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"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

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© Ilya Stavitsky. Will Weigler in *From the Heart.* Produced by Will Weigler and Victoria International Development Education Association.

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ARTICLES

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Editorial

The Occupation of Palestine is an Artistic Issue

BY NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH

"I WANT TO MOVE PEOPLE. I WANT THEM TO WAKE UP … IT IS THEIR SILENCE THAT ALLOWS THINGS TO CONTINUE."

– Juliano Mer-Khamis

Artists in the West, and particularly in North America, do not often talk about the occupation of Palestine. For a community that by its very nature envisions itself as agents of discourse and change, the general silence from artists about Palestine is pervasive. This has to stop. Artists must talk about Palestine, and in the wake of Israel's current deadly military assault on Gaza, artists must talk about Palestine now. We must do so because the occupation of Palestine is, among other things, an artistic issue.

The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because storytelling is an artistic craft. As artists we know that one story can be told an infinite number of ways. In storytelling, characters do not always have equal access to narrative platforms: this is particularly apparent in the story of Palestine. The dominant narratives told to the world about Palestine are instrumental in ensuring the occupation continues. Contemporary art-makers and audiences are versed in balancing many practices of artistic reception: the skilled playgoer, for example, can submit to Aristotelian catharsis at the moment of dramatic climax and still invoke Brecht to question the intentions of the artist and other possible perspectives not present on stage. It is vital that the world maintain such critical artistic reflexivity when told stories about Israel-Palestine, for as Joyce Dalsheim argues, "The literary nature of national narratives is extremely important" (156). As is the case in many settler-colonial societies, including Canada, the popular story told about the state of Israel relies on the erasure of Palestinian indigeneity. In the particular case of Israel: "a people without a land" needed a "land without a people," and so in the story of Israel's statehood, Palestinians become "an uncanny other, not fully recognized, not fully known, somehow magically imagined away, and for all these reasons that much more frightening" (167). When they are not made invisible in the story of Israel's creation, Palestinians are rendered hypervisible in narratives of violence that conceive of Palestine and Israel as somehow being equal players in an equal war, as opposed to a colonized people—refugees in their own land—resisting apartheid and siege from a military superpower. North Americans very often do not feel empowered to speak or think critically about Israel and Palestine because of the dominant narrative that conflates a 3500-year old religious history with a 66-year old colonial history — the story is thus, "too complicated to question" and those who dare tell another version of the story are bound to have their motives, integrity, and legitimacy questioned. The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because the prevailing story told about Israel-Palestine is an artful construction that serves to perpetuate the occupation, and it must be understood as such in order for critical analysis and action to take place.

The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue for artists in the West when the colonial powers who maintain the occupation of Palestine exact influence so powerful and intimidating that it censors our art-making at home. In 2006, CanStage had planned to stage *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, a play based on the true story of a young American activist who was killed by an Israel Defense Forces bulldozer while attempting to prevent it from destroying a Palestinian family's home. However, the theatre pulled the show from its season after being dissuaded by "prominent benefactors" (Voss). New York Theatre Workshop pulled the show from their season the same year, saying they didn't want to take "a stand in a political conflict" (Borger). When Teesri Duniya Theatre staged it the following year, it was met with charges of anti-Semitism from groups such as the Quebec-Israel Committee, who publicly derided the show—without having seen it (Arnold). In 2009, Independent Jewish Voices Montreal (IJVM) organized a reading of Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza*, which Churchill wrote in response to Israel's military assault on Gaza earlier that year. Again, the all-consuming taboo against talking about Palestine in the West surrounded the project: as IJVM's Abby Lippman wrote in an *alt.theatre* Dispatch, "cries of outrage and accusations of anti-Semitism were swift, loud, and numerous." Lippman stresses that "while heated discussion and legitimate criticism are both welcomed, the kinds of attacks made against *Seven Jewish Children* deflect attention from the very issues it raises for discussion." Silencing work that speaks about Palestine is a normal, everyday affair: "Rather than engage with the substance of the play, these critics ignored IJVM's invitations to come to see the play and discuss it with us and others—they merely sent letters of protest to the media." Also in 2009, the Koffler Centre for the Arts commissioned Toronto artist Reena Katz to curate *each hand as they are called*, an exhibit celebrating the artist's Jewish roots and the Jewish history of Kensington Market. Despite the project itself having nothing to do with the occupation of Palestine, the Koffler Centre ended the exhibit and their association with Katz after learning about her history of Palestinian solidarity activism (Lu). The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because for artists like Reena Katz, artists who dare express solidarity with Palestine, their art, regardless of its content, becomes subject to political profiling. The silencing machine forces artists to choose between their artistic careers and legitimate critique of the state of Israel, even when the critique happens elsewhere. The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because supporters of the state of Israel try to force it to *not* be an artistic issue.

The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because artists do not create in isolation: we are part of a global community of artists, and our artist counterparts in Palestine call upon us to act in solidarity and observe a cultural boycott of Israel. In 2006, a network of Palestinian artists asked us international artists to join "in the boycott of Israeli film festivals, Israeli public venues, and Israeli institutions supported by the government, and to end all cooperation with these cultural and artistic institutions that to date have refused to take a stand against the Occupation, the root cause for this colonial conflict" (Palestinian Campaign). This year, again, Palestinian performing arts organizations and artists collectively called upon "fellow artists and cultural organizations to condemn the current aggressions against Gaza and the occupation of Palestine through petitions, protests and statements" and specifically to support "the Palestinian cultural and academic boycott of Israel" (Palestinian Performing). They are not calling for the boycott of a people or a nation, but of an oppressive state. As it was in South Africa, the boycott is a tool the international community can use to pressure Israel and Israel's allies (including Canada) into ending Israeli apartheid.

The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because the way art lives in occupied Palestine is an exemplar of the urgency, the necessity, the power of art in the face of oppression. The way art lives in Palestine reminds us of its ability to exist and resist. The occupation of Palestine and subsequent border restrictions starve Palestinian artists of resources, but they find a way to create and innovate. Mohammed al-Hawarji, without access to paint, took to his canvas with curry and cumin; his work subsequently garnered international attention for its multisensory engagement of smell as well as sight. The occupation of Palestine and the Western media culture that supports it prevents Palestinians from speaking the political truths of their personal lives in the rare moments when they do have access to media. Through art, however, their truth finds a way: activist Rafeef Ziadah's poem *We Teach Life, Sir* responds to a moment when a journalist asked a loaded and leading "Don't you think that everything would be resolved if you would just stop teaching so much hatred to your children?" Ziadah's piece recalls the pressure in the moment to resist saying anything that could feed stereotypes of Palestinians ("not exotic, not terrorist") and the journalist's own prescribed rules ("Give us a human story. / Don't mention that word 'apartheid' and 'occupation'. / This is not political"). However, in the piece itself—her performance of it went viral online—she answers the question with unbridled honesty and artistry: "We Palestinians teach *life* after they have occupied the last sky. / We teach life after they have built their settlements and apartheid walls … No soundbite will fix this … We Palestinians wake up every morning to teach the rest of the world life, sir" (Ziadeh). The occupation of Palestine is further an artistic issue because Palestinian artists cannot nurture and expand their practice through tour and exhibition, the way free artists do elsewhere. Indeed, since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, imagined borders and eight-metre-high walls have prevented Palestinians from being able to travel through the land their ancestors called home for time immemorial. And yet, Palestine pushes back: The Palestine Festival of Literature gathers artists and puts them "on a bus that travels from one Palestinian city to another, breaking down a state-sponsored system of imposed isolation and ignorance" (Abulhawa). The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because the ways Palestinians make art in spite of and in response to their oppression is an incredible demonstration of how culture is a tool of resistance. The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because in Palestine, the spirit of survival lives in all dimensions of art: not only in the content of art but also in its forms, relationships, and ways of dissemination.

The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because artists have real power to destabilize the structures that oppress them. Israel's current assault on Gaza was sparked by the kidnapping and shooting of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank by Palestinians. Within a week, Israel had named suspects and ordered the demolition of their family homes. Three years earlier, Juliano Mer-Khamis—son of a Palestinian father and Jewish-Israeli mother and founder of The Freedom Theatre in the West Bank's Jenin Refugee Camp—was assassinated by a masked gunman just outside the theatre grounds. Mer-Khamis, too, was an Israeli citizen, but in less than two days Israeli authorizes abandoned the investigation of his death (Issacharoff and Harel). Israel was not interested in justice for Mer-Khamis because they knew his art challenged the state; they knew his art was powerful, popular, and already stimulating change. They saw that the occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue.

The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because imagination is a vital tool shared by artists and the oppressed. Our counterparts in Palestine remind us that "as artists, the most powerful weapon we have is our ability to play, dream and imagine." The occupation of Palestine is an artistic issue because although generations of Palestinians continue to be born into the reality of occupation, and the cycles of siege repeat, "as long as we are able to imagine another kind of reality, we have the power to pursue it—a free and just Palestine" (Palestinian Performing).

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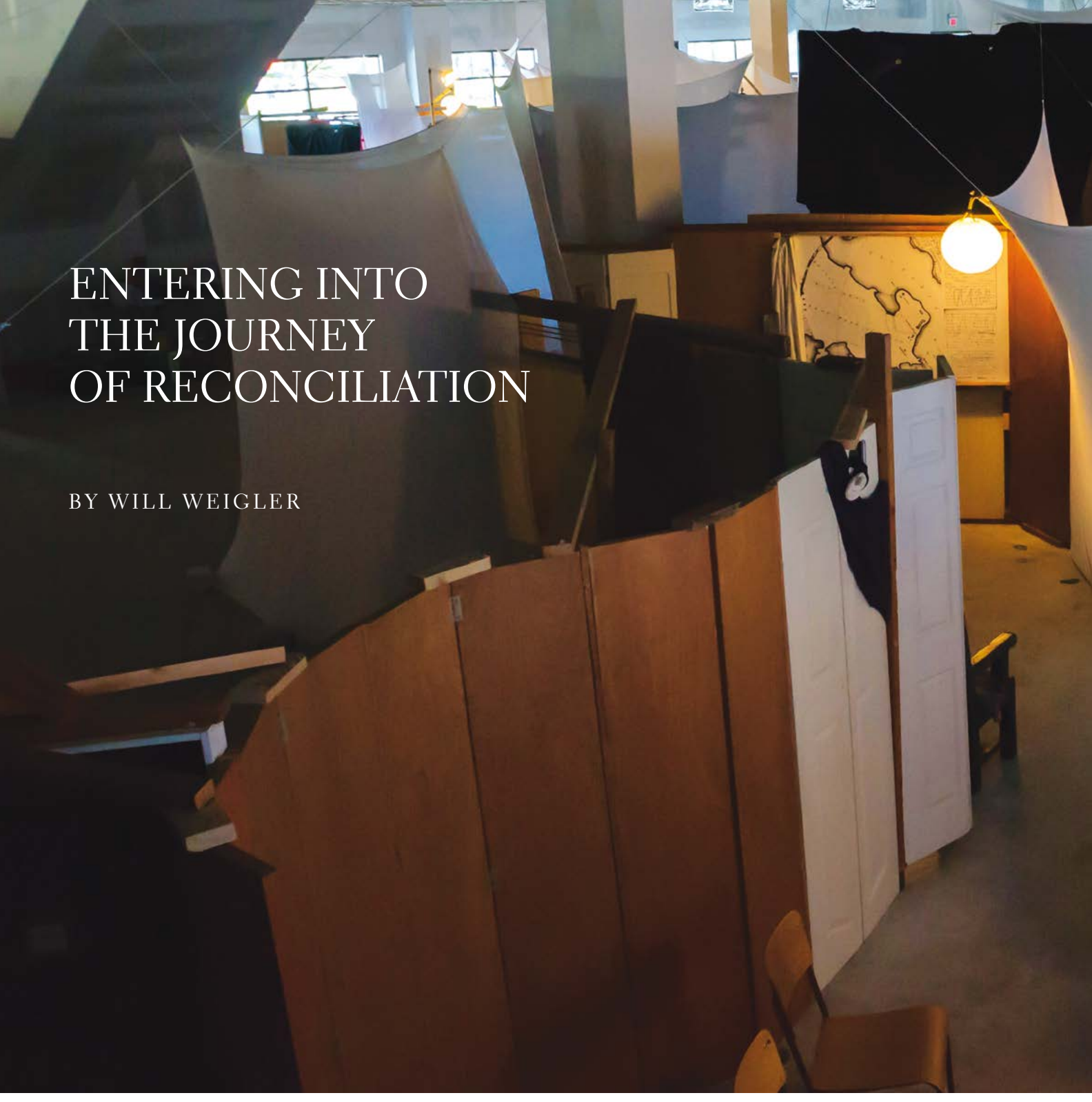
ENTERING INTO THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION

BY WILL WEIGLER



© Ilya Stavitsky. Set of *From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation*.

