



the dance current

**Dancers
Using Clown**
just for entertainment?

body/machine
the intersection of dance
& technology

***Exiles: A Book
of Questions***
Marie-Josée Chartier
& Linda Catlin Smith

**Andrea
Nann**
fluid
identities



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display from 10.03.01 to 10.31.01

on the web: Arwyn Carpenter's account of September 11th, 2001

[In the Making}

Depths of Field



Marie-Josée Chartier & Linda Catlin Smith in creation

by Heidi Strauss

It starts with a gift. Literally. Linda Smith receives it at a concert in Victoria from a composition teacher of hers named Rudolf Komorous. The gift is a book, a collection of Czech photographer Josef Koudelka's black and white images. Exiled from his homeland after his photos of the 1968 anti-communist uprising in Prague caused some distress, Koudelka immigrated to Paris. There his lens still captures and preserves the days of exiles and gypsies. He is an invisible observer; he is one of

them. His eye is tuned. His photographs are crisp, uncluttered, and infused with a loud silence. They are shining marbles of stopped time, wordless stories.

LCS: He'll take the most startling picture and uncover the fact behind it, without overplaying the drama.

MJC: You gave the book to me to look at, and I knew there was a grant deadline coming –

LCS: Somehow – I don't remember how – it might have been your idea >>



Marie-Josée Chartier & Linda Catlin Smith
Photo collage by John Oswald

EXILE IS NOT A MATERIAL THING,
IT IS A SPIRITUAL THING.

ALL THE CORNERS OF THE EARTH
ARE EXACTLY THE SAME.
AND ANYWHERE ONE CAN DREAM IS GOOD,
PROVIDING THE PLACE IS OBSCURE,
AND THE HORIZON IS VAST.
— VICTOR HUGO



Bottom to top: Bonnie Kim, Fiona Drinnan, Yvonne Ng, Gérald Michaud, JoAnna Powell, Darryl Tracy in rehearsal for Marie-Josée Chartier and Linda C. Smith's *Exiles: A Book of Questions* (2001)

Photo by Jan Komárek

MJC: I said, "Oh my God! Linda we have to do something with these photos." And because I knew I wanted to work with you again, with your music – now *I can't quite remember*

LCS: I was travelling.

MJC: I think we had one week to apply,

LCS: and I was going to give up the idea because there was such little time.

Czechoslovakia, 1967: They all hold their breath. Three bare chested young boys. Shoulders raised. Underdeveloped biceps flexing. Six defiant fists. Six fearful and expectant eyes. Ribcages and intercostals like washboards. Between the fingers of one right hand, a hook.

LCS&MJC: boys with ribs

What you aren't there for is always hard to imagine, even if the story is well told. Strong images – wordless or not – arouse empathy and associative memories. We are left with impressions. Buttons go off as quickly as a camera click. What is in the frame or on the stage fuels the imagination. You create your own context; the impression you're left with is only part of what you see. It is also what you read into, how you react, what you remember.

For choreographer/dancer Marie-Josée Chartier and composer/pianist Smith, the goal is to create in partnership, sharing the musical and choreographic composition – to both enter unfamiliar territory. They apply and receive funding for the project, and with Koudelka's published collection, *Exiles: a book of questions*, they travel to Banff for a week-long improvisational workshop that begins their creative process in 1999.

LCS: We would take turns doing solos based on images. We would look through the book and then just choose an image. We'd spend two minutes staring at it and letting it inform us – not making a picture of the picture, but responding intuitively by going into the space.

MJC: We'd both do the same picture or our version of the same picture. Then we'd do duets,

LCS: in which case we'd set up the video camera. Then (in the afternoon) we'd go to the

music studio and do the same process except with piano and voices being recorded.

Czechoslovakia, 1963: (background) A long queue of people on an incline toward a house. No glass in the windows. Five soldiers patrolling. (foreground) A vacant lot marked by thick tire tracks. A dark haired man in a too-tight tweed jacket and wrinkled white shirt leans to his right, caught mid-step. Shoulders rounded forward. Wrists locked together in silver cuffs.

