience with Tik-Tok, will try to initiate her comrades to Tik-tok to make 30-40 sec videos summarizing their oppressions.

- Daly and Annabelle will rummage through the CJE's clothing stock (which the center uses to prepare young people to dress well for job interviews) and find pseudo-realistic costumes for each of them. Costumes they would use to represent the alter egos they would create.

- Charlie, the group's musician, will take stock of the group's musical skills and film a video of everyone singing and clapping along to a rhythm of their choice.

## **APPENDIX D: Workshop day 3 - CJE Trois Rivières, Oct 21 to 25, 2022**

Max, Dan, Annabelle, Christelle, Valérie, Mathis, Pauline, Charlie and Marie-Claude (the social worker) were present. While Cloé, Daly, and J.C. were absent.

For Day 3, I wanted to encourage participants to continue looking for their ritual or story that would illustrate a way of transcending their anxieties or oppressions. I planned to do this by having participants search for an Alter Ego while having fun with costumes (like my Doctor F, whom they found very funny). I also wanted to talk about Alejandro Jodorowski's Psychomagic acts, with examples to give them some wacky ideas. This was going to be a great Segway for our guest, Eric Marleau, a clown apprentice.

Eric, a former student at CJE Trois Rivières, had been recommended to me by Marie-Claude (the social worker) because he'd taken up clowning and juggling and was beginning to find his place in the world. I'd spoken to Eric on the phone and he understood everything that I told him about the project. He himself suffered from depression and anxiety, and had had suicidal thoughts in the past. However, through the work of clowning, juggling and symbolism, he had gradually succeeded in finding inner peace, and was even beginning to do workshops in elementary schools.

### **Charlie's oppression**

We started with the Ridicule's Embrace exercise. This time around, the participants were much more expressive in their crazy movements than in the previous times. The exercise put everybody in a good mood and woke everybody up (myself included). The more a group does this exercise, the more powerful and cathartic it gets.

In terms of the "work" that I had asked them to do in the video I sent, it was hit and miss. Dan had tried to get people to engage with the Discord (to some success), and a few costumes had been found for Max and Charlie. On the positive side, Charlie had done a very effective 40 second

video representing his internal state. Something that could become a Tik-tok activity for future workshops.



*Click on image to see Charlie's*

***Oppression***

Password: **MDes**

### **What is psychomagic**

Alejandro Jodorowski is a Chilean filmmaker who, after spending time with shamanic healers, developed a sort of personal therapy that he named psychomagic. By combining Jungian psychology, the tarot, and cultural traditions, Jodorowski uses dreams, art, and theatre to empower individuals to heal psychic wounds. Through what Jodorowski calls poetic or psychomagic “acts”, individuals perform metaphorical solutions to their emotional problems. The goal being to connect with a deeper self, while breaking down our conscious persona, in order for transformation to begin (Jodorowsky, 2010).

Sometimes taking his patients directly at their words, Jodorowsky takes the same elements associated with a negative psychological charge and recombines them in an “act” that makes them positive. For instance, Jodorowski helped a judge who complained that his ego and vanity was governing his life by asking him to dress as a homeless person and beg outside a famous and expensive restaurant which the judge loved going to. The judge had to pull glass doll eyes out of his pockets and hand them to passersby. The lesson being that if a homeless person can fill his pockets with eyeballs, then they must have no value whatsoever. And thus, the eyes of others should have no influence on who you are.

The participants were really into the concept of Jodorowski’s psychomagic acts. However, due to the ethical and legal constraints, most of Jodorowski’s methods could not be applied to our group. However, we all agreed to keep it in mind for designing some rituals.

### **Clown talk with a former CJE youth**

Eric Marleau talked about his personal story and became the character of the clown. He then displayed symbolic objects and had the participants interact with them (a hammer, a large "diamond", a clock, boxing gloves etc.) Going around the table, the participants each summarized their "problems" and we brainstormed on how to express that with ritual, a simple scene or the objects.

The rest of the session was used by dressing up in costume and discussing each participants "problem" and brainstorming on narrative ways to illustrate/confront/transcend it: be it through a scene, a ritual, a dialogue, a video etc. It was agreed that subsequent one on one Zoom calls with the students were to be made to flesh out each participant's narrative.

### **Filmed outputs**

Charlie in a businessman costume was an interesting find. Charlie is a musician and artist. He already operates in the carnivalesque. The name of his band is Karni-Bal, and he owns a pig-like clown nose. In short, he's already in this space. Observation show that Charlie is always

interrupting, making jokes and absurd remarks in class. Because of his ADHD, remaining "serious" is hard. Also, it is hard for Charlie to deal with compliments and praise. Charlie always seems to make light of them, apparently. I turn to Carnival's reversal. What If Charlie would do the inverse of Carnival? What if he did something serious, tame, monologic instead of dialogic etc? Our instincts, his and mine, tell us that there is something to explore there. This is positive.



*Charlie as a businessman (he could not help it and had to don a wig)*

Pauline talked about her mother who guilts her into doing things for her. Pauline is learning to say no, but she has a hard time with it. We asked her to dress up and play at being her mother; which she did with brilliance, both in her native tongue of République Centrafrique and in French. We were all engrossed by her performance. It looked like she enjoyed the cheers she got. However, she had to leave early to pick up her child and so we could not debrief. Pauline is hard to reach. She does not get alerts from our discord channel.



*Pauline playing her guiltig mother*

Max dressed up as his own version of a stereotypical rapper (basketball tank-top, sunglasses, baseball cap askew, swearing a lot. He did not have fun with it, it felt forced. So we dropped the idea.



*Max as a rapper, which he hates*

Dan avoided “playing” by asking intellectual questions about the theories I used. However, at one point, he got sidetracked in a group conversation that questioned his respect of women – as illustrated by a rant he had about a date with a woman who made cooked ham the wrong way. This was both hilarious and disturbing.



*Dan on a rant about dating women*

### **Day 3 Reflection**

Eric Marleau's interaction with the group was a little bit underwhelming. Eric was only at the beginning of his Clown training/growth and did not have the ease of working with a group that a theater teacher or clown with years of experience might have. What did not help was that we were short in time. I used too much of the morning session to field questions from the participants on what the project was about. It turns out that they did not have a clear sense of what it was.

My ADHD scattered presentation style did not help. But I also realized that the project is too complex at this stage. There are too many theories, too many goals - artistic, design driven, social etc. It seems that problem defining phase was not done right. I focused on their larger problems - being high school dropouts, existential anxieties etc. But did not have/take the time to focus on everyday life, minor or micro problems. Perhaps this is something that we could tackle in the short time that we have left.

This third day left me with a strong case of the impostor syndrome. I am neither a drama therapist, nor a theatre teacher, nor a clown, nor a shaman. A carnivalesque spin on this would be "mouhahaha! it's the blind leading the blind."

## APPENDIX E: Solo work in the studio - Day 3.1 to 3.5

Montreal, Oct 21 to 25, 2022

These 5 studio days were what I call “Reflexive-practicing-in-action-research-creation-procrastination.” In short, these sessions were a game. They embody the spirit of the theories present in the research. And though they were all over the place, they ended up being very productive.

I put up the participant’s drawings of their impressions on the studio wall. I film the drawings while making an audio commentary - thus giving life to the drawings. Later, in editing, I’ll realize that the drawings speak for themselves and that we do not need my commentary. Again, I am not a drama therapist or psycho analyst. We are all equal in this. There is no “I cure you” direction of power.



From an initial assessment of the participants’ “problems” and hardships, I move towards a more personal account of what impressions these people had on me. This gradually gives rise to the tone of the documentary-style portraits that I will later exhibit for my MDes exhibit. Something more intimate and less condescending.

Another day, Docteur F decides to record himself pitching the project again. But this time, in a raw, direct way. Very different from university presentations, but still retaining the advertising narrative punch I'd acquired in my years making TV Commercials. The idea is that the project

should be described in a way that would interest high school students (or dropouts) and make them laugh.

