CHRISTINE COMEAU
ROSEMARY GEORGESON
SUZANNE LEBEAU
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DONIA MOUNSEF
NINA PARISER
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alt theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

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SUMMER 2013 $6

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alt.theatre is currently accepting submissions for a special issue planned for spring 2014 that will explore the intersections of (dis)ability, diversity and the performing arts.

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UPCOMING alt theatre 11.1 Fall 2013

ARTICLE SEIKA BOYE reflects on race and archival photography through her discussion of a single, enigmatic photograph. **DISPATCH** RODRIGO LOYOLA discusses the Memoria Viva Theatre Project and Latin American community arts in Edmonton. **BOOK REVIEW** LEN FINDLAY reviews *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada*, by Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi.

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alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage is Canada's only professional journal examining intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage.

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THEATRE

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
© Jaime Vedres. Jay Whitehead and Jerrim Rushka in Theatre Outré's *UNSEX'd*. Written by Daniel Judes and Jay Whitehead, directed by Richie Wilcox.

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ARTICLES

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SUZANNE LEBEAU
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DISPATCHES

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Editorial

What's Reasonable?

BY NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH

"*No one can find themselves in that society*."

Quebec Premier Pauline Marois, quoted above in the *Montreal Gazette* ("Charter"), is referring to England. She seems to believe that when demographically plural societies have intentional multicultural policy and strive for cultural plurality, everyone loses. Marois and her Parti Québécois government proposed the Quebec Charter of Values (now Bill 60) purportedly in an effort to defend the Québécois values of secularism and neutrality in public sector spaces, and, evidently, to enshrine in law the supremacy of the French colonial parts of Quebec's history over all others. Marois is seeking to legislate the answers to Quebec's ongoing debates on "reasonable accommodation."

"Reasonable accommodation": the term used in discussing the rights of minority groups when their practices come into conflict with those of the dominant culture. Perhaps this term itself is the starting point for many of our discursive problems. Reasonable accommodation sounds to me like a room in a three-star hotel located a short commute to downtown, not the lens through which the majority decides how minorities can and will live. "Accommodation" assumes a vertical relationship, in which someone in charge will attempt to make space for someone who needs it. "Accommodation" does not invite dialogue; it is a concession, or at best a service offered by those in power. The Charter has reminded us in no uncertain terms who in Quebec *accommodates* and who needs *accommodating*.

Indeed, neither citizenry, immigration status, nor social contribution necessarily guarantees your right to be recognized as a veritable, Charter-sanctioned Quebecer. Marois' brand of reasonable accommodation is clear: be they hardworking allophone newcomers, bilingual Quebec-born hijabis, or turban- or kippa-wearing men whose families have called *la belle province* home for generations, these apparent threats to French colonial culture are mere guests at Hotel Quebec—and it seems that even full assimilation would not be enough to settle the bill. Take Djemila Benhabib, for example, the daughter of Algerian and Greek Cypriot parents who was the Parti Québécois candidate for Trois-Rivieres in last year's election. Her Arabic name proved more important than her outspoken views against Islam and multiculturalism, separatist politics, and pro-secularism activism (which was fervent enough to win her the *Prix international de la Laïcité*). Instead, her ethnicity, immigrant status, and perceived cultural identity became hot topics during her ultimately unsuccessful candidacy.[1]

Assimilation shouldn't be the minimum requirement for one to be *accommodated*, and accommodation itself seems too paltry a framework. When groups of people who aren't infringing on the rights of others are able to practice their religion and live their cultures, it shouldn't be thought of as "reasonable accommodation"—these are basic human rights, and Marois and her most probably unconstitutional Charter are in violation.

A lot about this Charter of Values disturbs me, but what's most unsettling is seeing the PQ's complete unwillingness to listen to those whom they are, from some rhetorical angles, claiming to help. The Charter attempts to dictate what constitutes acceptable performance of "Quebec-ness," which affects several groups; but what Marois is doing, really, is capitalizing politically on popular fear of the headscarf. Proponents of the Charter are mainly targeting Muslim women, although they are happy to rationalize the logic in ways that also erase other visible religious minorities: as Charles Taylor told the *Toronto Star*, "[T]he Jews and the Sikhs are collateral damage" (Siddiqui). The PQ, like many before them, are perverting the language of gender equality toward xenophobic ends: the Charter seeks to ensure equality between women and men and its defenders see the headscarf as a concrete, culturally specific manifestation of gender oppression. Marois has said of the Charter, "We're moving forward in the name of all the women, all the men, who chose Quebec for our culture, for our freedom, and for our diversity" (Richler). Yet the PQ takes no interest in the sea of voices where Muslim women and others assert their opposition. Among many other examples, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Montreal in protest last September at a massive anti-Charter demonstration organized by the Quebec Coalition Against Islamophobia (Valiante). And countless articles have been written, such as Fariha Naqni-Mohamed's in the *Huffington Post*, which echoes the sentiments of many other (Muslim, female) Quebecers: "My province. My hijab and my choice." While Marois and the PQ are happy to speak for those they claim to help, they refuse to listen to them.

Is this just business as usual in Canadian politics right now, where the co-option of marginalized voices, the silencing of dissent, and the playing out of double standards abound? In the west, British Columbia and Alberta premiers Christy Clark and Alison Redford approach an agreement that would allow both provinces to sign onto the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines project, despite the dozens of implicated First Nations who have organized according to Indigenous laws and declared that they will not allow their territories to be party to the project.[2] In Toronto, a municipal scandal unfolds as the infamous alleged "crack[-smoking] video" brings Rob Ford (once again) under scrutiny—and Ford is still able to

defend himself publicly, because (as writer and activist Harsha Walia recently pointed out on Twitter) while "all the Black and Brown folks in the ... crack photo/video are either dead or in jail," its protagonist remains out, about, and mayor of Canada's largest city. Over in Ottawa, the senate expense scandal continues to unfold and no one, least of all Stephen Harper, can begin to accept responsibility.

There's nothing either reasonable or accommodating about politicians making their own rules. And being spoken for is frustrating. Conversations about who is typically allowed to speak, who tends to be spoken for, and if/when/and how to speak for others are common among critically minded artists and thinkers, often occurring right here in *alt. theatre*. Many of our contributors to this issue explore the tensions between speaking, speaking for, and listening.

In Christine Comeau's interview with playwright Suzanne Lebeau, "Breaking the Chain of Violence," the two talk about the burning need Lebeau felt to write about the murdered women factory workers of Cuidad Juarez, Mexico, which ultimately resulted in her play *Chaine de montage*. They discuss the politics of someone from the global North writing about real events and experiences from the global South: How can this be done in ways that are accountable to both the Southern voices the North seldom hears, and to the Northern playwright's artistic project? Lebeau shares: "I couldn't be one of the women who disappear. What I could do is bear witness and take hold of the story with the tools of my craft, which is to write" (14). Through writing, Lebeau seeks to bear witness, listen, and share.

In "Learning from Our Mistakes: Building Relationships through the Arts with First Nations Communities," two Vancouver theatre artists discuss listening and power-sharing. Rosemary Georgeson, a First Nations woman, and Savannah Walling, a "mostly Anglo immigrant from the US," reflect on their cross-cultural collaborations. Georgeson notes that although First Nations cultural traditions continued underground after being systematically shut down by the Canadian government from the 1880s to 1951, their "voices are only coming fully back into the public now" (17). They each offer insights on how non-First Nations and First Nations artists can work together on arts projects in ways that make space for and give voice to implicated communities.

Nina Pariser's dispatch article, "Storytelling at the Human Library," offers an account of a unique community project in Montreal that is designed to provide often unheard voices with a venue to speak for themselves. In the Human Library, "people *themselves* are the books" and members of the public are invited to 'check out' participants for half-hour conversations" (32). The "books" come from marginalized communities or unusual life paths, and at the Human Library "readers" have the chance to communicate directly with the horse's mouth, certainly interrogating their own presumptions in the process. The Human Library offers a designated space where people from different walks of life can engage in consensual discussion—speaking and listening—and gain insight on others' real, lived experiences.

Throughout its fifteen-year history, *alt.theatre* has striven to give voice to the margins, and this is in no small part thanks to the thoughtful, dedicated approach Denis Salter has taken to his role as associate editor. With this issue, Denis leaves the post, but as he remains a member of our editorial board, he will surely continue to be an integral part of *alt*'s development. And now, on behalf of everyone at *alt.theatre* and Teesri Duniya Theatre, I'd like to welcome our new associate editors, Dalbir Singh and Dirk Gindt, who each bring a breadth of skills and experience to our team. Dalbir is an editor, educator, playwright, and academic. He's the editor of *World without Walls: Being Human, Being Tamil* (TSAR, 2010) and will be editing *Post-Colonial Theatre* and *South Asian Canadian Theatre: Six Plays*, two anthologies from Playwright's Canada Press. His publications have been included in such journals and anthologies as *Red Light*, *She Speaks*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, and *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre*. He is currently a PhD candidate in Theatre and South Asian Studies at the University of Toronto. Dirk has a PhD in Theatre Studies from Stockholm University and is an artist-in-residence at Concordia University's Theatre Department. His research interests concentrate on post-war and contemporary queer theatre and performance, with a particular focus on HIV/AIDS in Canada and Sweden. His research on Tennessee Williams has been published in *Theatre Research in Canada*, *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Survey*, *Nordic Theatre Studies*, *New Theatre Quarterly*, and *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, in addition to several book chapters, and he is co-editor of *Fashion: An Interdisciplinary Reflection* (Stockholm, 2009). Welcome Dalbir and Dirk!

Our new editorial team looks forward to *alt*'s near future, including a special theme issue planned for 2014: "(Dis)ability, Diversity, and Performance," as well as other exciting work forthcoming in regular issues. We invite submissions on an ongoing basis, typically in the form of feature articles, interviews, dispatch pieces, and book reviews, but of course, new and different ideas are welcome—that's only reasonable.

NOTES

1 For more on the debates surrounding Benhabib's campaign, see Panetta and Blatchford.

2 Visit savethefraser.ca to read the Save the Fraser Declaration, which defends Indigenous lands from the Endbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines project.

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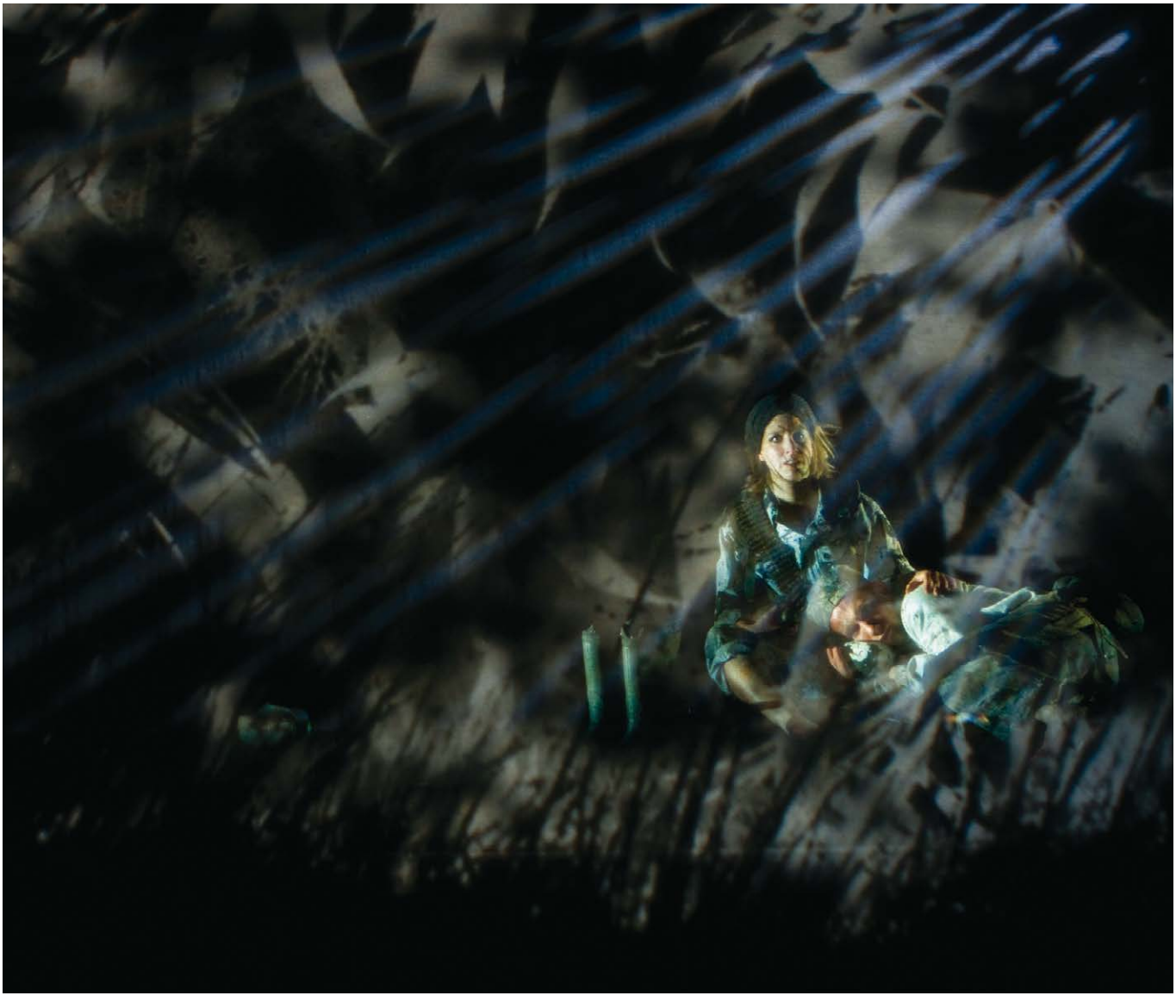
BREAKING THE CHAIN OF VIOLENCE: *AN INTERVIEW WITH SUZANNE LEBEAU*

BY CHRISTINE COMEAU



© FX Gaudreault. Audrey Talbot and Jean-Philip Debien in Le Carrousel's production of *Le bruit des os qui craquent* by Suzanne Lebeau.

Suzanne Lebeau first spoke to me through the voice of a woman facing a crude spotlight, squinting her eyes, alone, angry. On stage, Marie-Thérèse Fortin was reading *Chaîne de montage*, in which Lebeau, after forty years of writing theatre for young people, reaches out to an adult audience.

