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Yared Mehzenta
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Metachroma Theatre
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cultural diversity and the stage

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IMAGE BY SCOTT MUNN

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SPECIAL ISSUE: GENDER & THEATRE AT THE MARGINS

Upcoming  theatre
10.3 Spring 2013

SPECIAL ISSUE: GENDER & THEATRE AT THE MARGINS

ARTICLE Writer **ANGELA MYER** and photographer **SHIRLEY TSE** deliver an annotated photo essay on how the drag king duo Ben&Pony queer masculinity and whiteness through performance. **BOOK REVIEW** **DONIA MOUNSEF** reviews Judith Rudakoff's *TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work*. **INTERVIEW** **J. PAUL HALFERTY** talks to writer-performer **TAWIAH M'CARTHY** about his latest work, *Obaaberima*, a journey across continents, genders, races, and sexualities. **DISPATCH** **JENN GRIFFIN** and **MARILYN NORRY** reflect on the North Vancouver community-based theatre project *My Mother's Story*.


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T H E A T R E

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

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© Henry Chan
Image from *La Pasarela* with Patricia Ariza at
Aluna Theatre's Panamerican Routes/Routas
Panamericanas

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ARTICLES



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"Just for Them": page 15



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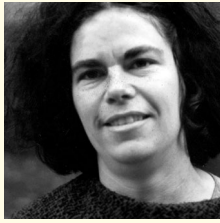
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DISPATCHES



LIB SPRY

is a director, writer, teacher, performer, and translator. She works with non-traditional theatre forms, such as popular theatre, community theatre, site-specific theatre, theatre for young audiences, clown, mask, and other physical theatre forms. She is a recognized teacher of Theatre of the Oppressed. The year 2013 marks the fiftieth anniversary of her first job in a professional theatre. To celebrate she is creating *Trance for Matron*: a play for old women, objects, memories, anger, and Zimmer.

Lightness and Political Theatre: page 34



METACHROMA THEATRE

Montreal's only independent theatre company of professional actors of colour, addresses the under-representation of visible minority actors in Canadian Theatre, challenging current perceptions by telling stories with a diverse cast to normalize the presence of these artists onstage. Among the company founders (Quincy Armorer, Glenda Braganza, Tamara Brown, Lucinda Davis, Julie Tamiko Manning, Mike Payette, Jamie Robinson, and Warona Setshwaelo) are Stratford Conservatory alumni, artistic directors, award-winning actors, and directors with decades of professional experience.

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BOOK REVIEWS



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Review of *Asian Canadian Theatre*: page 36



NADINE HOLDSWORTH

is professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Warwick. She has published *Joan Littlewood's Theatre* (2011), *Theatre & Nation* (2010), and edited John McGrath's collected writings, *Naked Thoughts That Roam About* (2002). She has written essays on McGrath, David Greig, Gary Mitchell, and Glasgow Unity and is currently editing a collection called *Theatre and National Identities* (Routledge).

Review of *National Performance*: page 37

(De)Colonization and Collaboration: *Toolkits for Change*

BY NIKKI SHAFFEULLAH

In September of last fall, I had the pleasure of attending the third biennial Prismatic Festival in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Prismatic is a national festival and conference that sets out to be Canada's premiere venue for showcasing Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists. Run by Shahin Sayadi and Maggie Stewart—who double as the Artistic Director and the Managing Director of Halifax's Onelight Theatre, respectively—the Prismatic 2012 program featured Onelight's tenth original theatrical production, *Hawk or How He Plays His Song*. *Hawk* is the story of a twenty-year-old man who struggles to find his identity amid the competing influences of his urban lawyer father, who fights for their Mi'kmaq community in Halifax's political arena; his rural mother, who is committed to living with and for their community on the reserve; and his loving Indo-Canadian girlfriend, Mitra. The Prismatic program also featured theatre, dance, photography, and musical works by leading artists from across the country, as well as a three-day conference that invited conversation surrounding key questions facing (culturally diverse and Aboriginal) artists. In my role as rapporteur for the Prismatic 2012 conference, I was tasked to pay close attention to the discussions and debates of the proceedings. Much like Prismatic 2010, the conversations (on policy, funding, education, and more) were marked by enthusiasm, energy, anger, determination, hope, and—certainly—passion.

Amid all of this, however, throughout both this Prismatic and the last, a question seemed to linger in the conference room: "What are we actually doing here?"

One possible response is that Prismatic facilitates social change, which writer, scholar, and disability activist Dr. Catherine Frazee spoke to with her words at the conference's opening panel: "We can work until we drop in the courts and the policy work, but we get nowhere until we've had an impact on culture. Everything we know about

justice and being human, that's where all those things happen." Cultural products are social agents with the power to either perpetuate the status quo or challenge (if not change) it; and in many ways, Prismatic is an ethnoculturally minded platform for the latter. But what makes the festival unique, I am starting to think, is not simply that it showcases "minority" work and issues, but how it does so. Firstly, this large and growing festival brings together culturally diverse artists and Aboriginal artists, as well as their allies. Secondly, while Prismatic's motivations are rooted in ethno-cultural minority rights activism, as an event Prismatic is simply about celebrating artistic innovation in Canada. It centralizes what is typically relegated to the periphery, and fittingly does so in a smaller Canadian city. In this way, Prismatic suggests a reconstituted Canadian arts landscape that, without tokenizing or depoliticizing, prioritizes culturally diverse and Aboriginal people, stories, and ways of creation.

I am currently in the throes of facilitating a community-based collective creation theatre project in Edmonton that for now is loosely titled *Staging Diversity*. The project has brought together people who identify both as women and as "brown"—the latter term being deliberately nebulous and referring to culturally and religiously diverse people who are seen as brown and thus connected through the (Islamophobic) racialization of their bodies, rendered hypervisible by post-9/11 "anti-terrorism" discourses. The project seeks to create an avenue for these "brown women" to respond to the selective "feminism" that has been appropriated by the Western mainstream, casting "brown" women as victims, oppressed at the hands of their male cultural counterparts.

A few critical questions seem to underlie the images, stories, and myths that have come up in our work: Which stories tend to go untold? How much should we worry about bearing the

burden of our traditionally unrepresented cultures when telling our individual stories? How can we confront patriarchy that exists in our communities—as it does in all communities—when we are so often forced to strategically essentialize with and support our male counterparts, put on the cultural defensive in the face of faux-feminist xeno-racism? In what ways can we best invite audiences to think, criticize, reflect and laugh with us? How can theatre help those onstage and off unlearn the (self-)othering and (self-)hate that was created during the Orientalist colonizing of our parents' and grandparents' homelands and which is upheld today through neo-colonial wars? In short, how can theatre help to decolonize—to unpack internal and external racism, Islamophobia, and patriarchy?

I was describing this project to an Ojibway friend who is active and invested in Indigenous anti-colonial resistance and she jokingly commented, "Everyone is trying to decolonize something these days." The vocabulary representing this all-consuming need to *decolonize* is indeed popular in activist circles. While *decolonizing* refers to many actions and attitudes, some concrete and legal and others abstract, I suggest that the kind of decolonization that seeks to undo internal colonization bears notable resemblance to the questions that catalyze most artistic creation: Who am I? Who are we? What are we doing here?

"What are we doing here?" Again, that question lingering in the room at Prismatic, which, in 2012, was held a few months before the dawn of the Idle No More movement. What *were* we doing there? To further explore this question, I ask, what does it mean for people of colour and Aboriginal artists—and these communities in general—to work together in solidarity? What is meaningful collaboration? I ask of myself: How can "brown women," such as the migrants and the daughters of migrants involved in my *Staging Diversity* project, work in solidarity with Aboriginal women who, due to sexualized racism, are five to seven times more likely to die of violence than their non-Native sisters? (Amnesty International) How can racialized people on this land now called Canada, migrants and children of migrants from colonized countries, begin to seek their own decolonization when they have come to participate in the colonial project as settlers on Turtle Island?

The dissonance within these questions may also be the answer. The quest for internal decolonization and the quest to create art both seek to answer

those “who” and “what” questions. They both probe the ever-loaded concept of identity and seek self-determined constructions thereof. As Shahin Sayadi told the Halifax *Chronicle Herald*, “It’s always been a struggle [as an immigrant] to understand the Canadian identity and I have come to understand it’s a mix ... and not just one. The beginning of it is our natives and the land we’re in is the land of the Mi’kmaq and *Hawk* is a story of family” (Barnard). For Canadians of all walks, the starting point for the long and elusive journey of mapping identity should perhaps begin with the land. It follows that anti-racism work by racialized settlers must not define progress as gaining more access to power, resources, and opportunity within the existing systems of the Canadian state and civic society. On the contrary, anti-racism must challenge the colonial project at its core and at every level, centralizing indigeneity at all turns. I am reminded of the opening panel at Prismatic where Jani Lauzon shared the powerful words of Sam Osawamick, an elder from Kaboni on the Wikwemikong reserve on Manitoulin Island: “This country will never be healthy unless it recognizes the roots of the tree ... every healthy tree requires the roots to be fed ... all right relationships will come from that.”

Hawk, like Prismatic itself, is a cultural event that strives to embody this kind of symbiosis of Canadian identities. The show is rooted in Mi’kmaq land and blends immigrant and Aboriginal narratives in a distinctly Canadian context, perhaps most poetically demonstrated in the relationship of the young lovers Hawk and Mitra, two different types of “Indian” who share a love of Tim Hortons. What enabled *Hawk* to achieve its intercultural character so effectively was that the content of the product reflected the tools of its creation process. Iranian-Canadian Sayadi wrote this play after twelve years of immersion in and friendship with Mi’kmaq families, and the show was developed in close consultation with cultural consultant William Nevin, Chief of the White Eagle Sundance in New Brunswick. This sort of long-term, collective, community-based play creation has a long history in Canada (and elsewhere), but still, it would seem, falls outside of conventional univocal theatre-making practice. Indeed, mainstream reception of *Hawk* wrote with reference to its uniqueness: one theatre blogger called the narrative and style a “new type of theatrical experience” that she had “never seen before” (Campbell), and a local reviewer commented on the “unusual theatrical structure” (Barnard).

On International Human Rights Day, December 10, ten weeks after Prismatic’s close, protests across Canada launched Idle No More: a multivocal, dialogical Indigenous sovereignty movement. The following day, Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat began what would be a six-week hunger strike intended to bring attention to First Nations issues, to contest the Conservative government’s Bill C-45, and to bring about a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor General David Johnson to seriously discuss the relationship between the Canadian state and First Nations. Much of the negative criticism surrounding Idle No More and Chief Theresa Spence has focused on its tactics—or, its tools. The *Globe and Mail* editorial board called Chief Spence’s hunger strike a “regrettable moral-pressure tactic,” and the *Calgary Herald* wrote it off as “blackmail.” Both of these sources, and others like them, suggest that Spence would be better off to use established channels of communication. But why would she? Four hundred years of restriction to the established colonial channels have only allowed the ongoing exploitation and oppression of this land and its Indigenous peoples. Why is it so surprising that a First Nations leader, whose community is in crisis, would use a radically different strategy? The employment of unconventional methods to affect social change is part and parcel of anti-colonial resistance. As Audre Lorde famously said, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Chief Spence did what was necessary: she developed her own toolkit.

Although neither *Hawk*’s creation process nor Chief Spence’s protest tactics are without precedent, both represent non-normative tools that were received with surprise and proved extremely potent. The play and the hunger strike each employed counter-hegemonic methods to achieve anti-colonial ends. Many of the contributors to this issue of *alt.theatre* explore this notion of alternative toolkits. Jimena Ortuza underscores the need for activist art and art-gatherings to practise politics in form as well as content, framing her discussion of the 2012 Toronto-based Panamerican Routes/Rutas Panamericanas conference around an understanding of English-Spanish language politics in the Americas. Manpreet Dhaliwal calls attention to cultural biases embedded in the structure of the Canadian court system in “The Performativity of Evidence.” Her discussion demonstrates how the use of oral testimony in the case of Aboriginal land claims is at once culturally responsive and inclusive, while

also serving to destabilize and subvert hegemonic structures. In “Lightness and Political Theatre,” Lib Spry argues that comedy is an often overlooked, yet effective tool for creating politically engaged art. The Dispatch “Why Metachroma?” provides what is perhaps an interesting counter-example to this exploration of revolutionary tools. While the article itself defies common practice, having been collectively written by the company members of Montreal’s newest culturally diverse theatre company, the founders seems to have used not only “the master’s tools,” but his very favourite ones when building their company. Striving to “[see] players who look like us onstage, to find our identities affirmed in the landscape of Canadian storytelling,” these actors of colour chose *Richard III* as their inaugural production—a work by, of course, William Shakespeare, the hegemon of drama in the Commonwealth and beyond. Their name, meaning “beyond colour,” finds its etymological roots in Greek, the language of the so-called birthplace of (Western) theatre. Does Metachroma’s explicit use of Eurocentric theatre conventions abate their multicultural goals, or is it a conscious appropriation of mainstream models that subverts through strategic re-invention?

And where does *alt.theatre* find itself amidst this talk of form and content? Much like Prismatic, *alt.theatre* seeks to centralize innovative creative work that would typically be kept at the margins: culturally diverse and Aboriginal art, politically and community-engaged art, and arts-based activism. We do so within the logophilic walls of a print journal, albeit one that is mandated to represent a diversity of voices and aims to be receptive to change—form, content, and otherwise. Welcoming new tools for our kit, I’d like to think, is a part of *alt*’s journey, too.

ERRATUM

In *alt.theatre* 10.1, the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company was mistakenly referred to as the “Saskatoon Native Theatre Company” multiple times throughout the issue. *alt.theatre* sincerely regrets the error.

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OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: TOWARDS GROUND-MAKING ENCOUNTERS ALONG PANAMERICAN ROUTES

BY JIMENA ORTUZAR



“Apologies for not speaking Spanish.”

These words resonated with a strange irony as I recalled the sorrows of ESL classes in Toronto public schools and the countless times I was asked to repeat my Spanish name, whose closest English equivalent was a brand of pancake syrup. I imagined hearing this phrase from immigration officers as I stepped onto Canadian soil with the promise of a future within reach.