However, I would need to test it in front of young people. Do some kind of A & B testing to determine the best, most catchy pitch. Just like they do in advertising market research.

Using advertising's mechanics to pitch the idea like a product. An absurd product that only costs time (like everything else in this attention economy) but that bring benefits: immediate laughter, and not-so-immediate well being. Who knows.



I realize that I like the materiality of it all. The fun of cutting the printouts of the participants photos and drawings. Of sticking them on the wall, of disguising myself and filming the whole thing. It's like I am slowly building the narrative through the physical act of laying out physical representation of what was done. This gives me joy. It takes me back to my first short films where I did mock-ups of the scenes I would later shoot. I realize that when making a film, I need to proceed this way. Perhaps I can allow myself to pompously call this "my practice" or more matter-of-factly, my method.

Later that night, Docteur F uses a tungsten lamp that my father gave me to film himself taking badass gravitas poses. The look is very old school, but effective. My dad is a photographer and I decide to ask for his assistance in anticipation of the final performance of the project. I know I will need a second camera to film and the idea of having my father with me is interesting in many ways. For one, it gives us a father-son activity to do; and, more importantly, it introduces the notion of family and community in the process. Something which is crucial in rites of passages.



I also begin work on thinking about my own ritual. Something that I will not do at the CJE, as I will be too busy filming and running the event; nevertheless, something which I need to do within my community in Montreal and show to the participants once completed. For such was our contract. Everybody has to participate. No spectator.

## **DANGER ALERT – the project is on the verge of collapsing**

I was hoping to come back to the CJE before the end of 2022. However, scheduling conflicts and distance made it difficult. The CJE organizes a host of events prior to the holidays and so we could not find a day prior to 2023. Moreover, Marie-France, the social worker, announced that she was leaving the CJE. She was my main contact and principal champion of the project within the organization. With her leaving, the project was in trouble. I had a good rapport with Kevin, another CJE social worker. We had had coffee machine conversations a number of times; however, I cursed myself for not having contacted, Sébastien Morin, the president of the organization, in order to cement his support. This goes back to the Callon Latour intéressement method that I mentioned earlier: make sure, when you do a project in collaboration with an organization, that you have several champions within the organization. Make sure that support happens at several hierarchical levels. At different passage points.

On top of this, several participants quit the project just before New Year's. Jean Christophe (JC) had been transferred to another city and will no longer be attending. Christelle decided to quit the program as she was too busy with her school work. Additionally, she was uncomfortable with the idea of exposing her weaknesses.

With the help of Marie-Claude, I was able to contact another social worker, Grégoire, and book not one, but three consecutive days for early January. I did not want to book a day and then wait for another month. I needed to be there for several days in order to actually cement something with the group.

It was agreed upon that I would come for January 11,12, 13 and for two more days after that: Feb 07 and 08. Feb 08 was to be our last day. The day of the “commemoration” or integration.

Situations had also changed with some of the participants: Cloé and Valérie had left the CJE as they integrated another institution destined to help with their adult education. They were no longer a “captive” audience, but would have to get permission from their other institutions to come to our workshops at the CJE.

On the gossip side, Dan had impregnated a young woman from the CJE (in another group), and she was going to keep the baby. He had had a panic attack over the holidays and had been hospitalized due to heart palpitations.

In short, our main social worker was gone and we were down to 9 participants. Two of which attended other schools and one of which was hospitalised.

It was Black Hawk Down and Trafalgar all rolled into one. I needed to bring it home. Simplify. Plan for a ritual performance, where each participant was going to perform something heroic by tackling their oppressions.

## APPENDIX F: Workshop Day 4 - Trois Rivières, Jan 11, 2023

The start of the day was tough. After the holidays, the participants had lost focus and interest. That morning, only two of our participants were present at the CJE. The others were late or had too much homework to do with for regular classes. What's more, we'd lost our ground-floor room (our beautiful room with windows overlooking the depressing parking lot). Our new room was a basement classroom. No windows. Neon lights, gray walls, plastic desks. Federal government-style. How can young people learn or create in this environment?

I set up in the room, mounted the camera, then called my girlfriend to tell her how depressed I was. I felt like crying. She reassured me. "Use this, it's part of the process" she said. I tried to argue that failure did not go well with hubris, but she cut the argument short as she had to go to work.

So, I put on the banana suit, switched on the camera and filmed myself sitting alone in the classroom. How glorious. Me, who dreamed of starting a social movement, a Pokemon Go-type game where subversive and humorous actions would federate a section of the population for a carnivalesque revolution.



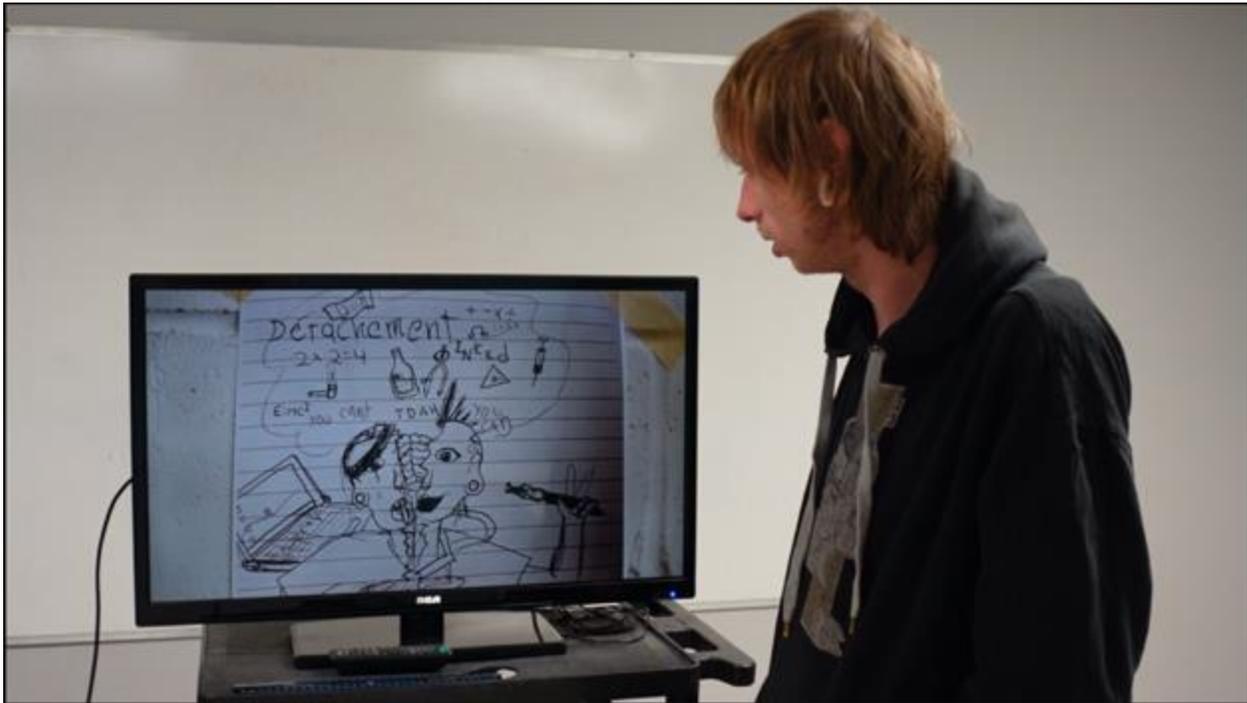
I decided to put footage of Doctor F on the TV, to make sure we were both there to witness fiasco. Getting caught up in setting up the shots got me a bit motivated.



By 11 a.m., I'd managed to rally Max, Charlie, Annabelle, Dan and Pauline in the basement classroom.

### **The TV Three-way conversation as co-design tool**

In the same way that Drama therapy uses video technology, we used the TV to play a video of participants, while filming that person commenting on what they saw. I make the participants look at photos of themselves on the TV in the room. I broadcast their drawings of their oppression and filmed them commenting on themselves. In the first person or 3rd person.