Chaîne de montage is based on events that took place in Ciudad Juárez, located on the Mexico–United States border. In 1991, the body of a young woman was found, half-buried in the desert. Over the following decade, nearly four hundred bodies were discovered—raped, murdered, mutilated. Women, young, pretty, often employed in the maquiladoras, massive factories that produce goods for exportation. Even more shocking than the violence was the impunity with which these crimes were committed.

Like a messenger telling the audience of deaths and murders that will not be shown on stage, Lebeau's character tells a story of horrors that can't be shown—and worse, that are being ignored by authorities. She struggles to see clearly, to make sense of the incomprehensible. Poignant, poetic, and sharp, this monologue reveals the many networks that connect an ordinary North American woman's life—and, therefore, my life—to the women of Juárez.

WHEN I HEARD THE VOICE OF THAT WOMAN, I FELT COMPELLED TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH LEBEAU, AN AUTHOR WHO HAS DEEPLY QUESTIONED SELF-CENSORSHIP WHEN WRITING FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES WHILE CONSTANTLY EXPLORING LIMITS AND PUSHING BOUNDARIES.[1]

C.C. **You're considered one of the pioneers of theatre for young audiences. You founded your company le Carrousel with Gervais Gaudreault nearly forty years ago, and your plays have been translated into twenty languages. How did you end up writing *Chaîne de montage*, a play for adults?**

S.L. It was unexpected. I was trying to write another play, *Gretel et Hansel*, when a friend offered that I stay in her house in Mexico City. The story of the women of Ciudad Juárez was haunting me. I had known about it for some time, but now it was as if that story was blocking everything else. I had so many questions, and no answers. I had no choice but to write it down. I read everything I could find on the subject, and I wrote a first draft in three weeks. I wrote day and night, with such a sense of urgency.

So it was not my intention to write a play for adults. It felt more like a takeover. I had to write it even if I thought we might never do anything with it.

C.C. **Your previous play, *Le bruit des os qui craquent* (The sound of cracking bones, 2009), which addresses the reality of child soldiers, was written for a young audience but also had an appeal for adults. What was the genesis of that play?**

S.L. After seeing a documentary about child soldiers, I was overwhelmed and I asked myself, "Can we tell children about such a difficult subject?" I thought I would either censor myself or be censored. Then I decided to ask them: I met with thirteen different groups of children aged 9 to 12 and I showed them the documentary. I had only one question: "Can we tell children about this?" In every group, the answer was the same: "Not only can you, but you *must* tell us about it." The children convinced me that I could do it, that they have a right to know.

I always try to bring different layers of interpretation to the work. Often there's a metaphor at the core of the story that allows for these different levels of meaning. In *Le bruit des os qui craquent*, these layers came from the structure of the play, which offers a double perspective. The children are in action, in the present, as they escape from the soldiers' camp. Alternating with this, we hear the nurse's testimony, which provides more information about the childrens' stories and their backgrounds.

I realized how significant this structure was when we were confronted with the different reactions coming from the audience. Reactions were so polarized between children and adults, it was fascinating. From the early stages, adults told us, "This is not a play for children, it's unbearable, it's much too harsh." But the play didn't seem that harsh to children themselves. We were puzzled, so we had a series of thirteen readings in front of children, adults, and mixed audiences. That's when I began to understand the identification process that was taking place. Children would identify with the younger characters, Elikia and Joseph. These child soldiers are confronted with a horrible reality, and yet by escaping, they break the chain of violence. Not only that, but the adult they meet, the only adult we see on stage, the nurse, consoles and reassures them, defends them, and cares for them. They find what they hope for, what they have a right to expect from adults: someone they can trust and who will care for their well-being. So the children found something amazing in that relationship. However, the adults would receive the full impact of the nurse's testimony in front of a cold, indifferent commission.[2] When she testifies alone on stage, it's as if she were addressing them directly. They would identify with the commission. Therefore they felt guilty, responsible, and powerless, as you can imagine.

These reactions set off an important reflection about the way authors position themselves when writing for a specific audience, which in turn became an important part of my PhD work.

C.C. **When I read that play, I pictured the story taking place in Africa, so I was curious to ask why it was produced with white actors at the Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui.**

S.L. There's nothing in the play that says that it's in Africa. We want to think it's Africa because the images of child soldiers we see are often from Africa. It could also be Asia or South America or elsewhere. There are child soldiers in Sierra Leone, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Uganda, but also in Myanmar, in Colombia (with the FARC), and even in England and the USA, because young people of 16 and 17 years old can be sent to war even though UNESCO considers that we are children until the age of 18. I interviewed former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but when I wrote the play, I didn't want to put a stigma on Africa so I didn't give my characters a nationality or a skin colour. I thought maybe someone else would—directors, programmers—but they have to be very aware of the significance of their choices.

C.C. **You mentioned that you're doing a PhD. Why, and why now?**

S.L. As creators, I think it's important to leave records of the research we've done, the methods we used, how this repertoire was built, and what allowed us to go further, to push the boundaries, to take risks. Why were we able, at a certain point, to address a certain subject—how did it happen? It's always been clear to me that I could go further in regard to what is allowed, what is moral, and what we can talk about with children. The limits were always so strict and the space allowed so small that from one play to the next I could always push them a bit further. The PhD seemed like the only setting in which I would have the time and the discipline to sort through and organize all that research. It's very stimulating. I'm enjoying it enormously.

C.C. **In your view, how do school and theatre interplay when it comes to education and learning?**

S.L. I've always loved school. In a democracy, school is where learning can take place. Children are curious by nature and they can learn in many different settings, but they should all have access to basic knowledge. Unfortunately, many children are deprived of this essential knowledge.

We need this layer of basic facts and objective truths to understand each other; but after that, we must also learn to exercise personal judgment and we must develop our capacity for dissent. This is why I've always made very tight-knit connections between art, education, culture, and history. Art is an obligatory part of education, on par with conventional school subjects. Art teaches subjectivity, the right to have an opinion, and the right to dissent.

I've had to distance myself from traditional didactic relationships, where children are considered inferior to an adult who holds all the knowledge and who can give simple and precise answers to an issue. Instead, I try to see the world from a child's perspective, while at the same time opening up that world to different layers of interpretation and meaning. And I like to reflect their questions back to them so that they will find a unique answer. It's always a temporary answer. It will satisfy them for some time, at this point in their lives, but six months later they will have to find a new explanation, and so on. Because the only questions that are truly important and interesting are existential questions.

C.C. ***Chaîne de montage*** **is not your first play about Latin America. Can you tell me about** ***Salvador*** **(1994) and your relationship with the global South?**

S.L. In 1988 and 1989, we had an opportunity to present *A Moon between Two Houses* in Argentina and then in Peru. It was my first experience of the South and I met street children for the first time. What moved me deeply was not to see them there at two in the morning, selling trinkets and crafts on the street or in a restaurant; I knew about that reality, I knew it existed. What struck me was their curiosity and their passion. "Where are you from? Do you have children? What do your children do?" There was such an eagerness to connect with others.

When I came back to Montreal, I prepared workshops about the South and I worked over ten weeks with children from different socio-economical backgrounds: underprivileged, severely underprivileged, and very privileged backgrounds. They learned a great deal about the South and specifically about the situation of working children. At the very end, I asked them about solutions, about what we could do in our daily lives to regain some balance.

In the underprivileged neighbourhood, a little boy told me this story: "I was watching cartoons and eating an apple, and when I went to throw it in the garbage, I realized I hadn't eaten it completely. So I finished it and threw away only the apple core." In the very privileged neighbourhood, the children said: "We should send all our poor people over there, and get all the rich people to move up north, so we'd be between ourselves." So I told them the story of the apple core. They said, "What a great idea! Let's send them all our unfinished apple cores!" I was terrified—and so was their teacher—but I realized something terribly important. I could not, by any means, try to invoke their sense of pity. I needed a character who succeeds in getting out of poverty, improves his condition, and tells the story of how he was able to achieve that. Significantly, Salvador becomes a writer who is able to tell his own story.

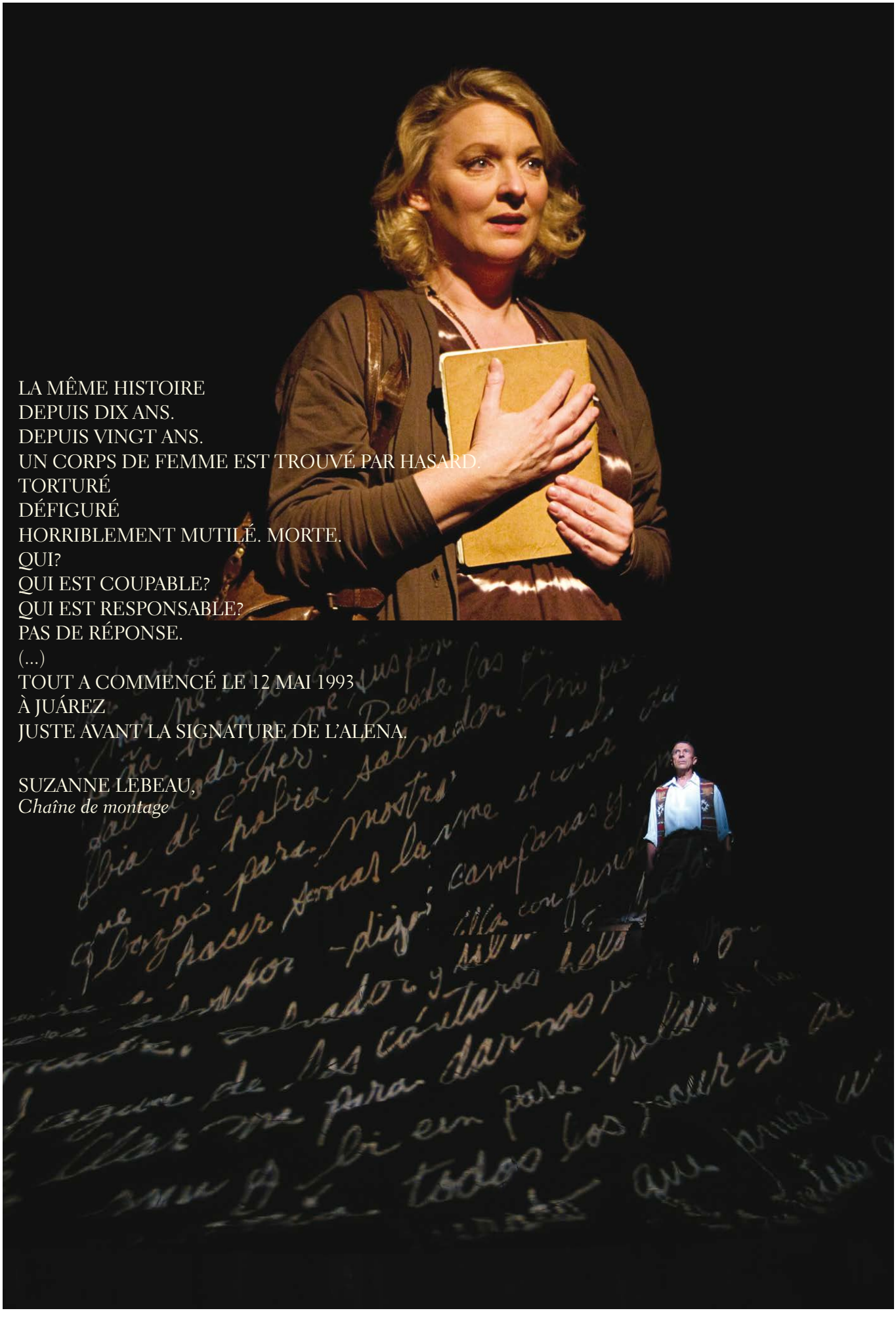
The children had taught me that they didn't necessarily have innate compassion. Working with them allowed me to make deliberate choices as a writer.

C.C. **In** ***Chaîne de montage*** **there's a passage in which the woman speaks from the perspective of a young factory worker, in the first person. I felt this was effective in showing that she's able to have compassion, to embrace another person's experience. Was that a conscious choice?**

S.L. Writing *Chaîne de montage* was a very unusual experience. I wrote non-stop, day and night, so I can't tell you how that part came to be—I can't remember. I think it must have emerged because of the frenetic pace, the rhythm that was overtaking me, which is the rhythm of the machine itself. I was becoming that young girl, the factory worker. The rhythm led me into this. The pace of this little girl's life. The way you have to show your sanitary napkin every month [to prove you're not pregnant]. There were so many absurdities, so many questions. It became almost impossible for me not to take ownership of what this girl is going through. I had to put on her work clothes. But again, it wasn't done consciously. I wasn't trying to make a point or to demonstrate anything. The pace of the work, of the factory, of the workers' lives, brought me to it.

C.C. **I was struck by the scope of this play. Your character describes in detail, calmly, a situation that is too horrible, too violent, too traumatic to grasp. Then she connects what is happening in Ciudad Juárez with her daily life, and therefore with my daily life, my domestic life.**

S.L. Again it was the play itself that brought me there. The woman discovers little by little how her existence is closely tied to the women of Ciudad Juárez. I wasn't setting out to make these connections, between her intimate being and globalization, between the South and the North, between capitalism and the way women are treated, and in this case murdered, but they quickly became a part of the story. It seems like there's an important part of unconscious reflection that shaped the piece, which must have been on my mind for several years before I wrote it. But indeed this is an important dimension of the play, and it's pointing at innumerable links,



LA MÊME HISTOIRE
DEPUIS DIX ANS.
DEPUIS VINGT ANS.
UN CORPS DE FEMME EST TROUVÉ PAR HASARD.
TORTURÉ
DÉFIGURÉ
HORRIBLEMENT MUTILÉ. MORTE.
QUI?
QUI EST COUPABLE?
QUI EST RESPONSABLE?
PAS DE RÉPONSE.
(...)
TOUT A COMMENCÉ LE 12 MAI 1993
À JUÁREZ
JUSTE AVANT LA SIGNATURE DE L'ALENA.

SUZANNE LEBEAU,
Chaîne de montage

including links between social classes and between women all over the world. The connections are not anything we can pinpoint or put our finger on, but rather something that we sense, that we feel is everywhere.

To me it seems unbearable that a situation like this continues and that we, as human beings, continue to allow it. And to think that all areas of knowledge are becoming more and more oriented towards a single goal, exploitation: "How can we exploit anything and anyone with a maximum of profit?" This is a quest of human beings that I'm unable to understand. It's a terrible mystery. At the same time, what I don't understand is what sets me in motion as a writer.

