alt. theatre
cultural diversity and the stage

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Train of Thought was an evolving community arts journey exploring collaborations and alliances between First Nations and settler/immigrant artists and communities, produced by Jumblies Theatre and over 90 other partners in 2015.

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"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
© Andrew Paul. Ben Gorodetsky and Todd Housemann as the intercultural improv duo, Folk Lordz

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Editorial

STORYTELLING ACROSS GENERATIONS

BY NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH

How do we tell stories across generations? How do we do it unconsciously? And in what ways should we do it intentionally? These are the key questions that seem to be occupying the minds of the contributors to this issue of *alt.theatre*.

We were struck by the congruity of these pieces: we did not seek them out by theme, but they all happened to come to us at the same time. Of course, the handful of artists and writers featured in these pages aren't necessarily demonstrative of the pulse of performance creators in Canada. But the thematic alignment and urgent tone of their current projects do invite reflection on why performing artists of different disciplines, cultural backgrounds, and regional locations are searching for new ways to connect the stories of their grandparents and ancestors with their contemporary creation processes.

We're always pondering identity in this bilingual, multicultural, colonial settler-state, but perhaps 2015 has been an especially remarkable year for critically assessing what it means to be (a) "Canadian." In June, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee released the final report of their six-year long examination of residential schools, a document holding monumentally important recommendations, including that Canada must move from "apology to action" to begin to achieve reconciliation with the indigenous peoples of this land. In September, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper referred to "new and existing and old-stock Canadians," immediately triggering national conversations on what these categories mean and who holds them to be true. The next month, voters overwhelmingly decided to end Harper's six-year reign, the byproduct of which gave Justin Trudeau's Liberals a majority government. The terrorist attacks in Paris in November provoked empathy for victims and their families across the ocean, but also catalyzed charged conversations at home about who is welcome to the title of "Canadian"—conversations ranging from social media banter, to violent acts of xenophobia,[1] to public and private commitments to reject racist backlash and build safe spaces for newcomers, in particular refugees from Syria. It has been a year of asking *Who belongs here? Who are we? What stories are we telling? What stories are we not telling?*

The articles in this issue provide a survey of how artists use their craft to uncover stories from past generations and move them into the present and future. In "Fictionalizing the Holocaust: Apologism, Revisionism, and Evil-with-a-Capital-E," writer and activist Sarah Woolf sits down with playwright Darrah Teitel to discuss Jewish identities, Teitel's play *Corpus*, and the play's exploration of how, three generations later, we remember the Holocaust. Teitel describes never having the "privilege" of not knowing the stories of the Holocaust and Woolf notes how "experiences of trauma and memory morph" over generations (12) in their discussion of how *Corpus* plays out "the debate that Jews have had, both privately and publicly" about the nature of evil. Teitel's script is in part an intervention into how stories of the Holocaust are told—as she says, "We can't complicate things to the point of complete obscurity" (13).

In "*The Tashme Project*: Revitalizing Japanese-Canadian Identity through Theatre," Matt Miwa shares how he and Julie Tamiko Manning co-created a verbatim oral history piece about Japanese Canadian internment because they felt an urgent need to "articulate who contemporary Japanese Canadians are, and who we can become vis-à-vis our confrontation with the past and with each other" (29). For them, interviewing their elders, bearing witness to their stories, and creating space for those stories on today's stages represent in part "an invitation to communion for Japanese-Canadian audience members" (29).

For some, the impetus to learn stories from past generations comes from a desire to render their current art practice more connected to their cultural origins. Improvisers Todd Houseman and Ben Gorodetsky created the long-form improv format Folk Lordz in an effort to integrate the storytelling traditions of their cultures—Cree and Russian, respectively—into their performance craft. As they share in "Folk Lordz: Northern Stories," a collection of travel diaries, the process of developing the Folk Lordz form led Todd, who identifies as "an urban Cree person living off-reservation," to develop a desire "to connect with Elders from First Nations communities in order to better learn and understand traditional storytelling forms" (22). Through their ongoing travels and studies, they are learning their own lessons about how to tell stories across generations: "If traditional storytelling forms are not practised, they are forgotten. But if they cannot adapt, they may lose their value (26)." For others, reviving stories from past generations is about helping one's culture resist assimilation. In "Owning Our Roots on Dangerous Roads," Menka Nagrani, dance artist and founder of Montreal's Les Productions des pieds des mains, describes her process of learning traditional Québécois step-dancing and finding ways to theatricalize it on the contemporary stage. She declares, "Returning to the basics, to the foundations of our artistic lineage, is a way for me to resist the influence of mass culture and the standardization that it generates" (30).

There are many ways in which artists arrive at cross-generational storytelling; but their reasons for doing so are concomitant: intervening in processes of memory-making and history creation; breaking silence around trauma; archiving the past; deepening and expanding contemporary artistic practices; and strengthening connections with cultural communities. What I find most exciting is seeing the incredible potential for practices of storytelling across generations to imagine, and influence, the future.

