

"THE CRIT PLAY"

A contextual, unrehearsed group performance
with selected objects and images

by

Frédérique Laliberté

With special appearances by :

Jeremy Cyr
Fortuitous Collaborator

And

Boris Dumesnil-Poulin
Botanical Poetry Expert

CAST LIST :

Frédérique	Frédérique Laliberté
Boris	Boris Dumesnil-Poulin
Ada	Ada Cakar
Parisa	Parisa Fouroutan
Iqrar	Iqrar Rizvi
Philippe B.	Philippe Battikha
Philippe I.	Philippe Internoscia
Maryam	Maryam Esbah
Donna	Donna Legault
Swintak	Swintak
Elisabeth	Elisabeth Belliveau
Bill	Bill Vorn
Tim	Backup Sculpture
Leila	Leila Sujir
Lynn	Lynn Hughes
Actions / Narrator	Alexandre St-Onge

Scene 1 : the only scene

INT. VA BASEMENT - NEAR STAIRWAY#3 - OPEN SPACE - CARPETED PODIUM

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Hi everyone, thank you for coming. We are going to begin this group performance immediately. The performance should take no longer than 30 minutes to be completed. Until we reach the end of this scenario, I am asking of you to say precisely what has been written for your character, and nothing else. As this play is unrehearsed, let's take our time and be casual. Each time you have to say something, your name is highlighted in your script, above the dialogue that you have to read. Any parenthetical remark below your name gives you direction about some attitude or action that you should perform while saying your line. Please pay attention. If you notice that it is somebody else's turn to speak and that this person is unaware of it, gently put your hand on their shoulder as a sign that we are waiting for them to go. I would like to mention the special roles that our external guest is going to play today : he is going to help us perform the play by reading out loud the actions that are written in italics. These stage directions are going to indicate everything that we need to do in addition to talking, therefore making Alexandre our external narrator for this play. This exercise is going to require a good deal of concentration. Should something go wrong, or should we find a mistake in the script - which for your information I have finished writing yesterday - let's leave the awkwardness behind and carry on to the next part of the script. If this happens, I will say the words : MOVING ON, and will indicate the number of the page where we will resume. The critique must go on. There is a chance that we will draw attention from bystanders. Let's call them the observers and not worry about them too much. They are part of the real world, from which we will be removed,

as a group, for the entire length of the performance. Therefore, we follow a different logic than these observers. Let's not take them into consideration. They are outside of this experience. I hope that everything is clear. According to the script, nobody has any question, so let's begin.

Frédérique begins her critique, showing one of her artworks, a papier maché rainbow.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(a little nervous)

So this semester, I focused on rainbows, among other stuff. So here is one of my pieces... It is made of papier maché. I wanted to make a kind of solid rainbow. You know, rainbows are an atmospheric phenomenon and I wanted to know what it would look like in a very sort of concrete sculptural form.

IQRAR

I have a question.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Go for it.

IQRAR

Is this new rainbow phase like a LGBT pride thing?

PHILIPPE I.

Well not necessarily, it could just be a celebration of colors, or some nostalgia for digitally produced gradients. You know, I think this whole "computer-free semester" has got into Fred's head a little bit.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

I just really became fascinated by rainbows all of a sudden. Think of rainbows for a minute. Aren't they amazing? I just think that they are beautiful natural apparitions...

(moving on to the bulletin board)

Here is another project I did : a series of naive still lifes representing my everyday cups of coffee titled « my coffee today ». Maybe we should remove these 3D glasses from the board to get a better view...

Frédérique takes the 3D glasses off the board and puts them in the storage space at the bottom of the plinth.

ADA

Did you make one everyday for the whole semester ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Yes I did.

PHILIPPE B.

I don't want to contradict you Fred, but roughly counting, it doesn't seem like there is enough drawings for every day of the semester.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Thank you for bringing this up Phil. As a matter of fact, there were some days when my coffee had so little aesthetic qualities that I found myself uninspired, depressed and giving up on the task.

ELISABETH

I see.