Charlie explaining his drawing of his Oppressions

This process worked wonderfully well. Tongues were loosened, the participants started going deeper in their stories, their childhood wounds - thus giving more meaning to their drawings. When one of them was up for being filmed, the others sat back, scattered in the drab empty classroom. No pressure to be focused or sit upright was put on them. The atmosphere was relaxed, and it worked. Dan, Annabelle, Charlie joined in the fun whenever I asked them to chime in or to repeat something another participant was saying. By that time, I was dressed as Docteur F and it was a three-way conversation.

It's a feedback loop, really. Doctor F (who is filming), the participant in the TV (or their drawing), and the live participant who is commenting on what's playing in the TV. This setup is liberating, it seems, from the camera shyness of a formal interview as the participant is no longer the subject of interest. They are commentator, analyser. And so, they can participate with Doctor F in devising a narrative for themselves – the version of themselves in the TV, that is.

## Max discovers the Call of Catharsis Ritual Spell

That day, Max was super depressed. His funding to go to the CJE had been revoked. He was going to leave the group and find a crappy job (convenience store, gas station or whatever). His dream was to finish high school and then study to become a social worker, and now his dream was shattered. He just found that out the previous day and feels his life is worthless.

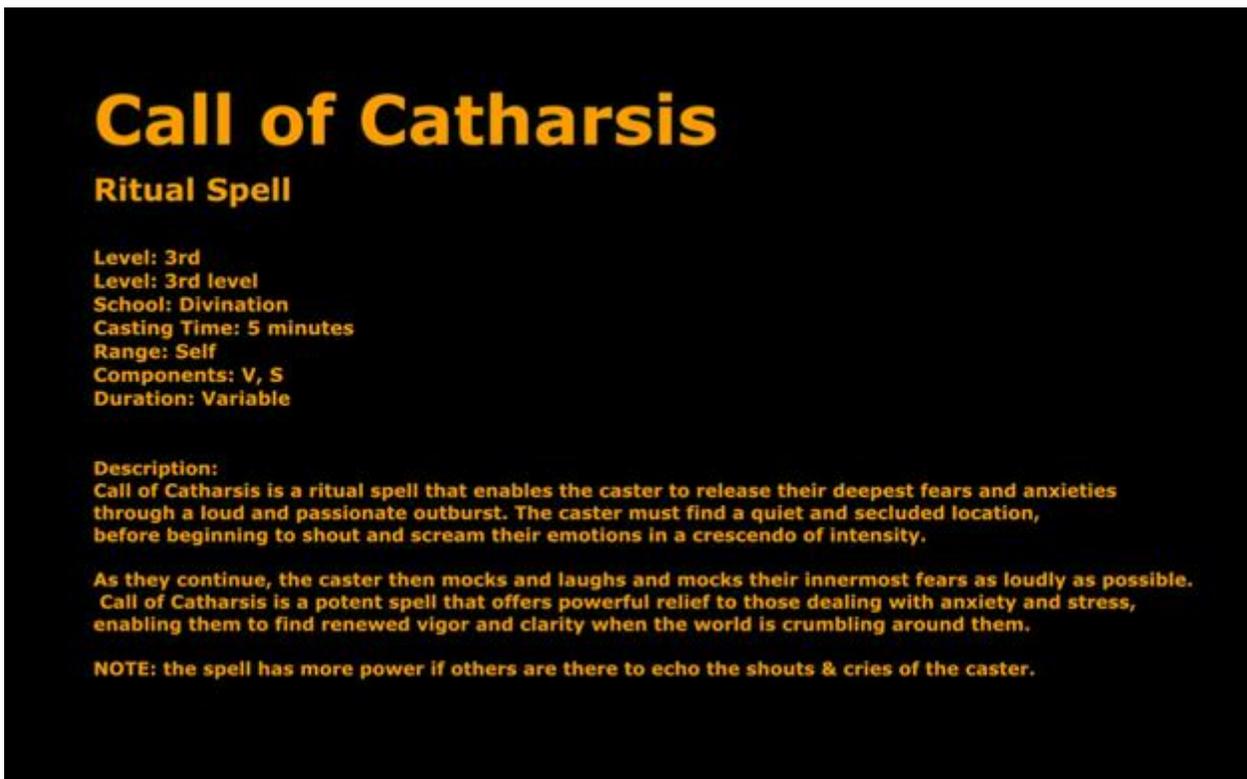


Max talking about how shit his life is and relating it to his Oppression drawing.

I decide to film Max as he recounts what happened to him since we last met. I then ask him if he's like to do something a bit crazy. He agrees.

I ask Max to repeat how his life is worthless while laughing out loud and by making a song out of it (ambivalent reversal). I get him up on his feet so that he can talk and walk around the room . Charlie is here, and I ask him to repeat what max is saying. Kind of like a mantra. Whenever Max says “my life is shit” we all repeat it in unison (universality). I tell Max that he can swear and curse if he wants to. He launches into a series of insults at his own life (grotesque). We build up a crescendo as I ask him to shout all of this louder and louder as he walks around the room. Max starts punching in mid- air. The crescendo ends in Max screaming and laughing at the top of his lungs and the rest of the group repeating the mantras he shouts.

Max’s rant ends. He is spent, more relaxed. He goes to lie down on a table and starts to talk about his father; about how the man used to berate Max and his brother when they were kids. All of the sudden Max finds what his final ritual will be – a ceremony linked to his father and all the foul things he said to Max when he was a child.



**Call of Catharsis**

**Ritual Spell**

**Level: 3rd**  
**Level: 3rd level**  
**School: Divination**  
**Casting Time: 5 minutes**  
**Range: Self**  
**Components: V, S**  
**Duration: Variable**

**Description:**  
Call of Catharsis is a ritual spell that enables the caster to release their deepest fears and anxieties through a loud and passionate outburst. The caster must find a quiet and secluded location, before beginning to shout and scream their emotions in a crescendo of intensity.

As they continue, the caster then mocks and laughs and mocks their innermost fears as loudly as possible. Call of Catharsis is a potent spell that offers powerful relief to those dealing with anxiety and stress, enabling them to find renewed vigor and clarity when the world is crumbling around them.

**NOTE: the spell has more power if others are there to echo the shouts & cries of the caster.**

Portrait of Max as we discover the Call of Catharsis with him.

[Click on image to view video. Password: MDes](#)

## Day 4 Reflection

I don't exactly know how the concept or name of doing a ritual-performance on the last day of the workshop came about, but we were all in agreement with it. We knew, as per rite of passage theory, that a form of commemoration would need to take place in front of the CJE community at the end of our research creation. We also knew that doing a pure performance (like a play, or song) would not do. Aside from Charlie, none of us were performers. And though we had come to accept that "it's ok to suck", subjecting ourselves to performing something mediocre in front of other teenagers and young adults was going to be counter-productive. We wanted to do something powerful and meaningful, for ourselves, while involving others to partake in it. For some reason, the name of ritual-performance emerged. The idea of each participant doing some psychomagic act linked to their current oppressions and Docteur F, as master of ceremony, ensuring a bridge with the other CJE students and staff, between the participants.