But lived experiences of migration rarely include such apologies. Instead, these words were spoken (by the moderator) at the opening panel of the Panamerican Routes/Rutas Panamericanas conference that took place in Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille last May. Inviting artists, activists, scholars, and community leaders from across the Americas to engage with issues of migration, displacement, and human rights at the intersection of theatre, performance, and politics, the three-day conference provided the ideal contextual assumptions in which these words acquire their meaning—an imagined community of Latin Americans and Canadians committed to social change and social justice. In such felicitous circumstances, apologies for not speaking Spanish are well in order.

Convened by Toronto-based Aluna Theatre with the support of the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto, the first-time conference was part of a new two-week festival showcasing emerging and established artists from Canada and Latin America through mainstage performances, workshops, films, and a photo exhibit. Artistic Director Beatriz Pizano, who founded Aluna Theatre in 2001 in response to the lack of cultural diversity on the Canadian stage, has endeavoured to create socially engaged work for over a decade. In creating this festival she insisted that “the whole continent is our home”(1)—following the tradition of Simón Bolívar, Manuelita Sáenz, and José Martí, from whom Pizano drew her inspiration.

The notion of “America” in the hemispheric sense, however, is not one shared by all nations, and as immigrants know full well, the division between North and South is the first lesson in geography and geopolitical identity that newcomers encounter in their new home. Unlike the Spanish panamericano/a, the English definition of Panamerican maintains the North/South divide even as these worlds increasingly overlap.

In an effort to move beyond such delimitations, Panamerican Routes/Rutas Panamericanas looks to the practices and strategies of artists that identify as “Latin American” in ways that have “less to do with essence than with conditions of (im)possibility and opposition” (Taylor and Constantino 3). The political thrust behind these interventions arises both from the traumatic memories of those generations that endured periods of extreme social unrest and from the inevitable effects of living conditions in the here and now. This form of popular theatre takes performance—which includes political interventions, cabaret, pageants and other forms of popular performance—as a means to contest multiple forms of repression and violence. How to convey the urgency of such interventions when relocating political theatre to Toronto stages remains an on-going quandary.

The opening session of the conference, titled “Theatre and Displacement,” included an all-Spanish-speaking panel—no easy task for a non-Spanish moderator, particularly in a bilingual conference whose main objective is to open dialogue. Indeed, one of the three participants, San Francisco-based Mexican

performance artist Violeta Luna, maintained that, as an immigrant, speaking Spanish in the United States is a political decision. Nowhere has this sentiment been better articulated than during public claims of rights to citizenship in the streets of San Francisco and Los Angeles, where Mexican migrant and illegal workers sang the US national anthem in Spanish, sparking much controversy and debate. This act has since been considered by the likes of Judith Butler and Gayatri C. Spivak for pointing to the intricate relationship between language, politics, and belonging—a concern that resurfaces time and again in discussions and performances throughout this festival. This political positioning towards language reminds us that translation is a significant component of this conference and one that should not be overlooked given that it always involves some movement of meaning. What is more, translation, as the above example suggests, can open up possibilities for decolonization and create spaces for resistance.

Amidst this productive tension between languages, moderator Tara Beagan of Native Earth Performing Arts skillfully opened the discussion with an excerpt from a play that touched on the notion of disappearance, a theme familiar to both Latin American societies and performance practice. Thousands of civilians were made to disappear during episodes of social disruption and political turmoil throughout Latin America—Argentina’s Dirty War, the Pinochet dictatorship, the Mayan genocide in Guatemala, the decades of civil conflict and violence in Colombia. Not only that, but the official stories of the repressive regimes often aimed to obliterate people’s lived experience of violence. Hence, as Diana Taylor observes in her insightful analysis of Argentina’s military dictatorship—in which seeing or witnessing violence “put people at risk in a society that policed the look”—choosing not to see the atrocities taking place around them led to a “self-blinding of the general population” (122-123). It is in this context of repression and violence (as well as the “political manipulation of disappearance”) that artists and activists made and continue to make political interventions that expose such violence while creating, through performance, a “community of witnesses” (Schneider 106; Ramírez 334).

Performance, long-assumed to be that which disappears until scholars began to query the notion of disappearance as its ontological basis, has more recently been thought of as that which also remains—the ephemera of traces, echoes, affects, and spectral meanings that resist “any neat antinomy between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence” (Schneider 103). This understanding of embodied knowledge suggests that legacies of the past and the lived experiences of the present remain through performance, that is, as a counter-memory. It is precisely in recognizing other ways of knowing and remembering, affirms Violeta Luna, that we can begin to ask who or what constitutes this place we think of as “America,” whether nation or continent, imaginary or real.

Together with Colombian artist/activist Patricia Ariza and Toronto-based Argentinean art therapist Eva Saphir, the women in this panel encouraged us to find our own rituals—perhaps to find ourselves again in ritual repetition. Undeniably, the idea of “performance as disappearance crosses chiasmatically with ritual,” as Rebecca Schneider reminds us in her essay “Performance Remains” (106). A surreal and fantasmic expression of this postulation—one that not only crosses but also negotiates the material world—appears in Aluna Theatre’s *Nohayquien sepa* (No One Knows), a multimedia production from 2011 that was re-staged for the festival. Its subject is the relationship between those disappeared as a result of the on-going violence

Finding a way of working together through collaboration and participation—one that offers women agency in their onstage representation—is the question guiding Ariza’s approach to this event.



in Colombia’s armed conflict and the local residents who discover their remains floating along the Magdalena River. Recovered by the locals and interred in a mausoleum dedicated to the N.N. (No Name) victims, the anonymous body parts are transformed into sacred objects of prayer and devotion. It is thus not the remains in the flesh and bone, which only resurface momentarily, but the seemingly forgotten ghosts that, through the performance of ritual repetition, reappear time and time again.

While *Nohayquiensepa* reflects on the death of strangers, *The Last Walk of Adolfo Ich* offers an in-depth account of victims of violence—the case of a Mayan Q’eqchi’ teacher and activist whose brutal murder at the hands of security forces in Guatemala leaves a family and a community shattered. Both performances confront us with the human rights abuses committed by Canadian mining companies, thus setting the stage for the discussions on notions of human rights, legal and social justice, and corporate responsibility from multiple cultural and disciplinary perspectives. Of particular interest were the meeting points between theatre and the law. Lawyer Cory Wanless from Toronto firm Klippensteins, which represents several Mayan Q’eqchi’ in a lawsuit against Canadian company HudBay Minerals, noted some of the differences and continuities in legal and theatre roles, assuming they are both preoccupied with “truth.” Where law is concerned with the facts of an event, theatre, he suggested, can often produce an effect that is “more true” to the experience at hand. Indeed, the privileging of recorded truth and written documents makes certain that the possibilities afforded by embodied, experiential memory are left to be explored by performance practice.

How then can theatre address such violence and how can such horror be conveyed to those at a distance? Ariza proposes to transform pain into creation: “[T]he theatre is what brings us back to life, it allows us to vanquish our fears” (qtd. in Ramírez 242). This kind of reflexive engagement with the effects of violence in everyday life is what she has endeavoured to bring about for over four decades in Colombia through her work in the country’s first alternative theatre, Teatro La Candelaria, and as the head of the Corporación Colombiana de Teatro. Ariza spoke at length on the phenomenon of falsos positivos (false positives)—criminal killings of civilians, staged by security forces to look like killings in combat of guerrillas. Her urban interventions not only speak to the victims of these atrocities but also to all those invisible victims, namely the women displaced by the on-going violence. Taking theatre out of “its place” and into the streets, these collaborative actions take women out of “their place” and bring them into view, thus quickly moving from a position of invisibility to one of hypervisibility.

This concern with visibility also underpins much of Luna’s performance practice. Although primarily working as a solo artist, her projects involve migrant women and the often hidden, invisible labour they perform. Like Ariza’s interventions, Luna’s performances must be seen through the lens of a feminist discourse that informs her work, that is, one that takes into account and articulates the position from which we speak. Moreover, Ariza questioned what it means to speak from a position of pain or resistance, while Luna reminded us that crossing the border in a position of privilege is quite different from crossing in a vulnerable state, at which point the body, always already marked by gender and racial politics, becomes a criminal body. But whereas the presence of illegal migrant



© Henry Chan. The company of Patricia Ariza's *La Pasarela* at Panamerican Routes/Rutas Panamericanas.

women in full public view becomes normalized by virtue of their invisible work, their claims to the rights of political belonging in the public sphere are cause for alarm. In other words, it is not visibility per se but the conditions of visibility that play a role in effective agency. Through such collective acts, migrant bodies contest their own position as illegal aliens by performing public actions when they legally cannot: for instance, public assembly and free speech—an act that Butler refers to as a “performative contradiction,” and one she suggests is key in effecting a radical politics of change (66-69).

For Butler, the articulation of plurality through performative acts in what she calls the “agency of the ‘we’” is a necessary condition for efficacious action (56). In order to transform personal suffering into issues for public dialogue, Ariza draws on testimony and reenactment to create a performance centered on women’s shared experience. Like Luna and Saphir, Ariza aims to create a safe space for voices to be heard. This strategy was behind the workshop she led during the festival, which culminated in a public performance titled *La Pasarela* (The Catwalk) presented as part of the session on “Breaking Models: Challenging Femininity.” With over thirty-five women taking part in the workshop, Ariza takes the fashion show runway form and re-invents it as stories of migration, identity, and trauma from the perspective of gendered experience, all while setting out to contest dominant modes of representation and spectatorship. The participants thus presented us with a series of individual acts ranging from the fantasies of inhabiting a male body to the loss of loved ones in armed conflict. Nearly all performers engaged, in one form or another, in reclaiming the female body and renegotiating its display according to an explicitly female subjectivity.

First performed in Colombia in 2007, *La Pasarela* has been staged in Japan, Norway, Mexico, and Peru with women from various walks of life. Universally identified and understood in as many contexts as possible, the catwalk model ensures a multiplicity of voices, particularly those voices excluded from the fashion institution. However, this focus on the collective experience of femininity risks overlooking the complexities of the female subject as situated in specific socio-political fields. In a racialized, class-stratified social hierarchy, it is imperative to consider the factors that relate to the specifics of time, place, and history, particularly when it pertains to its most vulnerable subjects. Perhaps, then, we need to consider the possibilities and the limits of such a model in addressing the ways in which gendered experience intersects with race, class, nationality, ethnicity, and sexual orientation—in other words, all other aspects that constitute identity. A feminist interrogation of visual culture must take this intersectionality into account (on this issue, see Doyle and Jones 607-615). To be sure, Ariza insisted the workshops are for community women, which not only includes local artists and performers but also those outside the art frame, and thus she makes a conscious effort to enlist marginalized women whose stories are often absent from the political stage.

Finding a way of working together through collaboration and participation—one that offers women agency in their onstage representation—is the question guiding Ariza’s approach to this event. But while community-engaged art has gained a wide appeal in Canada, particularly across various sectors that have a stake in this work, Ruth Howard reminds us there is “a fine line between the political potency and weakness of community arts” (7). Too often, she observes, “the modus

operandi for community arts, and particularly those that are theatre projects, is taken to be the collection and expression of ‘stories,’ (preferably confessional and traumatic) in people’s ‘own voices,’ most often presented by the people themselves” (6). This is not to say there is no longer a need for “telling our stories” but that striving for social and political engagement necessarily entails confronting the intricacies, layers, and modes of identity formation (not to mention those emerging from the encounters of collaborative efforts) that are too often allocated to a “location that resists telling” (Crenshaw qtd. in Doyle and Jones 609).

If these stories and performances, in their various forms, address the pervasive sexism encoded in all social institutions, they must be considered in dialogue with their counterpart segment in the conference—a performance that looks at the beholder of the gaze that transforms female identity into an object of sexual desire. This session—“What to do with the ‘Macho?’”—consisted of a performative paper written by Colombian playwright/director Carlos Satizábal and performed by Toronto-based actor Carlos Gonzalez-Vio. Titled *Nuevas Masculinidades* (The New Masculinity), this work draws a parallel between the training received to become an actor and the cultural training received to become a “man,” thus exposing the performative nature of masculine identity as based on sustained patterns of behaviour—in other words, acting manly.

Whereas *La Pasarela* set out to critique the male gaze, *The New Masculinity* attempts to dismantle it. Showing us how and when the object of desire is made, the performer looks for an alternative mode of being masculine, one in which he can see differently. And yet, as playwright/director/actor Guillermo Verdecchia pointed out in the follow-up discussion: How do we undo gender (or normative notions of gendered life) if we are looking for another masculinity? If patriarchy structures all social formations and infuses all models of power relations, especially in Latin America, then we need to address this question when we are suggesting a different mode of being in the world. Interestingly, the performance began by calling attention to the act of translation, and while we may be tempted to wonder what may have been lost in translation from one language to another (and perhaps from one Carlos to another), it suggests that the markers of gender—the gestures, words, appearances, and behaviour we understand as indices of masculine or feminine identity—can be constantly revised, altered, and reinterpreted to sustain or subvert the patriarchal social order.

Howard suggests that art making, if it is to be considered activist in its form and not just in content, “needs to cause something tangible to be changed or newly experienced” (7). It is clear that the participants in this conference have explored many routes with this goal in sight. The Panamerican “routes” are thus not only the paths that allow the movement of people and ideas; routes are also defined as the processes that lead to specified results and more specifically as a means to access—for instance, the route to social mobility, to a life without the threat of violence, to the rights of belonging as such. In the imagined “America” we aspire to, this itinerary necessarily exceeds national boundaries, and hence it is the task of the artists and activists committed to this vision to secure these routes or find alternate ones when these lead nowhere. The routes that I would like to see more of are those that engage with a critical and collective reflexivity in effective agency. Perhaps we can find a path that finally arrives at a more real than imaginary conception of Panamerican—one that resists the linguistic assaults of translation.

Taking theatre out of “its place” and into the streets, these collaborative actions take women out of “their place” and bring them into view, thus quickly moving from a position of invisibility to one of hypervisibility.

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“Just for Them”: LYNDA
HILL ON DIVERSITY
AND THEATRE FOR
YOUNG AUDIENCES

BY RACHEL PENNY



© Gregory Edwards. Thomas Olajide, Ijeoma Emesowum, Allison Edwards-Crewe and Dienye Waboso in Theatre Direct's production of *Binti's Journey* by Marcia Johnson.