Unless we who are non-Indigenous undertake to turn over the rocks in our colonial garden, we will never achieve what we claim to want so badly—to transform and reconcile our relationship with Indigenous people. Rather we will remain benevolent peacemakers, colonizer-perpetrators bearing the false gift of a cheap and meaningless reconciliation that costs us so little and Indigenous people so much. But what if we were to offer the gift of humility as we come to the work of truth telling and reconciliation? Bearing this gift would entail working through our own discomfort and vulnerability, opening ourselves to the kind of experiential learning that engages our whole being—our heads, our hearts, our spirits.

– Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*

This is the story of a community-based immersion theatre project that took place recently in Victoria, BC. The project, *From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation*, involved a large multicultural cast and crew of mostly non-Indigenous Canadians ranging in age from sixteen to eighty-eight. Audiences were invited in small groups to wend their way through a vast indoor labyrinth made from hundreds of salvaged doors and windows, a forest of tree branches, shadow theatre screens, and huge swaths of fabric, all lit by paper lanterns. In the alcoves and chambers along the way, the audience encountered songs, scenes, stories and visual installations. All the pieces were devised by a thirty-person core ensemble of "settler Canadians" to embody the transformative stories that have deepened their personal understanding about the lived experience of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. At the end of a ninety-minute journey, the audience found themselves in the heart of the labyrinth, a large comfortable room where they were offered a cup of tea and a chance to reflect on their experience in conversation with others who had come through. They could talk with local First Nations elders and youth, invited each night to join us in the heart chamber. There were opportunities to browse a collection of books about Indigenous histories and cultural perspectives. There were spaces for writing and drawing. Over the course of twenty evenings during the summer of 2013 the show had 120 performances and sold out the entire run. It received the Victoria BC Critic's Choice Spotlight Award for Best New Play of the 2012-2013 arts season.

As the lead artist on the project, I would like to share a few stories about the genesis of *From the Heart*, the intention behind it, and the ways in which the intention shaped our devising approach and production concept.

In the spring of 2011, I was a few months away from completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of

Victoria's Applied Theatre program. For my research project, I had asked theatre critics, scholars, directors, and anyone else I could think of who had seen a lot of plays to send me a description of their most unforgettable experience at the theatre. Had there ever been a moment in a show that simply stopped them in their tracks and made them suddenly understand something in a new or deeper way? I was particularly interested in moments of staging that appeared to make the entire audience gasp at once: that seemed to have affected not just the respondents, but also everyone around them. Nearly one hundred people sent me stories. I then went looking for reviews and other accounts by people who had seen those same productions. When I was able to find them, I discovered that in most cases the other writers were moved by the same exceptional moments described by my initial respondents. Even though all the plays were very different, there were clearly identifiable patterns and I was able to develop a theory that explained what it is about some theatrical staging that can create such an impact for an audience.

My aim was to formulate a conceptual vocabulary of these staging strategies that could be shared with community participants in collaboratively devised plays. Educator Paulo Freire's radical innovation was that literacy—mastery of comprehension and construction of language—allows students to meet teachers as full partners in their joint investigation and production of new knowledge. I believed that within the context of devising applied theatre plays, community members' fluency with a conceptual language of "theatrical" literacy would enable them to engage more fully as creative equals with their professional artist partners.

One evening on campus I attended an event where Dr. Paulette Regan read from her book, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling and Reconciliation in Canada* (UBC Press, 2010). Since 2007, she has worked with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which is mandated to document the history and legacy of the Indian residential school system and provide policy recommendations to facilitate long-term reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society. I was struck by the clarity of her call for non-Indigenous Canadians to take an active role in shouldering responsibility for healing and reconciliation. She writes of the potential for "critical hope" when settler Canadians who benefit from the continuing legacy of colonialism take steps to decolonize ourselves. She makes a compelling case that central to the task of building a more "authentic, ethical, and just reconciliation" is the willingness to face discomfort as we open ourselves to a more personal understanding of the fraught history of this country.

As a settler myself, I wondered what my contribution to the work of reconciliation might look like. Reading Paulette's *Unsettling the Settler Within* prompted me to question my own understanding of what it means to decolonize oneself. I found some useful clues in the writing of the late Roger Simon, who framed it as fostering a *transactive* public memory in which learning about and reflecting upon our collective history draws us into a very personal sense of responsibility toward that past. He asks, "What practices of memory am I obligated to, what memories require my attention and vigilance, viscerally implicating me—touching me—so that I must respond, rethinking my present?" (64). In other words, as a person who lives on this land, decolonizing myself means taking the initiative to educate myself about my country's past and my own past. I open my eyes and ears to what I have glossed over and I allow what I see, hear, and feel to affect my relationship with the present.

As a theatre director I began to imagine how I might facilitate a creative space where settlers of different ages and cultural identities could explore this work together through theatre. It quickly occurred to me that a project like this would be an ideal application for my doctoral research. The topic is complex and contradictory; each participant would certainly be bringing her or his own individual learning and insights to the table. By giving them the conceptual vocabulary of staging strategies I had developed, they would be equipped to "translate" their personal experience and understanding into gripping, theatrically evocative performances.

I sent a note to Paulette Regan in Vancouver to ask if we could meet and discuss the possibility of adapting her work for the stage. She was amenable, and we began the collaboration. We came up with the title together. "From the Heart" would signal that the show was grounded in expressions of the project participants' own experiential learning, not a performed lecture or exhortation to the audience. The subtitle, "enter into the journey of reconciliation," set a tone of invitation: an invitation for the audience to be witnesses and fellow travellers on a journey that the project participants were taking. I continued to check in with Paulette, but mindful that her attention was focused primarily on her work with the TRC, I brought together a Victoria-based team of professional artists.

I saw the need for a co-facilitator who would have more experience than I did in navigating the complexities of our topic. I also wanted a vocal and movement coach so we could quickly build mutual trust and individual boldness among our ensemble members through singing and moving together. To document the journey of the project participants, I wanted a *rapporteur* who would conduct informal interviews along the way, tracking the experiences of everyone involved. I'm a freelance theatre artist, so I needed to find a non-profit charitable organization to administer the whole enterprise. As it happened, I found two. The Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria administered the script development phase and through their reputation and local networks assisted in bringing together a culturally diverse group of participants. The overall fiscal sponsor was VIDEA, a BC-based International Development Education Association. Among its many initiatives, VIDEA is dedicated to promoting and sharing Indigenous knowledge and wisdom across countries, cultures, and generations. It is one of Canada's oldest global education centres.

Although I envisioned a cast of non-Indigenous participants for this project, I recognized the importance of inviting a First Nations co-facilitator to be my artistic collaborator and our cultural consultant. Krystal Cook is a Kwakwaka'wakw woman from the Namgis First Nation of Alert Bay, BC. A long-time teacher of "Healing through the Arts" and an accomplished theatre artist in her own right, Krystal brought her grace and expertise to the project. We were both enriched by our cross-cultural partnership. Krystal's performance work is grounded in an Indigenous, body-centred approach to collaborative creation. During the script development phase, she led the cast in weekly storytelling workshops, building

their confidence and capacity as performers. The storytelling sessions were also a way for her to encourage us to anchor our explorations in personal experience, avoiding finger pointing or analysis that distanced us from our own relationship with the topic at hand. The core ensemble frequently spoke of their strong appreciation for Krystal's presence and leadership in our work together.

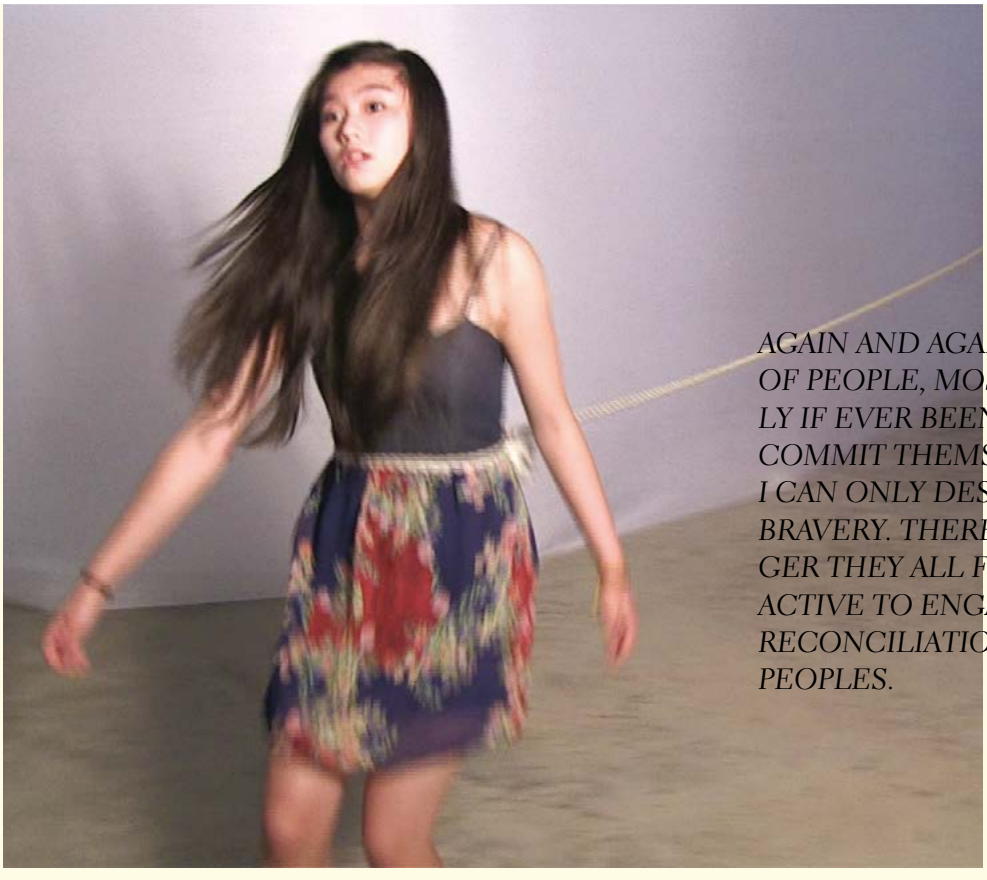
The role of voice, singing, and movement coach was taken on by Bisia Belina, the founder of SoundBody Studio in Victoria. For many people, the very thought of singing in public is alarming at best. Bisia and her colleague Margot Johnston share an exceptional gift for unfurling those knots of anxiety: making it easy for everyone to connect to each other through breath, rhythm, and song. Our rapporteur was Rob Wipond, an award-winning investigative journalist who joined the work as a fully participating member of the devising ensemble. Rob's "insider" status with the group led everyone to feel completely comfortable answering his questions and reflecting on what the work meant to them.

We also had on hand an impressive library of books donated by Canadian publishers in support of the project. After each session, our participants would take home books by Indigenous authors and non-Indigenous authors who write about anti-colonizing work. They chose from fiction, non-fiction, plays, poetry, art books, children's books, and graphic novels in search of those stories and images that would help them to enrich their personal understanding. Part way through the script development phase, we invited Paulette and her teaching partner, Anishnaabe-Métis educator Brenda Ireland to facilitate a two-day workshop with us to further our learning process.