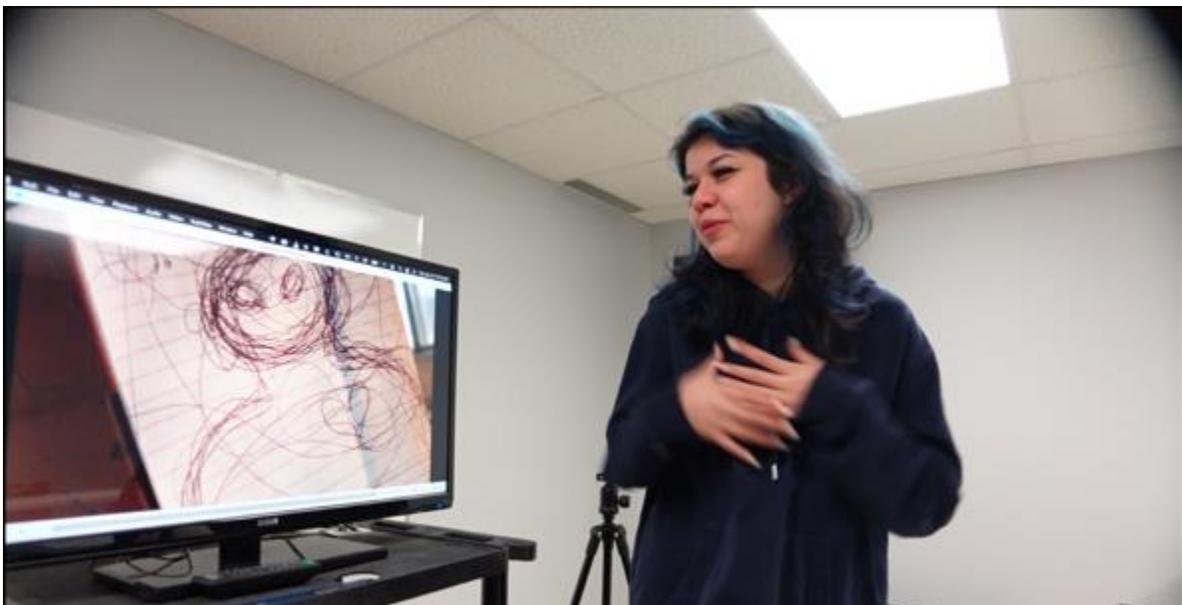
## **APPENDIX G: Workshop Day 5 - Trois Rivières - Jan 12, 2022**

Yesterday night, Pauline sent me a text message to announce that she's quitting our project. Pauline has a lot to manage in her life (school, family, small child). I asked her if she wanted to do a departure interview to talk about the process, but she declined. On the one hand I am sad to see her go - her mother's impersonation impressed the rest of the group and was hilarious. But on the other hand, her oppression is the constraints other people impose on her – linked to her inability to say no to them. In that sense, Pauline saying “no” to the project could be viewed as some sort of progress on her part.

We were down to 8 participants, 5 of which are present today. Daly, Valérie and Cloé are all studying at their other schools. I hope that they will be here tomorrow, as promised.

### **Annabelle discovers the Protection from Self-Poison Spell**

We decide to work with Annabelle. I show her Oppression drawing in the TV and ask her to talk about her drawing.



Annabelle describing all of her self-trash-talk.

Through further questions, we arrive on the topic of all the derogatory things she tells herself daily – her self-trash-talk. We film Annabelle reciting all the nasty things she says to herself every morning. Brutal.

Then, I ask the group what qualities they know Annabelle to have. The words courageous, loyal, kind, a good listener come up, along many others. I ask Annabelle to write them down. Since Annabelle has a hard time remembering all the things she survived and the progress made in her life, we decide together that a song – or a sort of mnemonic phrase - where she lists her qualities would be a great way to remember.

I get Dan and Mathis to be backup singers in a song Annabelle makes on the spot. A song that lists all of her qualities, and where the audience or backup singers echo each positive trait that Annabelle mentions. It's a riot. Annabelle says it's making her emotional.



Annabelle singing with Dan and Mathis as backup.

I dressed Dan as a banana to get him to experience the grotesque.

That's it, we found Annabelle's ritual. She will sing the song in front of the entire CJE on our ritual-performance day, and the entire "audience" will sing along with her.

# Protection from Self-Poison

## Ritual Spell

Level: 3rd  
School: Abjuration  
Casting Time: 3 minutes  
Range: Self  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Variable

### Description:

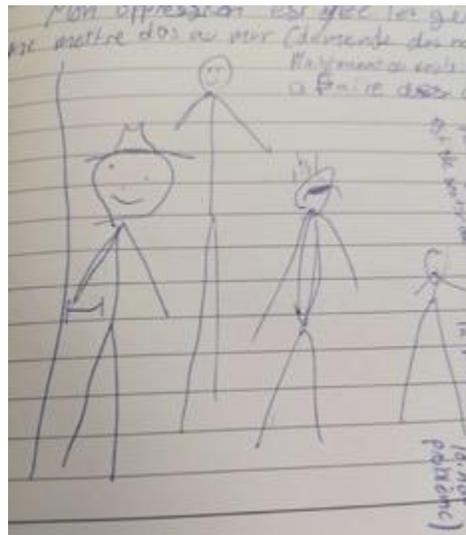
Protection from Self-Poison is a spell to counter the daily self-harm we inflict upon ourselves. The caster must first list all of their qualities on a piece of paper. Then, they must sing these qualities out loud in a joyous display of song and dance. Ideally with allies repeating every word with enthusiasm. The larger the group of allies present at the ritual, the more powerful the ritual, as the echo of positive energy from the group will gradually imprint upon the psyche of the caster.

*Please click on image to view a portrait of Annabelle's Quest and final ritual.*

*Password: MDes*

## Mathis tries the Call of Catharsis spell – to mixed results

Mathis remains a bit of an enigma to me. He seems to have no oppressions. Except, when people pressure him too much. Then, he just avoids the situation and leaves.



## Mathis and his drawing

The only thing that seems to indicate his relationship with pent up emotion relates to a recent conflict Mathis had with a prof. Something about homework and a bad grade. Apparently, strong emotions briefly surfaced, but he bottled them up immediately. where some strong emotions surfaced that he seemed to have bottled up immediately.

I get Mathis to stand up and retell the story. He puts on a wig and it seems to help. I get him to move and to describe his fleeting anger. Finally, he opens up and says that he did not feel heard. The other participants encourage him and repeat his words to amplify what he is feeling. By the end of our little exercise, Mathis manages to take a roll of tape and throw it on the ground. He admits that it feels good. It's not much in terms of catharsis, but it's a start.



Mathis trying to call forth the rage within, to limited results.

An hour later, at lunch break, Mathis comes and sits opposite me while I eat. He starts talking about his family. Normally shy and quiet Mathis cannot stop talking. He tells me, and the others

present, that as a kid, he'd be prone to bouts of anger and rage. And that one day, his parents, took out all of his toys from his room and let him sit there in the empty space.

Since then Mathis never got angry again. He also does not care about anything, it seems. Whenever he feels tension, he withdraws and lets it slide. In his own words "he does nothing."

Mathis agrees that perhaps a good ritual might be for him to let stuff out and learn to say what he means. To express himself. He says he will think on it.

### **I still cannot get Dan to try the carnivalesque**

Through reading Jordan Peterson, philosopher Marcus Aurelius and others, Dan finds some sense of the world. These authors seem to give him a way to get a handle on what's happening in his life. He wants to help in the project – I sense it is because, in part, he likes me and finds what I have to say interesting. However, he does not see the usefulness of the Carnivalesque, or "goofing around" as he phrases it. I've spent the last 3 days talking with him and working one on one to experiment things. But his rational mind first wants to know the net gain before truly letting go and trying something.



Dan being skeptical about our whole project

This is where I realize that I have a gap in my knowledge and experience. I don't really know how to handle the skeptics of laughter and clowning.

Hearing my conversations with Dan, Mathis observes that with children, goofing around, making fart sounds, clowning, laughter, are the only mode of communication. This gives Dan pause. He's going to have a child soon and will need to communicate with the baby in a way that's unknown and illogical to him.

I wish I had some dramatherapy training. This could have saved me a lot of groping in the dark and inner turmoil when faced with the various reluctant participants. But then again, our deal was not therapy. The reason these participants embarked in the project was the sense that I was equal to them, not trying to "cure" them.

## Day 5 Reflection

Max and Mathis are going to have some form of catharsis ritual. Annabelle is going to have a song. We still don't know what Dan, Cloé, Daly, Valérie, and Charlie will do. I am running out of days with them.