FOUNDED BY DAVID CRAIG IN 1976, THEATRE DIRECT BRINGS CULTURALLY DIVERSE AND THEMATICALLY CHALLENGING WORK TO YOUNG AUDIENCES IN TORONTO AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY. WITH A STRONG COMMITMENT TO COMMISSIONING AND PRODUCING NEW WORK, THEATRE DIRECT HAS WORKED WITH SOME OF CANADA'S MOST CELEBRATED PLAYWRIGHTS, TACKLING COMPELLING STORIES WITH COMPASSION AND SINCERITY. LYNDA HILL, THE COMPANY'S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SINCE 2001, HAS STRENGTHENED THE COMPANY'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, USHERING THEATRE DIRECT INTO AN EXCITING ERA AT ITS NEW HOME AT THE WYCHWOOD ART BARN IN TORONTO. LYNDA HAS WORKED FOR MANY YEARS IN THE ARTS AND WITH YOUNG AUDIENCES ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND IS PROUD OF HER WORK SOLIDIFYING THEATRE DIRECT AS A "YOUNG, CULTURALLY DIVERSE, FEMINIST THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE." I SPOKE WITH HER ABOUT THE UNIQUE WORK THAT THEATRE DIRECT DOES WITH YOUNG AUDIENCES, THE CHALLENGES AND REALITIES OF CREATING CULTURALLY DIVERSE AND ACCESSIBLE WORKS OF THEATRE, AND WHAT THE NEXT STEPS FOR TYA (THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES) MIGHT BE.

Rachel Penny: Thanks so much for meeting with me today. Maybe you could begin by telling us about the work done by Theatre Direct and about your own background in the theatre?

Lynda Hill: [Theatre Direct has a] really strong commitment to commissioning and developing new work and trying to bring forward some of the more contemporary voices. I think I would say it also has a more urban perspective. It's always had a tradition of striving for a plurality of voices, for example evidenced in its commitment to regular production of work by Aboriginal playwrights. In fact, my first directing opportunity with the organization was the production of *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* by Drew Hayden Taylor, and that was a national tour of a work that tried to bring the perspective of young Aboriginal men and their challenges as teens living on reserve to the stage. There's also a strong tradition of translations—English premieres of Quebec-based playwrights. When I applied to lead the company, it was a bit like inheriting the family business because they had given me my first directing opportunity, also my first acting job out of theatre school. My background, and my formative years as a theatre artist were in the areas of culturally diverse work and Aboriginal theatre, and feminist theatre. My initial period of training as a director and a dramaturge was at Nightwood Theatre. I was heavily involved in Cahoots Theatre Projects and their first conference dedicated to what at that time were called "visible minority playwrights," a conference called Write About Now. And then I was chair of the Native Theatre School, which we transitioned later to the Centre for Indigenous Theatre.

[These experiences] were reflective of my politics and my focus as a theatre artist and I simply tried to bring that sensibility to our work here. I like to consider Theatre Direct a young, culturally diverse, feminist theatre for young people. A lot of my dramaturgical and commissioning choices are rooted in that. I'm conscious that the majority of our new works have young women at the centre of the story. So many plays for young audiences have a young boy at the centre, usually a young boy who's on the threshold of change, or on the edge of danger, or at risk, and it was thought that this was the "universal" depiction of childhood. I thought this wasn't true, and we needed more remarkable young women at the centre of our stories. And naturally those young women also

reflected the diversity of our audiences either through productions like *Beneath the Banyan Tree* with the young woman Anjali who is new to Canada from India, or *Binti's Journey*, where Binti herself is a young girl in Malawi. That's a very comfortable place for me to work in, telling those stories.

RP: Who makes up the Theatre Direct audience?

LH: "Young audiences" is a huge term and young audiences in Toronto simply reflect Toronto. Because we serve primarily the public school system and Catholic school board as well, we have naturally an incredible diversity there, including many new Canadians. Many of these students also have English as a second language, and so that continues to influence our work and compels us to ensure that the work reflects that experience [...] Instead of one company trying to serve what is the second largest school board in North America, we are trying to engage frequently with our local schools and find multiple points of engagement between the art and the child: in their role as the student, their role as a young person. And we've really successfully seen that happening in this community. Our audience in this neighbourhood is a cross-section of Toronto because you have quite a bit of wealth in the neighbourhood, and then a lot of hidden poverty, and a lot of stressed middle class. And then you will see within that one classroom, for example, five rich kids, five super poor kids, two new Canadians, and relative middle class. General theatres are always talking about "Who is our audience?"—But we've never worried about who our audience is, we *know* who our audience is. The issue for us is more about always trying to resist the idea of addressing an audience as a kind of monolithic, homogenized force. We are becoming more and more interested now in who's marginalized *within* that large young audience and we see that has to do with economic marginalization, with linguistic marginalization, etc.

RP: I was hoping you could expand on a few key ideas that come up in the mandate and vision of Theatre Direct. The first thing that stood out to me was your mandate to "present theatre that is socially conscious and reflects and interprets the diversity of the Canadian experience." Could you tell me a bit about what this means to Theatre Direct?

LH: If you're speaking directly to an



audience, and your audience is diverse, it's your responsibility to create work that speaks to them and that reflects their diversity, so it's kind of just common sense.

RP: Another phrase that stood out was the goal of “[nurturing] our audience’s appreciation of the arts and each other through community and education-based programs.” Could you expand on the educational mandate of Theatre Direct, perhaps specifically as it relates to diversity?

LH: Obviously in the content of the work there’s a lot that a young person can discover about the world around them. So much is unexplained to them by the adult world, so there’s a great opportunity to unpack some very complex subject matter. In terms of their appreciation of each other, by telling a really compelling story about a young person in an extraordinary circumstance or placing complex characters on stage, there’s that fundamental recognition, that process of discovering and recognizing one’s own

character, one’s own weaknesses and strengths, and often those of their peers through a character’s actions. I think in a deeper sense that in a very isolated society—where we’re all so screen-based—being in the same room together, experiencing, feeling something together, being moved together is a really powerful humanizing force, and ultimately it’s a tool for empathy. Theatre is an opportunity to witness someone’s pain and through that process to unlock that empathetic capacity in the child [...] Unless a teacher is willing to really make a classroom a safe emotional space, there are very few opportunities for a child to experience human pain or love or joy. This is taught so much through rote but it’s not experienced.

RP: In producing work for young audiences, I imagine it’s important to build a connection with the adults in the lives of those young people. Can you describe Theatre Direct’s relationship with the adult members of its community?

LH: I like to think that our relationship with parents or teachers is a little bit different than in a family theatre context. When you produce a work for families you’re really striving to give a little something to everybody. In some ways we’re less concerned with pleasing the adults and more concerned with coaxing them into the role of *witness*, so that they can sit back and observe their student or their child’s experience of theatre that’s been created *just for them*. And when we’ve done our job really well, we actually can alter the relationship between the child and the parent or the child and the teacher. When a young person sees something they feel moved or outraged or compelled by, all of a sudden that child is expressing those ideas or those feelings and the teacher sees an aspect of that child revealed that they’ve never seen before. And that can alter the culture of the classroom. We consistently underestimate children: we have high expectations but we underestimate their capacity to absorb complex subject matter. *Binti’s Journey* is an example. It’s

a piece that doesn't pull any punches around HIV/AIDS. There's a mixed audience of girls and boys witnessing a scene where a young girl talks about being raped by her uncle, or a girl breastfeeding on stage, or a girl getting her first period. It's sensitive stuff but it's presented in a way that's so honest and direct that the teacher who's prepared for some grossed out reaction from the boys sees a shift in the boy's energy, one of sympathy or one of discovery, and says, "Hey that guy is pretty amazing, I thought he was going to act like a goof and look, what a young man." I think that's the political thing. I like messing with people's expectations of young people.

RP: An idea that comes up frequently in conversations about theatre for young audiences is that children and young adults engage differently with works of theatre than adult audiences do. Your values statement reflects this with the phrase, "Our audience inspires us to tackle big questions in the same way children and youth ask them, honestly, directly, courageously and passionately." What is different about how young audiences engage with theatre, and specifically with diversity?

LH: The idea that young audiences react "more honestly" is a bit condescending, simply because they haven't been taught the rituals of theatergoing. If you dig deeper, [young audiences] will respond more *kinetically* to a work that isn't engaging. We do learn how to sit still as adults. If [young audiences] are bored, they will start to shift. While they might not make noise, you can feel the shift in the audience, you can feel their bodies drop when the story has lost its power. However, if the work has a really profound emotional impact, they'll do the same thing. The younger kids will shift and sometimes that gets confused with boredom and in fact they're *feeling* so much that they're shifting. You have to learn to read an audience in a way that isn't always being interpreted as judgment. I think when it comes to diversity the same thing applies. When you're telling a story to an entire school of Tamil Canadians and it's a story that a) is weak and b) bears no resemblance to their experience and c) is condescending in its approach, naturally there's going to be a response from that audience that says, "This isn't working." But I also don't think it's as simple as saying that in order for a Tamil audience

to respond to a piece of theatre it must have Tamil content.

RP: Of course.

LH: I think it's not just rooted in the audience reaction, that value statement. It's rooted in a sense of responsibility. If you're aware of the needs and realities of your audience, then you *must* try to tackle subject matter that speaks to that or that's relevant for that young audience.

RP: You participated in a panel on diversity in theatre for young audiences at the Prismatic Festival in 2012. The main question was addressing a gap in diversity, where TYA is perceived as having achieved more success in diversity than theatre for general audiences. Do you see a different attitude towards diversity in theatre for young audiences?

LH: I don't know if it's about a different attitude.

... BEING IN THE SAME ROOM TOGETHER, EXPERIENCING, FEELING SOMETHING TOGETHER, BEING MOVED TOGETHER IS A REALLY POWERFUL HUMANIZING FORCE, AND ULTIMATELY IT'S A TOOL FOR EMPATHY.

RP: Maybe a different reality?

LH: I think the way I tried to tackle that [at Prismatic] is that the way diversity is addressed in TYA is beginning to shift, or has shifted for us. For a long period of time there were a number of companies that were very boldly "colour-blind" casting in that sense. And that was really great. [As an example], our early production of *Andrew's Tree* is about a family and in that family there was a Filipino actor, a white sister, and a black little brother and it made perfect sense. It was true to the story and the children never questioned it. It was a really fun way to push against ideas of family. But I don't subscribe to "Disney casting" or "rainbow casting"—where we're going to try and have every colour of the rainbow on stage "just 'cause." Everything has to be supported dramaturgically, but also it's still not addressing the question of content and story. If you're doing a play that's so absolutely rooted in a white British middle-class sensibility, how are we really pushing things, or serving that issue, by just casting diversely? For us, we started to look at how we could go a little bit deeper, look at the content of

the story, at who's telling the story, at the world of the play.

In *Beneath the Banyan Tree*, it is absolutely a brown world that we are entering. It is a South Asian family and we are guests in that cultural reality, and the one white character is the outsider. A lot of plays in the Canadian or British canon have the opposite, where it's the one brown person in the white world. In the case of *Binti's Journey*, it's entirely an African, sub-Saharan reality and there's no white guest [...] *Binti* is a very compelling character; she's flawed, she's a bit arrogant. She's not exoticized; it's not about a tour through ethnic Africa. The culture isn't there to "teach us" about Africa. Our next big challenge is to bring in more and more of the amazing culturally diverse playwrights who are working in the indie theatre scene. We would certainly love to see more of those young writers choose to write for young audiences. We have to do a bit more

advocacy work ourselves within the established indie companies and say, "Hey, send us your awesome playwrights!"

RP: What does that sort of advocacy and outreach look like?

LH: The best way is through a project that brings as many of those voices into the room as possible. With our production of *The Demonstration*, I commissioned five diverse playwrights to write a solo work on the theme of democracy. And from there, the stories were devised and became a full production [...] Sometimes it's just about numbers and a theme, and then from there you can at least bring those voices forward. From there maybe three out of the ten go, "Oh my God I love writing for young audiences." Others really may not have any interest. Others may see it as a further ghettoization of their work, which I find really unfortunate. Because ultimately as a writer are you not seeking the largest platform for your voice? And there couldn't be a larger platform than theatre for young audiences. I mean, an indie theatre show could *maybe* see in a successful run in a backspace *maybe* 1200 people.

RP: [laughing] Maybe!

LH: Yeah, maybe! And *Binti's Journey* has toured across this country. It's been seen by thousands of young people. What better opportunity for a playwright? We have some work to do in

terms of constantly advocating for this form as very legitimate and very powerful form.

RP: Does the fact that you have such a firmly established audience base have something to do with the different way you approach diversity—different from, for example, general theatre, which is constantly struggling to expand the audience and attract new members with programming?

LH: I don't know what the explanation is. Unless you are a theatre that's devoted to a culturally specific mandate—like the African diasporic experience or the Hispanic, or the multiple realities of experiences of Asian and South Asian culture and so on—that may be easy because you're speaking specifically to one audience. But there's still a diversity challenge there; they still have to look at how to bring in more people not just from the very culture they're speaking to, but people who've not yet experienced that. In terms of the established mid-size or general theatre audiences, partly that's just the evolution of our theatre from a kind of institutional, class-based practice in Canada and Britain and the States, and they're all freaking out trying to engage new audiences. And the model doesn't work, they need to change that up [...]

I think so much of the indie to mid-size theatre is rooted in the artistic director's vision. And if the artistic director's vision and artistic sensibility are not rooted in a culturally diverse sensibility, [and] he, primarily he, or she wants to tell stories that have nothing to do with different cultural viewpoints, then they are not going to know how to crack that issue. A theatre company survives on the strength of the artistic leadership. It won't be until we see some changes in that leadership—more opportunities for young diverse playwrights or directors to be trained in leadership opportunities—that we will see some real change in terms of diversity.

RP: How can we ensure access to theatre/culture for a diverse range of young people?

LH: We really work very hard to remove financial barriers. I think it's ridiculous that children or their families have to pay for theatre. It's their cultural right, it's part of their education, it's part of our investment in them as young people, future citizens. But that's not

the reality across the board. At our theatre here, we try to keep costs low—free wherever possible—by working in partnership with school boards and trying to increase awareness with our supporters. We don't have a massive fundraising base, but we certainly have been educating our public audience here about the need to keep the theatre experience free. And I think that's the best way: we have to reduce the financial barriers, reduce geographical barriers through touring, and reduce the content or aesthetic barriers by creating work that is accessible without being overly simplistic.

RP: How does touring fit into the goal of making theatre more accessible?