C.C. **Can you talk about what it's like to write such a testimony—of a woman from the North who denounces a situation in the South?**

S.L. It's an important question and it was the same when I wrote *Salvador*: "How can I speak of characters who live in the South without falsifying or betraying them, without watering down their reality, and without giving a perspective that has nothing to do with what is currently going on?" I don't think there's a simple answer. Maybe writing *Salvador* was one way to answer, *Le bruit des os qui craquent* was another, and *Chaîne de montage* is still a different answer.

The only way I could write about this subject was from the perspective of that woman, who could very well be anyone and everyone who lives in the North. I couldn't speak for the factory workers, I couldn't be one of the women who disappear. What I could do is bear witness and take hold of the story with the tools of my craft, which is to write.

When preparing for the reading, Marie-Thérèse Fortin was constantly looking for the psychological foundations of her character. "Who is this woman, what is her story, how does she live?" I would say: "She's an ordinary woman. Any woman. Me, you, any woman who lives in the North." That woman comes across a news item (*fait divers*) and develops an interest in that story, first of all because she can't believe it's true. It's unbearable to think of so much impunity, it doesn't make sense. Then when she looks more deeply into it, she begins to understand that her entire life is associated with the situation in Juárez. Whether she likes it or not, she's guilty and responsible in a certain way. She participates in, and benefits from, the economy that created the situation. Her need to speak up about what she has learned becomes my need, when I discovered that story, to scream so that everyone will know. I tell myself, "If everyone knows about it, it will stop, it has to stop."

Unlike the plays I've written for children, this one is heavy and leaves very little room for hope. The only thing I could never write for children is a play without hope. Here, I think each member of the audience has to forge their own hope. Personally, I wasn't able to find it. I think the only hope, in the end, is in the fact that these things are being said out loud. There is such a culture of silence for all minorities, for all those who are oppressed. There's hope in knowing that we can say what we know instead of feeling completely helpless and unhappy with how the world works.

C.C. **How has *Chaîne de montage* been received so far?**

S.L. We are working on a co-production for 2014, and we've had a few public readings, including a first reading with a teenage audience, which was very convincing. Teenagers were extremely interested in the text and the context. They're at a time in their lives when they are finding their place in the world and making very important decisions. The spiral of inflation might take them somewhere they don't necessarily want to go. Adults might see the play and think, "What have we done?" while teenagers ask themselves, "What will we do?"

C.C. **The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three women in 2011, a recognition of the role of women in democracies. Do you think solidarity between the North and the South is in the hands of women?**

S.L. Women are treated as a minority. It feels strange to say this but in the past few years, the fact that I'm a woman and that I belong to a minority hit me in the face. Of course it's easier to speak up about exploitation from a place of abundance and privilege, but I like to think that if I was a woman living in the South, I would have exactly the same attitudes. From my earliest memories of childhood, I could not tolerate injustice or inequalities.

When I was in Kinshasa working with former child soldiers, I knew I had a Canadian passport and I could leave tomorrow if I could no longer stand the scorching heat, the mud, the open sewers in N'gaba where I was staying. Yet I felt such solidarity and admiration for the women I met there. I was in awe. And there I was, a woman amongst all these women, with a sense of belonging.

For many years, I wrote almost exclusively male characters: Salvador, Petit Pierre, the Ogreling. I knew intuitively, and read some research that demonstrated this later, that young boys had a lot more difficulty identifying with female protagonists than the opposite. But one day it struck me that there were about ten great actresses for one great actor, and about ten great male roles for one female role. I decided that from now on, I will write for women, and my female protagonists will be so strong that men too will be compelled to identify with them.

So yes, I think the fate of humankind will depend on women. I'm convinced of that. Nowadays we hear more female voices and these voices are very strong. As long as women don't have an equal place in society, the power to make decisions and to impose their values, the world is heading straight into a wall. This endless pursuit of money and of all forms of power can't go on forever.

FOR A LIST OF WEBSITES AND RESOURCES ABOUT CIUDAD JUÁREZ, SEE DART CENTRE FOR JOURNALISM & TRAUMA:
HTTP://DARTCENTER.ORG/CONTENT/WOMEN-JUÁREZ-9#.USZ4CLBK5IH

SEE ALSO THE DOCUMENTARY WEB PROJECT LA CITÉ DE MORTES (IN FRENCH ONLY) :
WWW.LACITEDESMORTES.NET

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD SOLDIERS, SEE ROMÉO DALLAIRE'S CHILD SOLDIERS INITIATIVE:
WWW.CHILDSOLDIERS.ORG

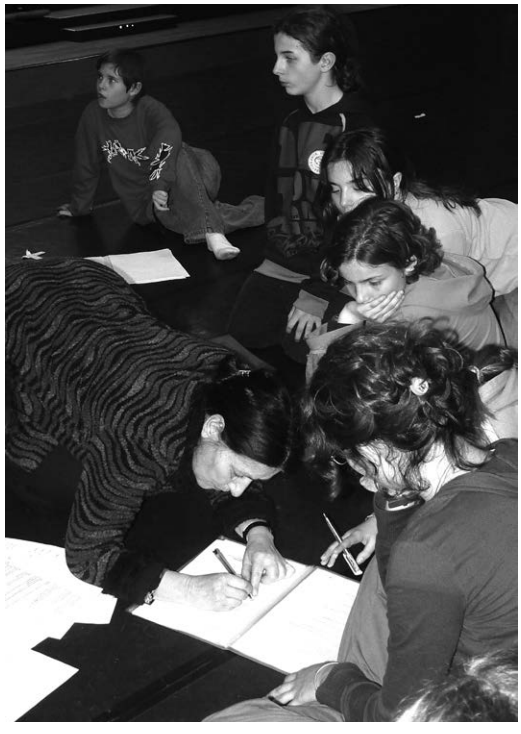


Image courtesy of Le Carrousel.

AS LONG AS WOMEN DON'T HAVE AN EQUAL PLACE IN SOCIETY, THE POWER TO MAKE DECISIONS AND TO IMPOSE THEIR VALUES, THE WORLD IS HEADING STRAIGHT INTO A WALL.

NOTES

1 Note that the following is my English translation of the original interview, which was conducted in French.

2 The precise nature of the "commission" is not specified in the play. The stage directions state, "It is not necessary to know where or why she is testifying. All that matters is what she has to say."

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As theatre artists involved in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in British Columbia, we—Rosemary Georgeson and Savannah Walling—have been friends for over ten years and have collaborated on various projects together. We've also spent a great deal of time sharing with each other about other projects we've had on-the-go in rural and urban communities, bringing together what we've learned through our mistakes and discoveries, our successes and our practices. We've

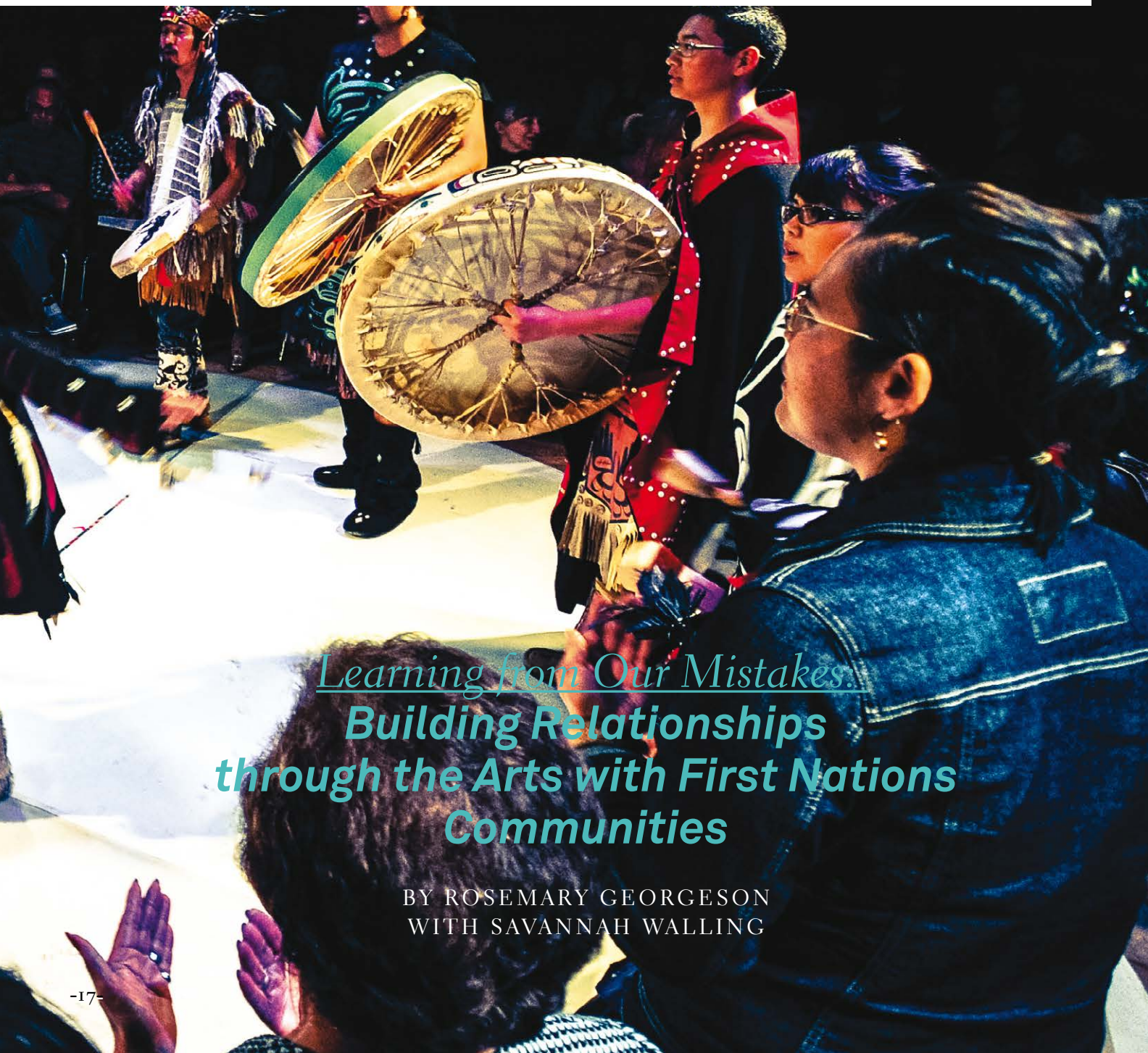
© Mark Montogomery. *Storyweaving: Weaving First Nation Memories from the Past into the Future* produced by Vancouver Moving Theatre and the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival in partnership with the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre.

thought that this dialogue—which evolved through our conversations and relationship—would be of interest and relevant to our larger arts community.

Rose

As a fifty-five-year-old First Nations woman, it is only in my lifetime that we as First Nations people have been accepted in theatres and presenting houses. We could perform but we were never audience members. My culture has always had its own theatre and forms of community arts, but the Canadian government shut them down from the 1880s to 1951. Although many of our cultural traditions continued underground, our voices are only coming fully back into the public now. Just that knowledge of this legacy explains the need for creating relationships inside First Nations territory that you are situated or entering.

Years ago I was at an arts conference participating in a workshop on how to engage First Nation communities in the arts. I heard a theatre producer speak about going into a Northern community with his show and how much effort and money he put into getting his show there. He was very angry that no one even made an attempt to come out for his production. When I asked about his outreach process, he



Learning from Our Mistakes: Building Relationships through the Arts with First Nations Communities

BY ROSEMARY GEORGESON
WITH SAVANNAH WALLING

had no response and seemed irritated that I would ask that question. He did say that when he mounted a production anywhere else, he didn't need to do outreach—he had PR people to do that for him. He made it quite clear, though, that he would never again attempt to take a production into a First Nations community. This was a turning point for me, hearing him speak this way about First Nation people and the arts. It was through the encounter with this gentleman that I started looking at the need to develop and build lasting relationships within our communities and between communities.

Savannah

As a sixty-seven-year-old mostly Anglo immigrant from the US whose ancestors fought on both sides of the Revolutionary, Civil, and Indian wars, I've seen big changes over the years in relations between non-First Nation and First Nation people. When I was born, Aboriginal/First Nations people were commonly called "Indians." Indians in Canada were forbidden to vote, buy land, practise their cultural customs, or hire lawyers to pursue land claims. Men lost their Indian status if they joined the Canadian military. Most Indian children

Every community and every individual is unique. No single approach suits every situation.

were taken from their families and sent to residential school. I was taught at public school—where there was usually not an Indian in sight—that Indians were a dying culture and Indian people would soon be assimilated. Today however, the old government restrictions have been lifted. According to the 2006 Canadian Census, the Aboriginal population is growing faster than the general population. Because of the amount of unfinished treaty business in B.C., treaty negotiations with First Nations are ongoing. Due to a history of broken trust between First Nations and immigrant communities, building relationships is foundational. Three Coast Salish Nations are embedded within and around the City of Vancouver where I live and work. Today's world is a very different world than that of my childhood. As a result, just about the most important step of my training and practice as an artist has involved learning to negotiate relationships with First Nation community partners, artistic colleagues, and community participants.

Rose

Relationship building is an ongoing process that does not happen overnight, but it is an essential key to opening doors to make a community arts project all-inclusive and to building relationships with First Nations communities. This applies to all aspects of interaction within our communities. Entering into a new community arts project is always a challenge. It takes time to build relationships and to ensure that your project is all inclusive. Building trust is so important. Take the time to go out and meet the people you want to connect with. We First Nations people have centuries of experience of our stories and ways being misappropriated—just taken and misconstrued into what non-First Nations thought they should be. This makes for bad feelings and mistrust when others enter into our communities.

Savannah

I've made some serious blunders on creative journeys involving First Nations cultural content and collaboration: mistakes due to ignorance, inexperience, cultural misunderstanding, working too fast and not putting in the time needed to build relationships. So I've done a lot of learning the hard way. As a result, some projects never made it to completion. A couple of others almost foundered, but instead of giving up, we interpreted the obstacles as a signal to take more time—and that was what was needed. The most important principle I've learned is that respect is the foundation of relationships.

Rose

While working for urban ink productions a few years ago in Williams Lake on the *Squaw Hall* community arts project[1]—and after making a few mistakes there—our team realized that we needed to have people from the community to help us find our way. As we were merging deeper into the community and getting to know more people, we started to talk with them about forming an advisory committee. The idea was met with appreciation and relief: We were asking them to become more deeply involved in our project and the community would have a much stronger voice regarding the work created. The committee was such a great resource for finding how we could best serve Williams Lake and the surrounding Nations and honour the stories they were sharing with us. Our committee was made up of people from that territory, First Nation and non-First Nation peoples, and men and women from all sectors of the community—from Aboriginal educators and a chief to a First Nations liaison for the health department, a city councillor, a reporter/author/historian for the local newspaper, and local businesspeople.