I feel a sense of communion with the contributors and their need to connect the form, content, and processes of their current art-making with that of their ancestors. As a teen growing up in Ontario who spent a good deal of time either making theatre or engaged in anti-racism activism, I neglected to see the connection between the two: I did not fully recognize how systems of colonialism had intersected with my artistic education to lead me to know and value the stories of Shakespeare and Arthur Miller and Oscar Hammerstein more than anything outside of the Western canon. Throughout school and the first few years of my career, I grew quietly curious and then loudly frustrated as I came to realize that what I had been taught was good art—or in some cases, was art at all—was based on Eurocentric standards.

And so, I began to explore what stories and artistic forms might be somehow more authentically true to me, artistically indigenous to my culture. But—what culture? India, where most of my ancestors supposedly originated? Guyana, the country where my more recent ancestors were brought to work as indentured servants and where my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived? Could the Quranic traditions from some lines of my family or the Biblical stories from others count—even if these religions, too, came to my ancestors through colonial systems? What about Toronto, where I was raised? Even if classrooms and theatres weren't providing stories connected to the cultures I came from, isn't the theatre ecology in Canada mine as much as anyone else's living and making art in this land, especially since I had come to love so much of it?

I don't know at what point I began to shift my thinking—and perhaps it wasn't a shift, so much as a concurrent process of realization—but I came to understand that I didn't have to uncover some pure, ontologically indigenous art form or story from my ancestors in order to make art that was literate and critical of the cultural systems in which they were created. It was slow but sweet relief to acknowledge that the post-colonial mess that is my ancestral history is also the world's history, and I did not have to negate any part of my (lived and ancestral) self in order to honour another.

In reflection, this process of growth resembles Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's familiar five cycles of grief: first, denial when I did not yet have the tools to understand the cultural normativity of the art that surrounded me; then anger, when I did; then bargaining, as I searched for something somehow "true" for me; then anger and depression when I had difficulty finding anything that made sense; and finally acceptance when I realized that my artistic and cultural "truth" was for me to decide for myself. Like Kübler-Ross's stages, the cycles are not necessarily linear, and they might occur more than once. But I wonder if there is a sixth stage for the postcolonial artist: imagination. Freed by imagination, the artist is able to intentionally seek stories from different cultural pasts, and weave them together in ways that are responsive, instructive, and elicitive for today's world.[2] I recall Walidah Imarisha's suggestion that imagination is "where all other forms of decolonization are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless" (4).

How are we carrying stories forward across generations? As artists we are fortunate that our work is explicitly about storytelling. One of my recent endeavours has been developing a theatre-devising series called The Old Stories Project, which I have thus far facilitated as artist-in-residence at Camp fYrefly, a national retreat for LGBTQ youth, and again as part of the Quebec Public Interest Research Group's event series, Culture Shock. In it, I work with participants to uncover cultural stories (myths, fables, bed-time songs, religious parables, and the like); analyze how power, oppression, and beauty work within the story; identify what it is about the story we wish to embrace and what we wish to reject or rework; and then adapt the story and give it new, resonant life.

While, certainly, this project is about developing methods of politically engaged art-making, it is equally meant to be a process of cultural healing—an invitation for participants to imagine new meaning in their ancestors' stories. Specifically, it is designed with individuals and communities who don't often see their cultural stories reflected in the mainstream, and those who have a hard time seeing their identities reflected in cultural stories in mind. It is a process of taking stories from cultures that the mainstream renders invisible or deems to be backward and making those stories resonate here and now; of taking cultural stories that erase or reduce non-normative genders, sexualities, or abilities, and reimagining those stories in ways that centre and celebrate those perspectives. The project recognizes that while stories from past generations may not always be a perfect fit for our lives today, finding new ways to treasure them can be deeply nourishing for people from marginalized cultures and communities. For me, facilitating this project so far has been a great way to practice the process of reimagining ancestral stories, and has affirmed for me the transformative power of imagination.

Stories from past generations live in our selves and our communities, and they will find ways to surface. For even when we are not explicitly art-making, we are adapting cultural stories: We create new versions of old cultural stories when we move our selves from one land and rewrite our lives in a new one; when we build tiny or big communities that reject holding gender as its most salient principle of social organization; when we cook our grandmothers' recipes and substitute spices for ones available at the corner store; when we allow the necessity of our situations to not limit, but inspire our responses to them. The pieces in this issue encourage us to intervene in these inevitable processes so that we can tell stories across generations with care and make adaptations with intention.

NOTES

1 For more on the Islamophobic backlash in Canada following the Paris attacks, see http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canadians-combat-muslim-hate-1.3324282

2 For another multi-stage approach to post-colonial meaning-making, see Poka Laenui's essay "Processes of Decolonization," which describes another five-step process for indigenous activists engaged in decolonization: rediscovery and recovery; mourning; dreaming; commitment; action.