During the first two months of Krystal's storytelling workshops, our singing with Bisia and Margot, and our weekly communal meals, I taught the participants my conceptual vocabulary of staging strategies. All of us on the professional team were astounded by the group's emotional risk-taking and the sheer theatrical wallop of the scenes, stories, and poems they created week after week. In my own work I have been inspired by Julie Salverson's writing on what she describes as the "the impossible bravery and willingness [of the clown] to engage in the face of failure" (246). Again and again we saw this group of people, most of whom had rarely if ever been in a theatre project, commit themselves fully to what I can only describe as impossible bravery. There was clearly a hunger they all felt to do something active to engage in the work of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This hunger led them each to put themselves at risk: to risk the vulnerability of being seen as someone who is at a loss for an answer. They allowed themselves to dwell in a place of openness as they faced their own uncertainty. What emerged was a validation of the tremendous contribution that art can make to meaningful reconciliation: because in that place of uncertainty, art-making gave them a task to embrace. The task was not to resolve their uncertainty, but rather to find an effective way to stage the performative equivalent of the unsettling feelings and stories they were striving to articulate.

I challenged the group to build their scenes around images that were not merely metaphors for what they were learning but would startlingly embody the gist of a relationship, mood, or emotional state in a single physical image. Followers

© Ilya Stavitsky. Odette Laramee and Patty Blumel in *From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation.*



© Ilya Stavitsky. Zi Yuan in *From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation.*

AGAIN AND AGAIN WE SAW THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE, MOST OF WHOM HAD RARELY IF EVER BEEN IN A THEATRE PROJECT, COMMIT THEMSELVES FULLY TO WHAT I CAN ONLY DESCRIBE AS IMPOSSIBLE BRAVERY. THERE WAS CLEARLY A HUNGER THEY ALL FELT TO DO SOMETHING ACTIVE TO ENGAGE IN THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

of Bertolt Brecht will recognize this as a *gestus* or *gest*. The gests they built into the core dynamic of each of the scenes made the staging itself carry much of the weight of its theatrical effectiveness. This meant that it was relatively easy for alternate cast members to step into the roles, supported by the inherent power of the way the piece had been constructed. Ultimately, we were able to invite many more participants into the project, relieving the burden of a nightly commitment from the core cast while expanding opportunities for broader community involvement. During the run of the show, the cast and crew grew from thirty people to nearly ninety.

The scripts and staging for the scenes, lyrics and music for the songs, and designs for the visual installations were set after three months. We then turned our attention to building the labyrinth. Committed to leaving only a small ecological footprint, we built the labyrinth from 350 salvaged doors and windows on loan from the ReBuilding Center in Portland, Oregon. The labyrinth was designed by internationally acclaimed "eco-architect" Mark Lakeman in consultation with Mar Ricketts, whose large-scale tensile fabric designs have earned him the moniker, "Architect of the Air."

The labyrinth itself was gestic. Paulette's book invites readers to venture willingly into becoming "unsettled" about what we think we already know of First Nations histories and people. One of my teachers, Dr. Lorna Williams, who is Lil'wat, once taught me the word *cwelelep* from her language. Cwelelep means to spin around like in a dust storm. It describes the experience of being in that place of dissonance and uncertainty that leads us to be alive with a heightened sense of awareness. It is a place where we may find ourselves open to new learning. The labyrinth encouraged cwelelep by sending people into new and unfamiliar rooms around every corner. We were committed to creating an atmosphere of mutual support among spectators and performers throughout

the "unsettling" encounters, and were gratified that people often told us how the labyrinth felt disorienting without being claustrophobic.

The labyrinth was also gestic insofar as it embodied the complexity and contradiction of settler/Indigenous relationships in Canada. The mosaic structure built into this immersion theatre style enabled each participant to present what he or she felt compelled to express on his or her own terms and yet the pieces remained part of an overall structure (the labyrinth) that included all the other ensemble members' expressions of their experiences on their own terms. It honoured the distinctiveness of each person's work while contributing to a cumulative, unified experience for the audience.

Because the show was modular, the rehearsals didn't have to involve the entire ensemble at one time; the schedules could be made to suit their individual availability. We created sixteen pieces that ranged from ninety seconds to ten minutes in length. Here is a flavour of a few of them:

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A scene set in a small café put audience members in the position of eavesdroppers. At one of the tables, two people were having a heated conversation about the legacy of colonization. As their debate grew more intense, a flashlight held by a waiter projected their shadows and gestures onto the wall behind them, graphically stylizing their impasse.

In one small alcove, a young woman sang a hauntingly beautiful song inspired by what she had learned from her First Nations teacher in an Indigenous studies course. She told how this "warrior of a woman" offered her a way to respond to becoming overwhelmed, burdened or frozen by the weight of the history. She translated the learning she had received into lyrics and music, sung to the audience a cappella.

In a scene that felt like an intimate memorial gathering held in a living room, three senior performers sat with the audience and shared memories about a First Nations friend of theirs. As they read from his letters and told stories about how his life and death had profoundly affected all of them, the audience saw the image of the man walking a tightrope nearly two metres in the air, cast as a shadow against the large fabric wall of the labyrinth. At the moment of his death, the actor behind the screen fell from the tightrope out of the light. As the performers buried ashes in a mound of earth on the ground, a tree grew on the shadow screen behind them where he had fallen.

A physical comedy piece featured a manic puppet scholar who became increasingly entangled in his coping strategies of anger, blame, distancing, and willful ignorance. He finally realized that, for him, the way out was to stop talking so much and to start to listen.

At a crossroads in the labyrinth, the audience met a young person and an older person sitting together. Both performers were tied to ropes that led down long side corridors. As they invited the audience to imagine themselves in another's place, the ropes went taut and unrelentingly pulled the two generations away from each other and out of sight.

Seated at a dining room table, the audience had fun joining two performers in mealtime rituals and customs from an unfamiliar culture in an allegorical world. After several minutes, a man in a comic half mask let himself in through a side door. With utter obliviousness, he ran roughshod over the protocols, taking what he wanted from the room and the table with a horrible and hilarious sense of entitlement.

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This is a seriously daunting topic. For many people it is fraught with feelings of shame, anger, emotional distancing, and lack of historical knowledge. I have been intrigued by the novelist Phillip Pullman's words: "Responsibility and delight can co-exist." That, I felt, was the key to engaging a potentially wary audience: framing these very distressing stories in astonishingly creative ways in an intimate setting. Presenting the work as an inviting journey of exploration through a 14,000 square foot labyrinth was intended to draw the audience in and encourage them to experience this knowledge and these feelings through nothing less than beauty and delight.

This project was always intended to test an idea, to demonstrate how it works, and then to create a "how-to" book that would serve as a resource manual outlining everything potential organizers need to know to create their own versions of the show based on the principles we developed. Work is already underway. The resource will soon be available as a free downloadable PDF on our website, www.from-the-heart.ca. Proceeds from the sale of the hard copy bound edition will support printing of additional copies to make the project self-sustaining.

From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation was produced and directed by Will Weigler in partnership with VIDEA: A BC-based International Development Education Association and the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria. The collaborative script devising process was co-facilitated by Will Weigler and Krystal Cook, with Bisia Belina and Margot Johnston. The project was funded by the BC Arts Council and Province of British Columbia, the Vancouver Foundation, Vancity, the CRD Arts Development Service, the Hamber Foundation, with additional support from First Metropolitan Church, Morguard Investments Ltd., the Victoria *Times-Colonist*, and many others.

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© Tim Matheson. Theatre for Living's *Corporations in our Heads*.

Corporations in our Heads: On Stage and on the Road

An Interview with Theatre for Living's David Diamond

BY DIANE CONRAD

Theatre for Living's (formerly known as Headlines Theatre) artistic director, David Diamond, arrived at the University of Alberta in Edmonton on his BC/Alberta tour to present his theatrical experiment, *Corporations in our Heads*. I was fortunate enough to be an audience member at the event and had the chance to interview Diamond after the tour had wrapped up, chatting with him about the growth of his company and the show.

Theatre for Living has been a professional community-based theatre company since 1981. The work of the company has evolved over the years. It had traditional agitprop theatre beginnings, but when Diamond encountered the work of Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and Augusto Boal's response to Freire with his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Diamond started to use the Theatre of the Oppressed form. Unlike agitprop, in which theatrical pieces are created to deliver a provocative message, Theatre of the Oppressed (referred to by Boal as "rehearsal for revolution") poses problems faced by communities and then invites the community audience to search for solutions together.

But Diamond adapted Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed further, so that Theatre for Living, rather than seeking solutions per se, is now more focused on facilitating dialogue in communities through the theatrical process. Diamond works with community members with first-hand experience of the struggles that form the basis of their theatrical work. The theatre they create together reveals the complexities of these struggles, which are then presented to communities to initiate dialogue. Audience members are invited to participate in the dialogue or the action on stage. Diamond confessed to me in my interview with him that Boal was a dear friend of his whose work he deeply respected, but that a binary model of oppressor and oppressed underpins Theatre of the Oppressed, which Diamond sees as being part of the problem we face on the planet. Theatre for Living's work avoids the binary model — which creates an "us and them" perspective— and tries to bridge the divisions separating us.

The event of *Corporations in our Heads* took place in the intimate theatre lab setting of the Arts-based Research Studio in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. The audience of fifty or so, of which I was a member, comprised academic faculty, graduate, undergraduate students, and local community members. Diamond told the audience, "For *Corporations in our Heads*, there is no play, no actors, no script." Rather, in the event that unfolded, he used the language of the theatre to facilitate a dialogue with the audience about how corporate messaging affects our lives.

As the event began, Diamond called audience members onto the stage for a physical warm-up. He put us in pairs, pushing us up against each other so that different parts of our bodies were in contact. Afterwards, he asked audience members if the activity connected symbolically in any way to corporate messaging, and advised us that in our *Corporations in our Heads* work, we would be entering a highly symbolic theatrical space.

Diamond invited audience members to come on stage and share stories of how corporate messaging had intervened in their decision-making processes. Three volunteered, and the rest of the audience selected one of their stories to serve as the basis for the evening's dialogue. The chosen story was of a young man on his way home one evening, hungry and faced with a dilemma: He knew the healthy and socially responsible choice was to go home to make himself something to eat, but he didn't want to wait that long and didn't have many groceries at home. He made the decision to grab something at the nearby McDonald's. The story resonated with us. Who has not made that kind of decision—choosing the fast, convenient, and inexpensive option over what we know is the better choice?

The storyteller played himself and re-enacted the situation. The improvised scenarios that followed—personally revealing, quirky, and humorous—were greeted with generous applause and laughter. Three other audience members volunteered to each create a shape with their bodies to represent their interpretations of the corporate messages that might be speaking to the protagonist at that instant of decision-making. Brainstorming with the audience, the actors playing the shapes gave them movement, bringing them to life. The shapes were branded with corporate logos and endowed as characters in the protagonist's life. The intention was not to demonize corporations—not to fall back into the reductive oppressor and oppressed binary—but to honestly reflect on our everyday realities.

One shape became the Easy Breezy McDonald's Friend, another the MasterCard Grandmother, the third Victoria's Secret Spouse. Each of these corporate characters moved and spoke together, approaching the protagonist and trying to influence his choices in the moment: "I want you to go to the golden arches for fast and reliable service"; "I want you to satisfy yourself. You can have anything you want"; "I want you to feel good right now. You know nothing is going to taste as good as me." The protagonist was overwhelmed—symbolically enacting how we are bombarded by corporate messaging every day.

The protagonist interacted with the corporate characters one by one, trying to reason with them. Easy Breezy McDonald's Friend was persuasive and persistent, paralyzing the protagonist. Audience members who understood the protagonist's struggles were encouraged to stop the action and take the protagonist's place, to try out strategies for confronting the corporate characters. When one audience volunteer attempted the strategy of walking away from McDonald's Friend, Friend followed. The symbolic message: There is no easy escape.

MasterCard Grandmother generously offered to take the protagonist shopping, promising he could have whatever he wanted. Diamond interjected, eliciting from the audience a list of other corporate brands that offer such promises: Enbridge, Weight Watchers, BMW. Another audience volunteer tried to turn the tables on Grandmother, suggesting that she was the one who really wanted to go to McDonald's, and wanted the protagonist to go on her behalf.

The third corporate character, Victoria's Secret Spouse, played on the protagonist's emotions, luring him: "Don't you like how I smell?" During an exchange with an audience volunteer trying another strategy, Victoria's Secret Spouse uttered the volunteer's real name, revealing that they knew each other in real life. Within the context

of the scenario, the moment became symbolic: "How do you know my name?" This suggests the intimacy of our relationships with the corporations in our heads: They do know our names. That scene ended with the audience volunteer making a movement to get what she wanted—reaching out to strangle the corporate character. The symbolic message: Sometimes we have to fight back!