Savannah

Over the years, I've come to appreciate that engaging with First Nation communities means engaging with values and ways of life that are distinct from Canada's immigrant-based cultures. In practice this has meant occasionally reminding production stage managers that body language and everyday cultural interactions can differ. Some First Nations individuals will avoid eye contact as a sign of respect. Many non-First Nations people in strange, stressful situations learn to react with a lot of activity and conversation until they restructure the situation or extricate themselves from it. Many Indigenous people, on the other hand, when put into the same situation may remain motionless and watch until they figure out what is expected. Stage managers unfamiliar with cultural differences can interpret these responses as indicating lack of interest or trustworthiness. When looking for a stage manager for the *Storyweaving* project[2] we kept in mind that First Nations culture has traditionally relied on an ethic of non-interference and voluntary cooperation. We looked for someone who was willing to learn about Aboriginal culture and traditional ways of demonstrating respect, and who was prepared to do their best to operate by the longhouse philosophy, relying on example and persuasion rather than authority and force.

We reschedule and do "work-arounds" when we run into the kinds of situations some people call "Indian time": unexpected delays relating to "the time things take to happen," or "the time it takes to do things in a good way and when the time is right." Delays also can happen when ceremonial events are happening simultaneously with the projects: the reality is that Indigenous participants and cultural leaders may have different priorities than those of the non-Indigenous artistic team, regardless of the project's artistic interest and their commitment to it.

We've also learned not to make assumptions about what Aboriginal culture is and what its customs may be. Every community and every individual is unique. No single approach suits every situation. Some Aboriginal people don't know their own culture and language, which is due to the impact of residential schools and assimilation processes forced upon First Nation people. Some people are negotiating the tough challenge of "walking in two worlds simultaneously": the world of the ancestors and the urban world of today. And some people are knowledge-carriers of their culture.

Rose

Do your research, look at the history and accomplishments, and find out some of the challenges that are faced in our indigenous communities and the existing communities around us. Look at interactions and relations between First Nation communities and neighbouring non-First Nation communities. This will tell you a lot about what you will encounter. So will listening to what a community is telling you. Don't be afraid to do your research and find key people who can guide you to finding the right parties to speak with. Other important keys to success are being able to fully explain your project, asking permission to bring it into their communities, and finding out how they would like to be involved. Always consult with people and partners in the community regarding storyline and changes to your project. Ensuring that our ways and traditions are respected honours our communities in a healthy way. Being open and honest is so important—about where our stories will go and how they will be kept intact and brought back to a community.

Projects can have consequences that are sometimes bad and sometimes good. By staying in contact with a community after the project is completed, you show your willingness to be accountable— and to stay in relationship.

Savannah

The following are some steps that can help in negotiating collaboration with First Nation communities. Many are eloquently described in a great web site dedicated to helping journalists tell Indigenous news stories. *Reporting on Indigenous Communities* **WWW.RIIC.CA** is created and curated by CBC reporter Duncan McCue who is Anishinaabe and an adjunct professor of the UBC School of Journalism:

- If you are planning a project on First Nation traditional territory, obtain permission from the tribal council, cultural centre, or organization involved from the cultural territory you are entering;
- Ask the person with whom you are setting up a meeting to help you—before you arrive—with the proper greetings and traditional territorial protocol;
- Acknowledge the host community, its people, and territory at the beginning of meetings;
- It helps if you have a trusted advisor or cultural translator to help you negotiate the local customs and help you locate people who have the authority to give permissions;
- When you're uncertain about the customs and don't know what to do, ask your host—and when all else fails, follow the lead of those around you;
- If someone pours you a cup of tea, take time to drink it, because refusing food or drink from your host may be seen as disrespectful;
- Take time to develop respectful relationships with the elders, who are carriers of history and cultural teachings; be prepared to offer a gift that respects their time and commitment to the project and always let them finish what they are saying;
- Take time to learn who has ownership or stewardship over the songs, dances, images, and other material, and who has the authority to give permission for their use and under what circumstances;
- Learn the culturally appropriate ways to represent and publically share knowledge and learn the limits of the permission;
- It is not always easy to learn who has the authority to give permission and under what circumstances—it means investing time and patience;
- Always request permission before filming cultural material, and if you agree not to record it, point your camera in another direction so people know it isn't running;
- Sometimes anger or frustration will be directed your way or you will become the recipient of five hundred years of anger: take a deep breath, listen, conduct yourself with respect, and move on your way;
- Keep a good sense of humour—most of all about yourself.

Jo-ann Archibald has written an important book called *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* (2008). She is from the Stó:l Nation and is an associate dean for indigenous education in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. She talks about how the responsible use and ownership of stories can be complex and difficult to carry out, with the process influenced by considerations ranging from the personal and familial to the community and political. Each nation has its own traditions around how stories may be told for teaching or learning purposes. Some may be owned by individuals or clans, some may be in the public domain, some can only be told at certain times of the year or at certain events, some can be told only in part. Your responsibility as collaborating artists is to learn about and respect the traditional cultural ways of teaching, learning, sharing, and presenting knowledge. Proper acknowledgement of the source material is part of using knowledge responsibly

Once a story or other cultural material is shared, you incur reciprocal obligations: to do your best to make sure that what you present is balanced and truthful, that it is presented in a way that is culturally appropriate, that you will try to protect people from any negative impact that might result from public sharing, and that the people who assisted you get to see, read, or hear their story. Offer them transcripts of the interviews, opportunities to participate or give feedback, and tickets to the performances.

Projects can have consequences that are sometimes bad and sometimes good. By staying in contact with a community after the project is completed, you show your willingness to be accountable—and to stay in relationship.

Rose

I have been doing this work for the past twelve years with Vancouver Moving Theatre[3] and urban ink productions. I've seen first-hand the impact of building relationships in a community where First Nation people have been heard and their stories honoured—just being recognized as first peoples of that territory. It is the interaction between First Nation people and other cultures—with both parties learning new things and being heard and respected—that creates change and makes room for everyone. When the time is taken to build these relationships, you see relationships shifting between First Nation and non-First Nation communities.

Savannah

Vancouver Moving Theatre's practice has been profoundly informed by the insights of friends and cultural advisors (including Joann Kealiinohomoku, Terrell Piechowski, and Alta Begay), by our years of collaboration and consultation with Aboriginal colleagues Rose Georgeson and Renae Morriseau, and by insights of many Aboriginal community participants, artistic colleagues, and cultural teachers. We are deeply in their debt.

Rose

When I first came into contact with Vancouver Moving Theatre just over ten years ago, they had a relationship with the Downtown Eastside built over years of being part of the community. I came on as Aboriginal outreach worker for The Downtown Eastside Community Play. It was my first time working in "outreach." I learned so very much from that experience that I carry into all my "relationship-building gigs." My listening skills have become much more attuned and I have learned a deeper level of patience as I have found trying to rush things does not benefit anyone or the project.

I've also realized how much I understand from my traditions about "community" and building positive relationships with a lasting impact. Respecting and recognizing all individuals is very important in Vancouver Moving Theatre's practice and what they bring to their community. Over the past ten years, as I have been involved in different projects with the company, I see First Nations faces I first saw ten years ago when I was sitting in the audience of the Downtown Eastside Community Play, apprehensive about the First Nations content we were sharing and how it was shared. Many of those same faces are now involved as participants and loyal followers of Vancouver Moving Theatre. When working on the *Storyweaving* project I was struck by seeing so many friends who were there ten years ago in the beginning, and how we have all grown over the years due to the diligence of Terry Hunter and Savannah Walling of Vancouver Moving Theatre and their passion and devotion to building and keeping relationships they have built over the years. The *Storyweaving* project revealed the fruits of over ten years of relationship building and its positive impact. Playing to a packed house every night, supported by not only First Nation people but by everyone who attended the show, was proof we can learn from our mistakes, from each other, through listening to needs, and, last of all, by taking time to build these relationships, honouring and respecting the people that help bring this art form to light.

Rose and Savannah

Like all living creatures we make mistakes, we learn from those mistakes and never know what can grow from them. That is so often the case as you enter into new territories and new communities when engaging in community arts. But it is what you learn and create from these mistakes that is the true beauty.

NOTES

1 The Squaw Hall Project (2009-2010) was a community-engaged theatre project produced by Twin Fish Theatre (Nelson) and urban ink productions (Vancouver) working with Youth and Elders from the Secwepemc, Carrier,Tsilhqot'in communities. It culminaed in an original play (*Damned If You Do; What If You Don't*) and short film (*A Community Remembers*), which presented on tour to local band communities and at the DTES Heart of theCity Festival in Vancouver, 2011.

2 *Storyweaving*, an original theatrical production honouring First Nations ancestral and urban presence in Vancouver, was produced May 11-20, 2012, by Vancouver Moving Theatre/Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival in apartnership with the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre—with educational and spiritual support from the Indian Residential School Survivors Society.

2 Vancouver Moving Theatre is a Downtown Eastside-based professional arts organization co-founded by executive director Terry Hunter and artistic director Savannah Walling

QUEERLY CANADIAN: HOW A "QUEER" CANADIAN THEATRE COMPANY FOUND ITS PLACE AT AN INTERNATIONAL "GAY" THEATRE FESTIVAL

BY JAY WHITEHEAD

© David Barrus. Jay Whitehead in Theatre Outre's production of Dave Deveau's *My Funny Valentine*.
Inset: © Jaime Vedres. Jay Whitehead and Jerrim Rushka in Theatre Outre's production of Daniel Judes and Jay Whitehead's *UNSEX'd*.

I am a theatre artist. I am gay. I am Canadian. Although my work on the stage and in studio has not and is not always attached to a necessity of telling gay Canadian stories or of motivating gay Canadian agendas, there is no refuting the fact that I am always a gay Canadian. But do those definers actually mean anything, either descriptive or prescriptive, about my role or responsibilities to myself, my country, or the arts community here or abroad?

For the past two years, I have been fortunate to be included as a participant in the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival in Dublin, Ireland. Both of the years that our company, Theatre Outré, participated in this festival, ours was the only Canadian contingent invited to attend. As a producer as well as a performer for these productions, I touted far and wide, in our publicity efforts, that we were the only Canadians invited, intimating that there was some prestige to be gleaned from the fact, which certainly there was. But never, on either occasion, did I go beyond such statements to consider whether there was any relevance to it. Perhaps being Canadian in a festival of international gay theatre performance meant little or nothing beyond simple geography. What exactly were we representing abroad by calling ourselves gay Canadian theatre artists and how did being narrowly defined as such in the broader context of a global arts gathering matter to those who experienced our work alongside the work of artists from other nations? Certainly there is a recognized pedigree to Canadian gay theatre, with a canon including the work of such internationally acclaimed artists as Sky Gilbert, Michel Marc Bouchard, and Brad Fraser. But I now considered, in comparison to the offerings of other countries, and the culture surrounding the festival in Dublin, if there was any particular relevance to our being Canadian in this context.

My first consideration would be the inclusion of the word "gay" itself, and the idea that perhaps we could not, in effect, be "gay" theatre artists from Canada because of the problematic nature of that word here culturally. In Canada, which, arguably, depending on the region, values plurality above all else, the word "gay" has long been rife with exclusion. In "politically correct" and artistically and academically savvy circles, the word is now passed over for inclusive and ever-growing acronyms to represent sub-groups of sexual minorities. But because to call oneself an LGBTTIQQ2SA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, 2-spirited or ally) artist is problematic, most Canadian theatre groups in this demographic have opted to define their work with the more inclusive word "queer."

Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Canada's first such theatre company, based in the heart of Toronto within one of Canada's most vibrant and active gay communities, has its own storied history of the language used to describe its work over the past several decades, and specifically the use of the word "queer." J. Paul Halferty outlines the progression of this "queer signifier" through the company's history. He traces the use of the word from the tenure of Sky Gilbert as artistic director in the 1980s, when queer meant "radical," "political," and "outside of the 'heteronormative' discourses of masculine/feminine gender and homo/heterosexuality" (125). As Thomas Yearling adds, at the time "this word [queer] work[ed] so well because it appropriate[d] a former badge of shame and because it suggest[ed] that is not our business or duty to appear acceptable" (qtd. in Halferty 126). Subsequent artistic directors, including Sarah Stanley and David Oiye, for reasons—financial, political, or philosophical—moved away from the use of "queer" as being "against [the] mainstream" towards being "queerly inclusive" (132). In the years that followed, up to and including today, Buddies in Bad Times and other similar groups across Canada have adopted mandates that remove provocation from the "queer" of the 1980s and replaced it with a "queer" that functions as "an umbrella term employed broadly to embrace the gay and lesbian community" (133). To many of us who are part of queer and arts communities in Canada, the word "queer" has since lost its sense of rebellion, and has instead become a "symbol of inclusion, rather than a tool for critique" insofar as it is used in the context of sexual minorities (133).

A quick scan of theatre groups currently operating in Canada that now use the word to describe, in essence, a homosexual or gay mandate includes Vancouver's Frank Theatre Company, which "produce[s] and promote[s] queer and sex positive performance"; Third Street Theatre, "Calgary's Queer Theatre Company"; and Queer Acts Theatre Festival in Halifax, which uses the word in its title and describes itself less broadly as an "event dedicated to highlighting the talent of queer artists and presenting theatrical work of relevance to LGBTQ community." No longer the "radical queer" of Sky Gilbert's Buddies, the word is used by these latter companies to include an entire community and to define a certain performance aesthetic that is not mainstream.

This is not the case in other parts of the world, as we learned at the Dublin Festival, which continues to call itself the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival. To those of us who, for years, have defined ourselves and our work in Canada as "queer," the word gay suggests an exclusive definition of a white, male, monogamous, and cisgender homosexual. By contrast, the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival includes works by lesbians, transsexuals, bisexuals, allies, and more, without causing offense to any of the aforementioned. In fact, Brian Merriman, festival founder and director, insists that it is a gay festival, not a queer festival. He professes this with a confidence in his binary definition that I, as a Canadian, feel less apt to do. We were careful not to use the word with those involved in the festival. Although the word is benign to us, we learned that this is not the case universally.