Getting participants to stand up and move while talking is great. Ideas and emotions flow when humans are in motion. Having the rest of the group nearby, in a semi state of relaxation is also interesting. That way, the participant who is the focus of the exercise does not feel like they are the center of attention. The others are there, in the space, ready to jump in and help. But there is no pressure for the participant to do figure out something in front of them. It's a good way to function as it allows for trial and error. This reminds me of dance, music or theatre rehearsal where the choreographer or director focuses on one artist, while the others are either stretching, or working on their own bits. It feels natural. A low-pressure creative space.

It's also a good move to get the more "cerebral" participants, like Dan, who don't really give themselves to the rapture or fun of chanting and clowning around, to help by supporting the antics of the other participants. Dan may not have been as into it as other participants, but helping out seems to appeal to his sense of duty and camaraderie - of seeing it through and being there for others – and this is not to be neglected in cementing the group. In fact, not everybody needs to be in the same level of engagement, or communitas.

### **To breach your own defences, watch yourself watching yourself**

Dan is a hard nut to crack in terms of our project. However, we both enjoy conversing with one another. Additionally, he really wants to have a breakthrough. So later that night, after Day 5 is done, I end up at his place for some junk food and a glass of scotch. I show Dan the video of the past day where he was watching his photo and drawing in the TV and I was asking him some questions. He comments on his posture, over-defensiveness, intellectualization, ego in appearing strong and in control. Dan manages to laugh at himself – the scotch helps.

Dan would have wanted more dares, provocations and challenges for this project. Something more intense. As he watches himself watching himself in the TV, I decide to film him. A meta meta inception. Take that, drama therapists!



Dan watching himself comment as he watches himself. Meta meta inception!!

## APPENDIX H: Workshop Day 6 - Trois Rivières - Jan 13, 2022

There's a major snowstorm on that day. Daly, Valérie and Cloé manage to come even though all three have left the CJE and are not required to attend. This is encouraging.

### **If you don't have the strength to fight your own demons, help others fight theirs**

Daly is dead tired. Her new cosmetics school has started and first day jitters and anxiety have drained her. She's not motivated. I buy her lunch and offer to give lifts to her and Max at the end of the day to make her stay and participate. This reminds me that in order for people to engage in ritual or "culture", their basic needs need to be met (food, safety, shelter, transportation). The need to be in a worry-free space is paramount. Free of logistical worries to tackle the "work of the Gods. I am sure the African subjects in Victor Turner's studies did not have to worry about income and eating when engaged in the adulthood rites of passages and rituals.

So back to Daly, we try and try different things, but nothing clicks. She does manage to talk about her family situation. How her father, after he left her mother for another woman when Daly was 14, gave priority to that woman over Daly – creating a deep hurt in the teenager that she was. Since Daly is so tired, I move the focus away from her and get her to be backup vocals and help Cloé and Valérie in their own explorations. The lesson here is this: if a participant won't or can't be in the spotlight, get them to help others in their own quest (universality).

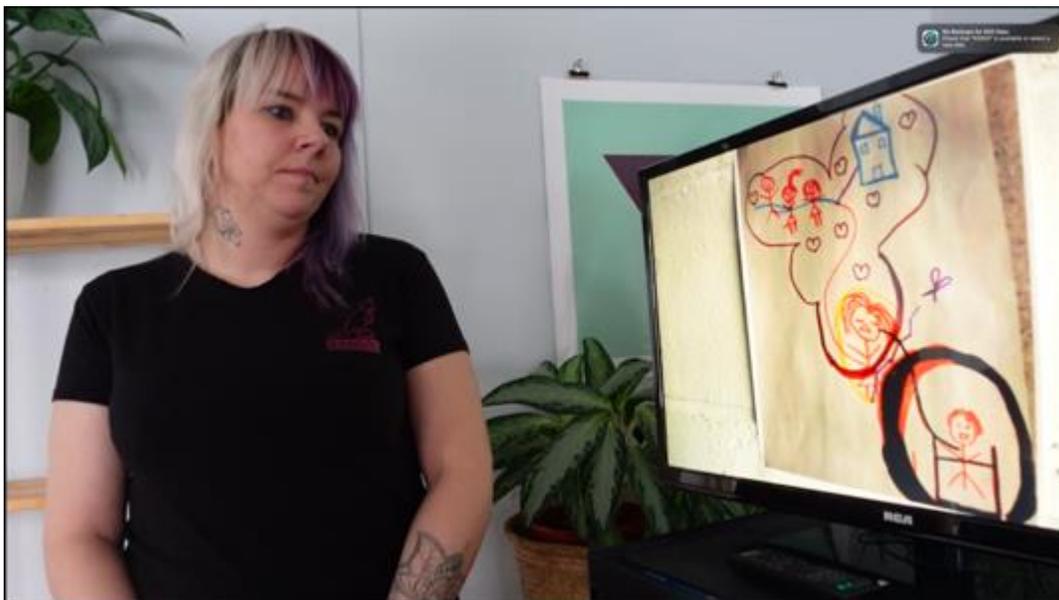


*Daly feeling the fatigue and the blues*

## Valérie discovers the Manifest Mantra Spell

We get a breakthrough with Valerie. Again, I show her Oppression Drawing on the TV as I film her talking about it. She actually explains what she drew and why. And in doing so we get at the root of the darkness plaguing her.

She says she “needs to cut the chord with her toxic brother” as he is dragging her down. This calls for a good old Alejandro Jodorowsky-style psychomagic ritual of cutting the cord, literally. I ask Valerie to find a shirt belonging to her brother and that I will supply the rope. Her ritual will consist of being tied to someone dressed as her brother and cutting the cord repeating the Mantra. She thinks it’s a good idea.



*Valérie talking about cutting "the cord" with her brother*

With Valérie we also realize that she craves the joy of being a little girl: shouting, dancing, demanding what she needs and wants. A far cry from her day to day life where she has to single handedly take care of her children AND her brother. That too, will be part of her ritual - becoming a 12-year old girl, her younger self, and then doing a “show” and asking for praise in love as she manifests her wishes on her vision board (something she crafter in another workshop).

But Valérie is shy, and getting her to shout out her wishes and to dance and prance around like a 12-year old does not come naturally. So, I get Cloé and Daly to act as backup vocals and energy enhancers. Daly gets to play Valérie's oppression, weighing her down like a heavy burden. It works. This is experimental theatre, really!



*Cloé and Daly backing Valérie up*



*Daly impersonating Valérie's Oppression*

## **Wanting to perform something badly is a great way to get over performance anxiety**

When it's Cloé's turn to describe her oppression drawing, she confesses that singing is a way for her to feel carefree. Given the social phobia she acquired after her abusive relationships, she rarely feels free in public, much less at night. It is her dream to be able to sing in front of a room full of strangers.

I ask Cloé to try and sing for us. She's unable to, making excuses that she's not ready, or that she forgot the lyrics of the song she'd want to sing. I put forth a challenge to her: "what if you sang that song with the sole purpose of singing it badly, out of key?" Cloé is bewildered. This is contrary to everything she feels about singing. Nevertheless, she tries it. She sings in front of us, in a loud voice that's out of key. It's fun. She likes it. Somehow, she still feels the elation of the performance. That little reversal trick enables us to set the basis of her ritual. She will sing in front of the entire CJE. I task her with thinking about the rest of her own ritual.

## **Channelling the tension between some participants to help in the rituals**

Valérie is willing to have Dan play her brother in order to use the negative feelings she has towards Dan in her ritual. In our earlier workshops, Dan had been dismissive of Valérie's problems with her brother. They had eventually sorted it out (I had challenged Valérie to tell Dan, which she did, and he gracefully apologised). But Valérie still feels some tension around Dan. So why not have Dan play her brother in her ritual, I asked? Valérie thought it was a great idea - using the negative interpersonal energy as psychic charge for the ritual.