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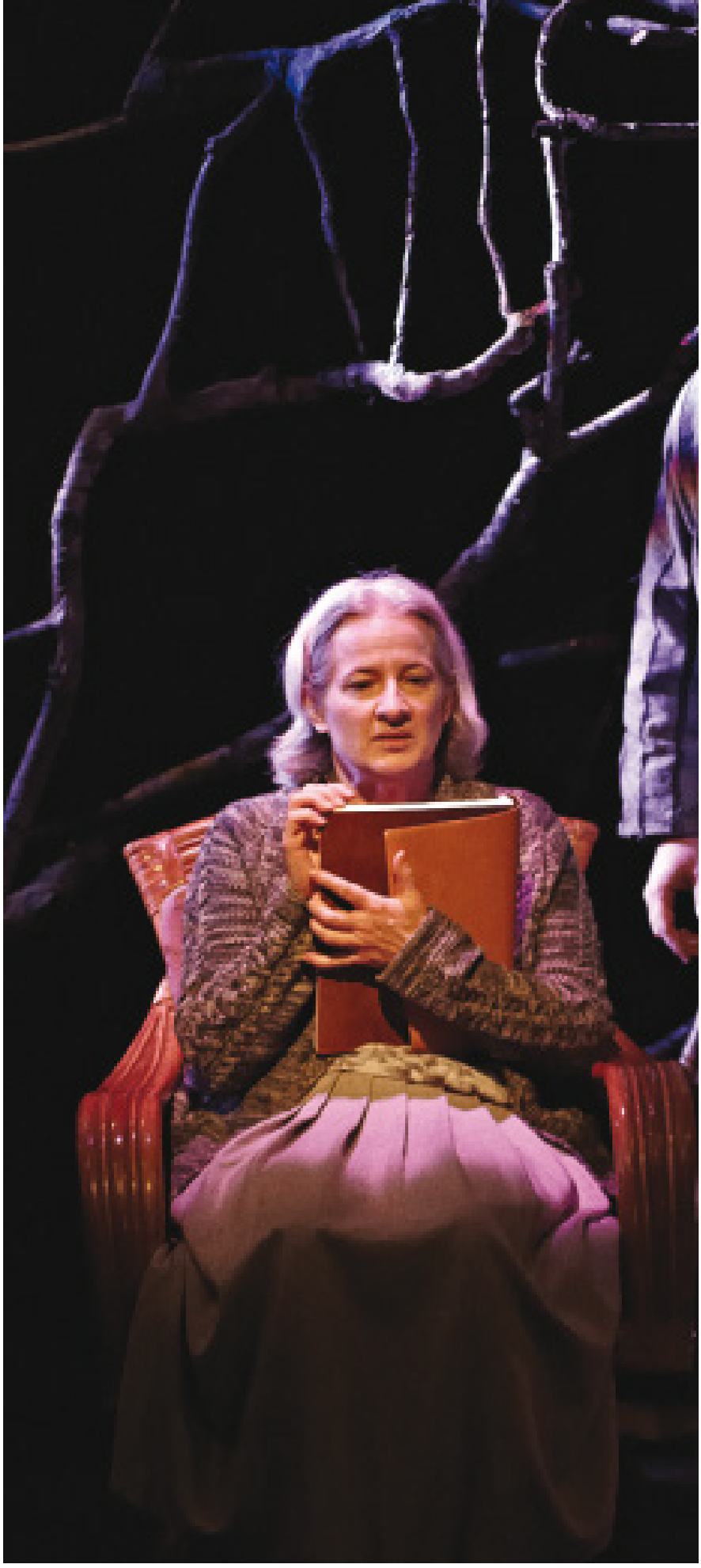
Fictionalizing the Holocaust: Apologism, Revisionism, and Evil-with-a-Capital-E

BY SARAH WOOLF



In January 2015, two friends—editor and community organizer Sarah Woolf and playwright and NDP staffer Darrah Teitel—sat down for a conversation about Jewish identity, the Holocaust, feminism, and Darrah's play *Corpus*, recently staged at the MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels) by Teesri Duniya. Corpus centres on Megan, a genocide scholar, whose provocative thesis about the wife of a Nazi officer finding love with a Jewish prisoner at Auschwitz raises complicated questions about history, fiction, and memory.

***

SARAH WOOLF **You've often said that you were obsessed with the Holocaust during your childhood and that you did enough reading on the subject to complete a graduate degree. I think this is a rather common experience among Jews of our generation. I can't speak for everyone, but I know I certainly went through a period of reading a lot of YA about the Holocaust.**

DARRAH TEITEL My education definitely began in YA and then expanded. Because my mother owned a children's bookstore, I had first crack at every novel that came out about genocide for the under-seventeen crowd. After that, I started to read Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, which led straight into nonfiction. This would've been age twelve, thirteen when I started reading the more adult stuff.

S.W. **Were you getting some of that at school?**

D.T. My school, United Synagogue Day School, was inside of one of the largest synagogues in Canada. The synagogue's library doubles as a kids' library. So there was a huge Holocaust studies section; I remember spending full afternoons sitting in the stacks looking at grotesque imagery. Occasionally there would be photographic exhibits from the Holocaust up in the school hallways. That terrifying image of the young woman holding her baby, about to be shot—you know the one—I passed that photograph every single day coming to school. I remember, several times, staring at it, just having it completely shake the core of me.

S.W. **I can imagine. I had a very different experience of learning about the Holocaust and had to seek it out. It sounds like you not only sought it out, but also had it all around you.**

D.T. It was just this constant messaging from the time I was probably in grade one: lest we forget, lest we forget, lest we forget.