LH: The way we tour, we either do venue touring, or when we do spend time in the school, we really prefer to spend all day in the school. We present the show, and then we do educational activities and workshops [led by the artists] through the rest of the day. We started backing away entirely from the idea of two shows a day. The number of shows isn't as important to us as the quality of the experience. Impact is measured differently for us. After Mike Harris in Ontario removed a lot of subsidy to the schools—removed arts consultants budgets and so on—it became a bit too threatening to our mandate to continue a two-show a day [model]. But moving to a full day program was a way of protecting our mandate and protecting our right to take on really complex shows. Because if we know that the teacher doesn't have the capacity to prep a show properly, or to unpack a show, then they're going to demand something that isn't going to rock the boat. They're going to want something simple and entertaining. For us, to try to do something like *Binti's Journey* on a two-show a day tour would not work.

RP: We've been focusing primarily on cultural diversity, but, of course, diversity has many meanings. How is Theatre Direct working to incorporate young people with a range of abilities into its programming?

LH: When you start to look at a young audience, you start to look at the diversity within that young audience, and then at the most marginalized or voiceless in that young audience. Zero to six is already a huge segment. Then within that, you could break it down to babies, toddlers, preschoolers, kindergartners—there's four companies

right there that could specialize in that kind of work [...] But also then you look at the number of children with autism or on the autism spectrum disorder, so we are creating a new work with Chicago Children's Theatre, through their Red Kite Project, which is an amazing program for children with autism. The audience is ten kids at a time, in order to provide the most intimate of exchanges. There's a whole technique around how you play for and engage children with autism. And we have a work in development exploring the life of Emily Eaton, a girl with CP who fought and won the right to attend a regular public school and not be in a separate school for children with disabilities. We're looking at that as a theme and an issue that we'll explore.

RP: So that would be a work for your regular touring schools?

LH: Yeah, and it's very early days, but even within that development process we are just beginning to explore what is the appropriate and respectful depiction of a young person with disabilities on stage. To ask: How does one do that in a way that's artful, respectful, and sustainable? So that's another challenge.

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*For any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing,
whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere,
the mirror up to nature.*
– Hamlet, III ii

“Un black” is the politically correct way of naming a person of African descent. “Un noir” is not. The 7-Eleven, or *dépanneur*, is referred to as “Larabe,” regardless of the real or supposed origin of its owner, who is most likely legally and culturally French. Canadian norms dictating what is “okay” and what is “not” need not apply in the incredibly complex and seemingly contradictory cultural environment that is France.

Forum Theatre is one of many techniques used by the Théâtre de l’opprimé Paris—founded by Augusto Boal during his exile from Brazil’s dictatorship in the 1970s and currently led by Artistic Director Rui Frati—to expose and counter systemic oppression. Using Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a theoretical basis, Boal formulated a method based on the oppressor–oppressed relationship, a method that has been interpreted and adapted to myriad contexts by an expanding number of international troupes/artists/animations/activists/etc. The method functions against systems of internalized oppression, “the cop in the head” according to Boal.

In Forum Theatre, the character is the script; the only fixed lines of what might be called a “script” in traditional theatre are immediately wiped aside when the first audience intervention occurs, leaving only actors and their rehearsed characters. In the version presented by the Théâtre de l’opprimé Paris, those characters are the Protagonist (Oppressed), the Antagonist (Oppressor), a witness, or a victim (with no limit on the number of actors or audience-members playing these roles). Victims cannot defend themselves in this context, whereas the Protagonist attempts to but fails, indirectly beckoning the audience to help. The Joker (host) encourages the dialogue between audience and actors. This Joker, like the king’s jester, plays a dual role, conscious of the action onstage (the king) and of the discussion brought by the spectators (the court), being the only person able to address and question both.

In this interactive format, each scene of a Forum asks a question and uses the scene’s conflict to indirectly present the audience with that question. The spectators are invited to act to resolve the conflict, turning them from passive audience to “spect-actors.” Unlike the question that begins a thesis and seeks an answer, the creators of a Forum make no claims to knowing the answer, even denying the possibility of a singular one.

Why bother? Can’t people resolve their conflicts through discussion or mediation? If the problems are stated and known, then perhaps. But if not, then this is where we must consider the “cop in the head”—the internalized oppression. Under dictatorship, an external presence is necessary to punish free expression; an internalized oppression exists when people no longer need this external presence to silence themselves, when they will not attempt to overcome their situations, and may even no longer be aware of the oppressive nature of their role in

a particular relationship (with another person, organization, state, etc.). Using different Theatre of the Oppressed techniques developed by Boal (and others) and in continuous development/experimentation, the Théâtre de l’opprimé Paris attempts to expose “the cop in the head” of the people we are invited to work with. Sometimes, unsurprisingly, we end up exposing our own “cops.”

Laïcité

On November 13, 2012, the troupe of the Théâtre de l’opprimé Paris performed a Forum for a Christian organization with a strong social orientation that worked primarily with homeless populations. As usual, we presented three scenes over the course of two hours, and different audience interventions provoked an opening of dialogue among a particularly engaged audience. All went as expected for me as an actor, my role of Oppressor well

rehearsed and ready for anything—that is, until an intervention in the third scene. The scene, entitled “Laïcité,” roughly translated as “Secularism,” saw me playing the role of a British expat questioning a French guiding principle and collection of laws that deny religious symbols in public institutions.

These 1882-1905 laws (which have been continuously updated over the last century) affect students in public schools, nurses in hospitals, and any government employees (from librarians to political figures). The laws, based on ideas of liberty arising throughout the Renaissance and highlighted during the 1789 revolution, reject the historic cycles of authority and repression by the Catholic Church and its tyrannical

godly-ordained rulers. In an attempt to preclude future religious repression, Laïcité laws prohibit public expression of “cult” in order to protect everyone’s right to practise whatever they chose to, in private. This is not Pauline Marois’ campaign version of Laïcité; a crucifix pendant is as taboo as a kippa, a hijab, etc. In this version, the French state pays for the construction of mosques and the maintenance of temples in order to allow people a private place of worship and to prevent overflowing congregations from praying on the (public) street (the Grande Mosque de Strasbourg was built with financing from many different sources, but with the bulk of it from the municipality).

However, as just as this law might seem, there is something in it that, at the time of performance, did not seem right from my real-life perspective as a Canadian-American-French-Jew with Egyptian and Polish roots. My multicultural identity made it difficult to relate to a law designed in a country where Canadian notions of multiculturalism do not exist. Beyond the character that I was portraying, my real self started feeling discomfort playing “defender of religious freedom” as the Oppressor among a French Catholic audience, a discomfort that stemmed from this country’s approach to distinguishing between culture and religion. Catholic culture and artefacts still reign in their near ubiquity throughout the country. “But, culture isn’t religion” is the subtle distinction echoed by co-workers and audience members to defend the heavy presence of that one particular religion in France. This is a subtlety that I do

Rehearsing Oppression (?): Forum Theatre at the Théâtre de l’opprimé in Paris

BY JULIEN NAGGAR

not understand. Where does culture end and religion begin? Is there not, for example, a religiosity to nationalism?

As the scene unfolded and more spectators came on stage to confront the Oppressor, I started feeling that I was actually the Protagonist facing a room of oppressive theophobia. The discussion moved to freedom of expression, religious or national, to the right of getting a tattoo, and yet they still saw my character—and me through the extension of my sharing an opinion with the character—as Oppressor. “There was at least one other point in history when religion was denied in the public sphere (that is, all but one religion). Was it the Spanish Inquisition?” me/my character asked an outraged audience, represented by one of their members on stage. An entire audience was furious with me. I was their Oppressor in the scene, but they were my Oppressors in real life. They were incensed over my audacious denial of this fundamental tenet of French society, even going so far as to have a spect-actor come on stage to defend France’s values of “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, Laïcité” (it should be noted that France’s public edifices only have the first three words engraved above their entrances). Was something preventing me from seeing religion as a truly oppressive force? Was the “cop” in my head or theirs? What happens when one challenges an entire society’s values? What happens when one does so unintentionally, as I did in this and other instances, not being aware of the weight that Laïcité held and still holds in France?

In confrontation with rejection from an entire audience, the notion of Oppressor-Oppressed broke down, and in this powerful moment my understanding of “oppression” shifted. I started to understand why many practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed prefer using Protagonist-Antagonist descriptors in the place of Oppressor-Oppressed. Oppression is systemic. There are no good guys and bad guys. There is not a black and white binary, but a complex spectrum of interlacing greys feeding into each other and removing agency from actors (those who act) who try and often fail to make things better against a system designed to make things worse, eventually accepting and feeding into that same system. Those interlacing greys acknowledge that Oppressors in one system can be Oppressed in another. After the performance was done, some spectators “complimented” me on how unbearable I was as the British character.

When spectators intervene onstage in a Forum, often times an attempt at fixing a difficult situation results in reinforcing cycles of oppression. The question of our scene on that day aimed to address our victim’s inability to wear her hijab while working as a nurse in a public hospital. She was forgotten in every intervention, and I was consistently in the position of speaking on her behalf, as if she couldn’t speak for herself.

Multiculturalism (France) and me

I was raised by a French parent in an Anglophone neighbourhood of a bilingual city in a francophone province in a primarily Anglophone country. Multiculturalism makes sense to me. And though undoubtedly a Canadian value, it is one that I always assumed held sway throughout the West. In France, this is not necessarily the case. Whereas in Canada multiculturalism implies a mosaic, a discussion among culturally different perspectives, in France the difference of perspectives comes from within the spectrum of historically agreed-upon foundational French values. The idea of a separate cultural community that professes values other than those of Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité is problematic. Of course, the interpretations of those

three words vary and allow for a political range that goes from far left to far right, but doing so without straying from the history of the Republic. The closest translation of multiculturalism in French is *communautarisme*, a word that carries the pejorative implication of communal radicalism. Upon becoming a French citizen, one is expected to become culturally French.

This appears to have worked pretty well for France in the past, but I should be clear at this point that I don’t quite understand how it could, as it seems to reject difference. However, in seemingly rejecting difference, in mandating public homogeneity, it does aim for equal treatment of all by neutralizing the superficial differences that human beings use to separate in-groups from out-groups. In an ideal world, that would make sense; but again, I personally reserve many doubts and value Canada’s multicultural approach as a more ideal way of dealing with supposed difference. I reserve judgment, though, having just begun navigating the French system. It also does not serve well to compare the two countries, as, for example, Canadian identity is not determined by its Charter of Rights. That Charter is not emblazoned above the doorways to its public institutions. Canada is a much younger country built around a rapidly changing mosaic, as opposed to an entrenched set of historically based values. And while I may idealize Canada, I recognize that Canadian application of multiculturalism remains far from ideal.

In recent years, a crisis of national identity in France has arisen as a result of the combination of this strong national identity with increasing immigration from former colonies and from Eastern Europe. The immigrants to France have been poorly assimilated, and those who have adapted have faced high discrimination. A person named Karim with a tanned complexion is less likely to get a job and is more likely to be asked where he is from (the assumption being “not from France”) even if he is a third generation French person. In a place where to be French is to be French—regardless of name, supposed origin, skin colour, etc.—the consistent discrimination has increased social and financial inequality in a system that has fought so hard for equality. This inequality has contributed to a movement in the “banlieues” (marginal suburbs that are home to many ostracized communities) to find cultural communities that inhabitants can identify with, which may not necessarily be in line with what it means to be “French.” These communities are born of a rejection of a system that has not been able to keep up with its own ideals. One is infinitely more likely to find a “Turc” (Shawarma stand) in the banlieues than one is to find a bistro. It should be noted that this “not keeping up” is not for lack of trying; legislators have put enormous effort into expanding laws against discrimination.

When a large subset of society rejects the existence of different communities while at the same time treating the members of those communities as different, the result is toxic. The contradiction is unmanageable. How can a young person identify as French when he walks into some neighbourhoods and is treated as an outsider? This environment is difficult to explain; the contradictions seem insurmountable. The opposing systems become very difficult to navigate for a Canadian not (initially) acquainted with the history and politics that end up having a direct effect on workshops and forums. Oppression is systemic. Individuals act the oppression that surrounds them. They are responsible for their actions, but those actions are heavily guided by internal and external triggers. When parents and teachers disagree, how can a Forum help if the creators of the Forum don’t understand that the conflict rests on the teachers trying to bring students to a French “norm” and that that is culturally acceptable? How does the immigrant parent understand that and

accept that? Is this the perfect example of systemic oppression? How do we live in a system that is so often oppressive? What are our options? Which battles do we accept as lost and which ones do we focus on? The Theatre of the Oppressed rejects the fatality of things, and uses the identification of these systems to guide the opening of possibilities and actions.

Coming from a different background, the experience has been humbling. What is snow to the person who has never seen it? How does one understand and relate that new experience? I often relied on my co-workers to inform me of events that I misinterpreted or didn't see at all. How do I "fight" oppression when it is veiled by the subtleties of an unfamiliar culture? The best example is a linguistic one, because French in France is a hyper-specific language with layers upon layers of subtext, and this subtext has different connotations than its Quebecois counterpart. In Quebec, the word "Tu" is commonly heard, even among strangers, to no consequence. During the improvisation of a Forum in Amiens, I accidentally said "Tu" to a stranger and the negative audience reaction was so strong that the guillotine seemed the only appropriate punishment for my disrespect. The question being asked by the Forum was forgotten and this became the subject of the discussion. An unintentional remark provoked a reveal of a whole other problem. The method emphasizes listening and non-judgment, meaning that even errors like these can open up a positive and fertile discussion. Sometimes, in seeking clarification, I've inadvertently triggered incredibly important dialogues that would have stayed masked without my cultural ignorance.

Accidents and cultural ignorance can be as fruitful as they are harmful. My ignorance of the extreme racism facing Romanians in France means that I could miss the opportunity for discussion of the topic during a workshop. What else have I missed? Ironically, I have had to learn commonly held French stereotypes in order to fulfill one of our goals, which is to fight them. We do so by calling them out when they arise and, without judgment, allowing a free discussion on the subject. This often means that the most horrifying stereotypes are revealed, but by bringing these internalized feelings to light, we can actually address them and rationally let the people in the workshops break them themselves without suggesting a "better" way to think about things. The idea of "better" is absurd and arrogant; I am not in the shoes of the person dealing with a problem, and I never will be. It is for them to autonomously find their own conclusions, because they are the only ones who can. Were I to express judgment, I would be performing the role of external "cop," whereas that job is already done constantly by the "cop in the head" that polices all free thought, along with real cops policing public expression. In France, a publicly racist remark is punishable by a fine; fashion designer John Galliano was fined 6000 euros in 2011 for his anti-Semitic tirade. French society has done a decent job at rendering many prejudices taboo; but a taboo does not cure the illness, it only treats the symptoms. By closing off the possibility for stating those deeply held beliefs, they remain—silenced, but not broken.