LEILA

Would you like to describe each of the drawings to us?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Sure ! Here is one from a day when I brought Boris' coffee to class so I had 2 coffees ; here is one done with a red pen that looks like a hipster coffee shop logo ; here is one with brown cheap paint and poorly executed perspective ; here is a red one with a cookie ; here is one with a nice pine trees design on the mug ; here is a very full one ; here is the last coffee I had in this amazing mug ; here one from the day when this amazing mug had a microwave accident and Donna advised me to never drink anything from it again ; here a small coffee done with a red pen ; here is one done with a green pen with sugar cubes ; here is one with a canadian mug ; here is a nicer one ; here is a rainbow coffee ; here is one in a

a distinguished container ; here is one from a day when my coffee had been placed too far away from me ; here is the bonus of my coffee that day ; here is a conceptual playful coffee ; here is one made with a blue pen on beige paper ; here is a 3D coffee ; and finally here is a 3D coffee with 3D glasses instructions.

LEILA

Oh 3D ! Great, should we try with the glasses ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Sure.

Frédérique hands out the 3D glasses. Everybody puts on a pair and looks at the 3D coffee drawings. There might not be enough glasses for everyone, so participants share them kindly.

LEILA

Oh... it's not really working...

FRÉDÉRIQUE

I know, I'm so disappointed... I spent so much time making these glasses.

PHILIPPE I.

The thing with technology is that you kind of need to know how to work it. Then people praise you for your knowledge. The poetry is optional.

BILL

Well Frédérique, you should not expect getting any praise about this technological piece. These pieces of garbage are completely dysfunctional.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(embarrassed)

I know and I am sorry for that. However, I discovered that the glasses work really well when it comes to animating this rainbow coffee here.

Everybody looks at the rainbow coffee drawing and agrees that the effect is exquisite.

SWINTAK

(looking at the drawing situated
above the rainbow coffee drawing)

I like this drawing

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Thank you.

DONNA

What is it ?

FREDERIQUE

Well...

PHILIPPE I.

It looks like a transparent tape roll to me

DONNA

(pointing at the drawing)

But what is this stem?

BORIS

Well if you must know, I believe this is a
portrait of Fred's dad.

Everybody nods, having a moment of individual reflexion.

IQRAR

(looking at the drawing on the
right side of Fred's dad portrait)

This one looks like another quite emotional
picture, do you want to talk about this one
Fred?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Yes, this one is about solitude.

BORIS

(showing the drawing next to the
solitude drawing)

And you made a reproduction of it?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Yes, I figured displaying two drawings about
loneliness side by side would create an
interesting paradox.

ADA

Are you not worried about damaging your

beautiful drawings with these staples?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

It don't see these as damages but rather as traces of this unique, private experience that these drawings will bear forever.

PHILIPPE B.

And also, you had only one hour to set up.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Exactly.

LEILA

(showing the clear plastic bag on the floor)
Frédérique, is this also one of your pieces?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

No Leila, this is just a normal life plastic bag full of colorful attractive objects that we are not going to discuss.

IQRAR

This is all nice work, Fred. However, I can't help but ask : Why did you drag us all here on this tiny carpeted platform, all squeezed up with your artworks ? Don't you want to have a succesful crit ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

That was the only place left, really.

PARISA

What do you mean the only place left ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Well I wanted to have my crit in the basement, you know, and make a kind of site-specific thing because this is a good site, with lots of specificities, I thought it would be great. But then I did some research about the V.A. building, just because you want to know, as an artist, the story of the spaces you choose to set your art in. So I came across this old book.

Frédérique puts the V.A. Building book on the plinth and everybody comes closer

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(continuing)

And I found this photo.

Frédérique finds the page that she is looking for in the book and everybody looks at the photo she is pointing at.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

It is a photo of this podium, where we stand right now, taken in 1996. Can't you tell what is wrong ? Take a close look.

BORIS

Oh boy...

MARYAM

(counting on the picture)

There are 1-2-3-4-5-6 steps to this podium... but right now there are only three... What happened to the three other steps ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Well the door is still here, the ramps are still here.

BORIS

It seems like the lower three steps of this platform are now invisible.

PHILIPPE B.

Invisible, that doesn't make any sense.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Look around you guys. Look at these objects down there. Don't you see ? Everything is sinking !

EVERYBODY

(flabbergasted)

What ?

SWINTAK

Are you suggesting that the V.A. Building is becoming submerged by its own floor ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

I am afraid so. According to this book, the floor is now about 2 feet higher than twenty

years ago. And it is probably still rising.