S.W. **Do you remember ever not knowing about the Holocaust?**

D.T. No. I don't have that privilege. I do think it's privileged to go through a childhood or adulthood and not feel the effects of any kind of historical or current racism.

S.W. **Absolutely. Though, personally, I definitely remember a period when I didn't know about the Holocaust. I remember, vaguely, learning about it. But I also had what would be considered an unconventional Jewish childhood. That, plus growing up in cities with small Jewish populations, meant that I've had experiences in my life of old-school anti-Semitism—never mind complete and total ignorance—that in some ways are hard to relate to people who have only lived in large urban, Jewish centres. So there are different experiences of historical and current anti-Semitism among Jews, too.**

While I agree it was a privilege not having the Holocaust looming, I also remember it being a complete shock to the system to learn about it suddenly. It was kind of like being told about sex . . . it's one of the few conversations where people sit you down and tell you about the world and it's things you don't want to hear *[laughs]*.

D.T. Yeah, I also don't remember learning about sex, which is the other major preoccupation of my writing! The few childhood experiences I had with actual anti-Semitism, I remember relating back to the Holocaust—I was able to place them in this much larger context of things I was terrified of. Those incidents were immediately part of a much larger narrative.

S.W. **I was also making those connections: "Okay, this thing happened to Jews not that long ago; I'm Jewish; it could've been me." The whole idea of actively placing oneself in these narratives is fascinating. I remember thinking: What would I have done in this situation? How about this one? What would I have said? How would I have survived? Some of that is natural, to be sure, but as in the example you gave, walking by those**

I DON'T HAVE THAT PRIVILEGE. I DO THINK IT'S PRIVILEGED TO GO THROUGH A CHILDHOOD OR ADULTHOOD AND NOT FEEL THE EFFECTS OF ANY KIND OF HISTORICAL OR CURRENT RACISM.

photos in school every day, a lot of it is also *put* on us.

D.T. Yeah, I think there was such an active campaign to have us understand and hold the Holocaust in our minds. And it does seem incredibly unhealthy and macabre to put that on children. At the same time, and maybe it's just because the campaign was so active in making *me* believe its core messaging, I *get* "lest we forget." I don't think it's wrong that we should require our children to remember stuff that happened to their ancestors not too long ago. There is some part of me that, as Holocaust survivors die off, feels anxiety about it.

S.W. **It'll be interesting to see how experiences of trauma and memory morph over the next couple decades, because it's different, it seems, with each generation.**

D.T. I think, inevitably, it'll be less potent. But at the same time, it was just as fictitious and imaginary for me as it will be for my son.

S.W. **Which brings us back to Holocaust education. When I was fifteen, I did this three-day trip to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in DC. The trip was a bit of a blur, to be honest. I remember a couple moments of genuine feeling around it, but looking back, what I remember most distinctly—though I don't think I could've put into words then—was this sense that the experience was being heavily curated.**

D.T. I was a bit younger, probably around twelve or thirteen. I went to Washington with my family and we visited the museum. I remember being in that boxcar, knowing it was real, and being like, "Oh, people died in this car."

S.W. **There's also a massive pile of shoes, taken off outside the gas chambers. That was really affecting for me. I have to say, though, what I most remember about the trip was this sense of a very structured, intentional attempt to provoke in me a certain kind of demonstrative emotional response . . . and catharsis, too. And if you don't respond in this way, you're unfeeling or you just don't get it or you're a bad person. I'm very interested in these sorts of experiences; the way learning processes can sometimes feel like—**

D.T. Manipulation?

S.W. **. . . indoctrination. Yes! Both.**

D.T. It's that layer of meaning that's put on top of it that we have to be so afraid of, I think. But, I hope, and I maintain, that there's a way of learning about these things that can remove that layer of meaning and that intentionality around politics . . . but, then again, maybe there isn't. Maybe that's just a function of history. That's something I'm trying to explore in *Corpus* as well. What is it to learn about history, in general? Why do we do it? What do we tell ourselves about why we're doing it? And what purpose does it ultimately serve? I don't know the answers to those questions.

S.W. **Do you think there's a better way of instilling this stuff? It was a traumatic history, so it makes sense that learning about it might also bring about trauma. To me, a big part of teaching this history in a better way is to not emphasize Jews' uniqueness in victimhood, but rather the political and social context that enabled the Holocaust to happen and the social justice lesson to be learned from it . . . the takeaway isn't our perpetual identity as victims. I do resent that narrative thread in Holocaust education; I resent how the lesson is warped and wielded opportunistically for certain political aims.**

D.T. And I want to sort of separate that discussion, with respect to *Corpus*, because I intentionally don›t bring it in. I do think that we can talk about these issues without placing them in the context of Israel . . . not ultimately and entirely, but in this small discussion I'm trying to have inside the play.

S.W. **I absolutely get that, but I think my most frequent interaction with the Holocaust and its legacies these days *is* in how it's leveraged politically. That said, it's true that learning about the Holocaust also taught me about empathy; it was one of the first ways I understood that the world was screwed up and that we had to actively participate to make sure things like that never happened again. Obviously things like that *have* happened again, in other places in the world. "Never again" is an important credo, but we can't say that aspiration has actually been fulfilled.**

D.T. Because we say "never again" while we're perpetrating the "agains." I shouldn't say the word "we" there. I have to stop doing that. When I say "we" and I'm talking about the Jews . . . that's a slippery slope, right? I think that stance of victimhood [that is so prevalent in Holocaust education], or that deep understanding of yourself as a victim when you're actually a person of power, is one of the most dangerous things on earth.