Most days are spent just asking questions and waiting for answers. When I don't know what to ask, the method does the asking through exercises. During a workshop game involving asking questions of the group, one teenager asked, "All those without socks (stand up and change places)." One teenager stood, and the rest laughed. I had no idea why. What was going on? I suddenly realized that I also wasn't wearing socks, so I stood up to change seats with the subject of what must've been some cruel attack, and the laughter was turned against me. The original subject, relieved, joined in the laughter and so did I. A dangerous

moment became convivial. As I sat down, I finally understood that "no socks" implied poverty, implied careless parenting, implied a hierarchy in this particular group, and I don't think I have ever been so happy to have forgotten to do laundry that week.

The troupe: Its present state and evolution

I have been working with the Théâtre de l'opprimé Paris for a year, and am consistently awed by the "Ah-ha!" moments of autonomous self-discovery; those moments when spect-actors finally express their internalized feelings of oppression. Equally impressive are the moments when people recognize their own roles as oppressors. We often talk about the play within a play used in *Hamlet* to expose Claudius' crime, using theatre to hold a mirror up to nature; in Theatre of the Oppressed, we get to watch the audience from the perspective of that mirror. The Joker is Hamlet in Act III Scene ii, standing behind his actors and watching the audience for a reaction (moving the king from stage to audience). I have learned and discovered a multitude of perspectives from this society through the troupe's work with teachers, students, community groups, business people, bureaucrats, homeless populations, social workers, immigrant mothers, prison inmates, and with any group willing to address a problem, start a conversation, and empower its community.

Boal spent several years in exile in Paris developing the method. It has continued to evolve in this city, guided by Rui Frati and the troupe of about ten actors. I personally fear Forums with Frati as Joker. He enjoys testing and challenging the structure of the traditional Forum, playing with its form by, for example, spontaneously halting a scene, pointing to me, and stating, "This character has something important to say"—as the gaze of an entire audience shifts to my suddenly empty head. Delphine Dey, a member of the troupe, creates forums from contemporary theatrical texts (most recently from *La Terre* by José Ramón Fernández, performed by the troupe in April 2012). Antonia Hayward and her own troupe, *Si tu vois Adrienne...*, take theatre to the streets to perform historically based, fictional, musical, interactive, and often politicized neighbourhood walks that engage and provoke. Vincent Vidal and Leonardo Frati have developed a range of new games, while Maria Teresa Ferreira and Toninho do Carmo integrate music into theirs. Manuela Brasil incorporates Capoeira techniques into her workshops; it is impressive to see this woman use a skilful manoeuvre to silence a provocative remark from a larger-than-life male inmate.

Those are just a few examples of the many ways different members of the troupe are applying/evolving the techniques. The Théâtre de l'opprimé Paris remains a multifaceted company. Once or twice a year, the company presents what could be referred to as traditional (non-interactive) plays at its venue in the 12th arrondissement; in November 2012 we performed *Nelson de Rio* by Frati and Isabel Ribeiro, a French-Portuguese biographical musical play of Nelson Rodrigues, the celebrated and incongruous Brazilian writer who, while supporting the dictators of his time, still saved the lives of countless artists under that same dictatorship, including Boal. The plays provide an opportunity to assemble and work together in our own multicultural yet French community, putting into a different kind of practice the ideals that unite us: autonomy, responsibility, and solidarity. While Hamlet gets lost in the past, we look together to a better future through discussion. We can aspire to goals best (under)stated by an enlightened twelve-year-old from one of our workshops: "Maybe there are alternatives."



THE PERFORMATIVITY OF EVIDENCE:

Oral History Testimony in Aboriginal Land Claims

BY
MANPREET (PREETI) DHALIWAL

WE NEED A HISTORY THAT DOES NOT SAVE IN ANY SENSE OF THE WORD;
WE NEED A HISTORY THAT PERFORMS. – JANE BLOCKER



The persuasive capacity of evidence in a courtroom is intimately linked to performativity. Oral history evidence is crucial in Aboriginal land claims because it demonstrates the peoples' connection to the land pre-sovereignty, which is an essential element to establish title. However, whether oral histories are performative in court—that is, whether the words *do* something in the final decision—depends on whether they are admitted as evidence and how they are interpreted by the judge.¹ Unlike traditional testimonial evidence, oral history evidence does not come directly from the person who witnessed the event. It is told over and over again to new people in order to pass it through generations. This nonsynchronous,

SINCE JUDGES' DECISIONS RELY HEAVILY ON WHAT OCCURS LIVE AT FIRST INSTANCE—OR RATHER, THE JUDGE'S PERCEPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED—THEATRICALITY MAY ALSO PLAY A ROLE IN INCREASING A WITNESS' BELIEVABILITY.

nonlinear, and multivocal nature challenges the common law's positivist conception of knowledge, which relies on a direct path between the witness and what the witness is describing.

Using *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (the foundational Canadian case on Aboriginal land claims) as a case study, this paper explores the performativity of oral history evidence presented in Aboriginal land claims before Canadian courts. I approach this paper as a non-Indigenous person. Writing from a legal background and through critical race feminist, post-colonial, and performance studies lenses, I seek to find methods of decolonization that frustrate, neutralize, or offset dominance within existing spaces and systems. I believe that decolonizing the legal archive and the courtroom requires a recognition and (re)bridging of the separation between mind and body. It requires a deconstruction of taught binaries—rationality and emotionality,

sense and reason, true and false—cultural constructs so deeply embedded that they have become intrinsic, innate. These dualisms create hierarchies of knowledge that delegitimize embodied ways of knowing. They deny that history is memory and that embodied practice offers a way of knowing.

The embodied nature of oral history destabilizes the legal archive and legal ways of knowing because it expands and disrupts law's attachment to the straight line between the knower and the thing known, as well as its textual orientation. The common law is logocentric: it privileges written word over embodied experience. When presented as evidence, oral history disorders legal convention by

advancing participatory, dynamic, and intimate experience that highlights particularities and interrogates context through a counter-hegemonic space. I believe this counter-hegemonic space is an interval of time—an opening of hidden and multiple vocalities—that can contribute to a process of decolonization by building a performance-based repertoire within the legal archive.

Connections between Law and Performance Studies:
What is performativity?
When is evidence performative?
And who decides?

Citationality is to performance studies what precedent is to law. Citationality dictates that words are only performative when they have been heard, understood, and repeated before. Words do something and have an effect through repetition and citation rather than in the unique or present moment when they are uttered. When an utterance has been spoken many times before and is familiar, it holds the power to be performative.

Similarly, precedent refers to principles or rules established in previous legal cases; it holds persuasive power because it has been used or said before.² A persuasive legal argument is only performative if its main tenets are familiar to and recognized by the

judge—this is when it will actually *do* something (i.e., have an impact on the judge's final decision). The more a precedent has been cited, the more persuasive it is. If it has been affirmed or rendered by a high court, such as the Supreme Court of Canada or a provincial court of appeal, it is more performative than a decision written by an inferior court, such as the superior court of a province (the trial level court).

Performance, of course, plays a role when testimonies are heard at trial. Since judges' decisions rely heavily on what occurs live at first instance—or rather, the judge's perception of what happened—theatricality may also play a role in increasing a witness' believability. In fact, most witnesses are "prepped" to some extent, not with acting lessons but advice on how to behave, dress, and respond to questions. Witnesses may try to physically display their sorrow to the trier of fact so that their story, if it involves some sort of tragedy, is believable; if typical features of sadness—a frown, tears, unsteady breathing, long pauses—are not shown, the testimony may not be deemed credible. While all scenarios recounted by witnesses and understood by the court "exist as culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality" (Taylor 13), only some are labelled as such. Performances that do not fall within dominant paradigms of witness testimony and conventional ways of knowing may well be considered less reliable—or less performative—by the judge.

So who determines whether a statement is performative? Who should decide? Who is the authority? Is it the sovereign, the person who decides and suspends law? J. L. Austin closely links the performativity of a statement to its ability to do something under the eyes of the state and in accordance with convention. Yet performativity is more subjective and nuanced than this. It is a decision rendered on an individual internal level as well as a systemic, external level. What is performative to one person may not be performative to a group of people. What is performative to a group of people may not be performative before the state. Whether words *do* something is personal, a decision rendered by each individual based on his or her experience with, understanding of, and relationship to an utterance and the context in which

it is said. In a court and before the law, however, judges or triers of fact are the authority because they determine whether testimony *does* something: that is, if it is admissible and how much weight it will be given in the final decision.

A Repertoire within the Legal Archive?

Embodied Memory, Oral History, and Written Words

Rebecca Schneider traces the root of the archive to the archon: the master's house, "and, by extension, the architecture of a social memory linked to the law" (68). Diana Taylor explains that memory in colonial archives only exists in tangible forms, such as documents, maps, letters, and literary texts (18). An unchanging text is regarded as more truthful than oral history because it is perceived to be a "stable signifier" (19). In archival systems, the absence of print renders a history unofficial because it relies on living bodies as a mode of preservation, because it is perceived as contingent rather than autonomous. This neglects that archives select, arrange, and present evidence and knowledge in particular ways, contingent on who selects and arranges as well as how that individual perceives. In striving towards a single and dominant written truth, the archive inevitably reinforces values particular to certain groups, customs, cultures, and identities. It may record things that are untrue or fail to record things that are true. While boasting impartiality, objectivity, and rationality, the legal archive is inherently biased and susceptible to both unacknowledged corruption and subtle manipulations.

The archive forgets or disregards that through live recitation, repeated gesture, and ritual enactment, truthful memory can be "be housed in a body and remain" (Schneider 67). Repertoire is embodied memory. It includes performance, gesture, orality, and movement. While some courtrooms may characterize these forms as "ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (Taylor 20), they are actually "vital acts of transfer transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [...] 'behaviour'" (Taylor 2-3). In repertoire, presence is central: "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there', being part of the transmission" (Taylor 19-20). In this way, oral history holds the potential to draw judges

towards involvement and engagement alongside, within, or perhaps over their roles as detached observers. By compelling judges to recognize that meaning is created intersubjectively, oral history offsets dominant legal ways of knowing and interpreting—this capacity to create a new space for repertoire within the court activates a decolonizing process within the legal archive.

Delgamuukw v. British Columbia at Trial (1991):

The Denial of Oral History Evidence and (Re)performance Colonization

How do scholars [and judges] see beyond the norms they use to frame the experiences of others unless those norms are interrupted and exposed so that scholars are vulnerable, seeing what they believe as possibly wrong, or at least limited?

– Greg Sarris,
Keeping Slug Woman Alive

In *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (1991), the hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Nations brought a legal suit against the British Columbian and Canadian governments for recognition of absolute ownership and jurisdiction over their separate territories. Each Gitksan House has an *adaawk*, a ritualized collection of sacred oral reminiscences about the history, the ancestors, and the territories of the House. Each Wet'suwet'en House has a *kungax*, a spiritual song (or songs), dance or performance which ties the members of the House to the territories of the House. The *adaawk* and *kungax* were the plaintiffs' key evidence because they were essential to establishing the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Nations' connection with the land pre-sovereignty.

The trial judge, Chief Justice Allan McEachern, described the *adaawk* and *kungax* as a "sacred 'official' litany, or history, or recital of the most important laws, history, traditions and traditional territory of a House" (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* 1991³, 113). He also highlighted that the *adaawk* and *kungax* undergo an authentication process at feasts, where they are repeated and performed and any dissenters can object to or question their details.

Nonetheless, after 374 days of evidence, which took three and a half years to hear, McEachern rejected the entire corpus of the plaintiffs' oral histories. The judge held that the

evidence was inadmissible because he did not consider the oral chronicles and songs documenting ownership, laws, and protocols governing the land to be "direct evidence." This decision eliminated the majority of their detailed history of land ownership, use, and occupation as detailed in testimonial evidence from ethnographers, scholars, chiefs, and others.

In his reasoning, McEachern attempted to distance the oral history testimony from Western legal perceptions of truth with labels of primitivism and myth. Yet his comment that the evidence "included some material which might be classified as mythology" (114) and projected a "romantic view" (121) of the appellants' histories neglects the role of romance and myth in the common law. Is the common law not premised on fictions or semi-truths of principled rules, the rule of law and a justice that is blind? Aren't our courtrooms filled with romantic symbols and rituals that hark to the past without any present purpose—lawyers who don black robes, clerks who still call out "All rise" when judges enter, outdated cases that still hold persuasive clout? In denying the oral history evidence, McEachern rendered Aboriginal traditions of fact-telling and recording history illegitimate on bases that are shared by all histories, including the common law's archive.

Perhaps more significantly, to say that it is impossible to easily distinguish between mythological and "real" aspects of oral histories disregards that *facts* are highly constructed, whether derived from direct evidence or indirect evidence, in a linear or non-linear manner. To discount the *adaawk* and *kungax* because they are not "literally true" (121, 123) or confound "what is fact and what is belief" (123) overlooks that language and representation always determine whether facts are reasonable and admissible.

By banishing repertoire to the past and judging through the Western epistemology of "writing = memory/knowledge" (Taylor 24), McEachern unfortunately reaffirmed the continued and performative presence of colonial power. Once more, "[w]riting served as a recognized weapon in the colonial arsenal" (Taylor 41). His reasoning reveals the common law's logocentric bias and shows how heavily the separation of heart and mind (Christianized by Aquinas and then brought to secular and academic worlds through the analysis of Descartes) weighs in Canadian jurisprudence, as he states:

The plaintiffs' ancestors had no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles, slavery and starvation was [sic] not uncommon, and there is no doubt, to quote Hobbs [sic], that aboriginal life in the territory was, at best, "nasty, brutish, and short" (27).

Chief Justice McEachern, a product of legal training that divorces the heart and body from the mind, viewed mental abstraction and rational thought as epistemologically and morally superior to embodied, sensual knowing. By challenging and disrupting the evidentiary status quo, the embodied inquiry of the *adaawks* and *kungax* revealed these processes of discourse and power.