After almost three hours of full-on engagement, we did not find any answers or solve any problems. That was not the point of the evening. We struggled together through the complexities people face in relation to corporate messaging. We had a conversation with members of our community, sharing insights into how corporate messaging affects us. We considered how things could be different. Some of the moments on stage, in their honesty and presence within the symbolic theatrical moment, revealed surprising truths—providing healthy food for thought for further conversation and internal transformation.

Corporations in our Heads acknowledges that messages from corporations are deeply embedded in our individual and communal day-to-day lives; corporations are not likely to stop communicating with us anytime soon. We can, however, change our relationships to those corporate messages. Theatre for Living's theatrical experiment in Edmonton provided me with insights into how corporations speak to me and how I might respond differently. It also allowed me to imagine theatre in a new way. We can create healthier lives and communities and live in more sustainable ways, and we can use theatre to help us do so.

Interview with David Diamond, by Diane Conrad

D.C. **Why the recent name change from Headlines Theatre to Theatre for Living?**

D.D. When we started the company our work was about exposing the headlines. Now, our work has shifted away from that to getting underneath what we know is going on, but about which we do not necessarily know how to talk. People were saying they loved the work we were doing, but they didn't understand what it had to do with the name Headlines Theatre. Fifteen years ago I had coined the name Theatre for Living to describe the workshops I was doing. I had to differentiate it from Theatre of the Oppressed out of respect for Boal, because it really was not that anymore. I thought we should call the company what we had been calling the work.

D.C. **Tell me more about how Theatre for Living's work has evolved.**

D.D. I got trapped as a theatre activist in failure mode. I was creating work that was trying to change the structures that many of us feel imprisoned by, but no theatre piece I ever made changed the structures. I had to start asking why. Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* writes very eloquently about how people have fought revolutions throughout history and have won those revolutions only to become the very things they were fighting against. Fritjof Capra's systems theory provides us some alternatives. Though we trick ourselves into thinking that we are prisoners of the structures, in fact it is our patterns of behaviour that have created the structures and not the other way around. We created those structures. I know a lot of people who do really good work on structural change. The theatre actually is better at looking at human behaviour. Changing human behaviours is necessary to support structural change. If we look only at structural changes and neglect the human behaviours that create those structures, we are doomed to re-create the very same structures all over again.

D.C. **How did *Corporations in our Heads* come about?**

D.D. In 2000 we did a forum theatre piece called *Corporate U*. As part of that project I did some experimenting to see if we could brand voices inside characters' heads. It has been developing ever since. The project is about corporate messaging and how it affects us. Our consumption is a symptom of something; it affects our relationships with each other and with ourselves. How do we access that in the theatre? A few years ago I realized that it was not a play, but an event: we had to develop a technique that would open up for people the idea that corporate messages are in our collective psyche. The work attempts to get beyond the symptom. We need to start taking responsibility for our behaviours and not just blame the structures around us.

D.C. **How has your work with *Corporations in our Heads* evolved throughout the tour?**

D.D. I have been playing and adapting all the time to try to understand the kinds of questions and the kind of structure that would make this possible. One audience member who saw it in Victoria very early on and saw it again in Vancouver the other night commented that the work had evolved – that it was working much better now. I figured out how to do it along the way.

It is an adaptation of Boal's *Cops in the Head*. For Boal the work served the oppressed, as the storyteller is very much in control of the event. Over time, I have taken the control away from the storyteller and put it into the hands of the audience. The person who offers the story gives us a gift that we then make ours in a very overt way. By the end of the event we recognize that we are not working on the storyteller's story anymore—it has become the story of the people in the room, the story of the community. So, for example, a story that starts out being about body image ends up also being about how a city is struggling with the fact that a mining company is telling it that if it does not accept the mine it will not be able to compete as a city with other cities in the province. The city has a body image problem. We come to understand that they are linked, so we are able to work on those issues in a more conscious way. It is not so much about the individual, but about the living community.

D.C. **How has the show been received?**

D.D. People have generally loved it. It was revelatory for some people. It has been hard to get them in the door though. I think they found the idea of it a bit scary. We had to start communicating overtly that no one was going to get dragged onto the stage. In our promotional material we explained very well what *Corporations in our Heads* is not: No play, no actors, no script. We did not explain very well what it is.

Some people thought it was going to be corporate bashing, but that was not the intention.

D.C. ***Corporations in our Heads* deals with serious issues. In Edmonton, I noticed a lot of laughter. Why do you think that is?**

D.D. Legitimately funny things were happening on stage. Comedy is a number of things. It is an easy fall back position of course; people like to laugh if funny things happen. Making fun of something is also a safe way to get at matters that hurt us. Much of the subject matter is about things that are unhealthy and hurting us, but there is no reason that our dialogue about it has to be painful. We can have fun doing this. There is also laughter of recognition: Laughter is not always "ha, ha – that is funny"; it is also "ha, ha – I do that." So laughter comes from lots of different places. There are also those very deep silences that happen in the room. One of the things all good theatre should do is take the audience on an emotional roller coaster. You can be laughing one moment and then sitting in a deep silence the next. People who attended had a great time. There was a lot of laughter and applause and also big "Ah ha" moments and beautiful uncomfortable moments; such challenging moments are important in the theatre.

D.C. **What did you hope to achieve with the tour? Did you achieve it?**

D.D. This new technique exists that did not exist before; that is no small thing. Another aim was to expose people across British Columbia and Alberta to a different mode of theatre and theatre making. Theatre does not always have to be about consuming a theatrical event. It can involve getting together and creating an event.

D.C. **Is there any moment from the tour that stands out?**

D.D. The largest audience was in Hazelton, BC, and something really profound happened there. We got talking about Enbridge. A man got up and acknowledged that dialoguing about relationships was important. He noted that some people in the room were talking about our right to clean water, but that we did not have a right to clean water. We heard the room gasp. He said we had a relationship to clean water, just like the other relationships we were talking about. In our relationship to clean water, we also had a responsibility to that water, just like our responsibility to our family members and generations to come. Part of the problem was that we think we have a right to that water. If we accepted that we have a relationship and a responsibility everything would change. He already knew this, but felt compelled to articulate it. This was a highlight for me because it resonated with the core of what this project is about. If we take our responsibilities to clean water seriously in whatever we are doing, even if it is mining or oil exploration, then things have to change; water is no longer seen as a thing.

D.C. **Do corporations understand that?**

D.D. We have to remember it is not the corporations that are thinking; it is the people inside the corporations. They are our parents, siblings, and neighbours. It is just too simple to see them as enemies. In Kamloops, we talked about the Ajax mining project. I know that some people from the corporation were in the room. We never know who is in the room.

D.C. **How is this work affecting audiences, affecting the Canadian theatre scene, and pushing our definitions of theatre?**

D.D. I am not working in order to influence Canadian theatre. That is too inward looking and not a healthy way to make theatre. You make theatre to have an impact on audiences in new and innovative ways and that affects the Canadian theatre scene. The other approach just creates plastic theatre. I do think this work pushes boundaries in what theatre is.

D.C. **What is in the future for *Corporations in our Heads*?**

D.D. I will be in Europe in the summer. There is already a request to do a *Corporations in our Heads* event in one of the European centres.

D.C. **What else is Theatre for Living working on?**

D.D. A BC/Alberta tour of our show *Maladjusted* is coming in early 2015. Another possible project in Vancouver is about how to have a healthy police force — working with police officers and people assaulted by the police. We recently completed work with Native Elders on the legacy of residential schools. Projects continue to bubble in Europe. Theatre for Living is on the curriculum for UNESCO's Peace Studies program, so I will be going back to work with Peace Studies students sometime in the future. A woman who has trained with me just did a successful *Corporations in our Heads* event in Austria. And Theatre for Living has been invited into the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Alberta to help transform the teaching environment in the faculty. Invitations keep coming.

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Fractured Fables— The Prison Puppet Project

© Jam Hamidi. The Prison Puppet Project at William Head Prison in Metchosin, British Columbia.

BY INGRID HANSEN

© Jam Hamidi. The Prison Puppet Project at William Head Prison in Metchosin, British Columbia.

Prison Theatre. Each fall at William Head Prison, Metchosin, British Columbia, the inmates work on a new show for the public. Inmates perform in the show, build the sets, sew costumes, promote the show, coordinate ticket sales, and act as ushers, concession, stage managers, and backstage crew for the production. Anyone over the age of nineteen may buy a ticket, drive forty-five minutes through the woods to the remote prison, get processed through prison security at the front gate, step into the prison gymnasium where an inmate usher shows you to your seat, watch the show, and talk with the inmate actors after the performance. Inmates have been running William Head on Stage Theatre Company (WHoS) for the last thirty-three years, passing the reins to the next round of men as those running the company reach the end of their sentences and return to the outside world. This company has, as one audience member wrote in the WHoS Post-Show Audience Commentary Guest Book, "the most passionate actors and audience I have ever seen. This program is priceless for the questions it raises and the barriers it takes down."

Every year the company hires a professional theatre director and a few actors to come in and work with them on the show. For the inmates, working together on a show "takes an amazing amount of courage and boldness, and a daily confrontation of fears," writes Caroline Birch, an actor hired to work with WHoS in 2005:

> If anyone truly knew the work involved with putting on a production in here, perhaps WHoS would be changed from a leisure activity to punishment. There is no conning in theatre. Either you show up and do the work, or you don't. It becomes evident to all involved which course of action you have taken. The way with which these gentlemen took personal and professional responsibility for this project is why it grew. Perhaps it was the first time that some were able to be a part of a community where there was a positive end result.[1]

The program is voluntary. Inmates choose to join, choose to stay, choose to commit themselves to this monster of a project and to venture together into the unknown. I have heard some of the men in this program say that after living in prison day-to-day, two months working on a play is a very intimidating time commitment. Yet the men work harder and quite possibly care more than any other group I have ever worked with. I have participated in WHoS on and off over the last seven years on various shows: teaching, performing, designing, choreographing, and directing. I feel honoured to be able to work with a team of such caring, hardworking individuals. I have been able to watch people come out of their shell and learn to trust again, as the men gear up for their eventual release back into society to live as our neighbours.

Two years ago I met Peter Balkwill, co-artistic director of the Old Trout Puppet Workshop,[2] when I was taking his course at the Banff Puppet Intensive. When I saw what a passionate, caring, and inventive teacher he was, I told him, "You should do a show with the prison." I sat him down and showed him photos from past productions I had worked on with WHoS, and he said, "No, we should do a show at prison."

So we did.

Puppetry provides creative jobs to people who might be hesitant to get onstage and call themselves actors—a prime fit for the prison environment. It also offers a universal access point to the innocence and confidence we experienced as children at play, puppeteering our toys to bring them to life. The show became a collection of seven fables, written by inmates and brought to life with puppetry, plus five true stories from the group members' lives.

In the spring of 2013, the Prison Puppet Project began when SNAFU theatre artist Anne Cirillo and I led three weekends of workshops at prison to unearth some raw material for the show. We built rough puppets using only newspaper and masking tape, and shared true stories from our lives through playback theatre. A few themes emerged: parents and children; interconnectedness/the people you affect without even knowing it; and childhood arson. This was the first time WHoS members wrote their own show, telling their own stories. I asked the men to try writing their own origin stories: for example, Spiderman's origin story is that he was bitten by a radioactive spider. The following story entitled "The Seal Boy" written by WHoS inmate R.L. came out of that session, and became one of the puppet fables in our show.

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Alice married when she was seventeen and moved with her husband to Seal Bay. There she would sit on her sundeck seventy feet above the ocean. She loved to watch the seals frolic down below. Then one day, a mother seal gave birth to twins. She would leave them for hours on end to forage for food. During these absences, Alice would go down to the beach and play with the twins. After a few weeks, Alice noticed that one of the twins paid her special attention.