LCS & MJC: guy in handcuffs

LCS: I used that image. When I would sit down at the piano, I wouldn't separate my hands. We didn't end up using that music, but it resulted in an interesting response. I was very literal in that way –

MJC: Except that we wouldn't know –

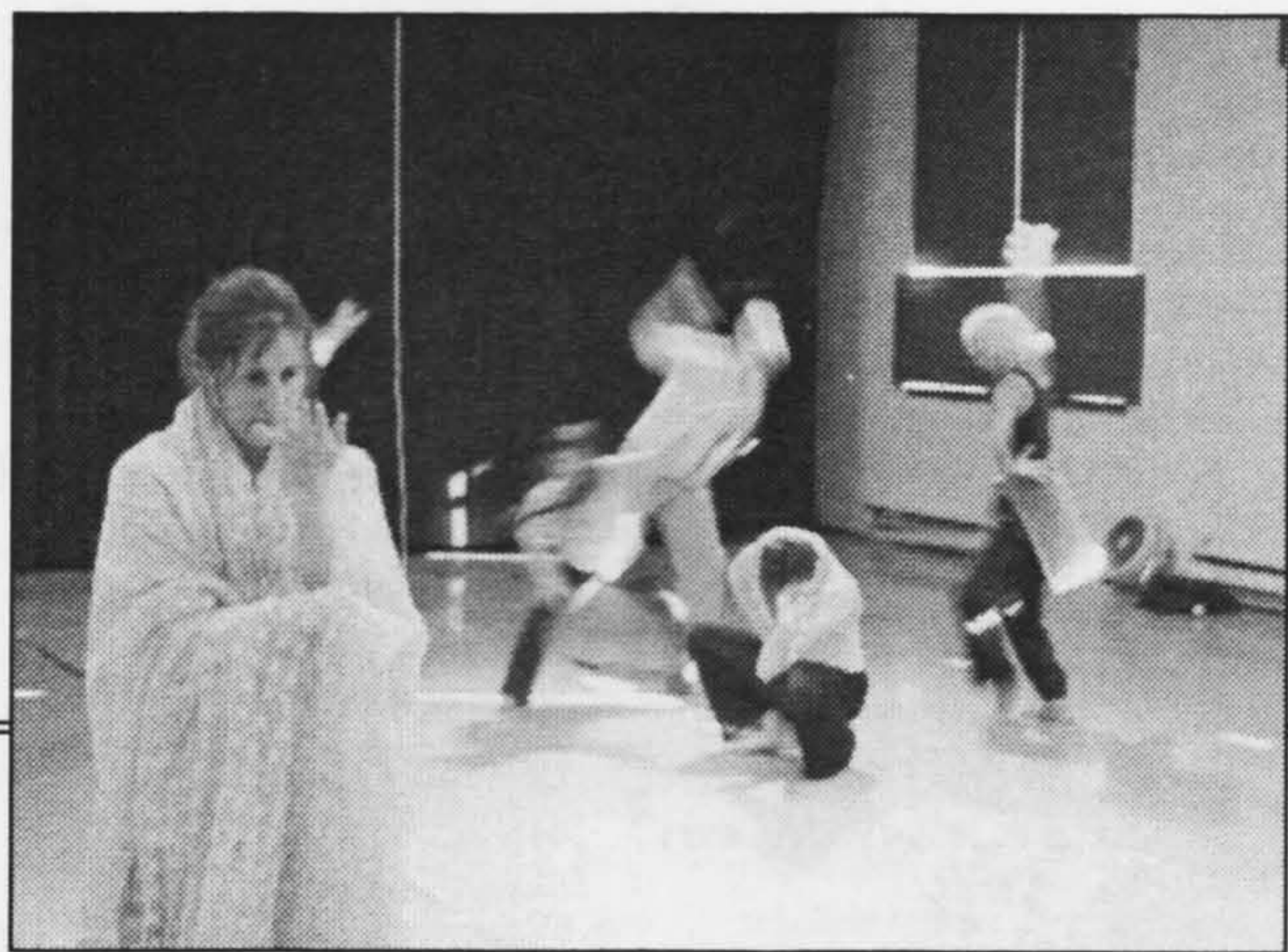
LCS: No you wouldn't know *but* there was a quality to the sound that was really quite sad – the part where you were shuffling.