One might consider the power of words and the choice to use words such as "gay" or "queer" within the cultural or political context of the country in question. Very recent, even ongoing, political debates in countries as developed as France, the UK, and the US over issues like gay marriage, civil

unions, and gay adoption might now appear quaint to some of us in Canada, who leapt hurdles like marriage equality on a national level with little or no memorable angst almost ten years ago. To Canadian artists, then, telling gay stories or creating a meaningful or provocative conversation with one's work requires a step further than just using a word like "gay," which, in a Canadian vernacular, is about as shocking and evocative as the word "straight." Rather than focusing work on issues surrounding a mostly tolerated gay community, Canadian companies, artists, and spaces have necessarily radicalized further with words like "fag," utilized now by Toronto's performance/gallery space Videofag. All this is in the effort to promote newer frontiers to challenge communities in Canada, including sex positivity, non-monogamy, and gender and sexual expressions that go beyond a simple "gay" interest.

In contrast to this, many of the countries represented by the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, including the host country, face or have more recently faced issues surrounding their basic rights. This necessitates a different approach by local artists in reaction to the political climate and the progress of the gay community in their particular country. In Ireland, for example, the act of "buggery" (or, gay sex) was not decriminalized until 1993, almost thirty years after the legalization of homosexual acts in Canada. Only recently in Ireland has the first generation of homosexual Irish citizens to be "born free" come of age. This landmark was celebrated at our first visit to the festival in 2012, shocking us Canadians. Perhaps it could be argued that Ireland, like many other countries, is on the continuum of homosexual acceptance, a few paces behind Canadians—or, more properly, on a different continuum altogether. It does seem, however, that words matter; and although the quality of and issues surrounding the work in Canada and Dublin remain relatively similar and equally diverse, the motivations behind the work in each of these countries seem to differ because of the relationships the queer communities have to their respective country's culture and progress vis-à-vis the gay movement.

It might also be noted that historically, "gay" communities have sought a form of assimilation with their surrounding culture, and "queer" communities have taken a more radical tone that seeks to highlight what separates them from the status quo. Recent attempts to persuade the general populace of the United States, for example, to accept gay marriage have focused on the similarities of gay and straight relationships and the desire of gay people to adopt the existing cultural traditions and tropes of straight marriage. Although in a contemporary Canada, as argued above, the word queer has come to take on much more general definitions of sexual minority, in the past and elsewhere the word has been far more charged.

In North America, following the riots at Stonewall in the late 1960s, the gay community entered into a decade of sexual liberation, artistic freedom, unbridled expression, and experimentation in reaction to the oppression of the preceding decades. In Canada, these radicalized times included Toronto bathhouse raids and subsequent riots and the founding of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre with its original rebellious agenda. This was a truly non-conformist and, by today's standards, queer period in gay history. When the AIDS crisis hit, everyone from Jerry Falwell to Anita Bryant to Larry Kramer pointed the finger of blame. Those in politics, pop culture, religious institutions, even many within the homosexual community blamed gay people for their decadent behavior. For a time, gay theatre in

this part of the world became, solely, a reaction to this. Self-loathing, survivor guilt, and sexual taboo once again took hold of gay communities, and the years that followed, theatre took on this more reactionary and assimilative tone.

But now that we've past the initial shock and loss of the AIDS crisis and fought and won victories in Canada such as the acceptance of gay marriage, there is a resurging, if more cautious, queer movement here that seeks to reignite the sex-positive and artistically expressive spirit of the 1970s. Theatre companies that define themselves as "queer," not "gay," continue to emerge on the Canadian arts landscape and seek to provoke a sleeping culture that perhaps takes its victories for granted, forgetting that our battles have not yet been won.

As a founder of one such newly formed and queerly dubbed Canadian company, I find it interesting to compare the work we have brought to the festival in Dublin with that of other countries with different socio-political climates and histories. It is also interesting to note how a desire for acceptance in parts of the world, like Dublin, play out in its perceived assimilative ambitions. I suggest that in Canada, much current queer work seeks to move out of the mainstream and back into the margins, where, in the years prior to the outbreak of AIDS, gay artists explored freely, pushed boundaries, and provoked intentionally. A recent production called *Hollywood Hen Pit* at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival, for example, created shock and made national headlines when queer theatre artists Ian Mozdzen and Doug Melnyk staged "simulated" oral sex and actual "mayonnaise enemas." And our very own production of *UNSEX'd* this year in Dublin contained staged representations of buggery with a foreign object, nudity, and cunnilingus with food products. This type of "radical" content was the exception among the shows at the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival—a festival that, it seemed to us, almost at times diminished itself (or was diminished by its own gay community) simply for being gay, let alone queer.

For example, the company from South Africa, the Rust Co-operative, was celebrated by the festival, its volunteers, and audience members for its production of an original play titled *The View*; however, much of the praise was for bringing in a "straight" audience—as if that were the ultimate goal at a gay festival. One Facebook comment on the show, proudly displayed on the festival website, was that *The View* "was too good to be regarded as strictly Gay Theatre" and should instead be seen in the more mainstream (and better funded) "Dublin Theatre Festival […] where a wider and more appreciative audience would have witnessed [it]." The implication that participation in a gay festival somehow diminishes the impact of the work, or that playing to a gay audience was not in itself a valuable endeavour, was offensive to us Canadians, and we bristled that the Rust Collective would use such a comment as part of a publicity campaign in a gay festival. In a parallel example closer to home, some months earlier in Canada, while casting *UNSEX'd*, I dropped a wonderful actor from the running when he suggested that a gay festival might bring less prestige to his CV than any other festival. This offended my queer Canadian sensibilities, indicating to me that despite my protestations, my inclusively queer Canadian bubble was not as impermeable to homophobia as I imagined. Given my sensitivity to this type of prejudice at home, reaching a "straight" audience was to me one of the very last things to be celebrated about this production of *The View* or any other production staged in Dublin.

Other anecdotes from the festival are equally troubling. At a gay club in Dublin, a local and well-loved drag queen half-heartedly advertised the festival (for which her employer was a sponsor) loudly over the microphone with the words, "It's only a *gay* theatre festival." Even for an irreverent drag queen, this seemed terribly dismissive of the fact that her city was hosting the largest such festival in the world. Of course, none of this should reflect upon the festival itself, or its administration, audience, or volunteers for whom I have nothing but the highest regard. But it is worth pointing out that, by contrast, Canada's Rhubarb Festival, a queer arts festival in our own backyard, is generally regarded as carrying both prestige and pedigree; and while some might debate the merit of its shows, art-minded Canadians, I suggest, would never debate its validity just because it is queer.

Aside from cultural issues pertaining to language and intentions, I might also note differences not so much in what stories we Canadians tell, but in how we choose to tell and stage these stories compared to groups from other areas of the world, who have different issues on their minds and different political and social issues back home. In a global context, Canadian artists seem less and less inclined to tell uniquely Canadian stories, although it might be argued that we tend to tell these stories in uniquely Canadian ways. For example, the first production we took to Dublin, *My Funny Valentine* by Canadian queer playwright Dave Deveau, deals with the issue of school bullying and homophobia, but frames it in the uniquely American context of a true-life school shooting. The play we took this year—*UNSEX'd*, co-written by Daniel Judes and myself—takes place in Elizabethan England and speaks to universal issues of fame and human obsession with beauty. This same trend can be seen of many other festival offerings from other nations, including the aforementioned *The View*, which came from South Africa and was inspired by a North Carolina preacher's suggestion that gays and lesbians should be rounded up and kept behind an electric fence.

It is not, then, so much the fact that Canadians create content and tackle issues that reach beyond our borders that sets us apart internationally in Dublin; rather, it is our approach to these issues and how we tell our stories that seems noteworthy. With *My Funny Valentine*, for example, I was drawn to Deveau's play, as a producer

and actor, by its three-dimensional handling of a complicated issue, presenting plausible, pluralistic reactions to a seemingly cut and dry issue with little sentimentality and much humor. The play refuses to take sides, and even leaves open the possibility of placing some of the responsibility for the shooting on the victim himself. This is a generous and open-minded approach, in which there are no definitive answers and everyone is given the benefit of the doubt. Conscious of this difference in a Canadian approach, festival director Brian Merriman praised the production for not falling into "the *Laramie Project* mix," comparing our take to an arguably more sentimental approach by American writers a decade previous. Merriman described Deveau's Canadian approach as "modern" and "original" (234).

UNSEX'd took on the issues of beauty, youth, and fame and our damaging gay male obsession with it. It is also inspired by my personal experiences as a male actor, through years of professional training and practice, with effeminaphobia—imagining a world where feminine men, like myself, are celebrated, both on stage and off, for as long as they remain beautiful. These issues run deep, and the play, as Irish reviewer Gordon Farrell noted, contains "so many layers that it is difficult to know where to start." Our approach to these issues, however, was inspired by queer Canadian pioneers like Sky Gilbert: masking the play's larger issues under a not-so-thin layer of high camp, wit, gratuitous nudity, and comedy. *UNSEX'd* was billed in Dublin under the curious category of "comedy/nudity," which we didn't object to for marketing purposes. However, I felt that although the production was an audience favourite, the play's deeper issues didn't strike a lasting chord with our audiences abroad so much as it simply tickled their funny bone.

Both of these plays in Dublin were celebrated critically and received festival award nominations in several categories: nominations for writing, directing, and an award for acting for *My Funny Valentine* in 2012; and nominations for writing, acting, and production elements for *UNSEX'd* in 2013. Although we considered our work in Dublin to be socially relevant, and its various creative elements were critically celebrated, we were never singled out for the festival's valued Doric Wilson Award for Intercultural Dialogue. This perhaps suggests that because our treatment of "gay" issues did not contain the gravity and sentimentality valued in many parts of the world, it didn't reach across borders and speak to social issues abroad. Our message seemed to be over-shadowed, in this context, by the play's raunchiness and comedic sensibilities.

Coming full circle with queer Canadian theatre history, we see that more and more artists continue to step forward to throw down the old gauntlet of the radically queer movement, using different language to define themselves in sufficiently political ways. As artists, we arm ourselves with traditional Canadian weapons of choice—wit, satire, humour, open-mindedness—to tell stories from our uniquely queer Canadian perspective. Telling queer stories in our signature open-minded Canadian way, Theatre Outré and other companies like us continue to try to define who we are and what we have to say, both at home and abroad. Although we tell our stories differently than do theatre companies in other parts of the world, and the words we use to define ourselves vary, the struggles we face overlap: be they marriage, gender identity, health issues, or the perceived professional validity of a gay theatre festival. Though we speak up differently than many of those we stood with in Dublin, our battles, even at home, are not yet won and continue to be worth fighting for.

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© Jean-Louis Fernandez. The cast of Wajdi Mouawad's *Des Femmes* at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde

In their insightful study "Affect/Performance/Politics" (2012), Erin Hurley and Sara Warner remind us that social sciences and the humanities today are experiencing a new sweep of theoretical inquiry, focusing on affect as a leading mechanism of how we create meaning and communicate, as well as how we make and receive art.

Staging Des Femmes: On Theatre of Compassion in the Works of Wajdi Mouawad

BY YANA MEERZON

In this article, I take the suggested theoretical framework further to examine what I refer to as Wajdi Mouawad's "theatre of compassion"—his dramaturgy, directorial choices, and work with actors—as an artistic project to shock and unsettle audiences. In my book *Performing Exile, Performing Self: Theatre, Drama, Film* (Palgrave 2012), I identified Mouawad's theatre as the meeting point between politics, autobiography, and poetry. Here, I further claim that Mouawad creates poetry by manipulating visual- and sound-scapes on stage.[1] He creates an "oratorio-type expressivity," using the power of sound—the spoken word, music, and singing—to stimulate the audience's emotions and make his political and artistic statements.

I argue that in Mouawad's theatre, the "effect of the autobiographical" also acts as a force that builds audience's emotions. It becomes the play's semantic gesture, even if the dramatic material does not directly reflect the artist's own or his collaborators' personal experience. Here, the mise-en-scene of "Self" predetermines the playwright/director's practice of translating his life-story into the newly constructed dramatic and stage images: into the sound scapes (audio), spatial scapes (including video), and the presence of the actors in the performance. It also insists on the privilege of the autobiographical as the principle of reception when the spectator's experience of catharsis (purgation) is exchanged for experiences of shock and affect.

I have written on the primary (dramatic and thematic) aspects of Mouawad's "theatre of Self" elsewhere;[2] here I examine his approaches to staging a canonical text. I investigate how affect—a "thrill experience" or "thinking feeling" (Hurley and Warner 99)—serves as the leading compositional element of Mouawad's theatre of compassion, helping him to form new theatrical and political communities. My analysis focuses on Mouawad's 2011 production, *Des Femmes*, an adaptation of Sophocles' three tragedies, *Les Trachiniennes*, *Antigone*, and *Électre*.[3] I saw it in April 2012 in Ottawa, when it toured to the Centre national des Arts.

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Born in Lebanon in 1968, Mouawad belongs to the generation of Lebanese artists/exiles who fled their country during the 1970s civil war and sought refuge in the West. Mouawad's exile is, however, more complex: he first experienced displacement at the age of ten when his family relocated to Paris, and again at the age of fourteen when they moved to Montreal. These experiences left discernible imprints on his language, dramatic devices, and themes. As Mouawad testifies, his second emigration left him vulnerable and lonely in adolescence. Perpetual homelessness and the seductiveness of suicide mark the life views of Mouawad's characters. His protagonists are eternal strangers, trying to reconcile their past with their present, whose experiences as young Québécois are those of refugees from a faraway country. In its subject matter, Mouawad's work presents an example of the exilic child's disengagement from the land of his ancestors; the theatricalization of collective and individual memory, as well as the objectification, fictionalization, and translation of a communal history. At the same time, Mouawad escalates the story of his personal suffering to the universals of abandoned childhood. He borrows the devices of testimony to "bear witness to the national tragedy of Lebanon, work through the trauma it caused, and offer hope to the survivors" (Moss 174).

Mouawad's theatre attains to resurrect the structures and the affective powers of Greek tragedy. His plays often follow "the formal organization of the tragedies," which function as a theatrical "feeling-technology" (Hurley 40). The characters' speeches are like those of a Greek chorus, marked by self-reflective powers and evoking audience empathy. Mouawad's plays also exhibit the influence of Romantic philosophy, specifically Friedrich Hölderlin's vision of tragedy as a highly personalized experience of catastrophe (Davreu 37). In Hölderlin's romantic tragedy, "fate" is introduced to awaken the characters' self-awareness and subjectivity, and to make them responsible for their actions. In Mouawad's theatre, fate paves the way for the emotion of shock to take over Aristotelian catharsis, inviting the audience's sympathy with the characters (Telmissany 49). This pursuit of tragic pathos and melodramatic affect marks all of Mouawad's theatrical endeavors, in particular his directing. His violent images of tortured and raped women, broken families, and abandoned children emotionally shake the audiences, raising our pity and fear and making us politically aware.