So on a sunny summer morning, Alice stole away with the baby seal. She put this baby in the spare bathtub in the basement. After a few months the baby would squeal and grunt in a manner that she could understand. His seal features started to morph into human looking appendages. At one year he molted, and there before her was no longer a baby seal but a butt-ugly little boy. As the years passed by he learned to walk, talk, and after each yearly molt, became less of an ugly boy into somewhat of a normal-looking kid. The years turned to decades and his life unfolded no better yet no worse than any of the other kids in their neighbourhood.

However, once he hit seventy his skin began to wrinkle at a very fast rate. The wrinkles quickly became folds. His toes became webbed and his arms shriveled and shortened. His double chin became immense. His nose grew large and bulbous. His once lean body took the shape of a football wrinkled beyond description. As he sat on the deck at his family home in Seal Bay, his mother long passed, he now too enjoyed just sitting and watching the seals frolic. The seals were barking and as he listened he started to realize that he could understand what they were saying to each other. It was a sunny summer morning when he waddled down to the beach and slipped into the water and was last seen frolicking with the seals in Seal Bay.

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At the end of the summer, our team of professional artists drove out together through the west coast rainforest to the prison, where we met our team of twenty-seven inmates who had been corralled, cajoled, and "voluntold" by WHoS inmate leaders to come out to first meeting. It was Peter's

first time meeting any of the guys. He wrote in our email correspondence:

> Entering the prison for the first time was very interesting for me. I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the institution, in fact it made me nauseous. I experience the same sensation when I enter hospitals. It could be some kind of empathy toward those individuals held within the walls, or a distant fear that I may find myself one day in a similar situation. Initially I wondered how we could possibly create anything in this environment. I was consumed by fear and doubt. In artistic pursuits I find these feelings ironically reassuring, it confirmed for me that this was something worth doing. I wasn't sure how to respond to these individuals, I didn't know their rules of conduct I only knew what I was told I wasn't allowed to do—those things delivered in the formal volunteer training that happened prior to the project. One thing became clear to me though, none of these individuals had any experience with puppets. Hilarious I thought.

At that first meeting each person around the circle told the group what aspect of the project they might be interested in working on. There were quite a few tentative, self-deprecating voices. What I didn't realize at the time was that most of the guys in the room didn't know each other. Most had no idea what the WHoS project was, or how it might unfold.

WHoS inmate R.L. wrote in his post-show reflection letter,

> At the beginning of each production I find myself in a room full of shadows that are trying not to stand out and who are of little voice. Then as time passes and their confidence grows their voices softly rise and they start to request more and more responsibilities. By opening night they no longer resemble the inmates that came to the first "all-call" and, albeit somewhat nervous, they are confident in the hard work that has been put forth and it is up to the audience to decide whether or not they have truly succeeded in their endeavor.[3]

During the first week of rehearsal the group read the seven fables Pete and I had pulled out of the material generated in the May development workshops: "The Children Who Played with Matches," "The Doctor and the Two Bakers," "The Seal Boy," "The Greedy Man and the Envious Man," "Birds of a Feather," "The Beetle Who Fell in Love with the Bird," and "The Giant Who Fell to Earth." We shared true-life stories sparked by each fable's theme. Tentative voices gave way into authentic and revealing experiences, and in two days, we had come up with three of the five true stories needed. These would eventually become the direct-address monologues that acted as interludes between our wordless puppet fables.

The musicians retreated into their band cave in the prison's F Unit and started making noise together. Katrina Kadoski, professional bluegrass singer-songwriter, led the newly formed inmate band in breathing and listening exercises to get in sync. Pete and I left the band there practically undisturbed for several weeks, where together they composed what would eventually become the musical score for the entire show.

Carole Klemm, our design coordinator, wrote a master list of puppets on the chalkboard—we would build more than forty puppets from scratch. Participants chose puppet characters they were interested in building, and we divvied the list up. Pete, Carole and I ran around town picking up glue, dowels, strapping, eyeballs, and other things for puppet construction, while the inmate team investigated the prison's junk heap for foam, wood, and fabric.

That was the beginning of a truly horizontal creation process. Remarkably, that is the way with building puppets—there are no experts. No formulas. No patterns to follow. You mash things together and see what you've got, testing for how the puppet's joints move, how the tiniest adjustments in the placement of the puppet's eyeballs can change a puppet's entire demeanor, whether it falls apart when you fling it around. One person would start a puppet, another three might consult on how the thing looked, someone else might finish building it, and then yet another person would paint it. The first two weeks there was a lot of confusion. I remember a lot of the men asking again and again what their puppet was supposed to look like. Pete readily offered feedback, support, and advice, but refused to design anyone's puppet for them. He was far more interested in what the men might come up with.

At the prison, any materials we wanted to bring in needed security clearance—a process that takes at least two days. Often you don't know what materials you will need until you are elbow-deep in glue. So the inmate builders would rustle up a piece of something from somewhere and make it work. Nothing teaches you ingenuity quite like living in prison, where men have been known to McGyver their Walkmans into homemade tattoo guns.

With two co-directors, a band leader, and a design coordinator, we had four active creative sites: guys building puppets in the lab with Carole, Katrina leading music in the band cave, one director shaping puppet scenes on the gym stage, and the other director holed up in the WHoS company office (a former basketball storage closet), dissecting monologues with the actors. The inmate stage manager would go over to other inmates' houses and quiz them on their lines, and took it upon himself to organize extra rehearsals for the team during days off. Like I said, these guys work harder than anyone I have ever worked with.

On opening weekend, one of the inmate puppeteers had to be shipped out to another institution for his psychiatric assessment. Another inmate offered cover for any of his roles—except for the child puppet, because he said was too old to play a kid. Pete said, "I think that's exactly why you should play the kid—because you said you think you're too old to play the kid." Pete has a great way of working with opposites.

Come opening night, the inmate performers always get nervous, possibly more nervous than any other group I've ever worked with—understandably so, as the stakes couldn't be higher. For most of the team, it was their first time puppeteering, first time singing, first time on stage, first time in front of a large group, and the first time in years interacting with the general public. The gymnasium was packed with 150 audience members. Even more nerve-wracking is the fact that the opening night performance is performed not for the public, but for rest of the inmate population and the other prison staff. Inmates' parole officers come see the show. Inmates' families come see the show. One man's entire extended family—most of

whom he had not seen in sixteen years—all came out together to see him perform. And since the inmates are not allowed to have contact with the audience before the show begins, the first time he saw his family after sixteen years was from up on stage at opening night. He was more than a little nervous.

The inmate band began the show with their bluegrass overture, and the audience waited anxiously for the show to start. When the first three kid puppets ambled on stage and lit the first match, I imagined the audience members around me were asking themselves, "What did I just get myself into?" It took the audience a bit of time to get used to the format, and by the third story people were laughing their faces off.

After each performance the audience could stick around for a Q & A session with the inmate team. Marilyn Brewer, former programme manager at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre, wrote in her open letter to WHoS that the interaction between actor and audience was "a rare interchange between those inside and the outside world," and that she found the whole evening "uplifting, engaging, funny, compassionate, seriously undertaken and beautifully realized." As inmate puppeteer B. B. wrote in a post-show reflection letter:

> By being involved with WHoS, I am able to stop harbouring greed, hatred, grumpiness, self-pity, and other counter-productive contents and put in grace, kindness, patience, and compassion, and reflect a wonderful nature. They gave me the trust I needed to put one foot in front of the other, gratitude for being in their care, peacefulness about my destiny, trusting that some day I will be home.

How do you get a group of twenty-seven strangers to trust you and to trust each other almost blindly? Even if they don't trust, how do you get a group to put their fears on the backburner? How do I prove my trustworthiness?

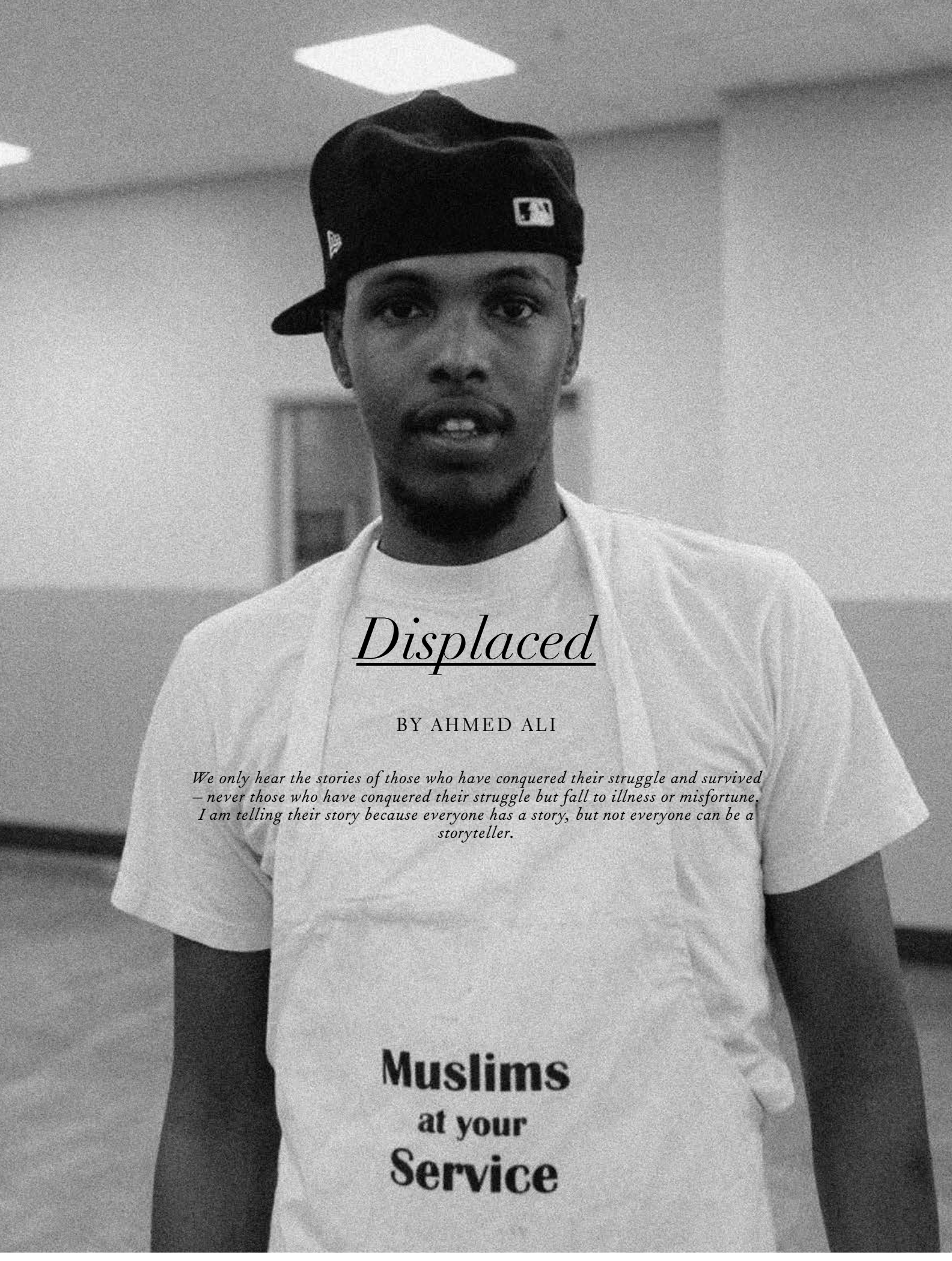
- I show up.
- I shake everyone's hand. I learn everyone's name within the first two days.
- I listen (not enough, I'm still a terrible interrupter, but I'm working on it.)
- I ask the group for ideas, questions, stories, criticisms. (For the first several weeks this was often met with responses like, "I don't know," or "I'm not creative," but as long as we didn't relent, soon the gems came out.)
- I share some of my own personal stories. It didn't make sense to expect the group to divulge their personal histories without reciprocation.
- I expect a lot of the group. A LOT.
- I laugh. A lot. Often when I leave my face hurts from smiling.
- I try as much as possible to lead by doing. I find instructing with words only takes me so far, and participants jump on board more readily when I physically demonstrate what I'm suggesting—with full gusto. If I wanted the group to sing at 70 percent volume, I would demonstrate singing at 150 percent volume, and then the group might venture 35 percent volume, and we would build from there.

I am beginning to learn how to create an environment that unleashes the creative power of the group. I continue to learn how to trust in our combined efforts, and have patience—PATIENCE. I am a very impatient person, which is a quality that gives me the fuel to tackle huge projects but also sometimes causes me to steamroller over moments and opportunities. The show needs breath and space in order for the group to get the chance to bring it to life.

Everyone met the challenge full on, buzzing with fear and adrenaline and ready for new beginnings. We laughed a lot—we had to: the whole project seemed so impossible and the potential for growth was unending. The most amazing thing for me was to watch inmates who are "old hats" at the theatre company counsel the newbies, and talk them down from the ledge when the stage fright set in. This project awoke me to the strength we can gain together from taking on these types of insane group projects. We had such a whirlwind experience together and I know it will continue to affect me and inspire me for years to come. I have been working with WHoS since 2007, and they are not getting rid of me anytime soon.

NOTES

1 Carolyne Birch, interview in the inmate-run *Out of Bounds Magazine*, 2005.
2 The Old Trout Puppet Workshop, based in Calgary, Alberta, is arguably one of Canada's best-loved puppet theatre companies, regularly touring shows across Canada and around the world. They have created a world that the *Globe and Mail* called, "Comic, macabre, and sublimely surreal."
3 All post-show reflections by inmates are included with permission.



Displaced

BY AHMED ALI

We only hear the stories of those who have conquered their struggle and survived – never those who have conquered their struggle but fall to illness or misfortune. I am telling their story because everyone has a story, but not everyone can be a storyteller.

It begins as ignorance
Just an act of lighting a small
fire under a volatile nation
during intellectual drought

Instantly it becomes wild fire
the whole nation is engulfed
you are forced to run from home
forced to endure the arguments
of bullets whose opinions do not matter

You witness your neighbour's
body confess bloody secrets
and like gossip the earth soaks
in the juicy parts but leaves
the important details behind

Each blink is both a photograph
and a waterfall of misery
but nothing washes away the blood
it remains thick and your
body wears the smell of iron like chains

The song birds are muted
and the wind gives a moment of silence
allowing a choir of pain to rise
but there are no sheiks on site
no pastors or rabbis in sight yet
just wounded human beings

The bullets are no longer disagreeing
but the war is not over
matter of fact it has just begun
this time you must travel miles
outside of your comfort
and into the depths
of your relentless thoughts

It has been several weeks now
you have learned to beg
learned to use your body to barter
mastered the relation
between vultures and death

The last guest you have
entertained was suicide
but the attempt was
restrained by malaria's fever

Under no circumstance do you rest
you will battle through
one foot followed by the other
right into line with thousands
of empty shells waiting
to be filled with comfort

That line will be saturated
by half-naked children
helpless fathers
motherless daughters
and those who have lost
more than blood

Shame does not belong
nor do pity or sympathy apply
some have lost the right
to the consent of their body
most have lost their mind

You are not worried that
illness is consuming the camp
your flesh might be intact
but your spirit has decomposed

You want to scream time out
demand a better role
maybe have the opportunity
to live life free
but this is not a poem
this is real life
majority of the time
good people suffer

DISPATCH

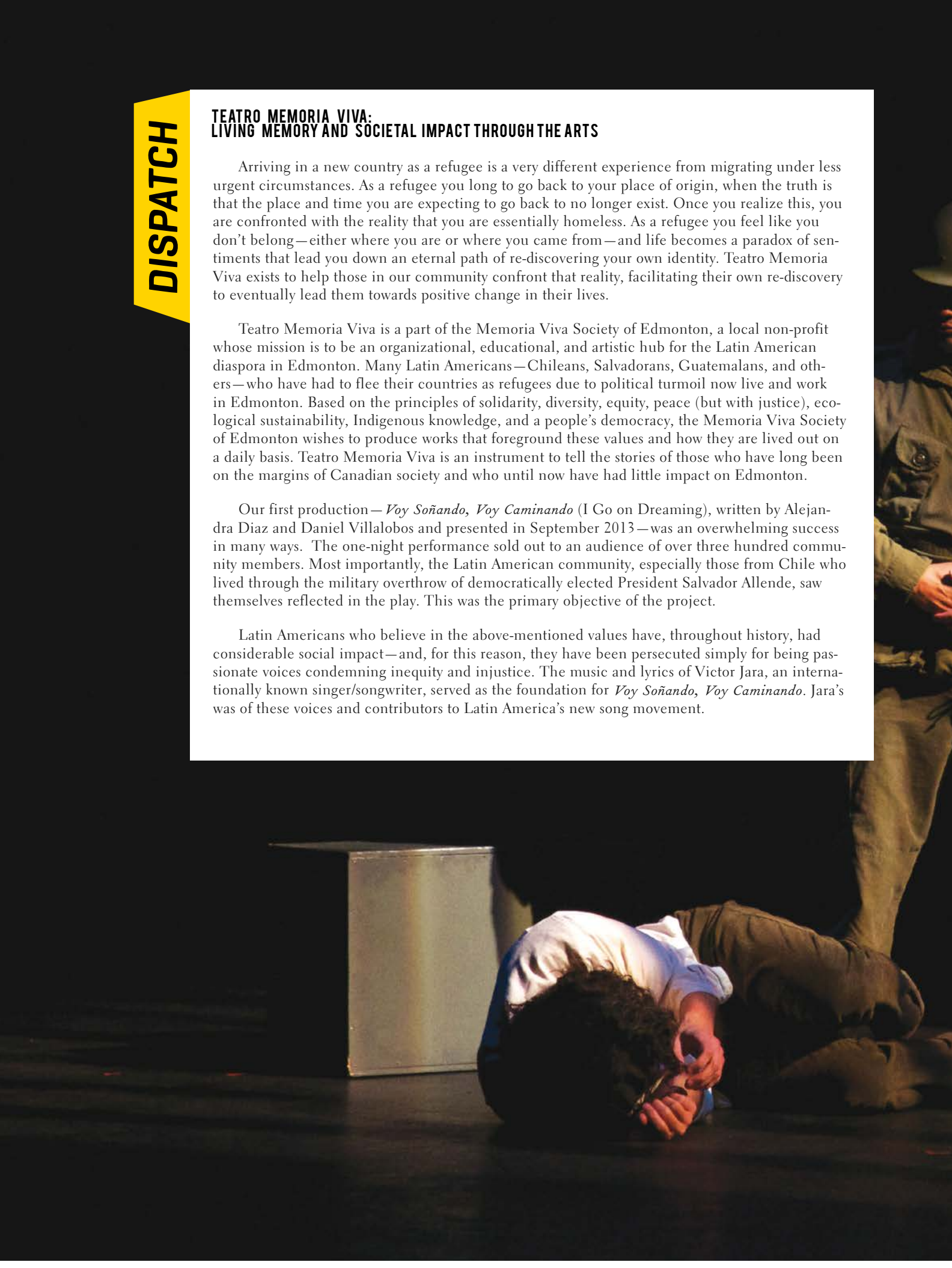
TEATRO MEMORIA VIVA: LIVING MEMORY AND SOCIETAL IMPACT THROUGH THE ARTS

Arriving in a new country as a refugee is a very different experience from migrating under less urgent circumstances. As a refugee you long to go back to your place of origin, when the truth is that the place and time you are expecting to go back to no longer exist. Once you realize this, you are confronted with the reality that you are essentially homeless. As a refugee you feel like you don't belong—either where you are or where you came from—and life becomes a paradox of sentiments that lead you down an eternal path of re-discovering your own identity. Teatro Memoria Viva exists to help those in our community confront that reality, facilitating their own re-discovery to eventually lead them towards positive change in their lives.

Teatro Memoria Viva is a part of the Memoria Viva Society of Edmonton, a local non-profit whose mission is to be an organizational, educational, and artistic hub for the Latin American diaspora in Edmonton. Many Latin Americans—Chileans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and others—who have had to flee their countries as refugees due to political turmoil now live and work in Edmonton. Based on the principles of solidarity, diversity, equity, peace (but with justice), ecological sustainability, Indigenous knowledge, and a people's democracy, the Memoria Viva Society of Edmonton wishes to produce works that foreground these values and how they are lived out on a daily basis. Teatro Memoria Viva is an instrument to tell the stories of those who have long been on the margins of Canadian society and who until now have had little impact on Edmonton.

Our first production—*Voy Soñando, Voy Caminando* (I Go on Dreaming), written by Alejandra Diaz and Daniel Villalobos and presented in September 2013—was an overwhelming success in many ways. The one-night performance sold out to an audience of over three hundred community members. Most importantly, the Latin American community, especially those from Chile who lived through the military overthrow of democratically elected President Salvador Allende, saw themselves reflected in the play. This was the primary objective of the project.

Latin Americans who believe in the above-mentioned values have, throughout history, had considerable social impact—and, for this reason, they have been persecuted simply for being passionate voices condemning inequity and injustice. The music and lyrics of Victor Jara, an internationally known singer/songwriter, served as the foundation for *Voy Soñando, Voy Caminando*. Jara's was of these voices and contributors to Latin America's new song movement.



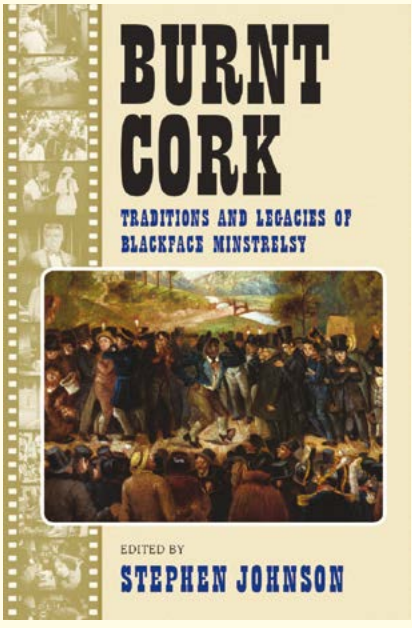
The play focused on the history of the military coup and the turmoil experienced by the many Chileans who lived the experience in the flesh. It communicated the pain of a generation and the hope of having fought for progressive ideals, and at the same time conveyed the reality of having been brutally crushed in defeat. The play introduced a new generation of Canadians from a Latin American background, as well as others, to these injustices—experiences that still affect many in our community today.

The play, telling the story of a father and son taken away in the middle of the night by soldiers who supported the military coup, evoked tears in the audience. These realities are not often shared, but here, expressed through the dramatic medium, they are being felt by the next generation for the first time. *Voy Soñando*, *Voy Caminando* related a chapter in Chilean history that we, as a community, cannot forget because it is such an integral and important part of our identity.

Following the inspiration of Victor Jara, Teatro Memoria Viva wishes to have an impact on Edmonton, Alberta, and Canadian society as a whole by providing an artistic expression of political aspiration. We will continue to contribute to reflections on who Canadians are and our role in building a better Canada for all.

Rod Loyola

© Mark Wells. Alejandro Ernesto Moreno Ruiz, Jose Luis Cortes Sanhueza, and Armando Munguia in Teatro Memoria Viva's *Voy Soñando, Voy Caminando*.



BURNT CORK: TRADITIONS AND LEGACIES OF BLACKFACE MINSTRELSY. EDITED BY STEPHEN JOHNSON. AMHERST & BOSTON: UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS PRESS, 2012. 266 PP.

Book review

BY
CHARMAINE A.
NELSON

Burnt Cork takes up the complex terrain of blackface minstrelsy as a widespread and profoundly influential popular culture practice and performance. Importantly, the book touches upon the fact that this cultural form was dominant all over North America and elsewhere. As Johnson argues, "Indeed, as it persisted, prospered, and perhaps ossified over the next century, blackface minstrelsy became arguably the most widely disseminated and commercially successful entertainment form of the nineteenth century" (7).

Strikingly, Johnson identifies himself as a white Canadian male and questions his own visceral response to the pop cultural form. Commenting upon his response to blackface minstrelsy when he was first exposed, Johnson writes, "I recognized it as present in the fabric of my own personal, familial, and local culture, inextricably intertwined into my life" (5). His "connection" to the form is also Johnson's response when questioned about why he has chosen such a research focus. The question reveals the continuing dissociation of whites in the West from the histories of their colonial performances of blackness and the concomitant exploitation of black populations. What Johnson does not address (and what I would like to suggest is another factor in this type of questioning) is the extent to which white Canadians have almost uniformly refused to deal with their history of trans-Atlantic slavery, effectively disavowing a historical black Canadian presence. This allows Euro-Canadians to see Johnson's research and the topic of blackface minstrelsy as 1) not about Canada and a nostalgia for or representation of *Canadian slavery*, and 2) not about white *Canadian* performances of blackness. Johnson's book makes a start as a corrective to this problem.

Johnson's racial self-naming is very powerful precisely because of its rarity. Euro-Canadian denial of Canadian colonial origins parallels the under-employment of critical race scholars at Canadian universities. Furthermore, white Canadian scholars within such an environment bear no burden to disclose their racial identities, instead maintaining a false sense of racelessness. In opposition to this, Johnson discloses his profound cultural connection to the practice of blackface minstrelsy, as a "white male born in the 1950s and raised about sixty miles west of Toronto in a fairly secluded area of rural Ontario" (5). This engenders the possibility of another kind of reading of the book by white audiences, who must also consider their connection to such histories. Given all of this, it is unfortunate that the book does not include any discrete chapters on Canadian incarnations of blackface minstrelsy. Some of the more recent incidents include the Campbellford Legion Hall Halloween party of 2010; the Haute études commerciales (the business school affiliated with the Université de Montréal) frosh week debacle of 2011; the Radio Canada *Gal Les Olivier* comedy award show incident in 2012; the McGill University Halloween costume incident of 2012; and the Quebec student rally of 2012, which coupled a Charest effigy with protesters in blackface. However, this absence is not Johnson's fault, but a result of the absence of support and encouragement for the creation of such scholarship in Canadian academia.[1]

The collection is also very important due to the caliber and reputation of the assembled contributors: well-recognized and widely published scholars on the subject. The book is mainly focused upon the more theatrical and performative aspects of minstrelsy. However, each of the chapters is firmly grounded in historical analysis; and given the book's thorough illustration, with over eighty images, it is also an extraordinary resource for art historians or other scholars working on the analysis of the art and visual culture that emerged from blackface minstrelsy. The book's focus on history and substantial illustrations makes it an excellent resource for undergraduate students.

Crucially, Johnson begins the book by introducing the vexing issue of the death/re-birth of blackface minstrelsy in Canada, the US, and elsewhere. Intriguingly, he suggests that incidents like Robert Downey Jr.'s recent blackface turn in *Tropic Thunder* or the use of blackface in *Mad Men*, or *America's Next Top Model* do not constitute a renaissance, because, as he argues, "I don't believe it did, or could, disappear entirely" (2). As such, Johnson challenges the (white) reader to acknowledge the ongoing pervasiveness of this popular form and to question its staying power and its transformation within new media and internet platforms like Facebook and YouTube, and, finally, he probes the continuing white desire for the re-presentation of black bodies within the grotesque, "comical," form of the burnt cork mask.

Johnson's introduction ably covers the scope of blackface minstrelsy, touching upon its ethnically and racially diverse origins from trickster figures in Africa to European practices of charivari and carnival. Importantly, he also spends time explaining the peculiarity

of the black mask at the heart of the minstrel performance, the application of the paste of burnt cork (which was never intended to approximate the real complexions of people of African descent), and the exaggeration of the lips with white and red makeup. For Johnson, the music, performed with African instruments like the banjo, bones, and tambourine, provided the context for the stereotyped "primitive" movements and bodily comportments that marked the grotesque "black" performers as inferior to their white audiences. However, although Johnson cites Eric Lott's pioneering scholarship *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993), his introduction does not pursue the more violent underpinnings of blackface minstrelsy, which Lott exposed as the foundations of the practice: the white fantasies of black torture and abuse as fundamentally based upon the deeply entrenched slave myth of the insentient black subject. This ongoing and vexing white desire for black humiliation and suffering as "comedy" is arguably the most under-examined issue in the collection.

But the book does open up the terrain of examination by including not only analyses of the more normative practices of blackface within the realm of theatre and the stage, but other contexts like twentieth-century animation (Nicholas Sammond) and twenty-first century "ghetto parries" by white American university students (Catherine M. Cole). In moving from stage to screen to the lived spaces of higher education, Johnson and his contributors then drive home a central point of the book—"that the blackface minstrel tradition has never left us" (2)—and focus upon contributing to an understanding of the "complex intentions and receptions of blackface" (3).

W. T. Lhamon Jr.'s chapter, "Turning around Jim Crow," is a provocative revisiting of the origins of the minstrel figure, who was a vehicle through which Americans thought through their "deferred democracy" (40). In search of a social history capable of recuperating the emotional transformations of American cultural life and racial beliefs, he maps the transition of Jim Crow from T. D. "Jim Crow" Rice's 1844 performance in *Otello* (22) to the outlawed Jim Crow that came to represent segregationist America (28). Along the way, Lhamon seeks to disclose the connection of Rice's original Jim Crow/Otello, his white wife, and their surviving interracial child, to Barack Obama's twenty-first-century ascendency as the similarly mixed race offspring of a white mother and Kenyan father.

The promise of the interracial "problem child" of the totem of Jim Crow/Othello delivered from the cross-racial union of black man and white woman is for Lhamon materialized in Obama, who, he argues, is the embodiment of the American dream of racial accord and longing. For Lhamon then, the original Jim Crow is a transgressive and socialist totem that spoke through "blackness" about the brotherhood of men across races as he simultaneously recognized his displacement and superiority to whiteness ("*Kase its dar misfortune | An dey'd spend every dollar | If dey only could be, Gentlemen ob color*" [23]). But Lhamon does not address the fact that such self-importance emanating from the "black" minstrel performer surely would have been a moment of comedic pleasure and release for white audiences.

Indeed, Lhamon does not fully articulate what it is about this specific type of overdetermined visually dependent blackness that facilitated this American popular arena of "truth telling" about all forms of oppression. Why was it the black body as "local, not exotic … insurgent American" that became the vehicle of such expression? While Lhamon argues that Obama's success hinged upon the evocation of a "positive counterlegacy that Jim Crow conveys," at times it seems as if there is not enough evidence to support the direct lines that Lhamon seeks to draw between the original Jim Crow and the president (26). Lhamon argues against the politically correct suppression of Jim Crow and insists that Jim Crow's continual resurfacing is necessary and useful as the transgressive political conscience that fights for social justice and common genealogies strategically through its veiled anonymity. Although provocative, this argument seems to overlook the racial violence and oppression that underpin the grotesque performances and have as their foundation the "comedic" displacement and expendability of the black body (40). If the black body as Jim Crow is the necessary vehicle of the rites that will "make the union whole and achieve democracy," then we must ask at what point white America will ever relinquish its grip on the black subject (40).

Nicholas Sammond's "'Gentlemen, Please Be Seated': Racial Masquerade and Sadomasochism in 1930s Animation" analyzes Walt Disney's animated *Trader Mickey* (1932). Sammond examines Mickey Mouse's minstrel heritage and incarnation as an unspecified trader "into the heart of darkness" (otherwise known as Africa), which recalled American slavery and threw Mickey into confrontation with the African cannibals. Sammond ably explains why the aesthetic specificity of animation has lent itself so well to the representation of (racial) violence (165), arguing that "the vibrancy and magic associated with the cartoons of this period depend on a sadomasochistic racial fantasy of encounter and resistance that is played out again and again" (166).

Mickey Mouse was a biracial (black and white), banjo-playing minstrel figure whose "white gloves, black face, exaggerated mouth, and wide eyes" were shared with his blackface minstrel brothers. Profoundly, Sammond exposes the violence of the supposedly innocent child media of animation, through which the terrorized black body became a source of "joviality, merriment, and song" for white audiences (172). Mickey as a black slave character was pleasurable for whites since he allowed them to witness black suffering as comedic. While Sammond notes that the pleasure of the white performer's inhabitation of the black body through blackface was their willing subjection to the sadomasochistic "pleasure" of racial abuse, I would offer that the appeal was also the ever-present escape hatch; the removal of the make-up and a return to their presumably whole and secured white bodies/identities.

Mickey's destination is rendered deliberately vague but decidedly dangerous. When the cannibals loot Mickey's cargo, his unfathomable jazz instruments perplex them enough to distract them from feasting upon him. It is Mickey's saxophone playing that transforms the aggression of the hapless Africans who, as Sammond notes, are helpless in the face of the rhythm. The cartoon collapses African-American

jazz with African "primitiveness" and reintroduces the diasporic minstrel as the cunningly comedic traveller.

This strategic juxtaposition of African Americans with "other" blacks persists in contemporary popular culture with similar representational strategies. Michael Bay's *Bad Boy II* (2003), starring Will Smith and Martin Lawrence, featured the African-American duo as the crime-fighting "good" Miami detectives pitted in part against a haphazard gang of Haitians who are so unethical they do not even produce their own drugs for sale but steal the shipments of rival gangs. The "civilized" African Americans are sophisticated and well-groomed and the black Caribbean "others" are disorganized, murderous, vodou-practising, ghetto dwellers with unkempt dreadlocks. Similarly, *Trader Mickey* telegraphs that Mickey Mouse as the Americanized bi-racial "black" is more "civilized" than the African cannibals.

Catherine M. Cole's chapter, "American Ghetto Parties and Ghanaian Concert Parties: A Transnational Perspective on Blackface," is perhaps the most urgent of the essays tackling the recent explosion of blackface amongst college-age white students on elite universities. Inspired by the scholar Louis Chude-Sokei's work on minstrelsy as a "transnational sign," Cole seeks to explain why both the semi-private fraternity-sponsored "ghetto parties" and the Ghanaian concert parties rely upon "a close connection to sites of education and the social mobility such education promises and engineers" (225). Bringing an excellent close reading of the specificity of San Diego to bear, Cole probes the logic of ghetto parties in spaces where students are authorized to celebrate and degrade the "ghetto" from their elite white vantage point and to conflate slavery with a specific vision of racialized poverty. Through this vision, signs of material deprivation or socio-economic suffering are transformed into grotesque symbols for their own pleasure. Cole aptly critiques the absurdity of the white appropriation of black-owned, black-produced brands like FUBU (For Us, By Us) that white students are encouraged to wear and to exploit as signs of black racial inferiority and difference. Additionally, Cole astutely reads the white "ghetto parties" as a way for privileged white students to further alienate and disenfranchise the already negligible black student population (1.3%) of the University of California–San Diego campus (240).

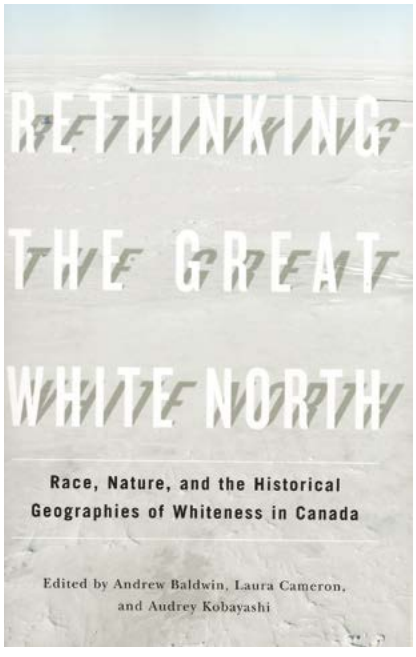
Linking San Diego's "Compton Cookout" to a host of similar parties that have taken place on university and college campuses across the US, Cole interrogates how these semi-private spaces authorize a spectacular staging of anti-black violence as comedic pleasure for young educated whites. In so doing, she poses what is perhaps the most difficult question: Why? One unsettling explanation is that these white students, "deliberately wish to insult and alienate students of color" (245).

In a search for explanations, Cole struggles with two key possibilities. First, might white student investment in blackface minstrelsy signal their disavowal of the "other" as a symbol of the places, lifestyles, and identities they do not wish to inhabit? Or second, might the combination of government cuts and furloughs, rising debt loads, and university corporatization indicate that white students, also increasingly economically disenfranchised as "Generation Debt," are also at risk of ending up in the "ghetto"? Both are interesting arguments, but I would add that what Cole overlooks is the specificity of the twenty-first-century moment in terms of the heightened visibility of the international black success stories of the über-famous. What does it mean that so many educated white youth are venting their frustration with themselves, their prospects, and their identities through the vessel of the black body in the age of Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and Michaëlle Jean? Can we not also read their behaviour as a backlash against precisely the gains made by such extraordinary people (and the more mundane black middle-classes)? How is it that whites are insisting upon rehearsing a vision of the disenfranchised, poor, illiterate, idiotic, deprived black subject at a moment when so many blacks in America and elsewhere have long proven to be the exact opposite of such base stereotypes?

To conclude, Johnson's *Burnt Cork* is a welcome addition to the study of a very complex and haunting subject. Its interdisciplinary combination of historical veracity across various media, periods, and regions of minstrel practice allows for a rich study of a multifaceted, challenging, and still unfolding legacy. The book reminds us that blackface minstrelsy must be confronted and understood, not only because of what it says about our slave-holding past, but also because of its dogged resistance to decline and its deeply troubling resurgence amongst people who should know better. The book masterfully contributes to helping us answer the troubling questions of why (and why now) we are still being confronted by the deep-seated white compulsion for control and possession of the black body as a vessel of white desires.

NOTE

1 I recently mentored a student from Ryerson University, Toronto, who was misled by a supervising professor to believe that there was not enough of a history or repositories of material and visual culture objects on blackface minstrelsy in Canada to support such a research project.



RETHINKING THE GREAT WHITE NORTH: RACE, NATURE, AND THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF WHITENESS IN CANADA. EDITED BY ANDREW BALDWIN, LAURA CAMERON, AND AUDREY KOBAYASHI. VANCOUVER, BC: UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS, 2011. 343 PP.

Book review

BY

LEN FINDLAY

As I put the finishing touches to this piece, the eighth annual spectacle of Prime Minister Stephen Harper touring Canada's North (or the official version of it) is unfolding. This spectacle is summer stock more calculated than inspired, not least because his former mentor, Professor Tom Flanagan of the University of Calgary, dubs it "Harper stagecraft" in "the nation's newspaper." Harper's royal(ist) progress covers huge distances at great costs. Its props are drawn mostly from nature. Its script, "media protocols," and "avails" bear the restrictive impress of the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. Meanwhile, the real audience for Harper's wooden performance—complete with a cheesy wardrobe, Lee Enfield rifle, and spouse in hand—lies far to the south: those savouring the remains of summer and wondering, intermittently if at all, what's really going on *way up there*.

Our prime-ministerial protagonist's monologues supplement photo-ops at various stops along the way. Over the years, these monologues, familiar to southerners and the Canadian press corps too, have shifted their emphasis from national sovereignty to economic development. Employment is nowadays being touted as the only antidote to the social problems of the immense region of Canada's North. The Indigenous peoples encountered en route from Whitehorse to Gjoa Haven to Raglan Mine may have misgivings about being promoted from dupes of colonial treaties to capitalism's proles in *petro-terra nullius*, a promisingly prolific source of cheap labour, territorial sovereignty, and local knowledge. However, it remains difficult to tell what the First Peoples of these territories think about this annual rediscovery process because they are largely silent or reduced to ceremonial bit players. Once again, paternalism and predation define the Canadian state's relations to Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples. Indigenous difference becomes raw material and décor, conscripted by *The Producers* in Ottawa into burnishing the image of our ultra-partisan, implausibly theatrical leader. It is clearly a very opportune time to re-read the book under review here, a collection I enthusiastically recommend to anyone interested in the consequential complexities of "whiteness" as read through academic and imaginative understandings of time, place, status, and money.

Like the "New Silk Road Initiative," which Michael Skinner identifies as using Afghanistan as its portal, the current Scramble for Arctica replays in an only too familiar key the Scramble for Africa after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and "the general scramble for preeminence" whose selectively punitive consequences Adam Smith warned against a century earlier (Smith 54). The scholarly and artistic communities are reaching into multiple archives, physical sites, and inventories in an attempt to understand earlier acts of imperialism, their effects as well as their echoes and derivatives in Canada today. The essay collection under review here is a timely contribution to this effort, but also transcends it. In the relatively modest name of "rethinking," the collection skewers smugness and convenient or inadvertent racism, stealing productively from us the notions of North, and of Canadian nordicity and niceness. These notions remain recognizable but unsettlingly altered by careful and courageous readings of place, settlement, title, and land use, refracted through some of the most influential work that has re-animated geography in recent decades as one of the most socially attentive and informative disciplines we currently have. While Canada's new polymer currency shifts from the always problematic signifiers of nature to the capacity of colonial and neocolonial Canada to settle and subdue nature in recurrent bouts of extractive zeal, we need to revisit or reflect for the first time on the difficult geographies, histories, and unequal outcomes that have sustained Canada as a deeply racist state with a remarkable capacity for fudging, disavowal, and the sly or shameless resourcing of amnesia and nostalgia. This collection follows some paths already cleared by Tom Berger, Sherrill Grace, Michael Byers, Jodi Berland; by the Inuit and southern contributors to *Art and Cold Cash*; and by the increasing numbers of scholars and activists currently recoupling reconciliation with economic redistribution—in courts, theatres, galleries, classrooms, roadblocks, and the unpredictable agoras reclaimed or invented by #idlenomore (see, e.g., the multicultural, interdisciplinary essays and community and artist statements assembled by Henderson and Wakeham and by Dewar and Goto).[1] But *The Great White North* nonetheless occupies a distinctive, instructive, and potentially transformative place in what remains a mammoth undertaking: namely, the work for justice in the North and in the innards and appendages of peace, order, and good government all across Canada.

After an introduction by the three editors replete with intellectual authority and political resolve, the collection organizes itself in relation to "Identity and Knowledge," "City Spaces," "Arctic Journeys," "Native Land," and "Interlocations." From the outset, the tone is bold and uncompromising, linking racial and natural "purity" in the creation and policing of a "national imaginary" whose inner workings and social consequences are examined in a number of predictable, but also a few surprising settings (including Australia as "Wide Brown Land"). These settings stretch understandings of "North" to

reveal that all acts of mapping, including the actions they support, are to some degree arbitrary and ideologically inflected, despite the "disavowal" (1) that so often accompanies their claims to innocent normativity. Geography shows its new-found capacity for critique by seizing its rival discipline, history, in a double movement of penetration and augmentation. Geography here demonstrates that the temporal without the spatial offers a needlessly impoverished perspective, and that even colours have histories whose recovery can tell us much about their symbolic and literal functions in particular territories and pigmentation systems. We may understand and feel Northern latitudes as singular, innocent, and sovereign, but that is a self-sanitizing move that inadvertently "leaves the North open as a route into our vulnerability, as a route for thinking precariousness as a universal human condition whose power-geometries never fully come to rest" (3). We are well-served to remember that the cultural logics of whiteness require the critical retention and deployment of the term "race"—not to ratify its fantasies as facts, but to attest to its tenacity, morphic powers, and toxic agency. Most prominently, race sutures and salves the wounds of capital, offering the false consolation and the pleasures of bigotry that have too often persuaded the white working classes that non-whites are their natural enemies. This is, after all, the reason why poor white immigrants to Canada as well as the United States failed to show instant and effective common cause with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the black abductees who survived the Middle Passage. This is why poor settlers have largely refused to join the economically embattled woman in Kugluktuk in declaring, "It's the monster of economy that made this happen" (176). We are still living with the results of that missed opportunity.

The established and emerging authors represented in the volume make "national nature" (Thorpe) reveal its many faces, including impersonation and white "surrogacy" (Erikson), and scalar effacement and distortion of local, urban, and park sites, or related forms of individual over-reach and what James C. Scott in 1995 aptly characterized as "state simplification." As the arch-exemplar of wilderness that becomes wild only as it is being invaded and tamed, the North helps legitimize structures of ownership and protocols of access in places as different as downtown Toronto, Temagami, the Coppermine River, "Indian land" in British Columbia, and Cape Breton Highlands National Park. When nordicity crosses the White Atlantic rather than the Black, it replays the imperial rivalries of Britain and France at the expense of peoples already defined as inferior and never quite ready for parity and justice. At least that is how they are constructed by commodity narratives and networked agency in the service of whiteness as both rapacious and blameless, inclusive and brutally exclusive. Whiteness in physical or psychic proximity to difference tirelessly, and mostly insouciantly, recuperates, recentres, and reinscribes its own presumptions, its own economic and affective goals. As Jody Berland demonstrated throughout *North of Empire*, the "cultural technologies of space," like the military and industrial ones, use elimination and assimilation in ingenious ways but can never fully and permanently quell the questions of the "formerly white" or the strictures of radical anti-racists, nor can they silence by aestheticizing or reducing to craft the extraordinary testimony of the recently deceased Kenojuak Ashevak, her Cape Dorset and other Inuit peers, and this work's analogues in story and song—and increasingly in film and video.

Commitment to and enduring stewardship of particular territory make the Indigenous peoples of the North convenient state proxies, but also inconveniently expert witnesses to the state of the environment and the extent of human greed. The global dissemination of Inuit art continuously escapes and subverts the networks of commodification in an attempt to build transnational communities of solidarity and concern. This body of work, impatient of southern notions of quality and authenticity, constantly adapts to new material, demographic and climatic realities, growing in its own forms and registers of resistance: alternative art that is alert to the ever-present but studiously ignored alternatives to white Canada's version of development. The voices and visions of the Inuit are not directly present in their own right in *Rethinking the Great White North*, a problem that Sherene Razack notes in her chapter "Colonization: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." But it is also a reminder of the enduring whiteness of Canadian academe, and the fact that no academic discipline can recruit and appropriate, or exclude and explain, the cultural practitioners and performers indigenous to the North. No single work, not even a multi-authored and carefully workshopped one like this volume, can achieve all that needs to be done. Nevertheless, its aptly interventionist ambition combined with becoming modesty reveal a convincing receptivity to multiple forms of Indigenous knowledge, title, and sovereignty.

Due to global climate changes, large portions of the Arctic are no longer "white" all year round, no longer states of nature associated with the polar icecap as stable, enduring, and so hostile to humans as to be effectively uninhabitable and hence inviolable. It was never permanent and pure, but only seemed so within a particular human timeframe; but it was always "great" in its vastness, and also in the scope afforded for human projection into and exploration of the notion of forever. It goes to the heart of the human desire to know, represent, and respect or exploit. Now, with rapid and accelerating change in the region, the Arctic is challenging well-established views of what it is, and in so doing it is altering consciousness about the planet, our species, geo-politics, North–South relations, and much more.

Human-induced climate change has already altered the extent and nature of the Great White North so far as to loosen its associations with Canada as a sovereign state, to arouse global interest in new transportation routes and new resource opportunities. Such is the pace of change and rising levels of interest that a custodial apparatus like the multinational Arctic Council has had to expand the number and alter the nature of countries sitting at its tables. The eight Nordic nations have been joined by others including India, China, Italy, and France, countries defined not by proximity to the region but by trade relations and extractive ambitions. Many more hands than the hand of Franklin are now reaching for the Beaufort Sea. Meanwhile, a search for the remains of Franklin's vessel offers a very white and European subplot for the main transnational show of oil and gas exploration and the re-drawing of national boundaries on the ocean floor. Canada has an opportunity and deep obligation to try to manage the unruly

and invasive focus of the moment, and to urge stewardship, collaboration, and the rights of Indigenous peoples before the rights of developers. Alas, this set of challenges finds Canada governed by a party equally averse to science, culture, and to Indigenous rights that complicate or displace that neoliberal binary: the economy or the environment. What is shaping up as a Scramble for Arctica is being led by Canada in the service of big oil, in defiance of this country's best past and current scientific, multilateral, and decolonizing practices. We need political action as well as expert analysis. To this end, we need a very different political theatre.

NOTE

1 Thomas R. Berger, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry* (Douglas & McIntyre, 1985); Sherrill Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2002); Michael Byers, *International Law and the Arctic* (Cambridge UP, 2013); Jody Berland, *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space* (Duke UP, 2009); Ruby Arngna'naaq, Jack Butler, Sheila Butler, Patrick Mahon, and William Noah (eds.), *Art and Cold Cash Collective* (YYZ Books, 2009); Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (eds.), *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress* (UTP, 2013); *Reconcile This!* Ed.Jonathan Dewar and Ayumi Goto. West Coast Line 74 46.2 (2012).

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