MJC: I was shuffling along the floor in the cabin and shaking the blinds ...

LCS: We ended up using the shuffling ... often the ideas would filter down and the initial impulses would still be there in another way.

Chartier and Smith create their album of sound and movement images over a two-year period. They give their six dancers (Fiona Drinnan, Bonnie Kim, Gérald Michaud, Yvonne Ng, JoAnna Powell and Darryl Tracy) improvisational tasks similar to the ones they devise for themselves. With material generated by so many, ideas must be condensed. A sequence develops naturally during the process and is recorded in storyboard form. It spells no linear narrative. Smith calls it a weave, describing the final accumulation of scenes as flitting between naturalism, heightened presentation and abstraction. And, like the observer of Koudelka's photographs, the audience member is cast as interpreter.

Spain, 1975: (back to front) A tanker. A long strip of oceanic water. A palatial fence met by sandy tiles, broken bricks, two full canvas bags, miscellaneous pieces of wood,



L-R: Fiona Drinnan, Yvonne Ng, Darryl Tracy, Gérald Michaud, JoAnna Powell in rehearsal for Marie-Josée Chartier and Linda C. Smith's *Exiles: A Book of Questions* (2001)
Photo by Jan Komárek

a broom, tumbleweed. To the left, a dog on turned-out hind legs peers out above a flat semi-vertical surface which, leaning, appears to mask something beyond the eye.

LCS & MJC: dog

LCS: Something about the dogs is key ... there is just something about the pictures of the dogs in the books, and about the dogs in the piece that have to do with what is in the present. They are so in the present, so honestly who they are.

We take a camera along when we know there is something that we want to keep for later; visual records jolt us back to a time, place or particular feeling – to memories. Sometimes we aren't sure why we take the photos in the first place. We only know we have to. In artistic creation, there's a parallel.

MJC: I always try to empty myself of the information I have ... I want to have a feeling and I want to go with it. That is all. I just want to go with it, whatever happens ... The challenge in the end is to create a whole, something that has a sense. It won't be a story – but maybe I've been transported somewhere. I don't know where exactly, but maybe it's an odd place with odd things happening. For us, [the process] is trusting that the piece will reveal itself to us. And following that, not even always really knowing – I mean that is the creative process: not forcing it, not imposing it.