The night before this day, Dan, fed up with Cloé's constant stories about her ex-boyfriend and her fear of being in public and fear of having strangers at her back, had suggested something radical. "Why doesn't she walk with her eyes closed in the CJE, back towards everybody, and have random people touch her back during the process?" A sort of crude exposure therapy. I relayed the information to Cloé, complete with Dan's flippant tone. She took it as a personal challenge and, out of pride towards Dan, decided to incorporate his idea into her ritual.

It is worth mentioning that Dan and Cloé were notoriously hating each other for the duration of our workshops. However, at the time of writing this thesis, they are now very much in love. Apparently, they hooked up a few days after our final ritual performance and have been madly in love since! All this to say that one should not try to avoid or ignore the tensions between participants of such workshops. It is utopian to think everybody will like each other and get along. Rather, it is much more productive to acknowledge the negative or tense feelings and to work them into the process.



*Cloé and Dan in June 2023, a few weeks after our MDes Exhibit.*

*Who said that communitas could not lead to love?*

## People who sing together bond together

At the end of the day, we recap each participant's plans for the ritual performance in 3 weeks. We're not going to rehearse the ritual performance per se, as this would take away the spontaneity and cathartic power of the act. However, we can plan for how the event is going to unfold.

This notion suddenly makes the participants become nervous – it's really going to happen! I remind them of the Carnavalesque tenets, of the humor of it all, and more importantly of the universality of the event. Everybody attending on that day will participate, not just them.

In the recap, I get Cloé to sing a KISS song – I was made for loving you – and everybody joins in. With Charlie on the keyboards, it's easy to get a groove going. The group has fun and bonds, as Docteur F films them. He sometimes gives each participant encouragements on singing louder or doing something outrageous. This gives us a realistic preview of the vibe we'll be going for on the final day. Singing together.



*Max, Charlie, Annabelle, Mathis, and Daly singing backup for Cloé.*

Why did I not do that in the first days of our workshop? Singing as a group facilitates group social-biological bonding response between the singers (Kreutz, 2014); additionally, singing together fosters a sense of self and of social inclusion. (Welch et al., 2014). Damn. Even Daly gets her energy back!



## Day 4, 5 & 6 reflection

One trend that seems to emerge with some of the structure of the rituals: 1) release some tension, 2) intake something positive (praise, pleasure, affection, hope), and 3) get others to echo and amplify that positive energy.

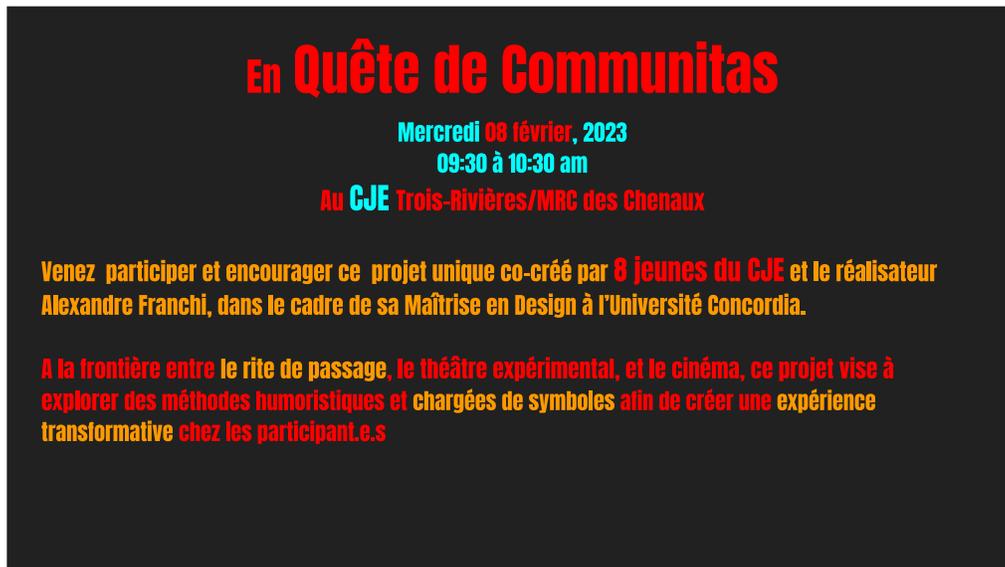
While one participant conducts their ritual, the others will wait for their turn. I realize they'll need to be able to conserve their focus. The participants are not trained performers (aside from Charlie, of course). I think that masks will help. Ideally, we would have had time to design our own masks; representing our internal monsters or pixies. But we did not. So, I opt for using the good old white cardboard masks and will get participants to personalize them with markers.

I'll have to MC the entire affair and so will need somebody to help me film. My father has agreed to be camera #. This keeps it in the family and somehow shows the participants that I bring my personal life into this project. That this is about relationships.

With the social workers, we've planned to invite all of the other students attending the centre, as well as the other social workers of the CJE, staff etc. The narrative is that we're inviting the CJE community to witness and partake in our ritual – where CJE attendees will grapple with their existential anxieties in a carnivalesque way, in the hopes of achieving some form of liberation.

In any culture close to their ancestral roots, the members of the community know the meaning of the rituals they participate in (or at least they know what to do). In our case, I'll have to give a bit of context to the invited visitors: the quest, what theories underlie it, the purpose of my studies etc.

I'll also have to make sure to repeat to the the visitors that this is NOT a performance, but an attempt to access something else as humans.



*Invitation sent to all CJE staff and youth*

As per

Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, the participants in the rite will have to let go of some item of their past lives. We all opt to burn something. I also plan to get special commemorative bracelets for everybody – as something that the participants have gained through the process.

Docteur F is very excited and confident about the entire affair. His very special brand of over the top motivation seems to be working on the anxious participants.



*Docteur F motivating Valérie at gunpoint.*

**The  
weeks  
preceding the final days**

At this point, Annabelle, Cloé, Valérie seem to have something strong for their rituals. Max plans to do something involving his late father's memory, but he has no positive or idealized moment in his ritual plan. Neither do Daly or Mathis. Dan and Charlie still does not know what to do. Charlie knows it's got to be an anti-performance, somehow. Something hard for him to do. Everybody knows they've got to bring something of value to sacrifice.

During those 3 weeks before R-day (ritual day), we'll keep searching. I stay close to the participants via Discord chats, voice or video calls. We discuss new ideas, modifications to their rituals and how the day will go.

I am super stressed. I lose sleep over it. Perhaps it's the performance pressure, even though it should not be a performance. The pressure to put together something good or great, the semi-conscious hope that something transcendent will happen paralyzes me with pressure and stress. Deep down, I long for something that will wow the social workers, the administrators of the CJE, the other students. I am secretly hoping for a world changing breakthrough. And there you have

it. This hubris will be at the centre of my own ritual. The one I'll do in Montreal with my own community. The one that I will film; and, one day, show the participants, long after this research is done. In the meantime, I send out the video invitation to the entire CJE.



*Click on image or link below to view  
QUEST FOR COMMUNITAS teaser video*

## APPENDIX I: Workshop Day 07- Trois Rivières – Feb 07, 2023

### The day before the final ritual performance

#### Yoga: physical hardship and relaxation

The day starts with a yoga session with my friend and yoga teacher Nathalie Salvas. We should have done this a long time ago – weaving in breathing, stretching and relaxation techniques into the process. A way to take care of the self, physically.



*Yoga session given to the group by Nathalie Salvas*

The group suffers together through the exercises. They curse me, they have fun. Engaging in something physically hard – a sort of physical risk-taking – has always been part of rites of passages. It is unfortunate that we did not weave more physical activity in our workshops.



*Cloé and Valérie cursing me for getting them into yoga.*

After the yoga session ends, Charlie gets a mini revelation. The slowing down of his nervous system seems to have done wonders for his mood. His ritual will revolve around achieving some kind of stillness and calmness – as opposed to the stimulation of performing. Interesting reversal.