The 2011 production *Des Femmes* is the story of several women "who have suffered harm at the hands of men" (Gauthier). It received extensive but disapproving critical attention in Europe and Canada. Reviewers objected to

Mouawad's exploitation of public scandal. He invited Bernard Cantat, the leader of the now-dissolved rock group Noir Désir and an indicted murderer, to perform and sing the part of the Chorus. The critics also found that the production did not have "tragic resonance and fluidity" (Shine). They claimed the play revealed that Mouawad feels "more comfortable with intimacy—characters as damaged children—than outsized, implacable forces of fate" (Shine). However, I argue that this production exemplified how affect can become the only semantic force in theatre when the devices of autobiography and musical composition constitute its intentionality.

In psychology, the term "affect" refers to the active processes of experiencing a strong emotion: our instinctual reaction to any psycho-physical stimuli. In theatre, affect is "associated with action," when "our blood rushes faster, our mirror neurons spike new synaptic activity throughout our bodies, adrenalin courses throughout the system, and, as an added bonus, we are literally massaged by the actor's voice" (Bogart xii). Affect can be also similar to shock experience, like the thrill sensation we get (goose bumps, for example) when witnessing a dangerous scene. Reactions are automatic: our experience of affect precedes our experience of empathy, compassion, or catharsis; the emotions are directly connected with our system of moral, ethical, social, cultural, and aesthetic values. While it is common in how it is physically expressed, affect can be a very subjective experience, marked by durational and mimetic categories related to the experiential definitions of Self, something that Hurley defines as the processes of making and receiving theatre performance as "feeling-labour." The uniqueness of this experience rests with the volatility of emotional outcome. It "requires two sentient bodies: one to act [the actor], another to apprehend [the spectator]" (Hurley 26). Thus, the pairing of theory of affect with semiotic approaches in theatre scholarship provides interesting insights on how the plays and performances of testimony and witnessing capitalize on their build-in structural or "artistic intentionality" to evoke the audience`s emotional or affective responses.

The poetic nature of Greek tragedy, with its epic modes of narration, has always been Mouawad's dramatic ideal. Story-telling devices, monologues, and theatrical passages that are more literary than theatrical are also part of the signature style of Mouawad's writing for stage. Staging the plays of Sophocles, Mouawad claims, allowed him to enter into personal dialogue with the classics, both in the role of a theatre director and as a fellow poet. For the production of *Des Femmes*, Mouawad secured a new translation of Sophocles' masterpiece: a text that would approach the language and narrative devices of contemporary dramaturgy. He sought the multiple levels of the poetic word to convey the wealth of dramatic and sensual experience found in the original. His objective was to reclaim the ethical questions of the tragedy and preserve its existential anxieties (Mouawad, "Le chemin change" 15). With *Des Femmes* Mouawad wished to address younger audiences, who by watching Sophocles today could be forced to recognize and appreciate the power of "logos"— the power of poetry to express the violence of world suffering. Seeking the sensuality of the text, Mouawad was constructing this production's intentionality: he devised the aural mechanisms of feeling technology to pre-determine the audience's empathy.

Mouawad invited French poet and translator Robert Davreu to help him with this project. Davreu's rich and abstract language captured the vividness and rough physicality of the Mediterranean landscape. The device of the autobiographical was echoed in Davreu's work as well. Describing translation process, Davreu emphasizes the intimacy of collaboration between himself and Mouawad's company, an experience constituting the primary mechanism of compassion. Davreu acknowledges that by inviting him to work on this project, Mouawad provided him with a unique opportunity to re-live his own childhood experience of the Mediterranean—his summer vacations at the seashore—through his sensory memory of the region (Davreu 22-23). Davreu claims that without this autobiographical approach to the translation, he would not have been able to evoke the images, the conflicts, and the philosophy of the Greek text.

However, in translating for theatre, Davreu also had to consider the actors' vocal performance. The actors-enunciators would need to adapt the new translation to their own vocal and physical particulars, so Davreu turned his text into something like a libretto for opera. The spectator-listener, rather than distinguishing every word sung, follows the rhythm and emotion of the music. In this sense, words become abstract sound, similar to one we associate with music. As Levitin writes, "music appears to mimic some of the features of language and to convey some of the same emotions that vocal communication does, but in a nonreferential, and nonspecific way. It also invokes some of the same neural regions that language does, but far more than

language, music taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward, and emotion" (187). Hence, if music can mimic the power and the structural features of verbal communication, the soundscape of a theatre performance can mimic a musical composition. It can use rhythm, tempo, harmony, and volume as mechanisms of affect to rouse theatregoers emotionally.

Mouawad is fully aware of the power of music's effectual mechanisms; and hence he often directs his productions as musical compositions. Working on *Des Femmes* he proposed that his actors rehearse Sophocles' text while listening to music to search for the inner rhythm of the production through the external rhythm of the chosen music. By listening to the music and speaking their lines inspired by it, the actors become ventriloquists for Sophocles' text—living channels transmitting the melody, rhythm, and timbre of his poetry. This trust of the psychological and physical interconnection between the actor's Self and the text they must seek is, for Mouawad, the manifestation of the unity between the actor's subjectivity and the character's subjectivity.

It comes as no surprise that Mouawad's trust in the power of logos has autobiographical roots. Not only are storytelling, chanting, singing, and praying the predominant modes of communication for his home culture, but oral interaction is prominent in his childhood experiences. He cites the power of his father's verbal presence at their family table, recalling that he spoke *at* his children, rather than with them.[4] Mouawad's worldview has thus been shaped by the experience of listening, which he translates into all his artistic endeavours: writing plays, staging productions, and composing novels. Moreover, Mouawad works in French as his second language. His use of French is thus self-conscious, making his exploration of the power of words and sounds on stage inevitable, and nurturing the aural mechanisms of affect in his theatre.

Andrei Serban, a Romanian director working in the US, expresses a vision similar to Mouawad's of the function of word and sound in theatre, where, he suggests, "the word is written to be experienced at the moment it is spoken, in an immediate relationship with the sound, with an infinite possibility to create moods and situations as music does" (26). Here, sound is recognized as the most powerful tool for making one feel; its vibrations are sensual. The type of performance within which sound is the main means of communication (as in a concert or an opera), with spectacle taking a subordinate position, has the effectual force of music. It prompts a higher level of emotional and sensual intimacy with the text on the part of the listener, who perceives at the level of sound and not intellectual meaning. This effect of perceiving verbal expression as sound or music is characteristic of communication within oral cultures, in which the spoken word predominates (Gray 51).

Furthermore, in his soundscape of *Des Femmes* Mouawad approaches the staging of sound in radio, relying on our "imaginative mind" (Rattigan 120). Mouawad secures the "effectual" power of speech and takes into account the dichotomy of time and reception that marks the aural reception of a radio play. Sound, as a mechanism of feeling technology based on the effect of autobiographical, allows a special meeting with the spectator's own self—when the subjectivity of the receiver/listener determines the effects of the radio performance. Similarly, listening to the sound-scape of *Des Femmes* allows for a connection between the spectator's self and the stage action to occur, as much as it allows for the actor's autobiographical self to be expressed.

With Des Femmes Mouawad wished to address younger audiences, who by watching Sophocles today could be forced to recognize and appreciate the power of "logos"— the power of poetry to express the violence of world suffering.

The power of Cantat's voice takes over the stage–audience interaction, functioning as a mode of feeling technology. His chanting determines the mood of danger into which Mouawad forces his actors and audiences; it signifies the moments of emotional rupture, when no words are left.

An artist of exile, Mouawad insists that of all possible geographical places of belonging (from Lebanon to Quebec to France), the rehearsal hall is the only place he feels at home. Hence, he seeks the sensation of autobiographical not only in his personal rapport with the literary texts he produces, but also in his connection with members of his company. Mouawad's manipulation of actors' emotions is similar to the exercises in emotional recall and affective memory of Strasberg's Method Acting, which are seen by Hurley as the elements of feeling-technology (60-70). To create more intimate relationships between the actor and the text, which are often marked by the actors' physical distress, Mouawad repeatedly used the physical stimuli of pouring cold water on the actors and exposing their bodies to the heat of stage lamps, until, as Shine notes, "pneumonia seem[ed] a bigger risk than the wrath of hostile gods." This stimulating of senses—from the physical experience of repeating sounds and words, to the psycho-physical experience of listening to music and speaking text from the place of trance—forces the actors to undergo the experience of affect themselves and so transmit this experience to their audiences. In this way, the actors become witnesses to the characters' horror of fate and hate, the Greek tragedy's *hyper-historians* (Rokem 13). At the same time, by watching actors being exposed to cold water, stifling mud, and the heat of the stage lamps, the audience becomes a secondary witness to the characters/actors' trauma and also experiences affect. As the result, the primary emotion the spectators feel is "the thrill of being in the presence of actors who are radiantly experiencing the present moment" (Bogart xii).

Des Femmes unfolds in the empty space of the Greek theatre skena, where the human tragedy takes place. This physical/scenic world consists of a combination of the primary elements (such as water, earth, stone and wood) and man-made objects (such as wooden chairs and plastic curtains). *Antigone*, the second play of the trilogy, opens with the chorus of Elders dressed in white and golden attire suggestive of a Mediterranean palette. They sit on the narrow bench across the empty stage, passing a jar of water while saying the lines of prologue. As the show unfolds, the golden whiteness of the world turns into black and greyish colors of decay and disintegration, while the natural elements of sand and water turn into mud and rubbish. What dominates this world is the voice of fate: the music and the singing of Bernard Cantat remains the leading mechanism of feeling, this production's semantic gesture. "Filling the night, and by turns strident, lyrical and elegiac, Cantat's hauntingly beautiful recorded voice takes over the production's charge of emotional tension and release. […] The timeless dilemma of vengeance versus redemption is evoked with the incantatory force of a muezzin" (Shine).

By casting Bertrand Cantat as the leading vocal presence on stage, Mouawad was seeking a performer–protagonist whose personal story had similarities to the Greek play's tragic overtones. His stage presence was to re-enforce the affectual power of autobiographical performance, based on collapsing the performer's subjectivity with the fictional world. In *Des Femmes*, the action moves from the introductory/transitory overtures of the chorus/narrator to the story of the characters: Clytemnestra, Electra, Antigone. The power of Cantat's voice takes over the stage–audience interaction, functioning as a mode of feeling technology. His chanting determines the mood of danger into which Mouawad forces his actors and audiences; it signifies the moments of emotional rupture, when no words are left. So when the Chorus sings, nobody can stop him. The characters/actors are left alone on the stage, in its spatial and aural emptiness, the voice of Cantat still resonating in the ears of the audience.

At the same time, Mouawad sets an uneven volume of sound by juxtaposing amplified speeches-chants of the Chorus with the actors' non-amplified voices. "Eisenstein's montage"—the device of creating a single composition by selecting and juxtaposing conflicting elements within it—becomes the leading principle of Mouawad's performance text and the technique of rousing emotion in the audience.[5]

Mouawad's montage is aggressive and unassuming at the same time: it does not "emphasize the rhythmical interruptions, but integrates them organically" (Banu 47).[6] Relying on Cantat's idiosyncratic singing predetermines the effect of flatness in the oral delivery of the actors; Mouawad engages with our sensory and aural thresholds of (in)tolerance. He violates the audience's aural expectations and makes it difficult for us to naturally adjust our mechanisms of listening to the constantly shifting pitch, tone, and timbre in the production.

In staging *Des Femmes*, Mouawad once again demonstrates his artistic preferences for a theatre of poetry, in which the power of a spoken word, the aurality of performance, prevails, and to whom the emotional attachment of the audience—the affect—is the determining factor of the theatrical experience. In Mouawad's theatre of compassion, Aristotelian catharsis is exchanged with the emotions of affect, shock, and empathy; whereas his original plays include the elements of Greek tragedy and melodrama. Mouawad uses his own biography to tell a horror story, whether he is staging his own text or that of Sophocles. His acting pedagogy is based on the principles of community-building and creating emotional interdependence within the group; and his staging employs theatre's auditory elements to create compassion in his audiences. As Banu writes, Mouawad's performances "grab you with the power of a shipwreck, and you lose and find yourself again within them taken by the glow of his language and the captivating set." Mouawad's "high-voltage theatre" (51) always manages to emotionally knock out its audiences.

NOTES

1 Some of Mouawad's critics, and occasionally he himself, claim that visual presentation is the key in his theatrical palette (Olivia Choplin, "Où placer les bombes? Art and Violence in Wajdi Mouawad's Le sang des promesses," *Québec Studies* 54 (2012): 77; Virginia Preston, "Imag/ing Theatre in Wajdi Mouawad's Seuls," *TheatreForum* 35 (2009): 17-25); I argue the opposite: I see visuality as a secondary element to his performative aesthetics.

2 Yana Meerzon, "Staging Memory in Wajdi Mouawad's Incendies: Archaeological Site or Poetic Venue?" *Theatre Research in Canada* 34.1 (2013):12-37; "Searching for Poetry: On Improvisation and Collective Collaboration in the Theatre of Wajdi Mouawad," *Canadian Theatre Review* 143 (2010): 29-34; "The Exilic Teens: On the *Intracultural* Encounters in Wajdi Mouawad's Theatre," *Theatre Research in Canada* 30.1 (2009): 99-128.

3 *Des Femmes*, which premiered in 2011 at the Avignon Theatre festival, is the first part of Wajdi Mouawad's five-year Sophocles project. Mouawad aims to present all seven plays in 2015, at Mons, the European Capital of Culture. See: http://nac-cna.ca/theatrefrancais/desfemmes

4 Author's personal notes from Wajdi Mouawad's workshop, *L'Auteur-Comédien* (Centre national des arts, 10-20 June 2012, Ottawa).

5 For more on the subject, see R. Darren Gobert, "Behaviorism, Catharsis, and the History of Emotion," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 26.2 (2012): 109-125.