I started to write *Corpus* while I was at the National Theatre School—I wanted to write something about how dangerous it is to fictionalize the Holocaust, and to really judge myself for all the time and energy I had put towards trying to make this experience mine. I wanted to turn it into a piece of pornography, almost, showing it from a different angle, and just be really sceptical in terms of our need to stare so fixedly into this incredibly dark history. The process of opening up that part of myself was a lot deeper than I realized. There was a *lot* of judgment, a lot of shame, and then a lot of forgiveness.

I also had to work through the fact that I was writing characters who were Nazis. When I first wrote the character of Eva, I was obsessed with Primo Levi's grey zone, and the *sonderkommando*—I thought, "I'm going to set this exactly in the zone of moral ambiguity so as to completely blur the line between victim and perpetrator, and I'm going to prove that point to the world." And be to some extent a Holocaust apologist, as they're called. I was trying to be the ultimate Holocaust revisionist.

Where I came out, on the other side of that, was in spite of the fact that, yes, it could've been me, yes, I'm capable of perpetrating this kind of thing—yes, we all are—the idea that we, Jews, are not afforded judgment . . . that's not a necessary conclusion. Moral relativism isn't the answer to all

of this Holocaust stuff. We still have to hold ourselves up to certain standards, and we still have to name and accuse perpetrators, as opposed to victims. And that, by no means, means that given other circumstances you wouldn't be a perpetrator. It just means that . . .

S.W. **This time you weren't. This comes back to the ending of the play.**

D.T. Yes. When they finally speak at the end, Megan says to Eli, the Holocaust survivor, "Eva was in love with you her whole life." And he says, "How could we be in love? She was a Nazi." Megan responds, "It's not that simple." And he says, "Yes. It is." The sexy story that Megan wants to create in order to complicate the narrative that there are good guys and bad guys inside a conflict—we want that narrative too badly right now. But most of the time it doesn't exist.

S.W. **I read the play as sort of playing out the debate that Jews have had, both privately and publicly, since Hannah Arendt's reports on the Eichmann trial for the *New Yorker*. She described Eichmann as «terribly and terrifyingly normal.» Her reports were turned into the book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, and this debate was and remains incredibly polarizing—whether or not individuals such as Eichmann were Evil-with-a-capital-E, the stuff of fairy tales and the Old Testament, or, more scarily, ordinary people informed by the careerism and social mores of the time. But it's a common misinterpretation of her work to say that Arendt depicted Eichmann as simply a thoughtless bureaucrat . . .**

D.T. . . . right, the notion that he was just a functionary. No, Eichmann was a creative thinker.

S.W. **And he was a supporter of a big-picture ideal of an Aryan Nation, a utopia that required getting one's hands dirty to achieve that higher vision. Arendt was charged with anti-Semitism for her thesis about Eichmann, but her writing on this has become one of the central works on the Holocaust.**

D.T. I think she's the progenitor of a *field* of Holocaust research, which is to say Holocaust revisionism. I think she›s the first voice in that.

S.W. **Most people hear "holocaust or historical revisionism" and they think that's an epithet.**

D.T. Apologism.

S.W. **But that's not necessarily what it means. Arendt was trying to get to a larger conclusion about the nature of evil, in cases *including* but not limited to the Holocaust. This is something you've conveyed in *Corpus*—that there is a line between perpetrator and victim, and moral relativism only gets you so far. At the same time, you also make a point of not portraying Nazis as these cartoonishly evil characters and, instead, as human beings who . . . made decisions that we make. They were affected by the social norms of the times, affected by making decisions in the moment—and they perpetrated great evil in the process.**

D.T. I guess that's sort of where I come to at the end of the play—that you need to continue to see the forest through the trees. We can't complicate things to the point of complete obscurity. And I think the most terrifying lesson things like the Holocaust involve—conflict and this kind of killing—is just how simple it actually is. We just need to come to peace with that part of the human condition. And by peace, I mean, constant vigilance against it! For me there's no necessary connection, the one everybody wants there to be, between the fact that we could do it and the fact that we have to judge it, to have it stand trial. I'm a bit of an existentialist in that sense: there is no capital-E evil, there's just behaviour.

S.W. **And decisions. One of the things that I took away from the play (particularly from Megan's narrative) is that being Jewish colours things. There are things that you can say as a Jew and things that you can't. And by "can" of course I mean, "do so without making others overly uncomfortable." When it comes to the Holocaust—and more commonly today in Jewish communities, the issue of Israel and Palestine—an opinion can be heard and understood differently depending on whether or not one is Jewish ... This is both, I think, a burden and a privilege. The privilege comes in when speaking to non-Jews about our experiences and the burden is present when challenging taboos within our Jewish communities. Can you talk about why Megan hid this part of her identity?**

D.T. I think it's complicated for her. She hates Jews, she hates herself, she hates the people who put her in the position of being constantly obsessed with the Holocaust. She's angry with her family for raising her that way, but she can't escape the person she's become as a result. There's also her opportunism and her realization that if she's not Jewish she's more of an anomaly in the field—it gets her a certain cachet to be a non-Jew who studies the Holocaust.