PHILIPPE I.

(pointing at a young girl's photo inside the book)
Oh look ! Here's a photo of young Maureen
when she was first hired by the studio art
department !

EVERYBODY

(touched)

Oh ! ahah ! Look at her !

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(very serious)

Anyway, when I learned all of that it was
too late : the critique spaces were already
assigned. So I panicked and I gathered all
of my art here on this podium to escape the
flood. The only safe place is here. All of
these things down there are not my
sculptures, they are the remnants of this
space's past. The computers, the coffee
cups...

*Swintak takes a closer look at the Cafe X coffee cup right next to the
podium stair*

SWINTAK

Wow, Café X was already doing compost back
in 1996.

DONNA

That's impressive.

PHILIPPE B.

(pointing at the two sinking half-macbooks)
No but wait a minute. These are two parts of
the same computer, not two sinking objects.
You are so lazy Fred.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

What are you saying, they are clearly two
different ones. See, they have different
glitches. This one's user was testing an
unsuccessful Max MSP drawing software when
he accidentally dropped his computer into the
floor. And this one, another rainbow lover
just like me, was seemingly experiencing
some trouble with its Finder system.

IQRAR

Stop bullshitting Fred, am I going to have to risk my own life going into this quicksandish floor, just to show everyone here that these...

(apostrophe gesture with hands)

...two computers are actually only one that you cut in half ?

MARYAM

No, no, don't go in there.

SWINTAK

It is true that this floor looks slightly quicksandish...

IQRAR

But is Fred going to admit that her props come from the same piece of cardboard ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Okay, okay, okay, fine, these are only one computer. But, I mean, computers are expensive, what kind of a budget do you think I had ?

LEILA

Everybody, time is flying, I know this V.A. Building story is stressful for everyone, but let's continue to concentrate on Frédérique's work while it is her critique.

IQRAR

I agree : despite any catastrophe, let's not forget why we are here for.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(unrolling the drawing of a flower)

Alright. Another piece that I want to show you is this drawing of a flower. I wanted to challenge myself to produce artworks that can be judged according to measurable criterias. You know, artworks that trigger objective appreciation for a change. So here is the longest drawing of a flower ever made.

Everybody nods with satisfaction

BORIS

(skeptical)

Did you verify this information ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

I did not. But something tells me that no one else ever put any effort in such a goal.

Everybody nods in agreement

PHILIPPE I.

Why is it upside down ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

I wanted to keep the best part of the flower for the end.

LYNN

(looking closer at the drawing and pointing)

Hey but this is not really a flower : look here is a hand. I don't think that this qualifies as the longest drawing of a flower ever made...

FRÉDÉRIQUE

I knew someone was going to bring this up, this is why I made another one, which is about the same length.

PHILIPPE B.

Well done Fred.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

And I was not quite sure of what to say about these flowers and we do have a botanical poetry expert with us today, so I was wondering, Boris, if you would like to say a few words about these two very long flowers ?

BORIS

As it turns out Fred, I do have a short poem on me right now, so I guess it would be appropriate if I read it.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Indeed, please do.

Frédérique gathers the 3D glasses and puts them back on the bulletin

board while Boris recites his poem. Everybody is delighted.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Another project that I tried to do was to take one photo of a rainbow each day for the whole semester. But I failed very early in the process.

LYNN

Were you not able to carry on with your commitment ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(putting her iphone on the plinth)

No the problem is that the first rainbow I photographed completely crushed my phone screen, and then I got scared of what would happen to me if I continued.

ELISABETH

You really have a spiritual relationship with rainbows don't you ?

LYNN

Troubled even, if I may say. It is good though that a certain sense of distress is starting to show in your practice Frédérique. I always felt like this was something missing.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Thanks, Lynn.

SWINTAK

Oh dear, look at this destroyed Macbook on this sinking table.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Yeah, it was there when I arrived. I don't know what happened to it, but it is clearly related to this dangerous floor.

BORIS

I know, what a shame. I bet it would still work otherwise.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

For sure, I have one that is eight years old and it still works fine. This model is

exceptional.

Frédérique gives a flashlight to Philippe I. Philippe goes to the Macbook and places the flashlight toward the screen. He turns the flashlight on, to highlight the apple sign on the other side.