6 All translations from French into English are mine.

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DISPATCH

STORYTELLING AT THE HUMAN LIBRARY

January 26, 2013, was National Human Library Day in Canada, with twenty-four Human Library events happening over fifteen cities. I was lucky enough to be among the interns selected to help create and facilitate the CBC Human Library in Montreal hosted by Atwater Library and Computer Centre and in tandem with Inspirit Foundation.[1] Having a background in theatre, I was struck by the parallels between the principles of this event and those in Theatre of the Oppressed and other forms of community-based theatre.

I've always been interested in community-engaged performance. I recall being in a high school production of Dennis Foon's *Seesaw*, a show based on the playwright's extensive interviews with kids between the ages of 10 and 12. I found it compelling that *Seesaw* was based on real people's stories and that someone bothered to interview all those pre-teens and really find out about their lives. My interest in Human Library is similar—it's a vehicle for underrepresented people to share personal stories with the public.

We all know that a library is a collection of books. The Human Library isn't a collection of books *about* people; instead, the people *themselves* are the books, invited to participate by sharing their different life experiences. People from the general public ("Readers") are invited to engage in half-hour conversations with participants ("Human Books"). The aim is for each Reader to connect with a Human Book, to appreciate what they've experienced and who they really are.

The thirteen Human Books in attendance at the CBC Human Library were invited because of their experiences with marginalization. Among them were Andrew Ploevets, a former bully who now works for the anti-bullying organization LOVE; Roksanna Bahramitash, author of *Gender in Contemporary Iran: Pushing the Boundaries* and producer of *Beyond the Borqua*, a documentary on women in Afghanistan; and Frank Verpaelst, musician, technician, blogger, family man, and dwarf. These, along with the ten other Human Books present, engaged in candid conversations with the general public.

Like Theatre of the Oppressed, Human Library was created in an effort to break down boundaries and have people engage in authentic conversations about their communities. The participants often have had to contend with power imbalances. Much like Boal's forum theatre, a Human Library without audience interaction would simply not work. The "Reader" in the Human Library acts like forum theatre's "spect-actor," who interacts with the storyteller to direct the course of the performance. I noticed that about halfway into their conversations, the Readers were sometimes talking as much as the Human Book—sometimes even monopolizing the conversation!

© Eric Craven. Jason Edward Lewis, Viola Rose Day, and Skawennati Tricia Fragnito at the CBC Human Library in Montreal.

© Eric Craven.Kim Thúy and Emily Schon at the CBC Human Library in Montreal.

"It gets through about four to six months of boundaries in about three minutes," Human Book Rabbi Andrea Meyers says about the powerful effect the project has on both the Reader and the Book.[2] The Human Books all spoke of how open their Readers became over the course of the conversation, sharing personal stories that they felt related to the personal struggles of the Human Books.

The power in the Human Library project lies in the fact that the storytellers are telling their own stories—they are not actors, they are themselves. The former bully who speaks out against violence comes in wearing a big smile and a Batman toque. I have great difficulty seeing him as a bully—and I think that is the point of Human Library. If this had been a conventional performance, someone seeing Andrew would have said, "This is not the right person for this role. He's too happy and bubbly and sweet." But life's not like that. Real life characters are much more complex and nuanced.

It is precisely this nuance that makes the event so engaging, setting it apart from other community or traditional theatre events. Human Book Roksana Bahramitash revealed that it was her interest in dispelling stereotypes that led her to storytelling: "Stories stay,"[3] she says, meaning that personal stories stick with the listener.

Like Forum Theatre, Human Library allows oppressed people to analyze oppression in their own community. But it takes this analysis in a different direction, deconstructing real stories so that Readers empathize with those who have been oppressed in other communities. It creates links between people who may have otherwise never interacted in a positive way—if at all. Human Library reinforces the belief I have had since performing in *Seesaw*: that there is nothing more powerful than a true, lived story, whether it is woven into a work of art or told face-to-face.

Nina Pariser

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE JANUARY 26TH HUMAN LIBRARY AT ATWATER LIBRARY:
HUMANLIBRARY.ATWATERLIBRARY.CA
CHECK THE OFFICIAL HUMAN LIBRARY WEBSITE FOR NEXT YEAR'S EVENTS: **HUMANLIBRARY.ORG**

NOTES

1 For more information on inspirit's bridge building grants, see: http://www.inspiritfoundation.org/en/pluralism-grants/community-impact

2 *Exit Interviews*, ALCCDLP, 28 May 2013. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBoVARvJcGU#t=19

3 *Roksana Bahramitash—CBC Human Library*, ALCCDLP, 18 January 2013. www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OndiRHw2E&list=TLgPZbVrBgHzw

DISPATCH

CONTRADICTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS: THE GRANDE PRAIRIE CENTURY PLAY PROJECT

September 2013 finds me figuratively standing on the edge of a fast-flowing stream. I'm contemplating what the next year will hold as I embark full time on a project that I have been longing to do for many years. It's like paddling a canoe on that stream, not knowing what rocks lie in my path, what shoals, what blissful stretches of calm water lie ahead. Bear Creek rushes, frothing and muddy, over and away from the dam that is one corner of the Century Play site in Muskoseepi Park, the centre of the northern Alberta city of Grande Prairie.

The Grande Prairie (GP) Century Play project follows the model described in Ann Jellicoe's formidable book, *Community Plays: How to Put Them On* (Methuen, 1987), which is based on her years of work with the Colway Theatre Trust (now Claque Theatre) in the UK. I have been waiting for the auspicious confluence of events that would allow me to direct a community play. The city of Grande Prairie's 100th anniversary, my tenured position teaching drama at Grande Prairie Regional College, a strong theatre community with a history of innovative outdoor theatre, and a city struggling to make sense of itself have provided the fertile ground for this project.

The project started in 2011 as I began sounding out whether a community play would be welcomed as part of the city's centennial celebrations. The response to Rockwood, Ontario, was positive, so I drew together a steering committee, and by May 2012 we had formed a not-for-profit society. We have now come to the end of Phase 3, Story Gathering, and are entering Phase 4, Play Development and Community Awareness/Capacity Building.

The GP Century Play follows in the footsteps of more than two decades of community plays in Canada, beginning with the *The Spirit of Shivaree: The Eramosa Community Play*, brought to Rockwood Ontario in 1991 by Dale Hamilton and the Colway Theatre Trust. The form has been utilized, adapted, and elaborated by forty-six productions across Canada to date. Six community plays, including the one I am directing in Grande Prairie, will be produced in 2013-2014.

What does mobilizing a city to create and produce a play about itself involve? Rather more than I think I can handle at times. We have strong support from City Hall and many agencies and organizations through material contributions and co-sponsoring events. So far, we have received two grants—one federal, one provincial. We have had setbacks, and still have organizational issues to work through. Fortunately, we have mentorship from others who have paddled this stream before us: Ruth Howard of Jumblies Theatre, Cathy Stubington of Runaway Moon Theatre, and Terry Hunter and Savannah Walling of Vancouver Moving Theatre.

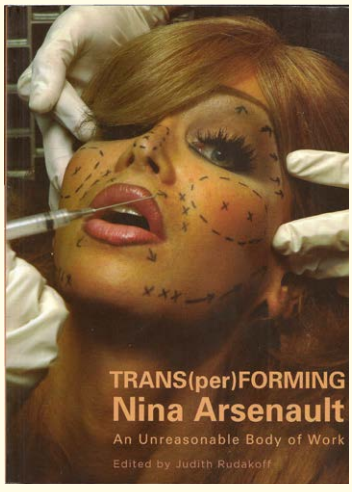
What fuels us is the contradiction of who we are: a boom or bust city in a boom or bust province, with an average resident age of 27 years. In six years, the population has grown by 10,000 to 60,000 people speaking different languages and with different customs and values. We are a staging ground for controversial oil and gas development that the rest of the world is far more concerned about than the average Albertan. I have been told unofficially that the greatest crime concern in our city is human trafficking. And yet, in the stories that people tell us, many arrive not just to make a fast buck and leave, but because they see Grande Prairie as a safe place to raise their families.

Our project byline is "Celebrating 100 years of our stories—our myths, realities and journeys!" There are harsh realities: finding housing; men working dangerously long hours in the bush and leaving young families isolated in town; racism and homophobia; a high cost of living; the shortage of family doctors. And there are touching stories of neighbours reaching out to help each other, humorous stories of dealing with the mud. The stories gathered weave a rich fabric. One phrase, from a new immigrant who has struggled to become proficient in English yet who speaks multiple languages, stays with me: "English opens doors but other languages open windows." Theatre employs languages of form, movement, sound, gesture, shape, and space to tell human stories.

A community play strives to be inclusive of ages, genders, races, cultures, economic situations, languages, histories. Will this inclusive vision sustain the process? Can I, as artistic director, navigate the rushing stream to raft together the many elements of our Century Play and deliver them to the city as an inclusive outdoor celebration in ten months?

Certainly not alone. Community plays are collaborative enterprises. The success of the play rides on the success of the collaborations. It is both daunting and exhilarating.

Annie Smith



Trans(per)forming Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work.

EDITED BY JUDITH RUDAKOFF. CHICAGO: INTELLECT LTD. 2012. 232 PP.

Book review

BY DONIA MOUNSEF

Trans(per)forming Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work is an ambitious collection that brings together a wide range of scholars, activists, performers, and artists to shed light on the work of Nina Arsenault, a transgendered Canadian performance artist whose body has been transformed from male to female with the help of thirty surgeries and who writes and performs her own work.

In her introduction, Rudakoff explains that the collection aims at "anthologizing difference" and creating a space where multiple voices can engage with Arsenault as "subject, object, and creative force" on different issues and problématiques related to the artist's transformation and performance (7). The breadth of the collection, and its strength, is in bringing disparate voices together, ranging from Sky Gilbert's reflection on Arsenault's monodramatic cyborg hybridity, to Alistair Newton's much needed comparison of Arsenault with French performance artist ORLAN. Aiming to reach a broad spectrum of readers, the collection juxtaposes Gilbert's experience of writing a monodrama to be performed by Arsenault, while Ashperger turns to acting technique to analyze Arsenault's identity constructions on stage and off stage. Using Susan Sontag's reading of Leni Riefenstahl's work in "Fascinating Fascism," playwright and director Alistair Newton judiciously compares Arsenault's work to French "carnal artist" ORLAN and the way the performativity of surgery locates the body at the intersection of queer liberation and fascist objectification.

Other contributions to the collection include Paul Halferty's "Unreal Beauty: Identification and Embodiment in Nina Arsenault's Self-Portraits," which cogently argues in favour of a construction and deconstruction of new identities through self-portraiture photography; and David Fancy's proposal of a refreshing Deleuzian reading of "becoming-Nina," considering the way the transgendered body seeks not to acquire a set of fixed attributes, but rather to become an assemblage where the "dynamics of ontology" are constantly foregrounded, challenged, and reassigned. Equally of note is Shannon Bell's analysis of Arsenault's embodiment and personification of the three major principles of "fast feminism":[1] that "theory must be grounded in action"; that to perform fast feminism is to put oneself at risk; and that one should "never write about what you don't do" (104).

The work is at its best when the wide spectrum of subjects and approaches have a through line, namely the focus on the performative transformation of Arsenault into a prosthetic *objet d'art* that challenges the construction of bodies, femaleness, gender, and beauty in a carnivalesque way. But at times the collection seems to stray into disparate analyses that do not contribute greatly to the theoretical and cultural reading as a whole. This said, the vast array of approaches do contribute to the overarching purpose, which is to chart a course through "Arsenault's terra incognita" (9).

Included in the collection are also two primary play texts by Arsenault herself: Landscape with Yukon and Unnatural Beauty, and The Silicone Diaries. Surprisingly, the play texts do not seem to create any sense of disjointedness in the collection. Even though they stand out in relief within the book, they add an element of visual and scriptural polyphony, because, as Derrida would warn us, "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (there is no outside-text). The presence of these two primary texts restores an important place for the written text after its typical repudiation in performance. Reading (and imagining) Arsenault's monodramatic voice brilliantly combines an atypical irony with a vulnerability of confession, creating a type of affective-irony. This combination is a disjunctive process between a message and its reception, not unlike the gender uncertainty, trauma, and survival at the foundation of Arsenault's experience.

Affective-irony is itself a performative practice, positioning the subject in a stance of uncertainty between possible overt and covert signification, unsettling meaning-making in the very act of interpretation.

The collection and its eponymous subject are brilliant reminders of a fundamental question: How is gender enacted, performed, and trans(per) formed? Arsenault interrogates the way gender performance and the critique of essentialist categories affect how we perceive and judge the transgendered body. Femaleness is as fake—and factitious—as it is real. If the simulacrum according to Jean Baudrillard is the simulation of an image of an image to which the original has been lost, then Nina Arsenault is an inverted simulacrum. Her cosmetic body transformed by surgery establishes an original copy to which others may aspire. Neither Barbie nor Pamela Anderson, Arsenault is herself a new standard of beauty, constructed on a conscious gender performance level, framed itself as a "somatechnic" (or the combination of the soma and the techne in the form of a cyborg). The cyborg is different from the automaton in the way that it becomes a culturally intelligible construct, able to transcend the dispositifs of "hard technologies" in and through a sublime body transformation. Nina's transformation gives shape to Jennifer Parker-Starbuck's revision of Donna Haraway's "ether quintessence" (Haraway 152), in her book *Cyborg Theatre*. Where for Haraway the body was too opaque to reach the sublime status without technological aid, for Parker-Starbuck (and Nina), the cyborg can go beyond "a subject technology," emerging "when what has previously been considered solely tool, prosthetic extension of the body, or system begins to claim concepts of agency" (41).

Nina's agency challenges our cultural and corporeal anxieties with a transgender performative production that places identity in transition, as this collection makes clear. Arsenault's multiple trajectories are not something she added or applied to her body as appendages, but rather, the means through which her body is constituted, positioned, and trans(per)formed. This collection offers an important analysis of this understanding of the body, as the discourse of incarnation and materialization of trans identity broadens beyond simply the formative and transformative, toward the hybrid, multiple, and mobile, refusing to be silenced in a culture of oppression that constantly tries to deny its agency.

NOTE

1 The term "fast feminism" was coined by performance artist and philosopher Shannon Bell, who wanted to apply Paul Virilio's concepts of speed and accident to third-wave feminism. Queering sex-positive feminism further, Bell advocated taking risk using provocateur techniques like drag kinging, performing female ejaculation, or bathhouse scenes, stretching the limits of the body in a post-gender landscape.