S.W. **She might be lent a certain baseline assumption of objectivity, *but* at the same time she goes on to espouse a pretty controversial thesis that might've been more easily swallowed by the academic community if she were Jewish.**

D.T. I don't think she's thought that far ahead. I think she . . . she hates Jews. She hates this posture of the snivelling, victimy hunchback person that comes out in her nightmare scene in the second act. She wants to kill that part of herself. And she's empowered to do so, because it doesn't really exist. It's all just ethereal. It's all identity, and identity doesn't exist inside that space of post-structural philosophy, right? It's all a construction that doesn't really exist. Except for the fact that this identity is so intrinsically stitched into every bone in her body . . . whether it's constructed or not, who the hell cares? It's definitely a biological part of her at this point.

Probably as soon as she left her parents' house she stopped identifying as Jewish. I did that as a kid. I lied to my friends, as early as kindergarten, about being Jewish . . . There was an ominous sense of otherhood involved in being Jewish. I mean, I was too young to have really clear, articulate thoughts, but I just didn't want to be different. And Christianity—the neutral—seemed so glitzy and glamorous and fun. Their white bread and their bacon and their Christmas tree. I once hid a package of bacon behind the radiator in my room as a kid . . . not realizing that you have to cook it. I fed off of it until it turned green, I'm not kidding . . . So yeah, I get that part of Megan.

S.W. **Ahh, there's the play's Julia Kristeva reference. Darrah/Megan's corporeal connection between food and abjection: *I'm going to feed myself rancid bacon.***

Speaking of Kristeva, this is another theme in *Corpus*: feminism

and motherhood. Your work often focuses on gender and sexuality, and feminist themes. There are two women in this play who provide interesting things to think about from a feminist angle. For Megan, we see her professional life and her personal life, both of which involve her struggling to set appropriate boundaries. Sometimes not enough (the academic mentor who steals her work), and other times too much (the lover in Germany who is emotionally but not physically available). There's also this pivotal moment, where Megan is publicly shamed, which has shades of both Jewish scapegoating and also the misogyny of witch-hunts. Meanwhile, Eva, who grapples with motherhood, she's . . . an unsympathetic character. She's the wife of a Nazi officer, she's a tortured and even cruel mother, she's manipulative and delusional—perhaps even dealing with some form of mental illness. Yet in some ways her cruellest act, which has to do with her child, is what prompted empathy in me as a feminist. This is so jarring—this empathy with, again, the unsympathetic wife of a Nazi officer.

D.T. It's the unsympathetic mother, right? It's much more about her being a mother and effectively killing her child. As feminists this raises our hackles because why is that so "unnatural"? Compared to all the other kinds of killing, why is this the kind of killing that women are supposed to never, ever, ever do? I get why that makes her a sympathetic character to you, in a certain way.

S.W. **It's unsettling that it was her worst act (irrespective of her place within the Nazi machinery) that made me empathize with her.**

D.T. The fact that to the general audience her negligence of her baby is worse than the conscious knowledge that she's perpetuating acts of genocide . . . something inside of me gets mad at that. Because, it's like . . . as a woman you're a woman *first*, before anything else.

Thinking about it now, I didn't do this consciously at all, but Eva's relationship with her baby plays out like a bit of an Arendtian quandary where the circumstances of her life, to some extent, justify her behaviour. Because we see how she's isolated, and she's alone inside of a death camp with a baby; *of course* she's feeling depressed, of course she has post-partum depression. But at the end of the day, there's a dead child. And when she says, "I need to say that I killed my son," we also see her grandson and Megan immediately being like, "no, no, you're a good grandmother, you're a good person."

S.W. **She might have been a good grandmother to him without being a good *person*.**

D.T. Right, and she was probably a really bad mom [to Heinrich's mother]. That happens all the time, though, for the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Their kids are just so fucked up by the parents' trauma and processing a whole range of psychological stuff that they've had to grow up with and the grandchildren think they're saints. It stands to reason that happens to grandchildren of Nazis just as much . . .

S.W. **I think these dual identities for Eva, young and old, came across beautifully in the staging. I was amazed to see how such a small space could be organized to convey four discrete times and places. There's contemporary Toronto, contemporary Berlin, Eva's home near the camp, and the woods of Poland during the war. And then you also have the dream sequences. But it was very clear and elegantly transitioned between all of those different times and places.**

D.T. This is the benefit of producing work in Quebec, where they have so many wonderful scenography training programs in Montreal alone. They're really high quality and they have such a phenomenal tradition of interesting scenography . . . It's one of the few places in English theatre that you can actually have crossover between French and English theatre—the design, sound, lighting and all that.