PHILIPPE I.

(joking)

Hey look ! It still works ! Wouh ! Let's do the startup sound !

Philippe turns off the flashlight and prepares to turn it on again in synch with the sound. Everybody prepares to sing the Macbook startup sound on Philippe's signal.

PHILIPPE I.

1, 2, 3, Go !

Philippe turns the flashlight on.

EVERYBODY

(singing onomatopoeia)

PAAAAAAAAMMMMMMMMM

Everybody cheers.

SWINTAK

I bet this is what they did for the Apple light before LEDs were invented.

DONNA

I think that this flashlight also uses LED Swintak.

Following Frédérique's lead, Parisa takes a closer look at the clear plastic slot near the green door.

PARISA

(taking the document out of the slot)

Hey guys, I do not mean to interrupt, but what about this document ? It seems to be full of clues regarding this flood.

ADA

(pretending to study the document)

Here is a photo of a red locker numbered 273

LYNN

What is all that fuss about this document ?

MARYAM

Don't you see that it is a piece of evidence ?

ELISABETH

Even artists have more trust in stapled printed documents than in art...

PARISA

(showing page 4 of the document)

Oh look, there is a page with a padlock combination sticker.

LEILA

This is kind of uncanny.

ADA

(looking at Parisa and then pointing toward the elevator)

I think the two of us should go and check those red lockers over there. Let's bring the document with us to see if we can open locker number 273.

PHILIPPE I.

(pointing at the river rocks prints on the floor)

Look at these river rocks. You can probably jump from one to the other to get over there safely.

IQRAR

River rocks ? This simulacre is very hard to believe.

SWINTAK

Try with the 3d glasses.

Parisa and Ada put on a pair of 3D glasses each and make their way toward the red locker number 273 by jumping from one river rock print to the other. Once there, they successfully open the locker. Inside, they find an empty bag of chips. They bring it back to the podium. While they are gone, no one moves.

ELISABETH

What was in the locker ?

ADA

An empty bag of Sea salt and Vinegar

flavored chips

PHILIPPE B.
This is kind of disappointing.

BORIS
You tell me !

Frédérique gives another bag of chips to Elisabeth.

ELISABETH
Oh but look : here's a full bag of the same
kind of chips !

Elisabeth tries to open the bag of chips

ELISABETH
I can't seem to be able to open it. It's not
a real food product. It's a sculpture !

PHILIPPE B.
(grumpy)
This is becoming more and more frustrating
and you better have a real bag of chips
hidden somewhere in this creepy basement
Fred.

FRÉDÉRIQUE
As a matter of fact, I do.

DONNA
But I am curious : was this empty bag of
chips already in this locker when you first
investigated this space Frédérique, or did
you put it there by yourself ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE
Wouldn't it ruin the whole narrative
potential of this bag of chips if I did
reveal the answer to that question ?

LYNN
In its actual mysterious condition, this bag
of chips remains the starting point of a
number of unanswered questions.

DONNA
You see, I'm trying to determine if this
found bag of chips is in fact a ready-made

piece or if it is a debris of an
unadvertised performative action.

BORIS

(sighing)

Oh... semantics...

Boris leaves, jumping on the bidimensional river rocks until he notices a real full bag of chips behind the big backup sculpture.

BORIS

(coming back)

Everybody ! I found the real chips !

EVERYBODY

Yaayyy

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Let's put them in one section of the rainbow
sculpture.

Frédérique takes off one part of her rainbow sculpture and uses it as a bowl for the chips. She places the bowl on the plinth. Everybody stands in circle around the chips. Everyone eats five chips, one at a time, trying to synchronise their chewing with the rest of the group as much as possible.

SWINTAK

(laughing a little bit)

Isn't it funny how what we believed was a
chips container just 2 minutes ago turned
out to be a sculpture and what we thought
was a sculpture earlier, is now a chips
container !

Everybody laughs a little bit

FRÉDÉRIQUE

About snacks, I know how important these are
for a good critique. I wish I had more to
offer. In fact I was going to bring some
cookies, but as you see, I dropped them into
the floor.

ADA

I did not know that chocolate chips cookies
float.

BORIS

Yeah, me neither.

Elisabeth gives the fake bag of chips to philippe B.