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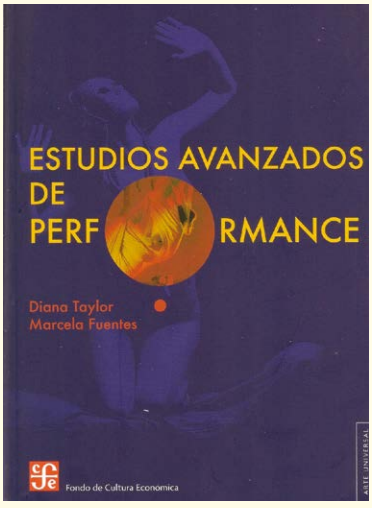

Estudios Avanzados de Performance.

EDITED BY DIANA TAYLOR AND MARCELA FUENTES. MEXICO: FONDO DE CULTURA ECONÓMICA, 2011. 631PP.

Book review

BY KATHERINE ZIEN

In a recent essay, Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer note that "performance" is an unstable and contested concept, yet many scholars persist in attempting to define its ontology. In lieu of seeking performance's "core" traits, Powell and Shaffer suggest other queries, such as, "What do performances do?" and "How is the field of performance studies positioned in relation to its 'objects?'" (1). The anthology *Estudios avanzados de performance* showcases contributions by authors whose work revolves around these very questions.

Rather than translating an existing collection, editors Diana Taylor and Marcela Fuentes have built their own, oriented toward performance in the Americas. The interdisciplinary volume addresses topics including performance as a means of transmitting knowledge, social memory, and (dis)identifications; the relative in/stability of performance as an analytical category; the performing body as a site of political, aesthetic, and social expression; space; performativity; psychoanalysis; phenomenology; ritual, folklore, and ethnographic display; gender and sexuality; critical race studies; globalization; post/colonialism; and nationhood. This advanced volume contains few basic readings; new students of performance are advised to first consult an introductory survey.[1] Yet Fuentes introduces each chapter with an insightful preamble that highlights key points, delimits the author's oeuvre, and makes connections to other essays in the volume. A Hispanophone readership of advanced undergraduates, graduate students, scholars, and practitioners will find this collection instructive.

Diana Taylor's general introduction opens the volume, challenging critiques of performance studies as presentist or lacking in coherence. Taylor contends that the amorphous shape of the field of performance studies is a function of its "post-" or "anti-disciplinary" status (preferring this over the term "interdisciplinary," which leaves contributing disciplines largely intact). Armed with multiple conceptual and methodological tools, performance studies transforms its substrates as it amalgamates them.

Even while acknowledging the proliferation of synonyms for and applications of "performance," Taylor notes certain internal consistencies. In her genealogical formulation, performance studies emerged contemporaneously with the 1960s global wave of radical consciousness-raising and protest. Therefore, the field possesses an intrinsic element of political engagement—a conviction echoed in all of the volume's essays. Performances can intervene in hegemonic institutions, reject capitalist logics, invert embodied norms, and divest audiences of prior conceits.

Expanding this genealogy, Taylor notes that performance in/as everyday life has a long and multifaceted history. We must consider performances in their local contexts and allow praxis to inform theoretical production. Taylor has long sought to ground the terminology of performance, a task made more difficult by the term's ambiguity in Spanish. She suggests "performático," as opposed to "performativo" (performative). More precise language will enable scholars to better respond to epistemological and political questions attending the ever-shifting ground of performance.

Estudios avanzados follows with Richard Schechner's classic definition of performance as "twice-behaved behavior." In "Restoration of Behavior" Schechner theorizes performance as a broad spectrum of activities, including cultural practices, sporting events, theatrical productions, and rituals. These performances can be transferred, learned, (re)appropriated, and modified over time as "strips of behavior." That such behaviours are separable from the subjects enacting them makes them viable objects of study, archives of repertoire, and links to the past, however mediated they may be in their diachronic and transregional journeys.

"Restored behavior" means that nothing ever happens for the first time. Schechner's characterization syncs well with the always-already reiterative citationality that Judith Butler takes up in the volume's next essay. In the introduction to *Bodies That Matter* (1993; trans. 2002), Butler addresses two central questions: first, the relation of the body to discourse, or how the body becomes both materially sexed and organized into genders through discursive constructions of power; and second, the role of "performativity"—repetitive discursive acts—in the materialization of sexed and gendered bodies. By attaching new value to marginalized, abjected bodies as critical vantage points, Butler deconstructs the normative discourses that produce socially valued bodies.

Butler continues investigations begun in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), theorizing the material and psychic production of bodies through a series of foreclosures. Subjects are constructed discursively in relation to the heterosexual mandate and gender normativity, with social and material consequences. As Derridean performativity makes clear, the citation of a norm constitutes the very scene and mechanism of its (re)production. Through her critique of multimedia case studies, Butler hopes to reroute signifying chains and revalue un/wanted bodies in cultural representations and everyday life.

Peggy Phelan's "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction" (1993), provides a counterpoint on performances of gender and sexuality. Phelan starts from the premise that performance is defined by ephemerality and becomes itself through disappearance, thereby enabling the appearance of the audience's subjectivity. Performance art dematerializes its object and so refuses the reproductive logic of capitalism. Phelan alerts us to the limits of the image as a political resource by challenging

the "metaphysics of presence" (94): whereas presence is always partial, there is power in the "unmarked." Women's acts of negation engage sexual difference beyond patriarchal constructions. "Performativity" is here construed as spectators' acts of creation in interactions with performances that unfold in an unrepeatable temporality.

In "Postmodernism, Subjectivity, and Body Art: A Trajectory" (1998), Amelia Jones continues Phelan's psychoanalytic, feminist, and phenomenological exploration of gender and sexuality in performance. Jones positions body art as a constitutive site for postmodernism. Rupturing Cartesian subjectivity, body art constructs meaning intersubjectively; the performance is completed by the spectator's desire. Jones challenges 1980s feminist critiques of body art as politically reactionary in its eroticization of the female body. In effect, body art opens a space for the exploration of the contingencies of subject/object relations, collapsing distinctions between public and private spaces, self, and other. Through circuits of mediated proximity, body art produces the spectator's subjectivity.

Joseph Roach attends to questions of performance and social memory in "Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World" (1995). Roach posits the persistence of cultural practices and traces "genealogies of performance" to connect historical and contemporary cultural performances. Performance, for Roach, is an analytic category and heuristic technique providing insight into social memory and intercultural encounters, particularly among subordinated populations whose histories have not been preserved in conventional media like writing. Roach develops the dual concept of "surrogation," in which 1) multiple actors share one role, or 2) a single actor represents multiple characters simultaneously. Following Victor Turner, Roach theorizes borderlands as key sites of inquiry, as borders are imbued with both liminality and the intensified performance of cultural identity.

In "Performance Remains" (2001), Rebecca Schneider takes up questions of performance's relative in/stability. Schneider problematizes assertions of performance's "ephemerality" as capitulations to the logic of the archive. To claim that performance disappears risks eliding performances as conduits of historical information. Like Schechner, Taylor, and Roach, Schneider argues that performance offers alternative routes to the past, passed from body to body. Not merely "remains," objects mark the "evidence of [performance's] impact" (218). Evoking Phelan's argument that performance's disappearance enables the spectator's subjective appearance, Schneider suggests that the material remains of performance emerge via the disappearance of the circumstances that gave rise to them. Objects, then, locate the body—performance's principal medium—as that which disappears. One can calibrate Schneider's characterization of performance as remains with Althusserian interpellation, psychoanalytic repetition compulsion, and performative citationality.

While objects testify to performance's impact, their exhibition—and the objectifying display of humans—produces vexed power relations. In "Objects of Ethnography" (1991), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett interrogates the social, economic, and cultural implications of the display of "fragments" uprooted from local contexts and de- and re-contextualized in the exhibition spaces of the global North. What practices of "othering" factor into these displays? How does ethnography produce and frame its objects? How do material artifacts relate to intangible processes that resist transportation? After comparing *in situ* and in-context exhibition techniques, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett details the history of freak shows and taxonomic museums. The "panoptic mode" of exhibition necessarily transmutes objects and humans into performing signs, complexly related to the contexts of their provenance. Additionally, the "museum effect" converts quotidian acts into touristic spectacle. Here performance analysis illuminates the socially determined and politically contested semiotics of subject/object relations in the production of self and "others."

In "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" (1994), Coco Fusco continues this line of inquiry, exploring the limits of multiculturalism as determined by governments and art markets. Fusco reflects on "Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit…", a 1992 performance piece co-created with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, which marked the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's exploration through a travelling exhibit of Fusco and Gómez-Peña performing as encaged "Aboriginals." Intending to present audiences with a contemporary encounter evoking the history of exhibited humans, the artists were surprised by how often audiences conflated performance with reality. Fusco reflects on the performance's site-specific reception in several imperial centres and notes ethical implications for the construction of a genealogy of human display.

Also addressing imperialism, Ng g wa Thiong'o's "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space" (1997) analyzes conflicts between artists and the state over material and symbolic spaces of performance. The theatrical stage is never "an empty space" (349), as Peter Brook would have it, but rather functions as a set of internal relations in dialogue with social, political, and material conditions. Speaking as an artist and political exile, Thiong'o examines post-colonial performances of nationhood in contexts of diaspora and forced migration. Thiong'o theorizes that the state assumes all national territory as the stage for its enactments of power, while artists create spaces of resistance, affirming the power of performance. In a Foucauldian framework, Thiong'o unpacks official and hegemonic concepts of "prison."

Víctor Vich's essay, "Symbolic Disobedience: Performance, Participation, and Politics at the End of the Fujimori Dictatorship" (2004), furthers the study of performance as political protest. After Alberto Fujimori's "auto-coup" in 1992, Peruvians turned to performance to express political dissent. Highlighting denunciations of the state in public performances in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Vich demonstrates how the strategic deployment of language and symbols reclaimed public spaces for civic participation.

Diana Taylor has also written extensively on performance and politics. Her 2002 essay, "You Are Here: the DNA of Performance," explores efforts by the Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS to craft a public presence in Argentina through protests, processions, and "escraches" that situate the dictatorship's violent history in contemporary loci. Taylor affirms Roach's assertion that performance can transmit cultural practices, social memory, knowledge, and identity formations.

Yet performances by activist groups in Argentina do not seek to fill empty roles; rather, performances of collective trauma foreground the voids left by the disappeared. By performing personal traumas in public, survivors can effect healing through the conversion of private pain into collective memory. Taylor theorizes "performance DNA" as the storage and transmission of embodied knowledge. This trope functions doubly to link Madres, Abuelas, and HIJOS biologically to the disappeared. Externalizing past violence, their performances constitute "symptoms of history" that stimulate active participation.

Jon McKenzie's "Performance and Globalization" (2001, trans. 2006) offers a counterpoint to characterizations of performance as resistance. McKenzie finds performance norms employed to measure efficacy in governmental, military, business, environmental, and technological sectors. Using performance language, global governing bodies set standards for "progress" in human rights and development. Working from Marcuse's "performance principle," McKenzie contends that performance has become a reigning onto-historical formation of power/knowledge (439).

While global bodies widen performance's scope, the Internet has enlarged and challenged conceptions of space and performance. Jill Lane's 2003 article "Digital Zapatistas" details cyber-protests by Ricardo Dominguez and the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT) in the early 2000s. Through virtual sit-ins and physical, syntactical, and semantic resistance tactics, hacktivist groups intervene virtually and materially. Clashes between private, commercial online enterprises and collective, politicized entities reveal and contest the contours of "cyberspace," eliciting new relationships among performance, politics, and spatiality.

Further engaging art's relationship to activism, Guillermo Gómez-Peña's 2005 manifesto, "In Defense of Performance," (2005), characterizes performance art as a means of decolonizing the body. Rather than attempting an ontological analysis of performance, Gómez-Peña chronicles his longstanding performance practice as "embodied theory" (492). For Gómez-Peña, the body is a site for contesting power relations. Interactions with audiences and objects can produce a "reverse anthropology" and open liberatory channels for those who might not otherwise have opportunities to try new roles and engage taboos and fetishes.

Turning to dance studies, André Lepecki offers a complex reading of stillness in "Still. On the Vibratile Microscopy of Dance" (2000). Employing phenomenology, Lepecki examines immobility not as the radical "other" to movement but as a "perceptual threshold" that shapes the relationship between the body and subjectivity as constituted by modernity (523). Like silence, stillness is never devoid of meaning. In contemporary dance, stillness becomes a source of potential. Moving from an analysis of the vibrational qualities of optical perception, Lepecki notes that intertwined stillness and vibration make possible alternative kinesthetic experiences of corporeality and subjectivity.

José Muñoz engages subject formation in his adapted essay "Introducing Disidentifications" (1999). Muñoz examines intersectional, marginalized subjects' negotiations of mainstream media and cultural representations through "disidentifications," acts of reappropriation and subversion that convert hegemonic forms to new political ends. Disidentifications are "survival strategies" whereby minoritarian subjects craft new interpretations and challenge their erasure from mainstream society (557). Engaging queer nonwhite feminist theorizing and aesthetic production, Muñoz demonstrates how non-normative subjects subvert identificatory processes and create new spaces for those who migrate continuously among racial, cultural, social, and sexual identificatory categories.

Estudios avanzados concludes with Antonio Prieto Stambaugh's "Political Corporealities: Representation, Borders, and Sexuality in Mexican Performance" (2008). Prieto traces the history of Mexican performance art from the 1960s to the present. Rooted in radical collectivism, Mexican performance art became institutionalized in the 1980s. Since the mid-1990s, artists have reinvigorated performance's political content by featuring the body as a site of public suffering. Within this historical framework, Prieto conducts nuanced analyses of recent performances that critique gendered and sexual abuse and violence on the US-Mexico border.

Estudios avanzados de performance re-energizes canonical essays through their juxtaposition with contemporary and geopolitically decentred research. In their selection of texts, Taylor and Fuentes take care to develop links between the US academy and performance scholars working in several regions in Latin America. Also featured are new Spanish translations of key works by Muñoz and Thiong'o. While it is not an exhaustive survey—for example, the contributions of Northwestern University's "school" are notably absent—*Estudios avanzados* offers sustained focus on many important topics. Were the volume to be reissued, I would suggest its organization into structured sections with thematic subheadings. Overall, however, *Estudios avanzados* provides an innovative and productive engagement with the field of performance studies.

NOTE

1 Noteworthy anthologies of performance studies include Marvin Carlson's *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (2004); the *Sage Handbook of Performance Studies* (2006) Henry Bial's *Performance Studies Reader* (2004; 2007), or, also somewhat advanced in nature, the *Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (2008).

WORK CITED

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