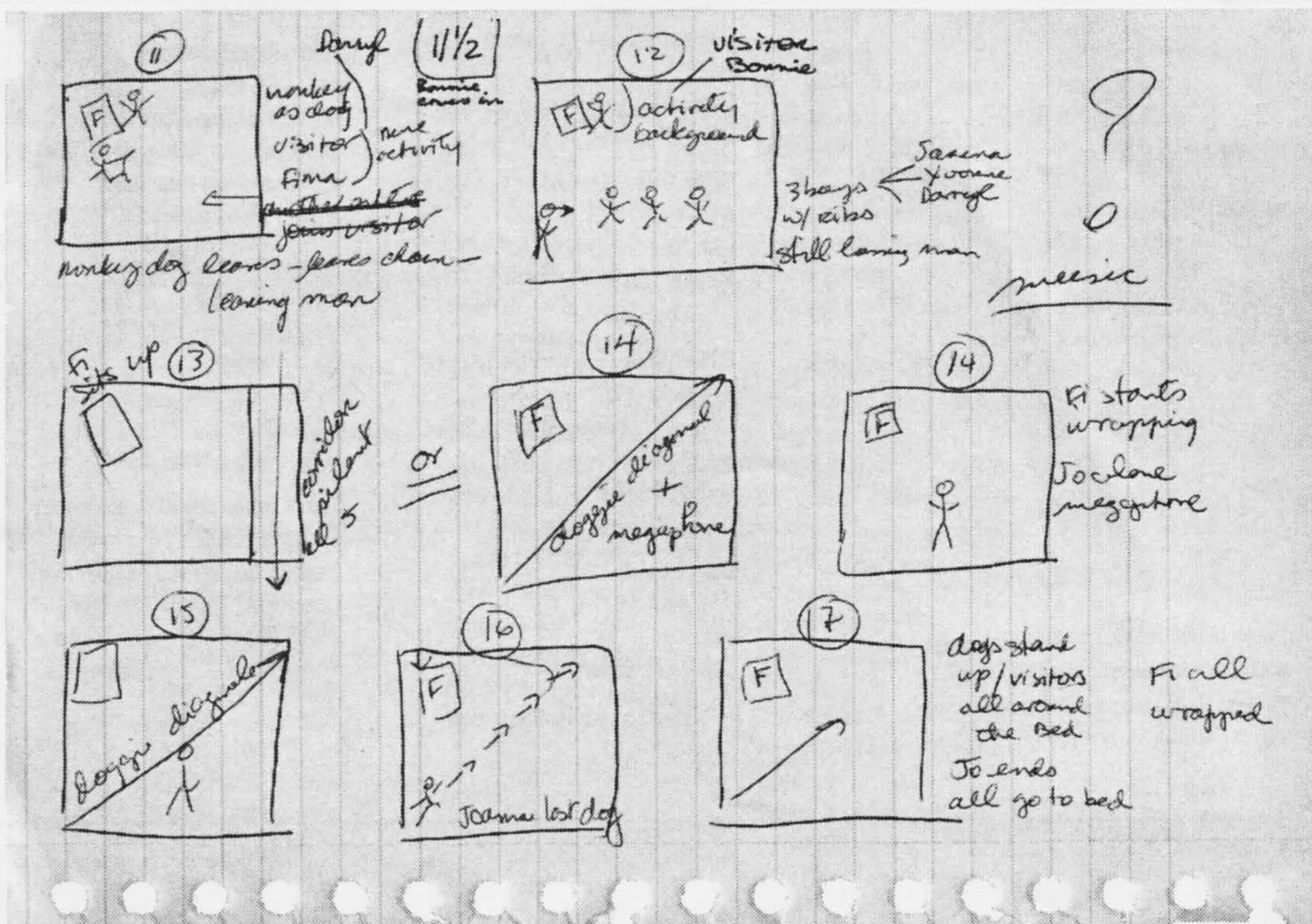
Canada, 2001: (real time) The sound of a fog horn. Hazy hot night near the island airport. Three women sitting at a long wooden table. Cheese, paté, french bread, rosé, and a paper of unnumbered questions. In large bold letters at the bottom of the page, a line Bernard Cuau wrote in the introduction to the book *Exiles*. It is about Josef Koudelka, the aeronautical engineer turned photographer who had his start when he brought a camera into the theatre. A woman reads: "He goes straight ahead without always knowing where." The other two look at each other.

LCS: That is exactly how this has been from the beginning ...

Les profondeurs d'un champ *Exiles : A book of Questions* [Exilés : un livre de questions] en création

Le début, ce fut un cadeau. Littéralement. La compositrice/pianiste Linda Catlin Smith reçut un livre de photographies présent par l'exilé tchécoslovaque Josef Koudelka. Le cadeau engendra une collaboration créative avec l'interprète/chorégraphe Marie-Josée Chartier. Elles partagent la chorégraphie et la composition. En improvisant, Chartier et Smith élaborèrent un catalogue de sons et de mouvements inspirés des clichés d'exilés et de gitans, des clichés nets et clairsemés de moments fragmentés. Ensuite, elles travaillèrent avec six danseurs, créant une séquence que Smith nomme un tissage; une accumulation de scènes

Exiles: A Book of Questions, also featuring the work of lighting designer Jan Komárek and costume designer Heather MacCrimmon, is presented by DanceWorks from October 11th to 13th at the du Maurier Theatre Centre, Toronto.



frôlant le naturalisme, la présentation accrue et l'abstraction. « Le défi, c'est créer un tout qui présente un sens. Ce ne sera pas une histoire – toutefois ... pour nous, [le processus] est d'avoir confiance que la danse se révélera » explique Chartier. De même, Bernard Cuau écrit à propos de Koudelka qu'« il se précipite sans toujours connaître la direction ».

Storyboards for Marie-Josée Chartier and Linda C. Smith's *Exiles: A Book of Questions* (2001)