*Charlie feeling zen for the first time in a long while.*

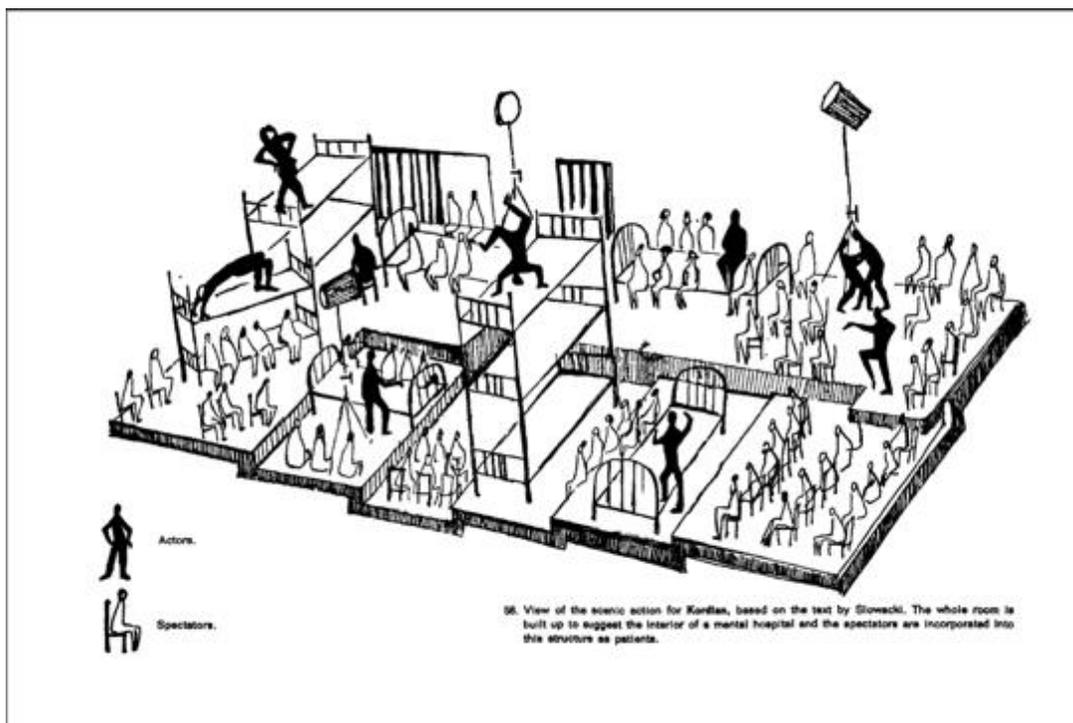
### **Setting up the space for the ritual**

We set up the space for tomorrow. On the walls, we put up the photos of the participants, along with their drawings. We set up strange lighting, coming from the floor, in order to transform the space. In addition, I ask every participant to bring a snack for tomorrow. A healthy snack, be it apples, carrots or whatever they can afford, that will be made available to the guests who will witness their ritual. A way to honor them.

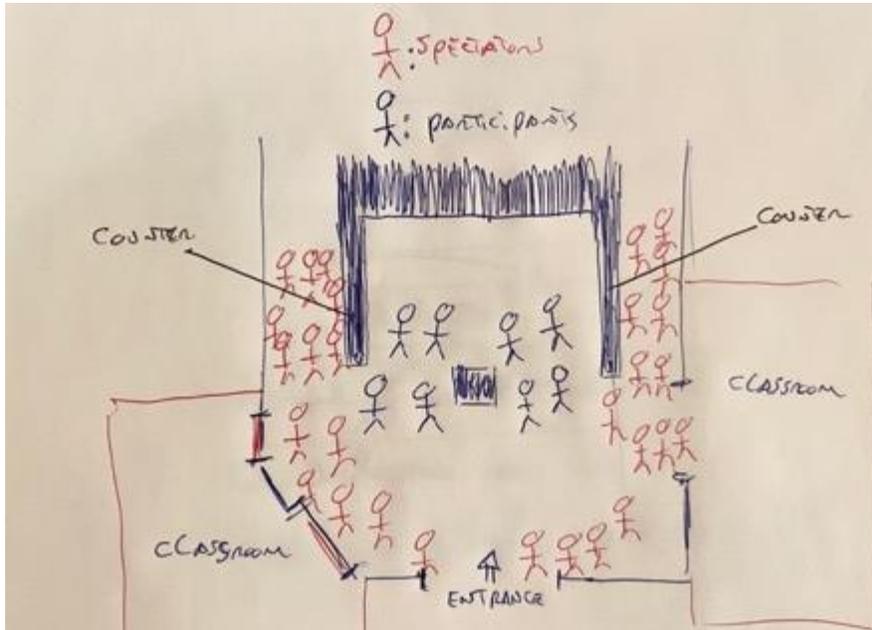


*Decorating the CJE with whatever was at hand*

The idea here is also to avoid the spectator/performer separation of the space. To ensure that the design of the space fosters a universality of group celebration. I take example from experimental theater director Jerzy Grotowski and his theatre designs mixing the actors and the spectators. Grotowski believed that theatre should have a ritual function to liberate the spiritual energy of the collective. In his play *Kordian*, which takes place in an asylum, Grotowski wanted the audience to identify with mental patients, and so designed the space accordingly (Grotowski, 1968).



*Stage layout for Grotowski's play Kordian (Grotowski, 1968, p162).*



*Floorplan of the ritual-performance space at the entrance of the CJE.*

With the group, we do one technical rehearsal (beginning, middle and end of our ritual) and call it a day. At this point, since there is no turning back. I feel that group cohesion is high with a playful 'come what may' attitude.



*The group is ready for the ritual-performance of tomorrow.*

Later that night, my father comes to assist me from Montreal. It helps me deal with the stress.



**APPENDIX**

*Father and son the night prior to the final ritual-performance.*

**J:**

## **Workshop Day 08 – Trois Rivières – Feb 08, 2023**

### **The final day of the ritual performance**

**Table 1 : Equipment and props for ritual**

- Tungsten lamps at ground level to create a blinding light effect
- Keyboard, sampler and speakers – manned by Charlie
- Participants photos all up on the wall
- TV with speakers for display of footage of participants during their ritual
- Red rotating police light to create movement and chaos
- White masks
- Banana costumes
- Palo Santo to burn for ritual
- Plastic brain jar to pick names of participants for ritual order

-Fruits and snacks for post-ritual

### **Preparing the guests for the liminal carnivalesque space**

The event started at 10:30 am and lasted until lunch time. The entire CJE staff and students came. In total, we must have been 40 or 50 people.

After a brief speech where I explained the quest of the participants and the carnivalesque sense of the world – putting emphasis on their participation as spectator/actors – I changed in Doctor F, while we dimmed the lights and Charlie put on a strange music via his keyboard and the speakers. The participants, who were all wearing masks, stood behind, as a tight knit group.

Docteur F explained the concept of the Beau Moment, meaning that if a participant froze or felt vulnerable, they were to say “beau moment” out loud, and everybody was to repeat it as a sign of encouragement. We then proceeded to do a countdown into the carnivalesque liminal space. Everybody participated.



*CJE students, social workers and staff watching the ritual performance.*

Docteur F then cast *Ridicule's Embrace* with the entire visitors present. He started making ridicule movements, and everybody imitated him. Then, each of the 8 participants led the movements.

Once this was done, Docteur F had one member of the onlookers pick a name at random from the brain jar - and the participant picked started their rituals.



*The participants & Docteur F casting Ridicule's Embrace with the entire CJE staff & students.*

### **The ritual structure: planned, but with chaos**

For each participant, we tried to follow the same structure. Another participant would explain to the crowd what the ritual-making participant's problem or oppression was. During that time, Charlie played soothing and meditative music, while the participant in question prepared themselves (putting on a costume, makeup, wig etc.). Once everything was in place, the ritual-participant would conduct their ritual. Either by speaking out loud what they were doing, or by letting Docteur F do it for them.