PHILIPPE B.

This fake bag of chips looks a little unfinished doesn't it ?

SWINTAK

Hum, well of course it does, but I don't necessarily think this is a bad thing : I mean it's a crit, it would not make sense if everthing was exactly the way the artist intended it to be.

ELISABETH

(pointing at the ceiling)

Frédérique, what are those little characters up there ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(pointing at the ventilation system)

Oh these are an upside down cinema audience. I forgot to mention that we are the protagonists of a real-life documentary about survival that is being watched by them right now.

IQRAR

(upset)

Oh I must say that I feel very uncomfortable about that. Is there a camera somewhere ? Are we being filmed ?

DONNA

Are you going to be using us as subjects of your own work ? You must be aware that this addresses questions of authorship and ethical issues.

ELISABETH

This very confusing... currently I don't even know if we are talking about the artwork or if we are part of the artwork.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Am I performing right now ?

TIM

This is all very fascinating. I wish you the best of luck. Good bye.

Tim leaves theatrically.

BORIS

Guys, there is no need to panic about cameras and all of that. We all know that this is just a fiction.

IQRAR

I am not panicking, I am just saying that I feel uncomfortable being filmed.

PHILIPPE B.

Who said you are being filmed ? I don't see any camera.

IQRAR

You don't see any, that doesn't mean that there is none. Clearly, Fred has been hiding all sorts of things in every corner of this basement, who knows what she is capable of ?

PHILIPPE B.

If it's that big of a deal, I am sure that Fred can pause this fiction for a minute and just reassure us all, in real life. Fred can you promise that we are not being filmed ?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Sure, of course, I promise that there is no camera here.

DONNA

You are still acting.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

No, this is real, not a fiction.

LYNN

If this is not a fiction, why are we still speaking according to a script?

BILL

Great plinth by the way.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

Thank you, I found it in the corridor and slightly changed its design. Now it's has multipurpose features and even some storage space here.

BILL

Very clever !

Frédérique displays the 3D contact lenses on the plinth

FRÉDÉRIQUE

If you don't mind, I would also like to show these 3D contact lenses that I have made, aiming - as always - to make life even 3Der than it already is.

BILL

I love this idea. These 3D lenses are superb robotic extensions that could allow us to do the things that we already do.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(displaying the 3D contact lenses case)

I agree. Here is the case in which they would come if I was to commercialize them.

(handing out the coloring kits)

And to sort of continue in that same line, I have made some coloring kits with blue and red crayons. With your help, these faces too can have 3D contact lenses. Just follow the example provided in the kit. I don't have enough kits for everyone though, so you will have to fight.

LYNN

What is with this 3D phase Frédérique? Did you get influenced by Leila during the semester?

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(clearing the plinth with coquillage)

No, actually I have always been into 3D spaces you see. When I was a kid, I lived in a 3D house and my 3D parents would give me 3D food. Even my school was three dimensional.

LEILA

Thats amazing!

FRÉDÉRIQUE

The last piece I would like to show is another kind of rainbow that I have explored and I would like to invite all of you to come under this blue tarp to see it.

Everybody gets under the blue tarp and holds it collectively like a tent with one raised hand (the other hand continues to hold their script). The plinth must be under the tarp as well, Frédérique will place it properly. Everyone looks at the plinth while Frédérique performs the elusive display of an indoor atmospheric rainbow.

FRÉDÉRIQUE

(while making the rainbow happen)

I would like everyone to concentrate very hard on the plinth, and create an optical illusion for themselves, where the farthest corner of the interior of the plinth becomes the closest corner of a reversed 3D plinth. I hope you are following me. Now, I am going to play with the light and try to place a rainbow on the illusional top of the plinth. I call this piece *Performing the elusive display of an indoor atmospheric rainbow.*

(pause)

I hope this is having a soothing effect on all of you after what we have being going through during this critique.

(pause)

Okay this is it, let's get out of the tarp now.

Everyone leaves the blue tarp tent. They replace it as it was before. The overhead projector should be placed away from the tarp, in order to avoid burning the plastic, which would end things badly. Long silence. The critique is now over. Now we can all stop this, go back to our true characters and talk some more about what just happened. Without a script, it will be easy to pretend that we are all more anchored in reality this time.