S.W. **How much of the staging was either detailed in the script or part of your thought process as you wrote?**

D.T. None. I write with *really* few stage directions. I try to keep them to an absolute minimum. I'm only telling the story. I leave the visuals up to the other creative artists. Which I think they like, because it leaves directors and designers room to do their own work. Liz, the director of this production, did such a good job of making do, for instance, with very little technology on stage. The last production of this play had computers and Skype cameras going on stage—it was a much more literal interpretation. Liz took all of that out but conveyed it perfectly fine. At least I thought. I never missed it.

THERE WAS A LOT OF JUDGMENT, A LOT OF SHAME, AND THEN A LOT OF FORGIVENESS.

S.W. **The physicality of moving these stacks of books in the place of computers . . . it was so simple but impossible to not see. I thought that was excellent.**

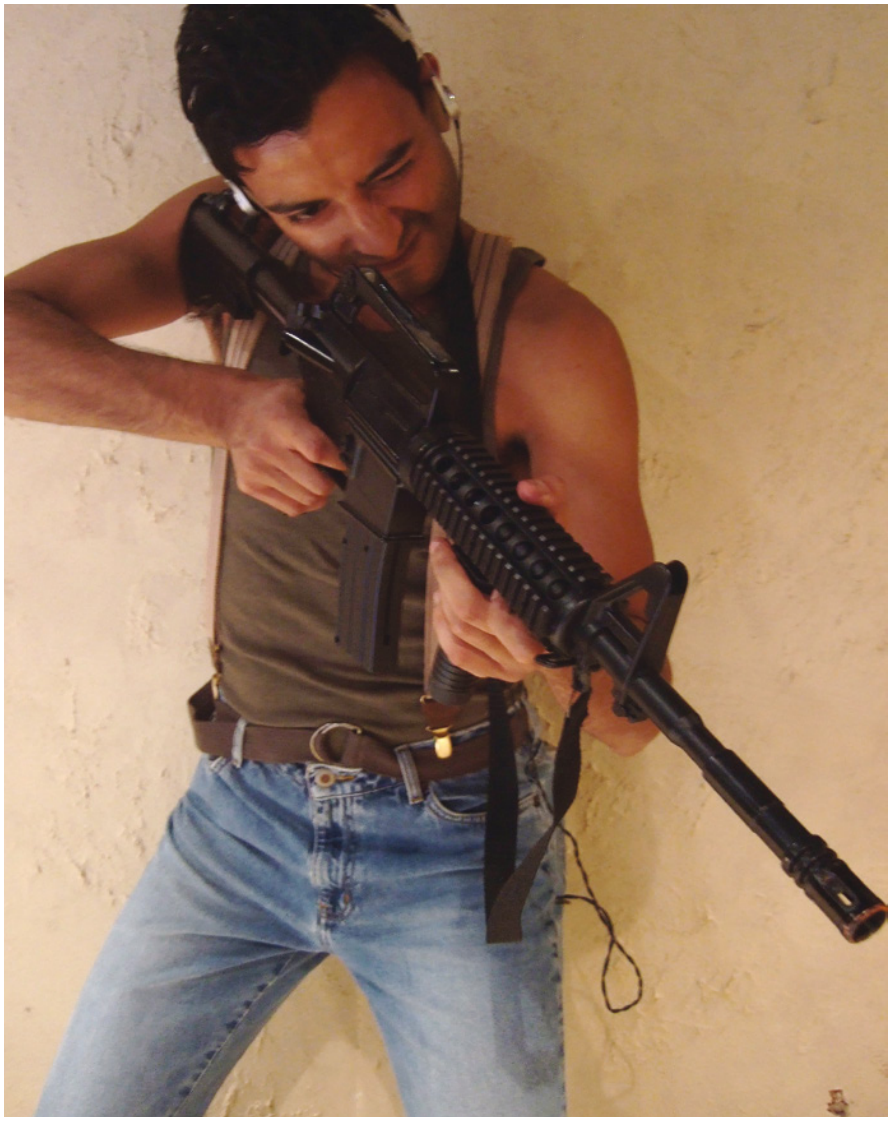
D.T. And the way she integrated Heinrich and Megan inside the same space, without ever giving up the convention that they were hooking up through Skype. It was really dynamic. The trap with this play, and I recognize this, is that you have people stuck in front of their computers for huge portions of the play. Liz is just such an intuitive physical director that she was able to totally make the space dynamic and make the characters active.

S.W. **There's something about the way Heinrich is in Megan's space on stage and moving around her that conveys the intimacy and immediacy of their conversation—and of the Internet, generally.**

D.T. You know, I'm a terrible theatre person because I'm profoundly disinterested in the question of stagecraft, and I'm really holed up inside my writer's bubble. I'm supposed to say that I write theatre because I love the collaboration and because I love the urgency of a live audience and all that stuff. But the reason I write theatre, *actually*, is that I'm a really discursive, polemical person. I'm driven often by conflict and conflict comes out of me through dialogue better than it does in other writing.

S.W. *[laughs]* **She says in an interview for a theatre journal . . .**

D.T. Yeah. Sorry, Theatre!



© Michael Brosilow. Adam Poss in Silk Road Rising's 2010 production of Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched*.
Next page: Images from Silk Road Rising productions. Left to right: © Johnny Knight: *Back of the Throat*.
© Johnny Knight: *Ten Acrobats*. © Johnny Knight: *Precious Stones*. © Michael Brosilow: *Invasion*.