Where judging is usually based on observation that "sizes up exteriors," oral history compels triers of fact to listen differently than witness testimony; it is an "interiorizing experience" that "demands copresence" while it "decenters categories of knower and known" (Conquergood 356). Critical legal scholars have long recognized that judgement is neither rational nor determinate: persuasion in the courtroom takes place by rhetorical and emotional means as well as by logic. Consider, for example, a brain scan. To show that an accused suffers from a particular mental illness or infrequent, erratic, and triggered states of mind, defense counsel may present a brain scan with affected areas highlighted in red. The colour red is chosen with intention. Red alerts particular senses, it evokes particular emotive and bodily responses from the judge. That the oral histories were not considered "direct evidence" neglects that triers of fact are inevitably affected by the aesthetics of all evidence which draws on their senses and demands moral judgment.

Finally, the judgment ran against well-established law. British Columbia is indisputably unceded Coast Salish territory pursuant to the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*, in which King George III declared that voluntary cession is required to extinguish Aboriginal title. This document, which retains the status of constitutional law in Canada, dictates that Aboriginal title cannot be taken by conquest or

occupation but requires some form of consent (i.e., "voluntary cession"). In BC, no treaties or agreements of any kind were signed between the Plaintiffs' nations and colonizing forces.

Delgamuukw v. British Columbia on Appeal (1997): Admitting Oral History Evidence and Working towards Decolonization

The final appeal of *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* was heard at the Supreme Court of Canada (the Court) in 1997.⁴ The main issue before the Court involved the performativity of oral history evidence in the courtroom. The Court overturned the trial judge's factual findings that excluded the oral

CHIEF JUSTICE MCEACHERN, A PRODUCT OF LEGAL TRAINING THAT DIVORCES THE HEART AND BODY FROM THE MIND, VIEWED MENTAL ABSTRACTION AND RATIONAL THOUGHT AS EPISTEMOLOGICALLY AND MORALLY SUPERIOR TO EMBODIED, SENSUAL KNOWING.

history evidence and articulated a legal test for Aboriginal title so that oral history evidence can now be accepted and Aboriginal title can now be recognized. The legal test for title requires proof that (1) the land was occupied prior to sovereignty (evidence can include oral histories); (2) territorial use was continuous between the present and pre-sovereignty times; and (3) occupation was exclusive at the time of sovereignty. The Court did not, however, make a decision regarding the land dispute because it felt a new trial was necessary due to how the claim was originally stated and how the oral history evidence was treated at trial.

The Court explained that oral histories should generally be admitted as evidence, although this determination will still be made on a case-by-case basis. While oral histories need to support an "air of reality," they should be viewed in the context of countervailing evidence rather than an absolute standard (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* 1997⁵, para. 53). In contrast to the trial

judge who refused to accept oral history evidence because it disrupted legal convention and citationality, the Court recognized that Canadian common law must "come to terms with the oral histories of aboriginal societies" because for many Aboriginal nations, these are the only records of their pasts (para. 84). The failure to make an exception would not only "impose an impossible burden of proof" but "render nugatory" any rights that Aboriginal peoples have (para. 87). The legal archive would become a mode of governance against memory and (re)perform colonization.

On the one hand, the Court's treatment of oral history evidence in the final appeal of *Delgamuukw* demonstrates how space for repertoire can be made within the archive. The Court understood and accepted oral histories as follows:

Aboriginal tradition in the recording of history is neither linear nor steeped in the same notions of social progress and evolution [as Western tradition] [...] the Aboriginal historical tradition is an oral one, involving legends, stories and accounts handed down through the generations in oral form. It is less focused on establishing objective truth and assumes that the teller of the story is so much a part of the event being described that it would be arrogant to presume to classify or categorize the event exactly or for all time.

In the Aboriginal tradition the purpose of repeating oral accounts from the past is broader than the role of written history in western societies. It may be to educate the listener, to communicate aspects of culture, to socialize people into a cultural tradition, or to validate the claims of a particular family to authority and prestige . . .

Oral accounts of the past include a good deal of subjective experience. They are not simply a detached recounting of factual events but, rather, are "facts enmeshed in the stories of a lifetime". They are also likely to be rooted in particular locations, making reference to particular families and communities. This contributes to a sense that there are many histories, each characterized in part by how a people see themselves, how they define their identity in relation to

their environment, and how they express their uniqueness as a people. (para. 85)

Despite rendering a more favourable decision than the trial judge, however, the Court still signalled features of oral histories that make their admissibility and weight as evidence difficult under traditional common law rules. The Court cautioned that these “special histories” were a repository of culture and particular values involving politics and moral obligations which are “tangential” to the legal fact-finding process and “determination of the historical truth” in court (para. 86, emphasis added). This highlights the archive’s continued refusal to acknowledge “history as a confluence of many memories, texts and points of view”; to understand that even written history “is always a fabrication both illusion and product of human labor,” a “manufactured” way of knowing “in which politics, economics and ideology determine what is recorded and how” (Savran 174-175). Thus, while oral history forces courts to confront the “objectivist science” on which the law purports to operate and carves out a counter-hegemonic space within the archive, old ways of thinking remain.

This hesitance not only signals the archon’s wariness to create new spaces for repertoire but its fixation with the original. The original, so valued by the legal archive, is rendered impossible by oral history because it is always “reconstructive, always incomplete, never in thrall to the singular or self-same origin that buttresses archontic lineage” (Schneider 69). Oral history evidence instead subverts the conventions and contents of the archive, forcing it to open up a new space, a counter-hegemonic space.

Despite the creation of a counter-hegemonic space, the common law and Aboriginal law, as well as written history and embodied memory, need not be binaries. While I may have characterized the archive as the hegemonic power and the repertoire as the anti-hegemonic power, their differing modes of transmission should not place them in opposition. Instead, I believe the intervention of oral history and space for repertoire within the legal archive can be viewed as an interstitial space where a step towards decolonization can be taken.

Power, Intervention, and Co-existence

Inevitably, admitting oral histories as evidence means they will be affected by dominant figurations. While oral histories challenge and disrupt the

spatial and temporal dynamics of the courtroom, they rely on judicial authority to facilitate a counter-hegemonic space in which to do so. This positioning, while beneficial in land claims, is significant because it allows the common law to subordinate oral history to the category of fact rather than law even though the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en nations regard their oral histories as law. Yet the dominant figuration is also changing: oral histories are informing and creating new ways of knowing within the law.

The oral histories recited in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* now reside in written texts—full transcripts—at the Office of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Gitksan in Hazelton, BC, and at the University of British Columbia’s Law Library. What does this mean? Taylor argues that oral history is alive and “exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it” (20). Outside of court, storytelling is about navigating relationships: nothing has to be produced. So what happens when oral histories are archived? Are they co-opted in this translation (or transcription) process? Or is this a method of “writing back,” a way of fighting the archive by expanding it and having new ways of knowing captured and kept within it?

When a decision is appealed, the evidence is not heard and performed again; only the transcripts, the written words, are taken to higher courts. Is this a loss? The witness—the live testimony, the flesh-embodied testimony—disappears. There is no photo to see, no body to sense, no words to speak at the court of appeal. Only a transcript remains, words on a page. The stenographer, however, writes in accordance with grammatical convention, not the grammar of poetics. A court transcript is neither the place for romantic ellipses nor descriptions of a witness’ movements, tears, and physical ticks; it is a writing that belongs to the archive, a writing that serves to regulate, maintain and institutionalize what occurs in the courtroom. Oral histories, when told in court, are repositioned in relation to legal structures and dominant narratives.

Taking oral history to the courtroom means it will be translated into writing, but perhaps decolonization in the courtroom does not require a total rejection of all Western knowledge and ways. What it requires is that individuals, including judges, begin understanding that *what* they know is affected by *how* they know and considering this in all decision making and evaluative processes that involve self and other. This means that triers of fact must develop a critical

understanding of their world views and values as well as an understanding of how these inform their perspectives and purposes, particularly when they are giving weight to evidence and rendering judgment in Aboriginal land claims.

NOTES

- 1 Note that Aboriginal rights and title are Western legal concepts that attempt to describe a relationship that exists between Aboriginal interests and Western legal property systems, among Aboriginal peoples, the crown, and non-Native persons.
- 2 Note that references to “the law” in this paper refer to common law systems rather than civil law systems.
- 3 All of the quotes from the 1991 trial are from this source.
- 4 Note that at the BC Court of Appeal (the first appeal), the claim was altered in two ways. First, the claims for ownership and jurisdiction were replaced with claims for Aboriginal title and self-government. Second, the individual claims by each House were amalgamated into two communal claims, one on behalf of each nation.
- 5 All quotes from the 1997 appeal are from this source.

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A photograph of a large, ornate building with a colonnade and a palm tree in the foreground. The building has a yellow facade with red brick accents and arched windows. A large palm tree is on the right side. The title text is overlaid on a white rectangular box in the center.

Reflections on Theatre
for Development in Eritrea:
An Interview
with Jane Plastow

BY YARED MEHZENTA

In January of 2012 I travelled to Eritrea to conduct a research project that sought to investigate the long-term impact of a Theatre for Development (TfD) project that took place there in the mid-1990s. That project was facilitated by Jane Plastow, a theatre professor at the University of Leeds in the UK who has done extensive work in the field of TfD in Africa. The Eritrean Community-Based Theatre Project (ECBTP)





was initially a three-month workshop-training program, which took place between July and September of 1995.

Plastow and three of her colleagues from the UK led training sessions with fifty-seven Eritrean participants, in which they developed basic popular theatre facilitation skills as well as a smattering of other theatrical techniques. The purpose of the training program was to build the necessary skills so that the trainees could eventually become trainers themselves, and ultimately to sustain an independent and community-driven Eritrean theatre. A number of participants from the training sessions eventually formed a theatre troupe, which wrote and directed short plays and toured them around the country. This troupe continued to produce work until 1998, when political circumstances in Eritrea brought the ECBTP to an untimely end.

The following is an interview I conducted with Jane Plastow, in which she reflects on her experiences with the ECBTP. The correspondence took place in November of 2011. I wanted to get a sense from her of how she, as the facilitator, felt the project went overall. I was curious to know if she felt any differently about the project now, with the benefit of hindsight, than she did at the time her articles on the project were published—some fourteen years earlier. I also wanted to know how she compared her work in Eritrea to other countries, as I thought this might help in understanding both the peculiarities of the Eritrean context, as well as possible lessons to be learned from other places. Finally, I wanted to gain a sense from



They were all prepared to put nearly a million pounds into three touring companies in three Eritrean languages over three years before the war blew all plans out of the water.

Plastow of what prospects she saw for a future community-based theatre in Eritrea. Plastow was more than happy to discuss her experiences with me, and gave generous responses. Following the transcription, I will attempt to synthesize some of the themes that emerged from her responses with my own background research, to offer some thoughts as to what might benefit theatre in Eritrea in the future.

YM: How would you compare the work you've done in Eritrea with work you've done in other African countries? When you consider the conditions under which you work/worked in Eritrea, and compare them to the conditions in other countries, what are your thoughts on the viability of Eritrea as a place to do Theatre for Development, both now and previously?

JP: When I first went to Eritrea it was quite extraordinary, as I had complete carte blanche in terms of both form and content. This is very unusual and was a delight. I had complete state support and highly motivated ex-fighters for the first workshops, with enormous commitment to making a wonderful new country. We also had audiences in the thousands and were able to reach probably a quarter of the population with our first theatre tours. It was quite unique. This persisted for the years from 1994-1997. In 1998 we made the piece discussed in "Telling the Lions Tale," where for the first time party officials started to make noises about the villagers not being "on message"—this was in the build-up to the border war of 1998-2000 which changed everything. I refused to consider making new work for the state after the millennium show¹ as there was no longer any real freedom of speech.

YM: Looking back on the community-based theatre project you undertook in the mid-1990s, how do you feel generally about that work? What about the project are you most satisfied with or proud of? Are there aspects of the project that you either regret, or things you wish you could have accomplished?

JP: I have hugely happy memories of that time, and I think we did some really good theatre training. This subsequently spread out to a huge range of youth groups in the later 1990s, with trainees becoming trainers and the seven Eritreans who came and studied at Leeds all going back to work further with various theatre groups.² What was good was that people started to own and develop the work themselves. So a group of trainees started an Oxfam-sponsored group after the 1996 training which made and toured very good work about FGM and dowry payments. In hindsight I rather cringe at the first HIV/AIDS play I made, which had a rather stereotypical portrayal of key agents in passing on the virus.

YM: I'm curious about the ECBTP's relationship to the state's development agenda. Based on your characterization of your relationship with Alemseged Tesfai in the early 1990s, and his enthusiasm for the arts, I get the impression that the state was very receptive to the idea of community-based arts, and was committed to fostering a tradition of free artistic expression. Would you say this is accurate? Did you experience any conflicts of interest between the kind of work you wanted to do, and the overarching state agenda, over the course of the project? That is, were there any state-imposed parameters to the project that you found to be limiting?

JP: I first went on condition that we could make theatre about whatever the participants decided to be important. The state was massively supportive—funding all participants for three-month training courses and touring expenses. I only raised the money for the Europeans coming over to do the training. Alemseged in particular wanted Eritreans after years of being

closed off from the world to have access to as wide a range of arts as possible and he was very important at this time. There are still important Eritreans who care passionately about the arts but this conflicts with the control freak-ery of the state apparatus.

YM: You mentioned in your article "Alemseged Tesfai in Service to Eritrean Liberation" that Alemseged was "deeply suspicious as to whether [the NGOs] really had anything worthwhile to offer Eritrea." But at the same time, the ECBTP, like so many of these kinds of projects, was funded by NGOs like Oxfam and Christian Aid. I'm wondering if that additional factor created any tensions in the project—either between yourself and the NGOs, or between Alemseged/the Eritrean government and the NGOs? Or were the various "agendas" more or less aligned?

JP: The work would never have happened without outsiders funding, as I had to raise the funds to take over training teams for months at a time. The first funders were Rockefeller and the British Council. Later, Oxfam was a major funder of the touring work. They were all prepared to put nearly a million pounds into three touring companies in three Eritrean languages over three years before the war blew all plans out of the water. This is probably my greatest sorrow, as this would really have embedded community theatre practice. All funding was given on condition that no constraints were exercised over content, which originated purely from the concerns of the participants. This is pretty unique. Oxfam wanted to fund because Eritrea was already closing in on NGOs and I remained in good odour. But the key thing was freedom to work with the people's agendas, not those of state or NGOs. I do not work otherwise.