Whenever appropriate, Docteur F would play his role of Joker and get the crowd to cheer, repeat or encourage. Sometimes, as a Joker, Docteur F would change the script and ask the ritual-participant to go further than they had planned. This happened several times, when Docteur F felt that the participant could push it a notch further. For instance, in the case of Cloé, Docteur F asked her to sing another song in addition to the KISS song she had planned. A Portishead song she loved. Cloé was shocked at first, but then took up the challenge and sang it a cappella, and properly. This impressed everybody, most of all, Cloé herself.

Once the ritual comes to an end – after cheers and claps from the assembly – each participant shows the object they want to burn and explains the meaning and power of the object to them before putting it into a chrome garbage can I had brought.



*Annabelle flanked with Dan & Mathis for her ritual*



*Max finishing to talk about his father.*



*Valérie as a 12-year old shouting her life goals.*

## How it all went

The entire event was very emotional. At times, there were tense silence; at others, people were wildly cheering. As I was filming Max's ritual involving his father, I noticed that some of the more rowdy teenage boys were very silent and absorbed by what was going on. At other times, I caught social workers shedding some tears. The following table summarizes the ritual of each:

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Ritual</b>	<b>Group positive enhancement</b>	<b>Thing to burn</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>Daly</b>	Tell her father how he hurt her feelings when she was a teenager (Max, her boyfriend was playing her father)	N/A	Gameboy unit from her teenage years	Total silence from the crowd
<b>Cloe</b>	Walk with her back to the crowd and have strangers touch her back. Then, she sings in public.	Sings along with her.	Photos of the jail where her ex-boyfriend was incarcerated	People sang with Cloé and she even got the courage to sing another song a cappella (and sing it well)
<b>Annabelle</b>	Her trash talk is broadcast in the TV, for everyone to see. Then Annabelle sings her qualities out loud.	The group repeats Annabelle's qualities	Favorite Pink Floyd sweater	Everybody got into it. Wild singing and cheers.
<b>Max</b>	In front of a photograph of his father, Max will channel all the nasty things his father said to him as a kid	N/A	Rings that his late father gave him	Total silence from the crowd. Especially the young men.
<b>Mathis</b>	Let his anger go and practice saying that he wants to be heard	Crowd repeated Mathis' mantra	One of his favorite books as a kid	Polite applause

<b>Charlie</b>	Do a public meditative yoga routine in silence	N/A	One of his first guitars	Silence. Charlie was sweating, and we could feel the tension within him.
<b>Dan</b>	Perform a series of carnivalesque actions the other participants chose for him (sing, dance etc.)	N/A	Cigarette	People laughing and encouraging him.
<b>Valerie</b>	Cut the umbilical cord with her brother. Be a 12-year old wishing for the best things in life by singing and chanting	Encourage her in cutting the cord and repeat her wishes.	Shirt of her brother	The crowd went wild with encouragements for Valérie to cut the cord. They also repeated her wishes with her.



*Charlie's ritual to achieve stillness.*



*Mathis trying to conjure up repressed emotions in front of his brother and mother (who cried).*

### **The burning**

After each participant was done, we all left outside (the participants, Docteur F, myself and my father) to burn the objects to be sacrificed. Meanwhile, the CJE community stayed inside and were invited to help themselves to the snacks.

Using lighter fluid, the garbage can was set ablaze. The moment was solemn as everybody suddenly became quiet. Meanwhile, I was looking for a good camera shot and missed the solemn moment. Typical!

After that, we took group photos while engaging in some ritual howling and laughter and all went inside to rejoin the rest of the CJE. Inside, the participants were all smiling as they were being congratulated by their CJE friends, families and social workers. The lighting was back to being normal – we were back in reality. The participants had the look of a great tension being lifted. I think it was a success.



*Burning important objects in the garbage can, an ambivalent image.*



*Group photo at the end of the ritual.*

### **Post ritual feedback**

That same day, I treated the 8 participants and my father to lunch. The mood was high.

Later in the afternoon, back at the CJE, I tried to conduct feedback interviews with the 8 participants. However, I did not get much out of them in terms of detailed notes. They were a mix of drained and elated at the same time.

Valérie seemed to get a lot out of her ritual. Insisting to keep the rope she cut as a symbol of her progress. Max told me that his math professor, a father of three boys, had come to see him after the ritual to confess that Max's story had gotten him to rethink the way he addressed his sons.

Charlie's ritual was the strangest as he stuck with the slow yoga routine he had planned. Sweating profusely to stay in the moment during the entire time. He later confessed that his mind was racing a mile a minute and still does not know if the ritual had a lasting effect on him.

Dan did a series of dares and dances that the other participants had told him to do – given that he could not find a meaningful ritual to do. In short, his dares were to match what his colleagues did. Dan was a good sport about it, but I am not sure he got transported as the others did.

Mathis tried the exact same thing he had done a few weeks prior – but it lacked the spontaneity of the first time. This leads me to think that for such rituals-performance, there needs the risk of trying something new and unique, and not merely repeating an exercise.

Daly had a touching moment of speaking to her dad, but since Max, who happens to be her boyfriend, was playing her father, it was rather strange. Additionally, contrary to Valérie, Daly did not have an item of clothing belonging to her dad to be used in her ritual. This lessened its power. But more importantly, Daly's ritual did not have a positive component.

The most powerful rituals seemed to combine the expression of an oppression followed by the expression of an ideal state. This was the case for Annabelle, Cloé, and Valérie.

## Appendix K – Post-Feedback Semi Structured Interview Questionnaire

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### En Quête de Communitas

#### Feedback des observateurs

Pour celles et ceux qui ont assisté au rituel/performance du Février 08, 2023 au CJE

Cette discussion devrait prendre environs 30min.

**GÉNÉRAL** – Comment décriveriez-vous ce que vous avez vu le 08 février? Que s’est-il passé selon vous?

**ÉMOTIONS** –Avez-vous ressenti des émotions durant le rituel? Si oui, lesquelles? Qui ou quoi ont provoqué ces émotions? Comment ont évolué ces émotions (pendant le rituel)?

**APPARTENANCE** – Comment vous -êtes-vous senti APRÈS la performance. En avez-vous parlé à des amis/collègues? Vous êtes-vous identifié à certains de ceux qui ont effectué le rituel? Si oui, qui? Et Pourquoi? Est-ce que cet évènement vous a fait sentir connecté aux participants du rituel? Aux autres membres du public? Au CJE? Si oui pourquoi? Si non, pourquoi?

Aimeriez-vous participer à quelque chose de similaire dans le futur? Dites pourquoi si oui ou non?

**CONNAISSANCE DE SOI** – Est-ce que le rituel a provoqué ou manifesté des sujets/émotions/idées par rapport à votre propre vie que vous aimeriez changer ou adresser?

IDÉES – whether you are a social worker or student, did the ritual/performance prompt ideas on how you work, study, live your life?

Encerclez la réponse qui vous concerne. Êtes-vous un(e) :

Étudiant(e)/ Intervenant(e) / professeur(e)/ autre personnel du CJE

INTERVENANTS : y-a-t-il des éléments du rituel (exercices, idées, etc.) que vous intégreriez à votre pratique ou travail? Si oui, lesquels?

Si vous trouvez que cette activité a été pertinente. Comment l'améliorer (durée etc.. ) A quel moment dans leurs parcours les jeunes devraient faire cette activité?

AUTRES QUESTIONS (si'il reste du temps)

- Quelle participant(e) du rituel vous a le plus affecté? Et pourquoi?
- Aves vous des commentaires ou suggestions pour nous afin d'améliorer ce genre d'activités?
- A quelle personne du rituel pouvez-vous vous identifier le plus (Annabelle, Mathis, Dan, Max, Daly, Charlie, Valérie, Cloé)?
- Could you identify your personal drama? Your Oppression, Anxiety in the same way as the performers of the ritual did?

## **QUESTION POUR LES PARTICIPANTS au rituel**

-Estime de vous?

-Appartenance au CJE ?

-Quelles sont les règles qui ont émergé dans ce processus

-Discussion sur les défis: