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alt theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

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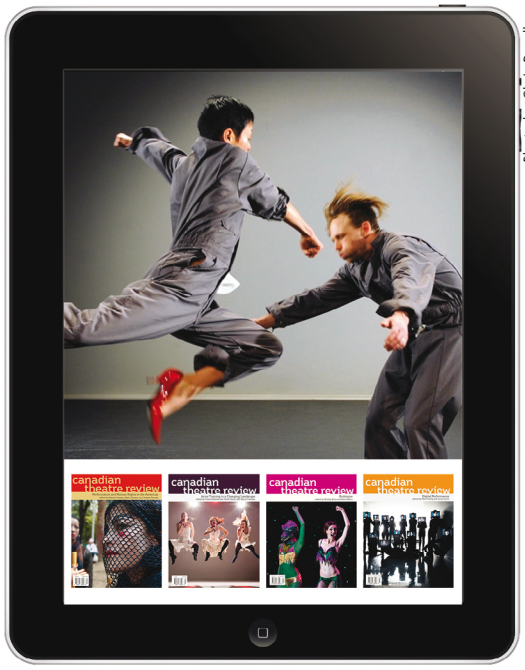

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"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
© Bert Gillet. Bert Gillet's scenographic design from MT Space and Cactusbloem's co-production of Hazim Kamaledin's play *Black Spring*.

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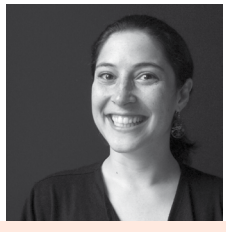

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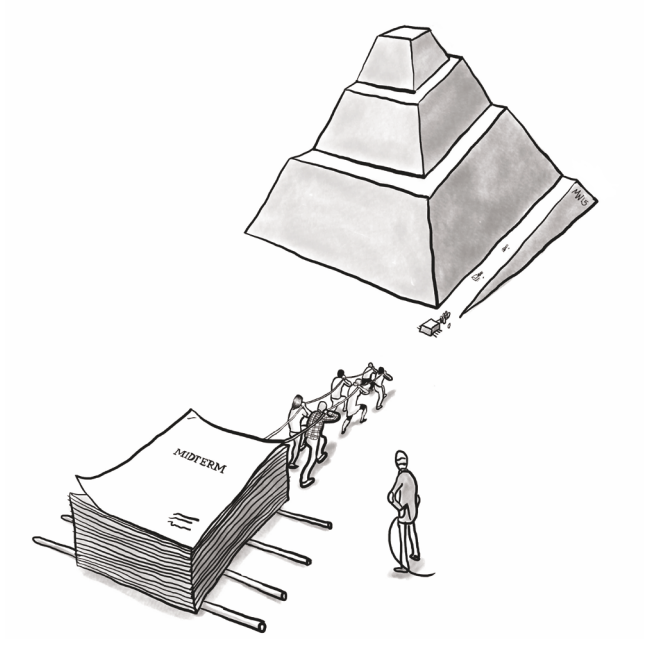
Editorial

STARVING ARTISTS, STARVING STUDENTS

BY NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH



The American painter Robert Henri once said, "I am interested in art as a means of living a life; not as a means of making a living." This quote captures the essence of the "starving artist" narrative: possessing a drive to create that is so strong it becomes more important than, or at least separate from, the need to sustain oneself in a society driven by capital. But, alas, even for those whose professional practice is to probe society and the human condition in service of collective social growth, a living wage needs to be made, and as such, public investment is necessary to support artists, art workers, and researchers of the arts and humanities.

From the conservative right, we hear the argument that the arts are at best a creative pastime and at worst elitist (who could forget Stephen Harper's infamous 2008 declaration that "ordinary people" do not care about arts funding), and thus merit little to no public investment. If an artist is to make some or all of a living from their practice, the argument goes, it should be via the free market. In a 2012 article entitled "Is the Canada Council Just Funding Hobbies?", Peter Worthington, co-founder of the *Toronto Sun*, grumbles: "Why do writers have to be subsidized by taxpayers if they are 'professional' and earn a living through their writing? The answer is that many 'writers' can't make a living because people won't buy their work, hence subsidization." Such simplistic characterization of public funding in the arts overlooks the many returns on investment, both the economic benefits (multiplier effects of arts funding, the bolstering of tourism and other adjacent industries, etc.) but more importantly the innumerable social benefits relating to community engagement, popular education, political discourse, and mental health. It is these social benefits of arts investment that demonstrate that art should not be limited to commercial production but is in fact a public good.

Voices from the activist left also criticize arts grants, although for very different reasons: the mechanism of grant application writing and reporting can serve to dictate and limit the nature of artistic projects and their potential social benefits, particularly in the case of projects that are explicitly politically charged, socially engaged, and made by historically marginalized communities. As Adjoa Florencia Jones de Almeida writes in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*:

> In theory, foundation funding provides us with the ability to do the work . . . But funding also shapes and dictates our work by forcing us to conceptualize our communities as victims. We are forced to talk about our members as being "disadvantaged" and "at risk," and to highlight what we are doing to prevent them from getting pregnant or taking drugs—even when this is not, in essence, how we see them or the priority for our work. (186)

Applied theatre scholar and practitioner Judith Ackroyd shares concern about how "success" is measured when the language of grant reporting betrays that funders "are more interested in the number of participants who went on to apply for jobs or upskilling programs rather than how many felt touched by the drama encounter" (5). While public arts bodies in Canada have over the decades become increasingly effective at incorporating artists' expertise when designing funding models and processes, they are still subject to bureaucratic systems that favour quantifiable, productivity-oriented results.

Despite how good arts workers have had to become at defending the sector in economic terms, its biggest merits simply cannot be articulated in the language of neoliberalism. The arts sector in Canada, overwhelmingly non-profit, and does not define or prioritize "productivity" in ways congruent with free market standards.

As they professionalize, artists learn quickly that resources for their art-making and their own sustenance are hard to come by in these perpetually austere times; and those artists who experience marginalization within the art-making world—by virtue of their personal identities, modes of practice, or artistic content—face disproportionate barriers to access. Shifting our examination from artistic practice to research, it comes as no surprise that when university administrations revisit budgets and assess program priorities along productivity-based metrics, the arts and humanities face the most funding cuts, and the academic employees most affected within the targeted departments are the most precarious

workers: graduate students and contract workers who already face increasingly high tuition fees and low compensation packages.

The recent strike actions by CUPE 3902 and CUPE 3903 (the unions representing contract academic staff at the University of Toronto and York University, respectively) helped put a national spotlight on how these and other academic institutions fail to adequately support their contract workers, who face little to no job security while carrying the lion's share of university instructional duties. The CBC reports that more than half of undergraduate students are taught not by tenured faculty but by contract teachers, and the former make $80,000 to $150,000 per year while the latter make a fraction of that at $28,000 (Basen). One of CUPE 3902's requests was for the university to offer funding packages that at least met the Toronto poverty line—a request that went unmet by the administration.

The "starving artist" trope, which I'll expand here to include the "starving graduate student," at its most extreme translation by capitalistic society implies that an artist should be content to toil at their passion-filled work regardless of whether it generates an actual living—even if the artist is trained, recognized by their peers and community, and creating work that enhances civic society and public wellbeing. It is status quo for artists to work for free at some or many points in their careers, especially early on. This is certainly a result of the underfunding of arts and its marginalization in neoliberal society; perhaps for some artists it is also a self-determined way to refuse to have their work depoliticized by the mechanisms of external funding, or validated by capitalism through a pay-cheque. Mostly, however, working for free as an artist is simply taken as a right of passage in the sector. With graduate students specifically there is a pervading expectation that they will: work unpaid overtime to complete the teaching, marking, and research assisting expected of them; excel in their own research; serve on university committees; and publish and otherwise contribute to their fields. Again, this norm is in part sanctioned by the notion that these roles are a temporary right of passage toward becoming a (living-wage-earning) professional.

While in no case should it be acceptable for institutions to exploit the labour of their most precarious workers when they have the means to properly compensate them, perhaps the right-of-passage narrative has more traction in some departments—for example, STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematic) fields and business, —where there are many real, field-related work opportunities that graduate students can pursue outside of the academy after graduation. But what of our humanities student—say, the theatre researcher—who relies on the academy to provide a venue for their professional practice after graduation? As the graduate student representatives to Canadian Association of Theatre Research (CATR) said in a statement to the association, the CATR members on strike with CUPE 3902 and CUPE 3902 "represent the future of the association" but also "live below the poverty line, and without the hope for a future that includes job security, decent pay, and proper working conditions." These problems are compounded for contract workers who do not have other financial support, who have dependents, who are living with disabilities and/or chronic illness, who experience racialization, who experience barriers due to their gender and/or sexual orientation, and who face other barriers. As universities hire less tenure-track faculty and more contract instructors to teach increasingly larger classes, emerging researchers are rightly concerned that the labour exploitation they experience at the graduate level might not be a temporary condition, but demonstrative of what their career in the university will be like for years to come.

I do feel resonance with Henri's commitment to "art as a means of living a life; not as a means of making a living." My art-making and worldview are inextricable from one another and that is what motivates me to create. The romantic "starving artist" idea evokes relentless passion, and, as you well know, *alt.theatre* reader, no one gets into the Canadian theatre game for the money. Public funding is carried out through imperfect systems where on one side funders aim to create accountable granting models and on the other recipients struggle to reconcile their own expertise and vision with the constraints of grant streams, applications, and reporting. But ultimately, when society—governments, arts funders, universities—fail to adequately support work conditions in the arts and academy, they are effectively condoning visible and invisible barriers to access. If all public funding to theatre in Canada were to be cut tomorrow, would theatre artists still make art? The answer is: Yes, most would. Art is a means of living a life. But it would be the theatre artists with the most access to capital and social privilege who would be the most able to dedicate time to and access resources for their craft.

Meaningful investment in the public goods of the arts and academic research means ensuring that those most likely to face barriers can fully participate. This is a matter of justice, but it is also in service of maximizing the quality of these public goods: it is a primary step in creating artistic and intellectual ecologies that are diverse and fertile. If we starve artists and starve students, we starve society.

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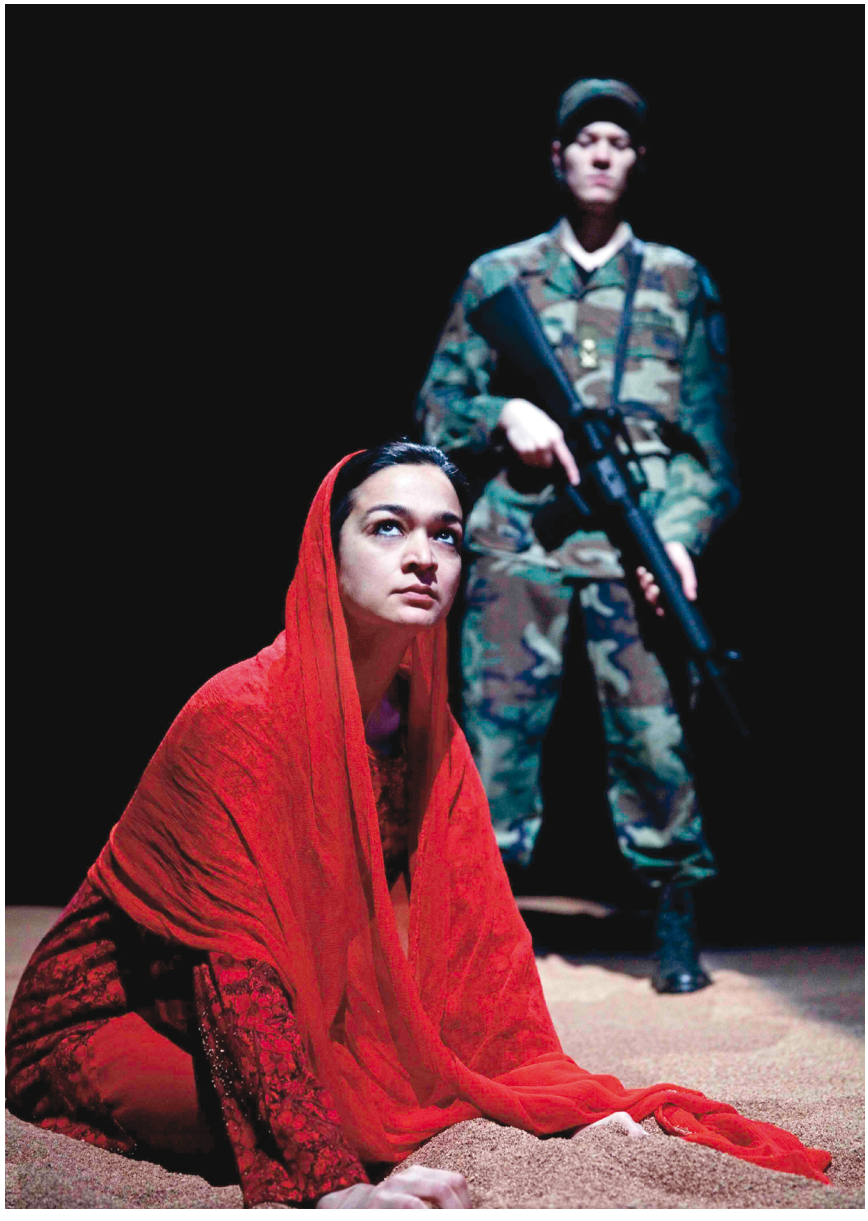

© Trudie Lee. Samiya Mumtaz and Zachary Dugan in Human Cargo Theatre's production of *Dust* by Christopher Morris and Jonathan Garfinkel.

TOWARDS A THEATRE OF GLOBAL EMPATHY: IMAGINING OTHERNESS IN THE WAR ON TERROR

BY MATT JONES

In Hannah Moscovitch's play about the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, three soldiers stand and address the audience as if they are being interviewed by a journalist. Who are they talking to? The story they tell is about the violence they endured and committed overseas as well as the dysfunctional sexual and psychological states they fell into as they were pushed to their limits. As they struggle to rationalize the decisions they made to an audience they perceive as potentially hostile, it becomes clear that they are speaking across a chasm of misunderstanding. As the play's curt title, *This Is War*, suggests, their stories strip away the sanitized mythologies that surround humanitarian intervention to reveal the brutal truth that former General Rick Hillier introduced us to in a 2005 *CTV News* story on hunting al Qaeda in Afghanistan: the job of the Canadian Forces these days is simply "to kill people."

What Moscovitch seems to be doing is staging this disconnect in our national consciousness. The soldiers are speaking to the nation and asking us to take account of what we have become now that we can no longer take comfort in the notion, however flawed and narcissistic it may have been, that the country acts as a peacekeeper on the world stage. *This Is War* is one of several recent state-of-the-nation plays that focus on the figure of the soldier as a way to confront us with the militarism of the post-Pearsonian era.[1] But who is left out of this story? What of the "detestable murderers and scumbags," as Hillier, in the same news story, described the people we are at war with?

In her recent work on ethics, Judith Butler has been concerned with thinking about how we imagine "otherness." She draws on Emmanuel Levinas' idea that empathy for other people is unconsciously triggered when we see their faces. Looking at another person's face reminds us of the precariousness of life. Their fragility reminds us that humans are interconnected and that we cannot survive without each other. This can awaken a feeling of responsibility for other lives that can be powerful enough to work against our own instinct for personal self-preservation (132). Hence, as many of the recent soldier plays attempt to show us, in extreme situations we might be willing to die to protect those around us.

But one problem that develops from this is that we tend to empathize more with people near us because we see them regularly. This helps to solidify a social bond that, because it is based on proximity, will always be parochial in nature. Butler wonders what it would take to develop a sense of global empathy that crosses borders, escapes the provincialism of the nation, and allows us to empathize with the people on the other side of the world with whom we are somehow connected. In her book, she turns to photography as a medium that can present the face of the other to us. But is there a way that theatre might also help us do this? The faces that theatre brings into view are almost always the faces of (usually local) actors. The presence of these faces highlights the absence of the real faces of the other. What techniques might theatre practitioners use to help us imagine the other?

A small number of recent Canadian plays have attempted to imagine how Afghans and Iraqis have been affected by the War on Terror. This is not the now-familiar act of migrants bringing stories of their homeland back to a Canadian audience. These artists are engaging in the challenging process of staging the experiences of communities they are removed from, either by accident of birth or by forced exile, but that we are connected to politically. Rahul Varma's *Truth and Treason* stages intercultural political conflict in the occupation of Iraq; Christopher Morris and Jonathan Garfinkel travelled to Pakistan to develop *Dust*, a "creative verbatim" play built from interviews with Canadians, Afghans, and Pakistanis involved in the conflict; and the MT Space, in order to create *Black Spring*, invited Iraqi-Belgian playwright Hazim Kamaledin to produce this play about a cross-cultural love affair during the looting of the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad.

In interviews with these dramaturges, I asked them about the strategies they employed to stage the problems of alterity—an issue that is complicated by the politicization of identity during wartime and the misrepresentation of culture in mainstream media—and how they dealt with the ethics

THE FACT THAT VARMA BEGINS WITH A PHOTOGRAPH IS INDICATIVE OF OUR RELIANCE ON PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIA TO TELL US WHAT IS HAPPENING IN WARS FAR OUT OF OUR SIGHT AND THE SUBVERSIVE POWER SUCH IMAGES CAN HAVE WHEN THEY SLIP THROUGH THE HIGHLY CONTROLLED CHANNELS THAT FEED THEM TO US.

of representation involved in staging other people's histories. Since theatre cannot simply show us the real faces of the people whose stories are being told, each dramaturge had to find another way to incorporate a trace of the real experience of their subjects into the work, to which they added an element of their own subjective relation to the issues at hand. Each play derives its strength from its incorporation of traces of real images, language, and traumatic memories that go some way towards helping us construct an image of an other that we might empathize with.

The Haunting Image: *Truth and Treason*

Rahul Varma's *Truth and Treason*, first staged in Montreal in 2009, paints a grave picture of the competing interests and rival factions vying to get ahead in occupied Iraq. His characters include aggressive American soldiers, well-intentioned but naïve Canadian humanitarians, comprador Iraqi businessmen, and cynical locals who see little to gain in loyalty to Saddam or to foreign occupiers. Varma stresses that it was important for him to have Iraqi characters play prominent roles in the drama. Putting a number of Iraqi characters in the play, he says, avoided the "Canada-centric" model of the conventional Canadian war play. "The people were not spoken for," he states, "they are speaking for themselves" (Varma interview).

But how is it that these distant voices come to speak?

Varma opts for an explicitly anti-documentary approach, choosing to follow his political and aesthetic instincts about the material rather than base his work on any one individual's story.[2] His inspiration to write the play came from an emotional as well as a political source. Though he began working on it in 2001 after feeling a strong need to counter the dominant narratives that followed the attacks of September 11, what gave the play its eventual shape was his reaction to an image that caught his attention; as he told me:



© Terry Hughes. Teesri Duniya Theatre's production of Rahul Varma's *Truth and Treason*.

> I was reading a lot about what was happening to people in Iraq, but essentially I saw two images. The first was of an Iraqi man on his knees in front of US soldiers and his family was crying behind him. This was such powerful imagery of humiliation. And there was another image that was published in *World Press* in which a suspected terrorist was caught behind barbed wire with his little boy sleeping on his lap, but there was a bag pulled over his face so that he could not see.

These images sum up much about the occupation, especially the way the apparently compassionate gesture of allowing a prisoner to be with his child only increases his debasement by further humiliating him in front of his family. The fact that Varma begins with a photograph is indicative of our reliance on photographic media to tell us what is happening in wars far out of our sight and the subversive power such images can have when they slip through the highly controlled channels that feed them to us. As Susan Sontag reminds us, photographs can be "a means of making 'real' (or 'more real') matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore" (9). As she put it in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us" (71). But Sontag also worried that though images might shock us, in spite of ourselves, to empathize with someone far away, their steady accumulation might also anaesthetize us to them, leading us to paralysis rather than action. Representational theatre, as a mimetic art form, inevitably lacks the immediacy and shock value of a photo, but its value cannot be reduced to the explanatory power of narrative either. What can it do instead?

Truth and Treason stages scenes that recall images we recognize from news footage of the war: checkpoints, hospitals, protests and riots, and political funerals. If representational theatre cannot show us the faces of those far away, it can at least connect the faces of the actors we see before us with images we associate with news coverage of the region, reminding us that our access to images of Iraq is inevitably mediatized and filtered, and potentially evoking a sense of our own helplessness faced with the power of media spectacle. At the same time, as a work of fiction, representational theatre can do what no documentary can and give us a glimpse into backroom scenes set in prisons, private conferences, politicians' back offices, and other places that neither we nor TV news crews can access.

There is something utopian in the gesture of a playwright presuming to present what they cannot know. In order for an audience to suspend its disbelief, the unknowable must somehow match up with the audience's sense of what things must be like, which means that these scenes are equally dependent on the mediatized image we receive of Iraq. While they are unable, I would suggest, to evoke empathy in the direct way that a photograph can, what they might provoke is closer to sympathy, dependent as they are on our separation from the other and the impossibility of knowing what they experience. The other remains an absent presence that haunts the stage in the way we connect to them through frustration at not being able to see them. This frustration is one shared between audience and playwright and it echoes in the play's tone of indignation. In this sense, even though in the final production Varma opted not to stage either of the images that inspired him, the play carries a trace of the original reaction of outrage the photos provoked in him. Rather than the play showing me "the truth" about Iraq, as a photograph claims to do, the play stages the frustration at not being able to see what life must be like there. This sense is emotionally bolstered by the haunting presence of the photos, but it is also dependent upon the world of narrative that exists beyond the play and that prepares us to accept such a claim.

Importantly, the play is only one place in which the narrativizing process goes on in the ecosystem of Varma's company, Teesri Duniya, which includes this magazine. Talkbacks and panel discussions with activists and academics working on issues related to the war followed each performance of *Truth and Treason*. As Varma explains, "We are looking for the audience to come not just as a ticket buyer but to become engaged with the politics, with the social issues. The mind cannot be changed only by the play; it has to be changed by engagement with the community" (Varma interview). This question of community engagement helps to avoid the unidirectional model of how politicization happens—so common in political theatre—and draws attention to the way that the panels relieve the play of the burden of offering a final narrativization of the problem. Opening up this wider dialogue reminds us that developing empathy is a complex political process to which a play can contribute at both the narrative and the emotional level. If such emotions can be carried by images that become words on stage, can they also be carried by language?

KAMALEDIN'S METHOD SEEMS TO BE AN ANTI-METHOD. THE PLAY IS BRIMMING WITH SYMBOLS AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT REFER TO EACH OTHER LIKE CONDENSED AND DISPLACED IMAGES IN DREAMS. THERE IS NO STRAIGHTFORWARD WAY TO PIECE THEM TOGETHER.

The Unobstructed Voice: *Dust*

The idea that a play allows the voices of diverse communities to speak for themselves is taken literally in verbatim theatre. The genre derives its claim to legitimacy from the way it stages the original, unaltered words of its subjects, creating a kind of verbal photograph of an event. The method had its heyday in England in the 1970s, where it was used to bring attention to the stories of marginalized communities in a way that celebrated their distinctive voices and attempted to minimize the artifice of theatre-making. It has been revived frequently in theatre dealing with the War on Terror, often presenting itself as corrective to the mainstream media.[3] In contrast to the manipulation of soundbites on CNN and the spectacular visuals of Hollywood, verbatim is theatrically minimalist, frequently foregoing stage lights, sets, and costume to focus on the original, unobstructed voice. It bases its claim to authentically represent its subjects on this lack of interference and on the rigour of its creators' research methods. If theatre cannot provoke empathy by showing us the faces of those not present, can it do so by presenting us their words?

To create their play *Dust*, which opened in Calgary in March 2013, co-writers Jonathan Garfinkel and Christopher Morris spent three years travelling to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Petawawa military base in Ontario to interview and get to know different communities implicated in the War on Terror. They describe their method as "a combination of verbatim drama and creative adaptation," as they allowed themselves to streamline different people's stories into a manageable number of characters. For security reasons they had to change characters' names and, unlike the British model of verbatim theatre, they had to rely on translation. Their method was also an immersive one. Both writers were concerned about the problem of parachuting into an unfamiliar environment from outside. For Garfinkel, the time spent living among the people he was writing about helped create the conditions for a fruitful exchange. And, as he explained in an interview, this was a process that took considerable time:

> The first weeks when we were in Lahore, nobody wanted to talk about anything. They thought we were with the CIA. But we just tried out as many different avenues as we could. It took going to parties in Karachi or talking to the military in Islamabad. What's important to understand about a place like Pakistan is how hospitable and welcoming people are to foreigners. We were taken into so many people's homes, fed extravagant meals, and taken into their lives. We tried to build off of those kinds of relationships.

It was not until their second trip that the pair felt they were beginning to understand the social conventions surrounding how people preferred to speak about the often traumatic experiences the playwrights were interested in exploring. In other words, Garfinkel and Morris needed to be among the people they were writing about and to develop relationships with people that allowed them to begin to empathize with those people. Eventually, they were able to obtain access to people who might not otherwise speak to outsiders and would never have spoken to journalists.

But getting close to their subjects also brought on new contradictions. Garfinkel and Morris were careful to return to the people whose stories they had used to show them how they had been incorporated into the play script. In cases where the fictionalization was received unfavourably, the pair would continue to work with the story contributor. As Garfinkel explained,

> There is a part about Afghanistan that is based on an actress whose husband had been murdered in Kabul. When Christopher and I decided to write about it, we knew that we would have to show her the writing at one point in the process, but at the same time we also wanted to give ourselves creative liberty to just create and edit ourselves. It was incredibly nerve-wracking. We had spent a year working on that part of the play. In the end [because of the collaboration] it was very gratifying.

This step was important not only to ensure verisimilitude and an ethical use of people's life experiences, but also to provide security for the interviewees. Even though it was unlikely that the play would be seen or read by anyone hostile, keeping the stories anonymous helped to prevent them from being associated with real people.

This situation is also a reminder of the tenuous position of the verbatim playwright, as developing empathy risks a loss of impartiality. As much as the success of their work depends upon them getting close to their subjects, they must also remain somewhat aloof if they are to avoid the trappings of becoming as embedded as the mainstream media. Their objectives, in that sense, are not totally aligned with the objectives of the witnesses who gave them their stories. Garfinkel and Morris attempted to avoid the trap of one-sidedness by widening the scope of their survey to include three different communities and a number of conflicting voices. By speaking to participants on both sides of the conflict, they ensured that whatever empathy they evoked for one group may find itself in contradiction with the empathy developed for another. Many verbatim practitioners strive for invisibility in their work, and some eschew the idea that they are playwrights at all (the British journalist and verbatim playwright Richard Norton-Taylor, for example, calls himself an "editor"). While this helps to de-centre the playwright as the master of the work, it also hides the important role of the writer in editing and selecting what is finally shown. Garfinkel and Morris make less bold claims about their roles, and their attempt to develop a "creative verbatim" method seems to retain a sense of responsibility for what they do with the work.

They are careful to go back to each community not only with the written work but also with the final production. So far, their show has been staged in Calgary and Lahore, and they plan to bring it to Toronto, Petawawa, Islamabad, and Kabul in the near future. Just how those different audiences react to the work will be seen as the piece is performed in these places over the coming year.

But the creative-verbatim hybrid also somewhat diminishes the power of reality that the play can claim, just as "based on a true story" is a step down from non-fiction. It raises the question of what kind of realities might escape the verbatim method that need to be filled in with the creativity of a playwright. What kind of truths evade rigorous field work and responsible research methods?

The Power of Ghosts: *Black Spring*

Black Spring is the culmination of a month-long residency that brought Iraqi-born Belgian-based playwright Hazim Kamaledin to the MT Space's studio in Kitchener in the fall of 2013. The play takes place in a ghostly landscape, evoking the ruins of both a cemetery and the looted Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad. The play is about love, death, and cultural hybridity at an ugly and contradictory meeting of East and West. Two women—one American, the other Iraqi—brought together as they cover the Western invasion for different media have become lovers. When the Iraqi is killed in an attack by coalition forces, the American channels her grief into writing a memoir about her love, which soon becomes a bestseller. The relationship between the elements is unclear: Is it a love story between two people or two cultures? Is it about the occupation, or is it about Kamaledin's traumatic exile from Iraq and the difficulty of finding a place amid the xenophobia of the new Europe? Or is it about archaeology and the senseless loss of irreplaceable artifacts? Kamaledin's method seems to be an anti-method. The play is brimming with symbols and relationships that refer to each other like condensed and displaced images in dreams. There is no straightforward way to piece them together.

"One thing I have learned in my life is: there is no style," Kamaledin told me in an interview. "The subject is the style. I have a theme: the subject is inside me. When it comes deeper inside me it gives me a sense of what is going on." In the case of *Black Spring,* Kamaledin's intuition led him to create a play that is largely verbal, even though the work he is best known for tends to be more visual and physical in nature. Speaking to Kamaledin, one gets a sense that his plays are constructed in much the same way that he speaks: through trails of associations that the listener must work to keep up with. He tells me that he began with the figure of an exile, who became a dead man, which brought out the idea of a graveyard, which led to ghosts, which led to the ghosts of archaeology, then to love and intercultural encounters.

But the trauma of exile remains the primary theme, hanging over the other elements of the play in the same way that the photographs haunt Varma's work. Kamaledin revealed that he was sentenced to death seven times during the reign of Saddam Hussein, and finally fled after narrowly escaping arrest when security forces shut down his 1979 play, *The King is the King*. When the Americans invaded in 2003, he decided to return to make theatre again, but his work soon ran afoul of the new authorities and he found himself banished once more. "Going back to Iraq was a disaster," he said. "What I saw was a carcass of a city. [The real Iraq] doesn't exist. It is virtual."

This implicitly postmodern comment reminds us that whatever the "real" Iraq might be, there is no reliable way of determining what that is since neither language nor photographic evidence is a stable transmitter of meaning. This distinguishes Kamaledin's method from those of both Varma and Morris and Garfinkel, each of which relies on source material to validate its authenticity. Similarly, his position as a long-time Iraqi exile troubles his position as a storyteller. His distance from Iraq means he is not a diasporic writer describing his country to a foreign audience, but his familiarity with the place and his connections to its people mean he is neither an outsider attempting to look in. Kamaledin's aborted return to Iraq confronted him with the fact that once you leave a place, as he says, you remain "a stranger." Despite his sixteen years in Europe, Kamaledin also feels that immigrants in the West never cease to be seen as strangers, regardless of official policies of multiculturalism. But this sense of double strangeness is also a positive trait that he attempts to harness in his work. Moreover, he believes that this feeling of cultural rootlessness might be a way for different people to connect with one another:

> I'm looking for this collective memory. How can we recognize each other? Occidental, oriental: we are looking for each other and we think we are in love with each other, but in fact I am looking at you from my own references about the West and you are looking at me from your own Orientalist references about the East. Trauma is one item we share. There is a collective trauma and that we share.

Vertical images: © Terry Hughes. Teesri Duniya Theatre's production of Rahul Varma's *Truth and Treason*.
Horizontal image: © Gillian Gallow. Deena Aziz and Samiya Mumtaz in Human Cargo Theatre's production of *Dust* by Christopher Morris and Jonathan Garfinkel.

Perhaps this is a key to understanding what theatre can contribute to fostering a sense of global empathy. Kamaledin points out what is shared across cultures at the same time that he points out the ignorance we may have about each other. In the play, the occidental-oriental divide does not prevent the characters from falling in love. When the American writer publishes her book, though, she cannot help interpreting her lover's story through a Western lens even as she strives against doing so. This extends to the archaeological artifacts looted from the museum. Ignorant of Middle Eastern antiquity, the only vocabulary the American can find to describe them are Ancient Greek and Roman references. We do not have to truly know the other in order to love them or to empathize with them, we might extrapolate. In fact, the desire to totally know the other has routinely been part of strategies of domination and colonialism. This is not an argument for ignorance but a recognition that even when we love someone, we do so in our flawed way.

What does this tell us about the experience of Iraqis under occupation? (Asked if *Black Spring* is a political play, Kamaledin was unequivocal: "Let us be serious," he said, almost hostile. "Theatre has no message.") The play does not try to tell us what life is like in Iraq, only what it is like to be connected to that place and yet removed from it, to be affected by the violence inflicted on the region by the West but also part of the West. Although Kamaledin is not a character in the play, it is the specificity of his feeling of anomie that haunts the frustrated coming together of the two lovers, cultures, traditions of architecture, armies at war.

Conclusion

Each of the attempts to represent the lived experience of the other fails to some extent—perhaps inevitably. Varma's desire to allow Iraqi voices to speak gives way to a kind of hopeful ventriloquizing of the Iraqi experience. Morris and Garfinkel capture the utterances of Afghans, Pakistanis, and Canadians, but transform this raw material into a narrative they craft themselves. Kamaledin takes us deeper into his own psyche than the streets of Iraq. The plays are most successful when they take account of their own limitations and stage their creators' own relationships with the people they are attempting to represent.

One thing to appreciate about Morris and Garfinkel's approach is their self-consciousness about the possibility of failure and their attempts to rectify this by including a series of checks and balances in their method. Likewise, the power of both Varma's and Kamaledin's work comes from the way they foreground their own emotional reactions to the political situation rather than offering a merely factual account of what happened. By implicating themselves in the struggles of the region, these writers invite us to reconsider our own relationship with populations far away and to question the apparently stable cultural entities (the nation, the West) to which we belong. Perhaps the plays do not need to succeed in representing the other in order to succeed as art. As Gayatri Spivak notes, "[U]nless we are trained into imagining the other, a necessary, impossible, and interminable task, nothing we do through politico-legal calculation will last" (83). We may not know what happens to the others out of our sight, but the art of trying to discover our connections to them remains an important part of developing a flawed but essential sense of global empathy.

NOTES

1 A number of recent Canadian plays analyze the lives of coalition soldiers serving in Afghanistan or Iraq, including: Don Hannah's *While We're Young* (2008), James Forsythe's *Soldier Up* (2008) and *Safer Ground* (2011), Jason Maghanoy's *Gas* and *Dust* (2010), Pierre-Michel Tremblay's *Au Champ de Mars* (2010), Evan Webber and Frank Cox-O'Connell's *Little Iliad* (2010), Alyson Grant's *Trench Patterns* (2012), George F. Walker's *Dead Metaphor* (2013), and Caroline Azar's *Dink* (2015). I discuss some of these in "After Kandahar: Canadian Theatre's Engagement with the War in Afghanistan," *Canadian Theatre Review* 157 (2014).

2 He explains his rationale for rejecting documentary and verbatim-based work in Rahul Varma, "State of Denial" *Canadian Theatre Review* 157 (2014): 31.

3 I have found more than thirty examples of verbatim plays about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of which are based on soldiers' testimony. Jonathan Holmes's *Fallujah* is one of the few examples that includes substantial Iraqi contributions.

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© Coman Poon. Dani D'Emilia interacting with audience members in in La Pocha Nostra's *Corpo Insurrecto 3.2*.

Contextualizing the Image: La Pocha Nostra in Toronto

BY SHELLEY LIEBEMBUK

On a rainy afternoon in late October 2014, I rolled four large chickens in a mixture of glue and shiny pink glitter on a plastic tarp on the floor of the blackbox Helen Gardiner Phelan Playhouse. These disco chicken carcasses were to enjoy their theatrical debut that evening: the opening night of La Pocha Nostra's group performance of *Corpo Insurrecto* 3.2, as the final event in a week-long artistic residency of four Pocha artists at the University of Toronto.

La Pocha Nostra is a transdisciplinary and transnational arts collective founded in 1993 by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes, and Nola Mariano. The founding impulse of the collective was to create performative interventions, primarily in reaction to oppressive US-Mexican border politics and the discrimination faced by US-based Latinos. Since its inception, the collective has grown to over thirty core members worldwide, and this expansion has distilled the essence and broadened the scope of the founding artistic mission to what they currently term a "radical pedagogy." This core performance methodology of radical pedagogy aims to create work that upsets normative, hetero, patriarchal, racist, and hierarchical assumptions in both content and form. Significantly, as part of disseminating and expanding their radical pedagogy, La Pocha Nostra has spent the last decade partaking in university-based artistic residencies. These allow Pocha artists to come together and create new work, as well as to show their work to new audiences. And, perhaps most notably, they offer an intensive workshop for local students and artists to engage with Pocha's aesthetics and political mission with the goal of engendering a "temporary community of rebel artists" at each site.[1]

As a theatre practitioner and scholar keenly invested in the potential socio-political effectiveness of aesthetic practice, I jumped at the opportunity to co-organize and secure such an artistic residency for La Pocha Nostra at the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies.[2] With the help of a sizeable SSHRC[3] grant, we were able to host four Pocha members in a week-long residency, from October 25th to 29th, 2014, entitled, "*Rebel Acts: La Pocha Nostra's Activist Performance Pedagogy.*" The four invited Pocha members were the iridescent co-founder Gómez-Peña, whose performance art practice has spanned over three decades and has positioned him as the most renowned Latino performance artist in the world, and three of the troupe's newest members: Brittany Chavez, Dani D'Emilia, and Saul García Lopez, each bursting with an intense and unique passion for contemporary political performance.

Our organizational aim for the residency was to offer multiple points of entry for interacting with La Pocha Nostra members and their work. These ranged across a five-day workshop, an artist-activist dialogue, and two distinct performance events. Aiming to reflect the breadth of La Pocha Nostra's artistic practice—ranging from small-scale spoken-word performances, collective *acciones* (or performance actions), photography, and cyber-art through to large-scale multimedia performance installations[4]—the residency included a small-scale spoken-word piece by Gómez-Peña, *Imaginary Activism*, and the Canadian premiere of the group performance *Corpo Insurrecto* 3.2—a large-scale performance integrating performance actions from all four visiting Pocha members.

© Coman Poon. Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Jess Balitrónica in La Pocha *Nostra's Corpo Insurrecto 3.2*.

My immediate task on that late afternoon in October 2014, in preparation for that evening's opening performance of *Corpo Insurrecto* 3.2, was to attach chicken feet to the now glittered chickens using an assortment of safety pins. The pink disco chickens are a significant symbol in Saul García Lopez's action, which is itself a reconceptualization of a vintage Pocha *acción*. The original action, which involved the killing of a live chicken, was performed in the early 1990s as a critique of the treatment of illegal Mexican border crossers—known pejoratively as "pollos" (literally, "chickens" in Spanish). In the contemporary iteration of this action, chicken carcasses covered in pink glitter dangle from a staff-like pipe carried by the fetishized body of García Lopez—clad in sombrero and cowboy boots, with aloe-leaves decorating his privates.

For the performance in Toronto, circumscribed as it was by its North American institutional setting, the live killing of a chicken would have been out of the question—not that García Lopez had even suggested it. Nonetheless, the action and its elements had been organizationally negotiated across the specific constraints of meeting health and safety policies at the University of Toronto, with an unexpected hiccup from a city of Toronto health and sanitation by-law dictating chicken carcasses and chicken feet must be sold separately—prompting the last-minute re-attaching of chicken feet pre-performance. As organizers of the residency, we had to negotiate the tensions inherent in carving out a space for a "radical" artistic residency through the required material support of hierarchical, mainstream structures from the outset. Yet, while I had anticipated that this institutional context would potentially sanitize La Pocha Nostra's work, I did not anticipate a second, possibly more grievous, re-framing: the work becoming reduced to a "curious" aesthetic form, bereft of the socio-political context that drives its content.

A gnawing set of questions arose as I continued to prepare the chickens for the opening performance, combining with the acrid scents of raw flesh—quickly losing its freshness—and glue: What was the resonance of a chicken carcass within a socio-political context that may be unaware of the Mexican border crosser reduced to "pollo"? Is there a need to provide the contextual framework to "read" the symbol of the *pollo* politically? How does an action—birthed in reaction to a particular socio-political context—resonate in a new, "globalized" context? What happens to an action's political effectiveness across this transposition?

As my first opportunity to engage directly with La Pocha Nostra's work, this residency forced me to interrogate my presumptions about the work's political effectiveness in its present context and across its various artistic forms. Across the events of the residency, I felt galvanized by those events centred around verbal negotiation—from the informal conversations with the Pocha members to Gómez-Peña's solo performance. But, I felt uncomfortably dissatisfied by the artist-activist dialogue and the group performance, whose powerful visual imagery was affecting but somehow far more simplistic in its political content. Across these engagements, I began to recognize my own propensity for discursive contextualization as a means to engage the political potential of art.

Upon the arrival of La Pocha Nostra, I was immediately struck by the troupe's incredible generosity and receptiveness. The first evening revealed a sincere interest on their part to acquaint themselves with the local political situation and context of Toronto. Specifically, Torontonians were reckoning with the prior week's shooting in Ottawa and Jian Ghomeshi's dismissal from the CBC; and our dinner conversation soon centred on the state of Canadian discourse on racial politics, the rhetoric around national security, and gender violence. The Pocha members' desire to familiarize themselves with the local iteration of these discourses resonates with their stated objective for this residency: enabling the creation of a "temporary community of rebel artists" jointly experimenting with radical pedagogy in performance. Pocha members arrived not only armed with their well-honed aesthetic and pedagogical tools, but also, clearly, ready to discover the particularities of this temporal community and to take part in an ongoing conversation. The promise of a productive residency appeared to rest upon this attentive curiosity, and its potential for flexible responsiveness.

The possibility of fostering a joint community through the residency was particularly centred on the intensive five-day workshop. The workshop was structured to engage participants "from different disciplines, ages, ethnic backgrounds, gender persuasions, and nationalities" in exercises led by the Pocha members, in a manner that "not only accepted but encouraged […] difference and experimentation."[5] While I was not a participant in the workshop, I had the opportunity to overhear the first workshop exercise led by Gómez-Peña on the second day, while putting up bios outside the theatre door. Gómez-Peña suggested that a radical act was being kind to every labourer one encountered through the day. Here, destabilizing his position of guru, Gómez-Peña not only stepped aside to allow the newer members of the troupe to lead the workshop, but also shifted the focus to the micro-politics of everyday interaction. The space seemed set for conversation and exchange.

That evening, as Gómez-Peña prepared to go on stage for his solo performance, he once again showed an incredible sensitivity to the context at hand. He called the organizers into his dressing room and asked us two specific questions: How much of the audience would understand Spanish? And was it accurate that the shooter in Ottawa the week prior had been depicted as non-white in the press? Seemingly non-sequiturs, both questions revealed the same motivation: a means for Gómez-Peña to transpose his work to this evening's context. After a short chat with us, Gómez-Peña told us he would minimize the amount of Spanish in the piece, and that he would not bring up the shooting in Ottawa the week prior as he didn't want to push a delicate subject in a context foreign to himself. This second decision surprised me: Gómez-Peña chose not to take up a localized critique of visual politics, as his position to the local situation was that of a visitor. Yet what did such a decision do to the "bite" of his work for a Toronto audience?

The performance of *Imaginary Activism* that followed was a brilliant example of Gómez-Peña's skilful word play, targeted mostly at American politics, with a cameo by Pocha member Brittany Chavez whose spoken word piece resounded with power and fury. Prior to La Pocha Nostra's visit, Gómez-Peña's prolific writing and spoken-word performances had captured my imagination by voicing an incisive critique of contemporary power politics in a sharply ironic mode that encourages the reader or auditor to critically assess not only the situation at large but one's own position within it. To be a live audience to both Gómez-Peña and Chavez's performance was entrancing; and yet, when watching Gómez-Peña's performative lectures on YouTube a few days later, I found myself equally engrossed, and recognized much of the same "recycled" content. How much political bite did Gómez-Peña's work have as part of the residency in Toronto? Would it have been stronger if Gómez-Peña had chosen to navigate the Ottawa shooting? In an auditorium filled with willing devotees, Gómez-Peña's words were an inspiring reiteration of a message that, albeit radical, we all comfortably felt we were already on board with. How does a radical artistic practice take place within the safe environment of a North American, urban, liberal university's theatre department?

The next evening, we held an artist-activist dialogue. Five Toronto-based artist-activists were invited to dialogue with La Pocha Nostra members and the audience at large at the Luella Massey Theatre, a gutted church on Glenn Morris street, which was also serving as the workshop-hub during the week's residency. Rather than the anticipated round-table forum, La Pocha Nostra decided to set up a performance action in the centre of the floor in solidarity with the "Todos Unidos por Ayotzinapa"/ "Ya Me Cansé" protests and actions taking place concurrently across Mexico: a reaction to the forced disappearance and suspected murder of forty-three students from the city of Iguala.[6] The La Pocha action consisted of two of the workshop's participants lying nude on a central table, covered by a white sheet. Once the audience was seated around the table, in a full circle, an invitation was extended to those present to write the names of the forty-three missing, or of any victim of violence, on these two bodies using an assortment of lipstick, eyeliner, and markers once the white sheet was removed. The five invited artist-activists were then asked to briefly introduce themselves and their work, coming up to speak at the standing microphone at one end of the circle.

Four of the invited artist-activists did so; the fifth artist-activist, Coman Poon, decided to "speak" by approaching the table, uncovering the bodies, and then lying under the table itself. Poon's choice to engage with the central action was the first point of direct contact between what was otherwise a tense relationship between the performative action as visual focal point and the microphone as a static, removed position for the verbal dialogue that was taking place. His intervention seemed like a good promise for integrating this action of solidarity for the missing Iguala students with the immediate context. After Poon's intervention, Pocha members as well as audience members came up to the table to write on the bodies, and a slow trickle of Pocha members and audience also spoke at the microphone, at random.

Yet through this process, I felt a growing tension between the central performance and the various speakers at the microphone. The performative action precluded the flow of a conversation in the round, both practically and affectively. The microphone stayed at one end of the space, so speakers had to walk around the performance to go up to it. When a speaker questioned something someone else had said, or asked for a dialogic follow-up, this was interrupted by a pause as the interrogator went back to her/his seat and the interrogated made her/his way to the microphone. The dialogic possibility of the event seemed even more stymied by the affective nature of the performance: it sat in the middle of the space, taking up the central and performative focus, positioning the audience as primarily reactive to it. Unexpectedly, I felt that the performance action, while able to elicit a strong emotional response from the audience—a response that can be read as one of transnational solidarity—also overwhelmed the space.

La Pocha Nostra's choice to stage an action as part of what was conceived as an open artist-activist dialogue between La Pocha Nostra and community members in Toronto at once skewed the possibility of open dialogue and enabled an immediate, affective community of participants. Highlighting a performative event, and framing the evening around it, La Pocha Nostra imposed this structure on the entire dialogue, leaving little room for restructuring. However, at the same time that I felt this as an imposition, I also recognized my own deep-seated expectation that Pocha members would actively lead and guide the evening's conversation verbally. Instead, Pocha members chose to primarily curate the dialogue through a non-verbal performative action. Certainly, this performative action provided a very immediate "something" to contend with and negotiate across. But how much did we, as an audience, want to take up and question the action taking place in the space?

There was only one instance during the artist-activist dialogue where the performance action was directly interrogated. Poon intervened into the performance space a second time, taking the microphone off its stand and bringing it over to the two bodies on the table. He asked them a question regarding how each felt and whether they wanted to say something, and then thrust the microphone next to each of their mouths. While both quickly declined, Poon seemed to continue to insist they say something, holding the microphone to their mouth past their first refusal. Through the course of Poon's second intervention, there was a growing sense of unease amongst the audience, which I read as a response to the striking power imbalance between the muted, nude bodies on the table and the mic-wielding, fully-clothed Poon. Shortly

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© Coman Poon. Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Jess Balitrónica in La Pocha Nostra's *Corpo Insurrecto 3.2*.

after this, audience member Natalie Alvarez directly addressed this tension. She took up the mic, went to sit next to Poon, and asked him directly whether he recognized the aggressiveness of wielding a microphone over someone else; and, then, echoing his own gesture, thrust the mic to his mouth. As an audience member, I was highly uncomfortable with Poon's second intervention, but, upon reflection, it was significant to note that Poon was the only one to offer the nude bodies the possibility of partaking in the verbal dialogue around the action; and to question their placement as the vulnerable bodies on the table. As I learned later, the two participants on the table had been directly solicited to perform by Pocha members: an invitation that at once opened up to their participation and, more problematically, singled them out as "bodies of interest" to the La Pocha Nostra political "aesthetic." The two bodies on the table "read" as a black woman and a trans person: bodies that visually represented minority bodies facing violence. Yet, what might be problematically re-inscribed through the process of soliciting these particular bodies to be on display? The artist-activist dialogue seemed to operate as an aesthetic echo of a political intervention that might be staged effectively elsewhere, and whose immediate problematics remained, for the most part, unaddressed.

The final performance of *Corpo Insurrecto* 3.2, which included the previously mentioned disco chickens, incorporated a wide-range of provocative images associated with La Pocha Nostra's performance practice. The four Pocha members performed across three platforms in the space, along with a projected video montage of racist historical representations and an upbeat pop soundscape. La Pocha Nostra's aesthetic involves mimicking the display of "hyper-exoticized 'artists of color'" and "performing the stylized desires and intercultural fetishes of the mainstream" (*Ethno-Techno* 50). The political efficacy of such an aesthetic is a fraught one, as Gómez -Peña has been quick to recognize. In a cultural context of "the spectacle of the mainstream bizarre," "where 'radical' behaviour, revolution-as-style, and 'extreme' images of racialized violence and sexual hybridity have become daily entertainment," "performance artists might end up becoming just another 'extreme' variety act in the extensive and ever-changing menu of global culture" (*Ethno-Techno* 51).

Across the three platforms in the space, the Pocha members constructed a myriad of images in keeping with this aesthetic. One of the most poignant was Dani D'Emilia's embodiment of a macho fascist pig through donning the real skin, turned mask, of a pig head. D'Emilia's movements included strapping on a candle penis, which audience members were invited to melt using a small blow torch; as well as sexually interacting with the now-skinned pig head. The physical extremity of D'Emilia's performance was affective and disturbing. But did it bring anything new to the critique of patriarchy?

Of the various actions taking place, the most unsettling for me were a set of improvised tableaus, created by Gómez-Peña and Balitrónica, under the title *Ways to Kill a Mexican*. This sequence of tableaus invited audience members to join in and improvise "killing a Mexican" on the platform, offering them a fake shotgun to use as a weapon. As Balitrónica walked across the space, soliciting participants, I felt deeply unsettled by the political implications of the invitation, as well as by the strange dis-located positioning of Mexican-American politics in a primarily Anglo-Canadian context. More disconcerting was the additional invitation for those participants who wanted to kill a Mexican to get naked while doing so: an invitation which seemed to create quite a lot more tension in the audience than the first. As these images were constructed on the platform, I felt dissatisfied with their effectiveness, asking once again: What is at stake in creating these images here, at this time, with this audience? How much of the effect of these images is their ability to shock a prudish audience with nudity and sexualized imagery? Is the tableaux' potential for showcasing the problematic sexualization of violence and the reification of minority bodies as hypersexual being overshadowed by audience participants' "liberating" experience of public nudity?

Engaging with La Pocha Nostra's work over the course of this week-long residency, in this specific context and in various artistic mediums, brought some new discoveries. The affecting, but somehow, simplistic images of the artist-activist dialogue's performance action and those of *Corpo Insurrecto* 3.2 forced me to examine my own criteria for what I deem effective art, and highlighted my preference for verbal contextualization and subversion. In turn, the discursive complexity and subtlety afforded by Gómez-Peña's spoken word and the continual informal discussions with the visiting Pocha members about their radical performance pedagogy proved the most inspiring. Furthermore, forging a temporal community along with the Pocha members, workshop participants, fellow organizers, crew, and audience meant taking part in an ongoing conversation around the work—a discursive contextualization that I feel best ignites and supports the socio-political potential of La Pocha Nostra's artistic practice.

NOTES

1 As set out in La Pocha Nostra's workshop objectives description document, which they provided us, the organizers of their artistic residency.

2 I co-organized this residency with Prof. Barry Freeman (who originally conceived of the residency in conversation with Toronto-based Pocha member Saul García Lopez) and my fellow graduate student colleague Jimena Ortuzar.

3 The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

4 La Pocha Nostra's website includes links to many of these works: www.pochanostra.com

5 As set out in La Pocha Nostra's workshop objectives description document.

6 On Dec. 6, 2014, Alexander Mora Venancia was the first of the missing students to be confirmed dead. It is believed that all of the students were murdered (Dec. 2014).

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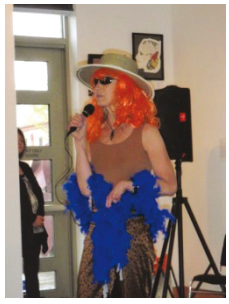


Following Her Story:

An Interview with Ruth

BY ÖZGÜL AKINCI

Bieber

© Leah Bowen. InsideOut Theatre performers Ruth, Nicky, Jamie and Diane in *Help Unwanted*.

Ruth Bieber, author of *Disability Theatre from the InsideOut*, is the founder and former artistic director of Inside/Out Theatre in Calgary. The company is still creating performances by and for mixed-abled people. In my interview with her, Ruth talks about her engagement with theatre, her directorship experience, and her play *To See or Not to See*, which draws from her personal experience as a blind woman who looks for spiritual and medical ways to re-gain her sight—with some surprises along the journey.

Özgül Akinci *I want to start from your first encounter with theatre. Do you have distinct childhood memories about theatre?*

Ruth Bieber No, no. We never talked about the arts when I was growing up. My father was very much a farmer. My mother was in hospital most of the time. And we were not exposed to the arts at all. But when you asked the question, something that comes to my mind were the little plays at church in Sunday school, always at Christmas and Easter. Performance would have been special. These probably would have been the most influential. Before grade seven, when I first acted, I don't think there was anything else.

Ö.A. *What appealed to you about theatre in grade seven?*

R.B. I was always interested in theatre. Although initially, in grade seven, I wanted to join the band at school, as most of my friends were taking music. But, the band teacher thought they couldn't accommodate a blind student.

Ö.A. *Wait a second—did they think a blind person wouldn't be eligible for music training?*

R.B. Yes, it was strange and it got even worse in grade ten. But returning to grade seven, I decided to take drama instead, and I was very good at it. That solidified my love of drama. Then when I started high school, I wanted to take French. Also, languages are an obvious thing for a blind person, right? My French teacher … it took him a week to figure out that I couldn't see. Finally, I decided I better tell him. And he said, "Oh, I am so glad you told me. Because, really, for a girl with no sight to learn French would be like a girl without fingers to learn piano." So, I dropped out of French class and took drama instead.

Then, when I started university, I didn't really have the courage to get a degree in theatre. So, I was getting a degree in social work and I took two theatre history classes and an acting class during my first and second years of study. When I was taking my graduate degree, I had the opportunity to take selective courses. There was a class called "Drama for People with Disabilities." And that was the course that changed everything for me. I became very, very enthused about arts and the importance of arts for our culture—how devalued they are. I was an outreach worker and a counselling therapist at the time, working primarily with people who have complex disabilities. I was finding that traditional verbal approaches to therapy were not effective, especially for this population. I started using the arts and some other non-verbal/non-traditional approaches to therapy.

Ö.A. *After you graduated from university, you took the initiative to establish InsideOut Theatre. What was that process like?*

R.B. As always, throughout my entire life, I was most drawn to theatre. So I started InsideOut Theatre Company in 1991, and I worked with the theatre company for nine years. The agency I was working for primarily counselled individuals. But we were also expected to run therapy groups. My groups always involved the arts, drama especially. (No performance, just drama games and activities.) After a few years it really seemed important to add the element of performance for the audience. It would also be empowering for the actors with disabilities and give them the opportunity to experience performing.

What I needed to do was apply for a grant so that we could rent a space and get into the community, plus hire some people to support the process. We hired a musician, a writer, and someone with experience with popular theatre. Then we worked for a year on developing our first play. The theatre company always relied on grants. We never had enough money from ticket sales to support the process. People

with disabilities often don't have enough money for extras beyond basic needs. The actors paid a nominal fee to be in the company and receive the training. We also wanted to make the performances accessible to audience members with disabilities and people with low income. That meant not charging much for tickets. So, we did lots of grant writing.

Ö.A. *What kind of disabilities are you referring to?*

R.B. All across the board. We had actors with autism, Down syndrome, blindness, deafness, learning disabilities, mental health disorders—diagnoses of all kinds. There were two rules about the group: actors couldn't pose a risk (one time a fellow started a fire in the bathroom) and actors couldn't be so self-centred that they couldn't work with other people. Other than those two rules, everyone was welcome.

Ö.A. *Did you have performers without disabilities?*

R.B. Yes. Everybody had to perform, even the students and the other facilitators. That was one rule. There were no observers, just participants. Everyone becomes involved in the process. That really helped to keep the momentum of the process going.

Ö.A. *Can you talk a little bit about your decision-making process when it came to what to create and how to work on it? When would you say, "Okay, this is what we are going to work on"?*

R.B. There are two answers to that. Primarily, the first time the group meets in a season we discuss and agree upon the theme for that season. One year, however, I had received a grant from the provincial government, but it meant that I had to develop a show about "work." Because that's what the mainstream culture is all about: work, right? And, the actors were initially very disappointed. They said, "We come here to forget about work, to enjoy ourselves." I said, "Okay, this is where the money is coming from so what can we do to make this a better experience?" So that year, we developed a show with two parts. The first part was about their experiences with their regular work outside the theatre company, which was not much fun—although it was good therapy for them to talk about their jobs. The second part of the show was about "fantasy work." They loved that because the actors developed scenes about what they would do if they could do anything they wanted.

Ö.A. *Did you have co-directors or other staff working with you?*

R.B. I worked 24/7. I did all the administration from my house, and you know what that's like: the computer is there, the work has to be done, and the grants have to be written. I did that. Most of the time I had an administrative assistant. My part was full-time; the administrative assistant worked part-time. But that person was also involved with the productions. There would be two of us, then. I hired facilitators who always had other jobs beyond the theatre company to sustain themselves financially.

ÖA. *Sounds like a working model to run a company.*

R.B. Yes, because I always took my cues from the actors and the community at large. It was not me doing something to them; rather, I responded to them. In my mind, that was a primary principle.

Ö.A. *What was the most exciting project for you?*

R.B. There is a moment I will never forget. It was during a production of the last play in the book. We had finished the show. It was a really good show. It was a full house and the audience really liked it. I could hear them clapping while we were all up there taking the final bow. One of the actors, Diane, she has a speech-related learning disability and she knew that I couldn't see, suddenly she taps me on the shoulder and says, "Ruth, they are all standing for us." It was such a precious moment because we arrived there together. That was a moment of arriving. With her doing that, it was another moment of the cooperative nature of the work. She was helping me. I loved that. That one sticks out in my mind.

Ö.A. *As an artist, which project was the most effective and productive for you?*

R.B. I think, just again, right at the top of my mind, it was the same show. It was called *Meistro Piece: It's No Joke*. There were two parts to it. One part was dialogue and the other part involved miming to music. At one point in the history of integrating people with disabilities, the theory was that it was very important there weren't too many disabled people in the same room at the same time. Personally, I don't get that. I think that's just bigotry. Anyway, at one point there was a scene with actors with disabilities only. Usually we had a mix of people with and without disabilities on the stage to maintain momentum, as I previously mentioned. But we realized at one point—without even trying, there it was—one scene with people with disabilities exclusively. We were so happy about that. It was like, "See, you don't always have to have people without disabilities involved to make it work." It worked and it was one of the most entertaining scenes we have ever developed, I think.

Ö.A. *In the beginning of chapter nine of* Disability Theatre from the InsideOut, *you say, "The evolution of InsideOut theatre has been the journey of demystifying arts." Can you expand on this?*

R.B. I believe that in many circles the belief is that only the elite can be performers—only seasoned, well-trained, people with degrees and lots of acting experience. That's the myth. The truth is we can all be actors and artists if we are given the chance and the right environment. The actors with InsideOut theatre, whether they have disabilities or not, don't need to have previous acting experience. They just need to be able to work with others in the collective process! And they are still running the company in Calgary to this day. It shows that everybody can make art, not just the elite. That's the big demystification.

Ö.A: *Also, the beliefs that theatre is all about seeing or theatre is all about physical movement—I think they are both challenged in your experience.*

R.B. I don't think I wrote that anywhere. I think I might add a chapter. That's neat.

Ö.A. *How did you decide to leave the company?*

R.B. I was completely burned out. Every September would come around and I would say, I can't do this again, but I would do it again: develop another show and run the company for another year. Finally, in 2008, I had a team of three or four facilitators who had been in the company a long time: very, very dedicated. They came to me and they said, "Ruth, we will carry this company, if you need to go." I thought this was great because I was beginning to realize there needed to be a team of people to replace me anyway. I did not want to leave and let the whole thing collapse. I felt the work was very important. And the company is still running. None of the original facilitators are there, but there are others now.

Ö.A. *And you wrote the play,* To See or Not To See. *When did you start to write it and why?*

R.B. I started to write the play in 2008. At that time I was just about to leave the theatre company. All of the actors in the company contributed to the process of the development of the play and the scripts. But I wanted to write something for my own experience that was more a process of a playwright writing a script, rather than a group of people contributing to the development of a script. Initially, my thought was to expand my own playwriting experience into something I hadn't done before. I attended some playwriting classes with Gordon Pengilly from Calgary, who is a very well-known playwright and teacher. I remember two things: I remember Gordon telling me that for my first play I couldn't have picked a more difficult topic for a number of reasons: because the script is very complicated, there are lots of characters, we go back in time, and of course it was autobiographical. And the other thing I remember is the first time I had a play reading in Calgary: it was such a great experience. People came to me after the reading and they were crying and they really, really got it. I remember feeling very happy that it actually made sense to people given the difficult dynamics I had taken on.

Ö.A. *Why did you choose this topic?*

R.B. I was at a point in my life that I have revisited many times. It is a point that comes and it goes. I was really quite tired of being blind, and I had also just started my shamanic training. Truthfully, somebody came to me and said that Marv Harwood, who was a shaman, could help me get my sight back. I approached him and I asked him about it. And he said exactly what he says in the play. He said he probably could but from his perspective it wouldn't necessarily be in my best interest or in the best interest of the world. I did accept that at the time and then decided to write a play about that experience. Because it is a curiosity, right? How do we wrap our minds around the idea that it is better for me and the world if I remain blind? I found that idea quite intriguing. Not that I haven't thought about it before. Because as I say in the play, research shows that many people who do get their sight back are very disillusioned by the sighted world. I guess I wanted to sort of share the message that, you know, maybe having a disability, as we think about disabilities, maybe it's not always what we think. That it's better to be sighted than to be blind; it's better to be walking than in a wheel chair. We don't really know that's true. So, I wanted to explore that a little bit and come to a conclusion that maybe would surprise people.

Ö.A. *When you finished the play, did your relationship with Marvin change?*

R.B. Yeah, probably, in a way, it did. Because in the end, it is really my choice. Not his. Maybe he won't help me get my sight back. But there are other things that I can do. There is stem cell research. There are all kinds of other possibilities. And I feel fundamentally that if that's something that I really want, it ultimately will happen. Now having said that, I also do believe what I say in the play—that life is more than being able to see. I win either way. I have a very full life. I am very happy. I had a lot of experiences. It's a good life. If I didn't get my sight back, there would be no regrets. But I would always like to just try and see what it's like to have sight. Just curious, right?

Ö.A. *What are your future plans with this play?*

R.B. The play did not get much attention. Now the book is done and I'd love to get the play produced. I remember a lot of people telling me that I should turn it into a movie. Because of the visual effects—it would easier to manage the visual effects on film. So I took an online film-writing course. I sent the teacher the script and she said I want you to double it and add these other dimensions to it. I did that. Then at the very end of the course, she said, I recommend you cut it in half. I did what she asked in the first account, but then when she asked me to return to the original length, it seemed like a waste of my efforts from the beginning. So, that was it. Now there is new interest in the script, which proves to be very exciting—but that is for another interview.

Ruth's play To See, or Not To See? *is scheduled for production in the autumn of 2015, with plans to later adapt the script for radio and the screen. For more information, visit www.playwithperspective.com.*

TRAIN OF THOUGHT GOES OFF THE TRACK

ANGE LOFT

Train of Thought is a creative expedition produced by Jumblies Theatre in collaboration with over 90 organizations across Canada. More than 60 travellers—artists of all stripes engaged in community-based work—will cross the country by train. The trip will offer on-board activities and facilitate meetings and exchanges at over 20 stops along the way. This lofty feat moves from West to East coast, hitting some of the bigger names on the map—places with sizable populations connected to the rest of the country with literal tracks. We'll also hit a few smaller cities and towns, reservations off the track, and a branch line in Northern Ontario that we call the "Ghost Train of Thought."

We conceived this journey through the lenses of perception, memory, history, and imagination—themes we have thoroughly explored at The Ground Floor, Jumblies' downtown Toronto studio. These have led us deep into Toronto's buried history, and to the original inhabitants of the area. We are learning about what is not on the map, who is left out, and whose voices have been cut off. On the train, our partners are artists who collaborate and form alliances between First Nation and settler/immigrant communities. If our goal is to discover how we can create, grieve, celebrate, shift tracks, and see the land we share in new ways, then it is our duty to get off the track.

On the Ghost Train of Thought, we will stop in Mississauga First Nation, right beside Blind River, Ontario, home to a long-defunct train line. There, I once visited a local historic museum and learned that it carried people, timber, coal, and uranium from the northern channel of Lake Huron. I also found a stop at a Spanish Indian Residential School, where my grandfather was sent to live among the priests, 600 miles from home. Through my theatrical collaborations in Mississauga First Nation, Nippissing First Nation, Sudbury, and Sault Ste. Marie, I find myself meeting a lot of Native people. Even though I'm of a different territory and nation, we share a similar train stop: at a screeching halt, with sparks shooting off our tracks, we discover that our grandparents went to the same residential school. For me, this old train line carries stories of connection, but also of being torn apart.

My home community of Kahnawake once had its own train station that linked directly to Montreal. The station closed over 40 years ago, abruptly changing our access: our visibility, mobility, and ability to self-actualize shifted radically. When we finally got a bus stop in Kahnawake, I took it to the city as often as I could. I took it to CEGEP and University, and through years of social, political, and cultural study, I attempted to understand how Aboriginal people have come to be as we are, and what we can do about it. I arrived at theatre-making as the most effective tool to build together, respect stories, and honour artists.

With so many Native artists thinking on location and legacy, I'm a little frightened about what we may collectively unearth. As assistant artistic director at Jumblies, and as a lead artist on this journey, I'm wary of letting myself reflect too freely, as I know the balance we must maintain for personal and communal safety and comfort. We'll be travelling not only with suitcases of art supplies, but also with piles of emerging, established, and senior artists and all the baggage accompanying them that may be unpacked through hard learning experiences and marathon intercultural sharing. It may get heavy — but the history is heavy.

I'll be travelling alongside so many artists I respect and admire — people who have chosen theatre, art, and community as a means to enter into the tough questions. We will support each other as we go deeper in our investigations, and help each other to stay safe. We're doing good research, and will make good work. Our country has many ghosts we are afraid to look at, but only through facing them can we continue down the track in confidence and with clarity. I will board the train in Victoria, B.C. and will head eastward, but it is our jaunt off the track for the Ghost Train of Thought that will bring me to the places I must go before I move on.

NATIONAL, DIGITAL, DEMOCRATIC: THE THEATREWIKI WAY

SIMON BLOOM

Three hours.

That's how long it took for the first 150 articles to be published on the Theatre Wiki, Canada's first-ever online community-based theatre encyclopedia. This past November, over 100 users gathered at hack sites (venues where users congregate to work on building something, either physical, like a piece of hardware, or digital, like a website or app) across Canada to push off the maiden voyage of the Theatre Wiki.

The term "wiki" (Hawaiian for "quick") was coined by software developer Ward Cunningham. In his book (with Bo Leuf) *The Wiki Way: Quick Collaborations on the Web* (Addison-Wesley, 2001) he identifies the "essence" of a Wiki as follows:

1. All users can edit any page, or create new pages, using only their browser.

2. A wiki creates meaningful topic association between pages through hyperlinks.

3. It seeks to involve visitors in the ongoing process of creation and collaboration.

The Theatre Wiki is wiki *qua* encyclopedia as popularized by the Wikipedia. It was conceived of by the Spiderwebshow, an initiative dedicated to creating spaces of convergence between theatre and the web, and built by myself and fellow digital dramaturge Graham F. Scott. It's designed with twinned objectives: first, to serve as an inflammable digital Library of Alexandria, collecting and storing all information about theatre in Canada past, present, and future in perpetuity; and second, to spark a national conversation about theatre that breaks down regional isolationism.[1] At its most distilled, the Theatre Wiki is an online encyclopedia where users can view, add, and edit articles that pertain to any facet of Canadian theatre.

To understand the vital importance of a site dedicated to the convergence of practitioners across the country, one needs only to look at the glory days of IBM. Their offices were intentionally built with intersecting corridors, ensuring that scientists and engineers practising in unrelated fields were forced to run into one another. These happenstance run-ins were the catalyst for great breakthroughs of invention. This is the spirit in which we built the Theatre Wiki: as a digital meeting place for artists who would not have otherwise met, provoking unexpected ideas and collaborations.

Unlike other digital resources on theatre currently available (e.g., *The Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia and The Toronto Theatre Database*), the Theatre Wiki is community driven and mostly democratic. I say mostly because it excludes anyone without access to the internet (around 15% of North Americans). And while the wiki has "guardians" — non-elected community managers who prevent spammers from flooding the site — it is the responsibility of the growing community to tend to their own garden. As creator and current manager of the Theatre Wiki, I dream that I might one day step away from it entirely, releasing it fully to the control of the community to decide on its oversight and future.

Until this happens, there's still work to be done evangelizing, maintaining, and growing the infrastructure of the wiki. This means working with our editorial committee to format existing articles and create new ones, continuing to add new features to the Wiki itself, and organizing live events called "Hackathons" where users can learn how to add and edit articles.

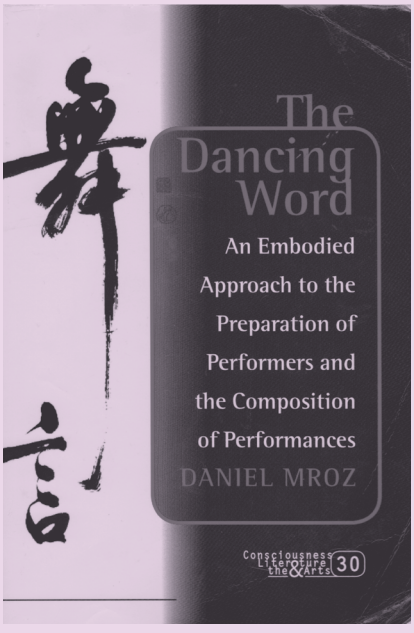
Our goal by the end of 2015 is to grow the Theatre Wiki's community base to include 400 users and 1000 articles. In March 2015, we redoubled our efforts by hosting a national Hackathon to coincide with World Theatre Day. It saw university students from across Canada writing articles about the work happening in their communities and sharing this new content on the Theatre Wiki.

At current count, there are 258 articles on the Theatre Wiki and 152 users. Every day these numbers grow and the online conversation about Canadian theatre evolves. We invite you to wander through our digital stacks and risk contributing an article of your own. It's as easy as going to theatrewiki.ca and registering for an account.

I hope to see you there soon.

BOOK REVIEW

BY
URSULA
NEUERBURG-DENZER



THE DANCING WORD: AN EMBODIED APPROACH TO THE PREPARATION OF PERFORMERS AND THE COMPOSITION OF PERFORMANCES. BY DANIEL MROZ. NEW YORK; AMSTERDAM: RODOPI, 2011. 220 PP.

In the *Dancing Word, An Embodied Approach to the Preparation of Performers and the Composition of Performance*, Daniel Mroz, leader of Les Ateliers du corps, co-founder of One Reed Theatre, and associate professor at the Department of Theatre at the University of Ottawa, accomplishes two feats: he gives an in-depth introduction to the practice of Chinese martial and self-care arts, and he explains his own approach to performance training and composition. He has developed this intercultural approach, the "Dancing Word," over years of Chinese martial arts and qigong practice, as well as through his apprenticeship with Richard Fowler, founder of Primus Theatre. The book *Dancing Word* proposes an alternative angle to many forms of contemporary theatre practice by focusing on a rigorous embodied practice in favour of psychological realism. It offers specific examples and concrete guidelines for both performers and directors. Mroz situates the *Dancing Word* in the lineage of Jerzy Grotowski's and Eugenio Barba's empirical studies via his mentor Richard Fowler and defines his approach as "ontological practice, an artistic practice that is preoccupied with the investigation of being" (19).[1]

In the introduction, Mroz lays out the different aspects and influences of his own training that led him to the formulation of his approach. A theatre student in Montreal, he first encountered Fowler's company Primus Theatre (1989-98) in 1992 and began training with Fowler in 1993. Following Fowler's advice, he began to study several types of traditional Chinese martial arts, or *wushu*, and in the later 2000s added training in the "self-care movement arts," or *qigong* (18). Mroz systematically describes and analyzes his almost twenty years of embodied practice in these approaches. He explains how his martial arts training has influenced his approach to performing and directing and has led him to his own style of theatre-making. As experienced through his practice, the transcendental aspects of Chinese martial training correspond directly with some of the psychophysical aspects of Grotowski and Barba's work, i.e. the effects of the "extra daily" practices, which, in Barba's words, "do not respect the habitual conditionings of the body" (Barba and Savarese 9-10).[2] Mroz describes how the performer reaches these states through the repetition of pre-arranged movement

patterns (PMPs) or "precisely set and repeatable patterns of movement animated by conscious intentions and impulses" (21), the nature of which features strongly in later chapters of his book.

In respect to the martial arts, Mroz refers to *wuwei*, understood here as "appropriate and effortless action," and *ziran*, meaning both "natural and spontaneous" or "a cultivated yet natural sense of freedom" (23). In other words, Mroz defines the correspondence between Asian martial arts and twentieth-century Western avant-garde movement training through their similarity in altered self-awareness, "where the mind reorganizes its perception of itself and its content" (21). This state is achieved via intense physical practice, governed by the rigour and extensiveness of training the body in pre-arranged movement patterns.

In his first chapter, "The Beginnings of Embodied Learning," Mroz elaborates on his early beginnings with the Talent Education Method pioneered by Japanese violinist Shinichi Suzuki, as well as on his later encounter with Richard Fowler's teachings. He describes how compatible their influence on his own artistic development has been. Mroz draws a parallel between Suzuki's violin lessons and Fowler's performance approach, basing it on the fact that both teachers assume their craft can be learned through diligent, incremental training, given the student's willingness to learn, rather than the cultivation of innate talent. In addition, Mroz was mesmerized by the holistic experience of a world of dance, song, and words when watching Primus' second production, *Alkoremmi* (1991-96). The physical connectedness of the performers and the integration of material properties left him yearning for more exposure to this type of work, until eventually he sought out Fowler and followed the latter's variant of an Odin Teatret–inspired work ethic.

Fowler, a student of André Gregory and Grotowski,[3] had been working with Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret in Holstebro, Denmark, from 1980 until 1991. In 1989 he founded Primus Theatre in Winnipeg together with a group of students he had taught at the National Theatre School in Montreal three years earlier. As Claire Borody in her sweeping and enlightening thesis on Primus Theatre puts it, "Primus was part of a tradition identified by Barba as originating in the work of Stanislavski, advanced through the work of Grotowski, and further expanded by Barba himself. Subsequently, Primus Theatre became another generation of this work by association with Fowler" (11).

In his second chapter, Mroz gives a "comprehensive historical and systemic description of Chinese martial arts" (46), highlighting ethical, ontological, and aesthetic principles that link these practices to his performance training and composition style. Detailed and precise, he lays out the different approaches he has studied, stressing the guiding principles of diligence, repetition, practice of prescribed movement patterns, and the resulting physical and mental benefits. This chapter will be of special interest to practitioners of any Asian traditional theatre or martial form or those who have been training in other rigorous performance systems, including dance and perhaps competitive sports. To my knowledge there is still little comprehensive literature on Chinese training styles available on the English market, which makes Mroz's book rare and commendable. Yet, the general question arises as to the degree forms of physical knowledge can be transferred, or even whether aspects of a physical practice can be put into writing in a way that engages the reader. While Mroz guides us in the ontological aspects of the training, such as the development of *shi* or presence, the many details referring to the different practices require the reader to maintain a strong interest and focus.

In order to define the tools for his analysis of the Chinese martial arts, Mroz draws parallels between the principals of Barba's school of theatre anthropology and those defined by *hoplology*, the Western "scholarly discipline that examines systems of human combative behaviour" (48). Hoplology was first established in the nineteenth century and, after a fifty-year interruption, revived in the mid-twentieth century. Some of the combat-related movement categories found there include, for example, the "cognitive/intuitive trait," which Mroz compares to Barba's "binary concept of inner and outer score," or the "transcendent synergy of the manifest adaptive traits" of hoplology to Barba's "performance mastery" (90). In his analysis, Mroz utilizes these and similar principles that are based in the knowledge of a precise physical language and well suited to his project of creating PMPs that ultimately lead to the composition of performances.

In addition, he introduces the reader to the five schools of *wushu* and *qigong* in which he has trained. The images of his master teachers are accompanied by a list of their names and standing within the lineage of their craft. Similar to the training systems in Chinese and Japanese traditional theatre dance forms, the training schools are organized like "families," and knowledge is passed on through direct physical transferal from master to disciple. A similar system can be also traced in the Western avant-garde movement, where apprenticeship with certain masters such as Grotowski or Barba also takes place within tightknit groups. And while some of the accumulated knowledge is disseminated through lecturing, writings, and visual documentation, the direct passage from teacher to student—i.e., from Grotowski to Barba to Fowler to Mroz—takes on a similar dynamic and importance as in traditional China (see also Dunkelberg).

In the next chapter, the "Principles of Performer Preparation" are laid out. Divided into nearly fifty headings, subdivisions, and sub-sub divisions, this chapter is both too long and not long enough. On the one hand, it seems to call for an even more specific description of the physical processes, similar to the many eighteenth-century European acting manuals or texts like the *Natyashastra*; on the other, the chapter might have gained from adopting the more the accessible style of contemporary acting texts and theories. During the first part of the chapter, I was reminded of the immensely practical yet highly philosophical work of Zeami in *Fushikaden* or *Path of the Flower*. Zeami divides his teachings into the performer's developmental passageway from fruit to flower, to path, ground, view, and gate, whereas in Mroz's book this order is reversed, placing the "gate" at the entry level. Perhaps in another

context these similarities and their place in the performer's development could be further investigated.

The second part of the chapter, "Levels and Phases of Performer Preparation," is very strongly focused on a number of "should's and should not's" and could have perhaps helped the reader by more clearly defining this approach as a choice among a range of possibilities. At the end of the chapter, the question arises how Mroz's approach compares to the current Odin Teatret principles, ethics, and composition methodologies, which have on many levels shifted and developed since the early 1980s.[4] Thus the chapter misses some of the positive rigour and diligence evoked in the early chapters, an effect most likely not intended and which seems unfortunate in respect to a performance approach that offers true alternatives to the North American mainstream.

In the fourth chapter on performance composition, it is possible that contextualizing the composition process in relation to alternative styles—such as Anne Bogart's viewpoints, Lecoq's composition training, or Barba's own process—would have opened up the possibility for comparison and situated the Dancing Word more strongly within contemporary practice. It is notable that the author focuses here on a strictly hierarchical outlook in regards to a master–student, performer–director relationship, strongly supported by the hierarchical lineages in both his Chinese practices and the Grotowski line. This is striking given that current original performance creation—such as Gob Squad, Rimini Protokoll, or Forced Entertainment's works—often stands for a more lateral approach amongst collective co-creators. In this context, the author might have broadened the scope of the book by acknowledging the cultural and ideological frame within which this practice is situated, and signalling the understanding that performance training and composition are, in Maria Kapsali's words, on some level a "cultural and social product" (106).

The more example-oriented chapters of five and six, "The Practice of Performer Preparation" and "Performance Composition and Performance Pedagogy in Practice," finally succeed in giving a taste of the actual approach and methodology. Here, with concrete examples and the interspersed experience of other participants, the strength of the Dancing Word becomes apparent. The reader is allowed to see that the practice is not only more flexible than the earlier chapters suggest but is also given a glimpse of the transformative powers of such a rigorous physical performance approach. The conclusion, "Martial Training and Consciousness," brings us back to the metaphysical path Mroz laid out in the beginning, revealing the reasons why one would want to engage in such a practice. By finally quoting Grotowski-heir Mario Biagini, Mroz is bringing us back to the Grotowski-Barba-Fowler lineage so successfully put forth in the opening chapter: "Through repetition, the limits of the known dissolve and recompose themselves one step further in a territory that is unknown to you" (Biagini, qtd. in Mroz 164).

Dancing Word presents itself more like a manual than a critical study. It is a history and how-to book concerned with the performer's diligent practice, albeit not without recognizing and treasuring the resulting transformative experiences. Mroz lays out a path towards performance creation that begins with performer training and leads to the creation of PMPs and their subsequent montage into a performance. The principle of this process is very much rooted in Barba's approach to performance creation, but it differs in that it is so strongly based in *wushu* and *qigong*. By comparison, the Odin actors are far more eclectic in the assembly of their techniques, following a variety of paths that are then sculpted into their movement scores and eventually flow into the performance creation process (see Carreri). In my experience it is very difficult to maintain the discipline and focus for such a process, especially when one is not located in a sheltered, remote location such as Holstebro, Denmark, or Pontedera, Italy. Mroz should be applauded for his courage and stamina, and his willingness to offer his own experience to the reader. It is good to be reminded that there are such worthwhile alternatives in Canada's performance creation world.

NOTES

1 Mroz footnotes ontological research with a reference to Peter Ralston's *Cheng Hsin: The Principles of Effortless Power* (Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 1989).

2 See Barba's words in *The Paper Canoe*: "[...] The bodies' daily techniques can be replaced by extra-daily techniques, which do not respect the habitual conditionings of the body. Performers use these extra-daily techniques" (15-16).

3 Fowler met and worked with Grotowski at the first open session of the International School of Theatre Anthropolgy (ISTA) in Bonn, Germany, in 1980. ISTA was founded by Eugenio Barba in 1979 as an itinerant university of performers and researchers. Open sessions take place by invitation at cultural institutions from around the world. According to the Odin Teatret Website, "Theatre Anthropology […] is a field of study applied to the human being in an organized performance situation."

4 Based on personal conversations with company members and observations at Odin Teatret Holstebro in July 2013 during an invited two-week workshop with Roberta Carreri (Odin company member since 1974) as well as during the author's earlier work with members of the Odin in the mid-1980s and in 2009.

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