YM: In terms of the project's methodology—with particular regard to the training programs—do you think the process was an effective way of a) addressing social issues in a community-based, participatory way, and b) helping to foster a distinctively Eritrean theatre aesthetic? If you could go back and do it all again, would you have conducted the project any differently, methodologically speaking?

JP: Well, what a very big question. There had been no formal theatre training ever when I went to Eritrea. The dominant style was a sort of heightened slightly melodramatic realism. Unlike other parts of the continent, there was no syncretic theatre pulling together folk forms and dialogue drama. I remember when we did this for the millennium production of Ngũgĩ's *I Will Marry When I Want* Alemseged, who translated it into Tigrinya, was almost in tears. He had kind of invented modern drama ideas in the trenches as fairly naturalistic, but he said this mixture of indigenous and international was what he really wanted. We experimented with lots of different forms. Notably, actors were initially resistant to learning from indigenous dancers and musicians—this was definitely a kind of cultural snobbery. I had to get my partner from the Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Solomon Tsehaye, to come and persuade people to give it a try. Then of course they loved it.

We did not develop an aesthetic. I didn't think that was my job. I always asked people to try things out on the basis that I would not be staying but they would so they could use whatever they found relevant. Each project involved new experiments with form to see what people found most conducive.

YM: Was there any way for your team to evaluate the success of the project? If so, based on such evaluation was the project successful/effective?

JP: Did we make loads of people love theatre and want to be involved? Yes. Did we have a substantial social impact? No.

You need longer repeat involvement. Did we leave anything? Well, some people with more ideas about making theatre, but politically it has become impossible. This was quite outside our control!

YM: Could you describe how the project ended? I understand that the breakout of war in 1998 meant that the project could not continue; but what specifically was the cause? Was it that the participants had to leave to serve? Or was your team of facilitators unable to enter the country? Or did the government cancel the project? Or did the funders pull out? Or was it some, or all, of the above? Can you explain how it all played out?

JP: Quite simply I would not consider working without meaningful freedom to discuss what we wanted, and Oxfam pulled out because everyone was temporarily sent off to the war. They have subsequently asked me to put on Shakespeare, but that is not my thing.

YM: Finally, do you see the potential for a future community-based theatre in Eritrea? And if so, do you see it as potentially arising out of another project of the sort you undertook, or is it more likely to emerge “from the ground up”?

JP: Not until the government changes radically.

—

In her interview, Plastow mentions that her greatest sorrow is the failure of the ECBTP to “embed” community-based theatre in Eritrea. This ultimately is the most important question to address: How can community theatre be embedded into the cultural policy, and eventually, the culture, of Eritrea? Projects need to be sustained, and in order to be sustained, they require funding. And funding will only materialize if the government is behind the projects.

But certainly it is not enough to wait around until “the government changes radically,” as Plastow tersely suggests would be requisite. In the absence of such radical change, it may that the path of least resistance towards embedding ECBTP in Eritrea is through Theatre-in-Education programming. While it may not be feasible to initiate a full-scale TFD project of the scope of the ECBTP right now, at the very least embedding theatre and arts training in public education institutions may be an important first step towards one day seeing a vibrant theatre community in Eritrea.

NOTES

- 1 “The millennium show” was a production of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *I Will Marry When I Want*, translated into Tigrinya by Alemseged Tesfai in 2000.
- 2 Efraim Khazai was one of these seven. In my conversation with him, he told me that he believes he is the only one still actively doing theatre work in the country.

Did we make loads of people love theatre and want to be involved? Yes.
Did we have a substantial social impact? No.

LIGHTNESS AND POLITICAL THEATRE

In 2006, courtesy of the Canada Council, I travelled to France to study with Philippe Gaulier, master clown teacher. I went, I have to admit, thinking that I would learn some useful new skills and enjoy myself in France for a few months. Instead, I had my mind blown and my approach to theatre radically changed. I kept going back over a three-year period (with help from the conseil des arts et lettres du Québec) as I learned that the best way to approach all theatre, but especially theatre filled with passion—sadness and joy, horror and laughter—was not through psychological analysis, nor intellectual discussion, nor heavy emotional digging, but instead through lightness, laughter, and play.

I recently had the pleasure of directing Kevin Loring's *Where the Blood Mixes* for Montreal's Teesri Duniya Theatre. It is a play that shows the destructive impact of one residential school on one community. In doing so, it talks to us not only about the horror of the attempts of the Canadian government and Protestant and Catholic churches to wipe out First Peoples' cultures across this land, but also about how human beings treat each other as they isolate themselves in their own little worlds in order to survive. But what could have become melodrama or hopelessness is instead a play filled with the passion of hope and life. While Loring gives the tragic moments in the play their full due, he then undercuts them with humour. He does not allow the audience to be sucked into self-indulgent sympathy, nor does he let us off the hook by thinking that if we suffer through an evening of "serious" theatre, then we've done our duty. In this play, it is not the tragedy that makes the audience weep, but the discovery of hope.

Molière said (according to Franca Rame), "Laughter should open the mind of the audience so that the nails of reason can be hammered in."¹ Laughter also needs to open the minds of the actors, so that rather than suffering an angst-ridden experience, they find a joy and pleasure in playing with the play, be it *Medea* or a clown piece, which they then share with their audiences. I have two mantras I brought home with me from France: "The heavier the scene, the lighter the performance" and "The audience are the ones who need to feel, not you." This does not mean that actors do not feel, but rather that they do whatever is needed to get the audience to feel. One of the ways I get this to happen is by feeding the actors their lines from day one, rather than letting them read from their scripts. This gives them a freedom to move, to play, to open up to their bodies' instinctive processes as well as their brains' thoughts. Instead of digging pre-planned emotions out of themselves, this technique lets each actor discover his or her character and story through physical impulse, exploration, laughter, games, and, at times, tears. As the actors work on their feet, we can identify together the appropriate and sometimes unpredictable emotions as they bubble up.

Why do we think that re-creating heavy interpretations of the "tragedy" of oppressed people on a stage will change the world? How often have we come out of a play labelled as "message" or "issue" so stunned by what we have seen and heard that we feel either hopeless and powerless, or smug because the horrible pain and suffering we have just experienced means nothing once we leave the theatre?

What is more subversive and political than laughter, lightness, and hope? Laughter is healing, and has been a weapon used by the oppressed against the oppressor for as long, I would imagine, as oppression has existed. Laughter's message is that however powerless one may seem, one can refuse the role of victim. Hope's message is that change, however small, is another step in survival. Laughter and survival go hand in hand. And out of this comes action.

When a playwright like Loring weaves together a passionate roller-coaster ride, it is our job to ensure that the audience exits the theatre breathless, moved, hopeful, questioning, and active. One of the most common comments we heard post-show was, "What can we do about this?" We provoked action rather than paralysis in the audience: To do this we must keep the work light and open. This is our job, and it is what, for me, makes a play genuinely political.

Lib Spry

NOTE

1 Quoted in Jenkins, Ron, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame: Artful Laughter* (NYC: Aperture, 1999), 83.

DISPATCH

METACHROMA THEATRE: LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD

In 2010, Montreal-based actors Tamara Brown, Lucinda Davis, Mike Payette, and Warona Setshwaelo got together to discuss the nature of hiring practices in Canadian theatre regarding artists of colour. As seasoned performers, we discussed our experiences and observations of how few opportunities there were for more than one or two actors of colour to share the stage at the same time (unless within a racially specific story), which raised the instigating question, “Wherein lies the opportunity for many actors of colour to be allowed to perform in mainstream theatre without the guise of adaptation?”

There are so many stories out there, and often I struggle against the limits of perception that dictate the type of stories that I get to tell and the roles that I can play. There comes a point where one must stop pointing the finger of blame at the status quo and take one's future into one's own hands. (Tamara Brown, Metachroma member)

We concluded that in order to level the playing field for all, we would have to initiate the change ourselves. We officially formed Metachroma Theatre in the latter part of 2010 when additional company members Quincy Armorer, Glenda Braganza, Julie Tamiko Manning, and Jamie Robinson joined the team.

In our many discussions within the company, as well as with our peers in the community, the term “colour-blind casting” often comes up. The question of “colour-blind” casting is extremely complex and raises several troubling points that work against Metachroma’s philosophy. “Colour-blindness” insinuates a disregard of a person’s ethnicity. Metachroma Theatre does not want our colour on stage to be erased, but instead to be seen as normal.

Metachroma doesn't ask us to come with a label to fit into; it just asks us for us. And if we keep standing for diversity who knows, maybe next time I'll be telling you the story of Joan of Arc. (Meilie Ng, Richard III cast member)

Metachroma Theatre provides visible minority actors the opportunities to work in productions that would normally be closed to them, or that only used race and culture as an artistic interpretation in order to affect or heighten a story. Instead, we endeavour to focus on the storytelling of a play, where plot and theme(s) are unaffected by the phenotype of the artists. Metachroma believes that this invites the audience to witness theatre without superficially rendering any biases, to view the diversity of skin colour as no different than the diversity of hair or eye colour. Many of us at Metachroma Theatre can attest to the incredible impact of seeing players who look like us onstage, to find our identities affirmed in the landscape of Canadian storytelling.

We chose *Richard III* for our inaugural production because we were looking for a challenge that would invite a powerful entrance into the industry. We asked ourselves what would happen if we did *Richard III* with no reference to culture or race: Would the audience have a more difficult experience watching a historical fifteenth-century English monarchy being embodied by an entire cast of people of colour? Most importantly, when you change the players, how much does it really change the game?

An audience will believe everything they see and hear so long as they are invited to embark on that journey. (Mike Payette, Metachroma member)

Based on the positive response to our work (both critically from the media as well as directly through dialogue with our audiences), we’ve seen the truth and viability of our endeavour. There are no such barriers to this level of perception in storytelling.

There are patterns in casting that need to be broken and I can see this company playing a major role in doing so for years to come. (Jimmy Blais, Richard III cast member)

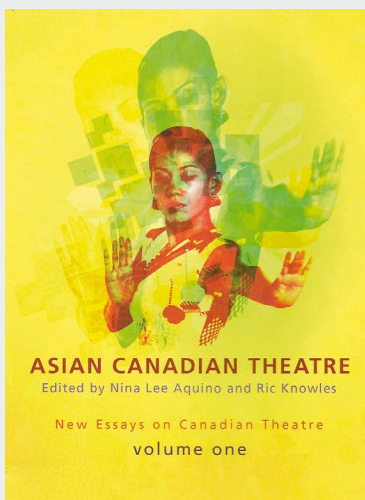
Something that is heartbreaking for us at Metachroma is how many artists of colour have had to leave town in order to eke out a living for themselves elsewhere. The question then is why is this phenomenon still happening? For Metachroma Theatre, there is a need to respond to that reality.

Normalizing the presence of visible minorities on stage has always resonated with me since, as an actor of mixed race ethnicity, I have learned to utilize this trait as a pillar of strength. Every role I play will bring a unique quality to an audience member's eye, as my ethnic makeup simply breathes on the stage like the lines exhaled from my voice, giving off a unique colour that inspires a freshness to a part that had been seen all too many times before. It is lovely to be working on shows with such a strong calibre of talent that needs no comment about how race affects a play, where we can all just be actors and leave the audience to decide what they wish about our appearance. (Jamie Robinson. Metachroma member)

The Company, Metachroma Theatre

DISPATCH





Asian Canadian Theatre

**NEW ESSAYS ON CANADIAN
THEATRE, VOLUME ONE.**
EDITED BY NINA LEE AQUINO
AND RIC KNOWLES. TORONTO:
PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS,
2011. PP. XVI. & 276.

Book review

BY AUDREY KOBAYASHI

This collection introduces a new field of study in Asian-Canadian theatre. The twenty-three essays emerged from the 2010 GENesis Asian-Canadian theatre conference, which brought together scholars—mainly of East Asian background—to discuss the emerging field. The editors, and many of the authors, acknowledge the fraught nature of the term “Asian Canadian.” Does it essentialize a racial category? What is its connection to larger Asian-Canadian communities and to the public in general? Who is included and who is not? How does a collection like this one reproduce or challenge the construction of the “authentic”? Of “identity”? Of “ethnicity”?

The contributors include academic scholars and performance artists, writers, directors, and producers. The chapters can roughly be categorized as either content or context oriented. About half of the papers engage the content of Asian-Canadian theatre in critical analyses of style, theme, audience reception, and social affect. Others address the context, including the rich history of Asian-Canadian theatre, starting in the late nineteenth century for Chinese Canadians, and the community activist

roots of contemporary theatre. Several biographical or autobiographical pieces personalize the movement, and provide insight into the passion and commitment to social justice of its players. The editors do a superb job of introducing the entire collection and identifying the major scholarly and social issues that challenge and engage Asian-Canadian theatre. I will review a few of them here.

The politics of representation are addressed by a number of the authors, and deftly explored by Christopher Lee, who concludes that “the destabilization of Asian-Canadian culture contributes to the actualization of its political commitments by offering the possibility of emergent communities that it can only faintly imagine in the present moment” (114). Paradox indeed. Of course, theatre, or any discursive act, by definition negotiates a politics of representation, but Asian-Canadian theatre also carries a burden of race, whether expressed in traditional genres and method acting, improv, or comedy. This collection brings to light some of the ways in which that burden has been shifted, unpacked and reconstituted, but never fully lifted. As Thy Phu shows, there are a variety of styles through which representations of race can be reversioned and dismantled.

What is Asian about Asian-Canadian theatre? Undoubtedly the entire movement and the rich array of works it comprises are greatly influenced by community activism, finding voice within dominant discourses, overcoming histories of oppression bound up in the politics of representation. But of course there is much more. Several essays point to the ways in which “traditional” motifs are reconfigured in Asian-Canadian theatre to redefine ethnocultural identities. For example, Ric Knowles discusses the productions of the Carlos Bulosan Theatre Company, with its intersecting tropes that are rooted in indigenous systems but never descend into nostalgia. They are enacted as “both political and transformational, negotiating new diasporic subjectivities across internal cultural, generational, and other differences and collectively performing them into being” (147). Shelley Scott discusses Marjorie Chan’s *China Doll* as an expression of transnationalism, connecting not only China and Canada but also Asian-Canadian and mainstream theatre in ways that challenge gender assumptions in both Chinese and mainstream traditions.

As Jean-Paul Sartre would have reminded us, life—including theatre—needs to be situated. A number of the essays do a fine job of situating Asian-Canadian theatre. Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, and Edmonton represent distinctive communities, but as June Park reminds us, all are racialized spaces (168-169). Jenna Rodgers provides an in-depth discussion of spatial staging and the use of language to create boundaries in Betty Quan’s *Mother Tongue*. The play is an evocative means of making visible, but visibility has diverse meanings when mapped across the stage or across the city. The concept of making space for new forms of language is also part of making space for the troubled recognition of Asian-Canadian theatre.

Making space is ultimately about embodiment: performance, enactment, staging. The collection explores numerous examples. Of note, Christine Kim addresses the question of audience engagement and the use of intimacy to re-racialize—or to achieve “a different orientation to bodies in order to make possible a public capable of both intimacy and social change” that will reconfigure the “social acoustics of multiculturalism” (194). Siyuan Liu depicts *Jade in the Coal* (Heidi Specht and Lenard Stanga, Pangaea Arts) as a combination of both spoken and body language to create interculturality, transcending race and traversing time/space to achieve dramaturgic fusion. Eleanor Ty explores the production of affect in the work of Catherine Hernandez, although here I would have liked to have seen a stronger acknowledgement that affect is publicly produced and situated, that it goes beyond the play. Donald Goellnicht recognizes this point by examining the staging of queer subjectivity in Winston Christopher Kam’s *Bachelor-Man*, which he describes as “a recreation of the past that provides an invitation to emergent agency and the development of future identifications” (235).

The quote from Goellnicht is the last line of all the chapters and a fitting point of connection to the important and emerging questions that define this text. As a whole, the collection portrays an active and engaged field of Asian-Canadian theatre within a long and still developing tradition. That tradition is only now subject to critical appraisal of its performance artistry, anti-racist practice, and its creative re-imagination of Canada and the embodiment of Asian bodies as a frayed intercultural tapestry.

The collection also raises unanswered questions. How effective has Asian-Canadian theatre been in reaching dominant audiences? Are some forms of representation more effective than others? How has the voice of Asian Canadians shifted since this theatre tradition became established in the social activism of the 1970s?

Of course we are still left with the paradox upon which the collection is built. Any field of study that emerges from a politics of oppression inevitably reproduces an identity that was constructed through a colonial prism. *Asian Canadian Theatre* (with and without the italics) carries the burden of race, and will do so for the foreseeable future. Perhaps it is not fair to saddle a whole tradition with this burden, but the colonial relations through which it developed, its struggle for voice and recognition, have not been fair either. The result, however, is a creative force of activist writing and performance art, and I look forward to future endeavours.



National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Céline Dion

BY ERIN HURLEY.
TORONTO: UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO PRESS, 2011. PP. IX
& 244.

Book review

BY NADINE
HOLDSWORTH

Erin Hurley's book *National Performance* arrived on my desk for review already carrying the weight of significant accolades. It has won the 2011 Ann Saddlemyer Book Award of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research/ Association Canadienne de la recherche théâtrale (CATR/ACRT), as well as the 2011–2012 Pierre Savard Award for an outstanding scholarly monograph on a Canadian topic from the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS). So, this is clearly a book that has received significant recognition and praise for the attention it pays to and the insights it provides on Canadian studies, and Canadian theatre specifically. It is hard for any book to live up to the significant hype that awards and prizes generate, but Hurley's book does not disappoint. It makes a lively and original intervention into studies of nation, Quebec, culture, and performance through its impressive reach and methodological inventiveness.

Derived from a performance studies approach and consistently driven by a sharp feminist sensibility, *National Performance* tackles how theatrical and performance labours and the objects they generate have evoked and complicated notions of *québécoisité* (Quebecness). At its heart, *National Performance* questions why certain people, institutions, and cultural and theatrical performances get co-opted as part and parcel of national agendas and others do not. But the book does more than this; it offers new ways of thinking about the different relationships that performance can have with the nation. Acutely aware of the representational and affective strategies consciously and unconsciously deployed in “national” performance, Hurley extends the territory in this field. You will find the usual considerations of construction and reflection—albeit expertly handled to bring new insight—but Hurley also develops “three new keywords for theorizing performance as national: simulation, metonymy, and affection” (6). The book's rich methodological approach unfolds through a series of self-contained yet interlocking case studies. Two introductory chapters are followed by deep analysis of a range of performance objects that gravitate around a pivotal idea for theorizing them as national performances. Hence, Expo 67 is considered in relation to construction; Michel Tremblay's iconic 1968 play *Les belles-sœurs* in terms of reflection; the drama and poetry of Italo-Québécois author Marco Micone is illuminated through theories of simulation; the dance-

theatre productions devised by Carbone 14 are unpacked through reference to metonymy; and the music and persona of international singing-star Céline Dion are explored in terms of affect.

Hurley's carefully chosen theatrical and cultural performances are important for a number of reasons. First, they enable a broad historical reach from the late 1960s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, but they also highlight important cultural moments that are indicative of wider political projects, social anxieties, and national circumstances. Second, Hurley's eclectic approach—ranging across architecture, exhibition, traditional theatre, and popular music—signals how the national and national identity can be figured in all cultural forms and how performance studies as a method enables all of them to be read for their performative qualities. Third, Hurley is able to bring such a level of intellectual curiosity, rigour, and telling detail to her performance analysis that the reader (certainly this reader) can be truly inspired to think beyond tried and tested performance objects.

After a brief introduction that outlines the rationale and research parameters of the book, chapter two situates the study within a wider body of work emanating from Quebec—Robert Lepage, La La La Human Steps, Cirque du Soleil—that have had an undoubted success and global reach. Hurley suggests that the global reach of these artists means that their *québécoisité* is often difficult to detect, overlooked, or simply irrelevant to the work produced. Hence, the most well-known and easily recognizable figures from Quebec's theatrical and performance culture are presented as contested figures who have had their *québécoisité* complicated by their transnational impulses and success. This positioning is important contextually, but it is also revealing of Hurley's approach. It is not enough that an artist or company emanates from Quebec, there has to be some sense in which they are explicitly or implicitly evoking nation-ness (as site, object, feeling, etc.) however loosely or contingently.

Drawing inspiration from Gilles Carle's documentary film on the 1967 World's Fair and Exhibition, *Terres des hommes/Man and His World*, Hurley's third chapter on Expo 67 begins with the figure of the tourist and the significance of discovery. As such, Hurley skilfully adopts Carle's method of reversing the

traditional discovery=tourism model to articulate a reversal: a tourism=discovery model in which a new version of Quebec can be articulated. “That world would take the form of a national, independent, modern, and urban entity” (32) due in large part to the progressive semiotics of the pavilion and its ultra modern setting and aesthetic. However, Hurley inserts a significant new dimension in this familiar national narrative of urban modernity by stressing the important interventions made by the Quebec pavilion hostesses in terms of generating meaning through their presence, knowledge, and emotional labour. The role of women is similarly central to Tremblay’s widely recognized state-of-the-nation play *Les belles-sœurs*, which has been credited with heralding “a type of theatre that was explicitly and self-consciously Québécois in form, theme, and language” (60). Hurley explains the influence of *Les belles-sœurs* in terms of how the play and original production cleverly intersected with a particular national zeitgeist and contemporary debate on the status of Quebec. Whilst respecting this predominately representational reading of the impact of this “national” play, Hurley complicates and enriches it by drawing attention to its formal properties, aesthetic strategies, gender play, and multiple socio-political provocations. Of these first two case studies Hurley writes that “Expo 67 and *Les belles-sœurs* expose the most common figurative means by which certain cultural productions become national—namely, metaphor—in its reflective and constructive guises” (88). The relationship between the nation and theatrical and cultural performance becomes more slippery in the chapters that follow.

In chapter five, Hurley turns her attention to the rise of *culture immigrée* (immigrant culture), *écriture migrante*, or transculture in the 1980s and 1990s. Concerned with the challenges posed by transculturalism to the national project, Hurley explores how the bodily and vernacular presence of the migrant highlights the “fictional or constructed status of Quebec’s language of authenticity” (99). Hurley argues that in exceeding the boundaries of the national, the *culture immigrée* calls the nation into question as a limited simulation. Focusing on Micone, specifically his 1989 poem “Speak What”—a response to Michèle Lalonde’s iconic québécois 1967 poem “Speak White”—Hurley argues that he “exposes the sometimes nativist, ethnocultural lineaments of the national

guarantor” (110). In Hurley’s analysis, Micone’s inability to represent *québécoisité* highlights one of the flaws at the heart of *québécois* literature—its racial dimension and also sensitively exposes the culturally marginal status of the allophone.

In chapter six, Hurley offers rich and evocative readings of the image-based dance theatre work of Gilles Maheu’s company Carbone 14. Engaging most explicitly in this chapter with the ephemeral moment of performance, Hurley explores how the company’s environments and use of objects “establish national referential frameworks” (124), but how these are resolutely fleeting—multivalent images brought into being and dissolved before the eye of the spectator. Hurley argues for the ways that these moments stand metonymically for any number of national histories and meanings, but also that their continual erasure resists easy representation, as meanings shift and change in dynamic interactions with bodies and space. The nation in this formulation is multiple, restless, and ultimately unknowable.

In chapter seven, Hurley is quick to establish Céline Dion as a contested “phenomenon” in Quebec who is both lauded as a source of national pride and denounced as a slightly embarrassing cultural ambassador. Indeed, throughout the chapter, Hurley constructs an argument around the pliability of Dion’s image and the multiple meanings activated by both the persona and music of Dion. She is seen in relation to the “revivified notion of Quebecness called ‘américanité’” (143), she is the pop “diva,” the über-mother, but above all she is an empty vessel re-produced in many different guises for many different ends: national, commercial, global. However, most interestingly, this is the chapter where Hurley fully explores the significance of affect (feeling) as a way of accounting for how Dion’s music, representational apparatus, and career trajectory can be understood in terms of *québécoisité*—as such attention is paid to the felt-ness of nation that is truly groundbreaking.

There were some things that I missed in this book. For the reader unfamiliar with the ins and outs of Quebec’s history and cultural status, a little more could have been done to orientate readers and enrich their understanding of the long (as opposed to the post-1960s) history of the nation. Equally, the shadow of empire and colonization hovers over the book

but could have been more foregrounded to explain the contemporary moment’s preoccupations and anxieties. Also, despite acknowledging Quebec’s similarity to other nations without a state (21) and reference to other “small nations like Quebec” (22), there is no further elaboration that could have provided useful connective tissue with other nations in similar positions to Quebec, such as Scotland or Catalonia. Equally, there is little reference to how the broad theatrical movements Hurley identifies, such as the shift from the political narratives of the 1970s to the image-based theatrical performance of the 1980s, could also be traced and mapped in other countries around the world. The lack of attention to these aspects can make the book seem a little inward-facing, but this accusation could certainly not be levelled at the reach and methodological sophistication of the book, which is seriously impressive.

Each chapter in this book is imaginatively assembled, painstakingly researched, richly illustrated, and draws on a wide range of interdisciplinary scholarly approaches and critical practice. Hurley is at ease moving from an analysis of architecture, dramatic text, poetic text, image-theatre, dance, and popular music and she draws on an equally impressive critical apparatus ranging from semiotics, linguistics, through phenomenology, to theories of labour and affect. This scope ensures that reading this book is never less than intellectually stimulating. It should serve as a model for critically engaged scholarship in the field of theatre, performance, and nation.



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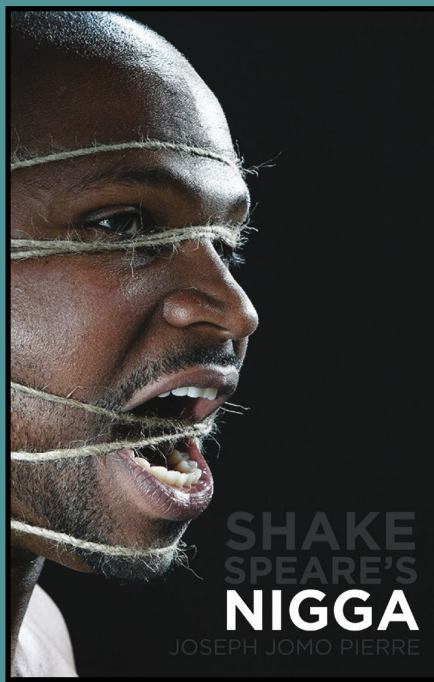
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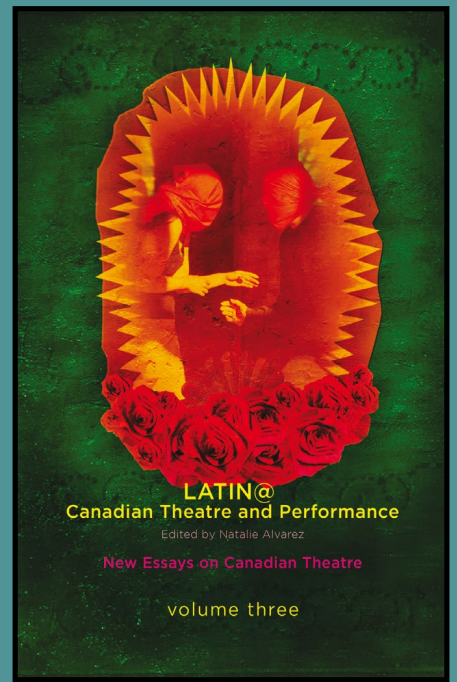
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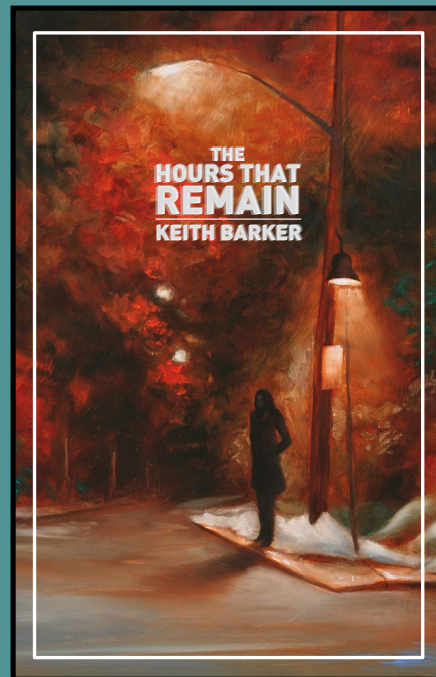
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