MASS MEDIA MUSLIMS: A THREE LENS THEORY OF REPRESENTATION

BY JAMIL KHOURY

MASS MEDIA MUSLIMS

let it be known that I am a theatre producer, a writer, a cultural activist, an "out" gay man, a mixed blood Arab American of Syrian Christian heritage married to a Pakistani American Shi'a Ismaili Muslim. In other words, my household is an ISIS/Al Qaeda worst-case scenario. We're a Wahhabi nightmare. We're not supposed to exist.

There's no reason why the evolution we have witnessed in queer representation cannot have parallels in Muslim representation, albeit on its own terms.

I think a lot about the representation of Muslims, particularly the representation of Muslim Diasporas, and especially the representation that occurs on stage. But what happens on stage rarely begins on stage. Images have a way of filtering up, gestating first in mainstream media before seizing dramatic license. The mass media manufactures images of Muslims, mainstream culture turns them into stereotypes, and playwrights—ideally—create context and nuance. So indulge me in a little theorizing and a propensity for thinking in threes. You'll see what I mean in a moment.

Let's begin by analogizing twentieth-century representation of gay men and lesbians with twenty-first-century representation of Muslims. Let's presume we are referring to North American representation. And, for the sake of subjective clarity, let it be known that I am a theatre producer, a writer, a cultural activist, an "out" gay man, a mixed blood Arab American of Syrian Christian heritage married to a Pakistani American Shi'a Ismaili Muslim. In other words, my household is an ISIS/Al Qaeda worst-case scenario. We're a Wahhabi nightmare. We're not supposed to exist. Now that I got that out of the way, on to the analogy.

Historically (and some may argue to this day), gay men and lesbians were represented through three lenses: psychology, religion, and law. As objective categories, psychology, religion, and law may seem innocuous enough, but as tools for defaming and injuring queer people, they are, in fact, quite lethal.

Psychology told us we were crazy, pathological, incapable of sustaining relationships, prone to self-destructive behaviour, and that we were feeding an addiction rooted in childhood trauma. Our love was impulsive, narcissistic, and never "real." If we were men, we had overbearing mothers and distant fathers. If we were women, we'd had bad experiences with men.

Religion told us we were sinners, we were evil, we defied nature, threatened families, signified social decadence and moral decay. In short, we were incompatible with righteous living, and we were plague carriers—stricken ill through divine retribution. Not even God liked us.

The law told us we were criminals, social deviants, predators, susceptible to blackmail, gender non-conforming, and of dubious citizenship. We were indecent, obscene, and corrosive to morale, and we were child molesters. The FBI, CIA, Pentagon, and State Department classified homosexuals as security risks and potential fifth columns. In many respects, we were yesterday's Muslims.

Psychology, religion, and law essentially branded gay men and lesbians; and society and public policy embraced the brand, hook, line, and sinker. We led tragic lives that begat tragic ends. Murder, suicide, or AIDS. Take your pick.

Building on that legacy, I would argue that Muslims today are also represented through three lenses. Those three lenses are national security, patriarchy, and liberalism.

Discourses on national security tell us, implicitly and explicitly, that Muslims threaten us. Muslims are violent. Muslims will kill us. They're prone to terrorism. They blow things up. Muslims pose an existential threat to our nation and to our way of life. Even a liberal Muslim and a moderate Muslim are but extremists-in-waiting.

Patriarchy, we are told, has a best friend in Islam. So much so that Islam and patriarchy are commonly conflated. Think male subject, female object, and our subject is possessive, controlling, and cruel. There may be misogyny and sexism in all religions, but Islam is patriarchy on steroids. If men beat and rape women, then Muslim men beat and rape women even more. Common wisdom invented a consensus: Islam is bad news for women, Muslim women are universally oppressed, and Muslim feminists are rarely to be found.

Then there's liberalism, with its emphasis on liberty, equality, civil rights, electoral politics, freedom of religion, protected speech, and achieving a balance between individual desires and collective responsibilities. In popular culture, Islam gets depicted as the antithesis of liberalism: not only incompatible with liberal values, but at war with those values. And this adversity is not simply ideological, or even theological; it may in fact be biological. Muslims possess an innate, inborn aversion to all things liberal. They are, by nature, authoritarian, tyrannical, void of empathy, averse to self-criticism and introspection, volatile, and understanding only of force. Pluralism, power sharing, tolerance for opposing viewpoints, and respect for the other are all signs of weakness in the Muslim mind.

Now I am well aware that the politics of challenging Muslim representation can quickly devolve into the politics of proscribing and policing Muslim representation, which is a death sentence for artists of all backgrounds. Counter-representation relies on dominant representation as its canvas. We are still simply responding. The challenge becomes to respond less and to create more, and to stop ceding power and legitimacy to narratives that reinforce people's worst fears about Muslims. Not as an exercise in "celebrating" or "purifying" Muslims, not as an apology or act of redemption, not as a nod to political correctness, but as a commitment to our own artistic integrity, and to the recognition that with representation comes

The challenge becomes to respond less and to create more, and to stop ceding power and legitimacy to narratives that reinforce people's worst fears about Muslims.

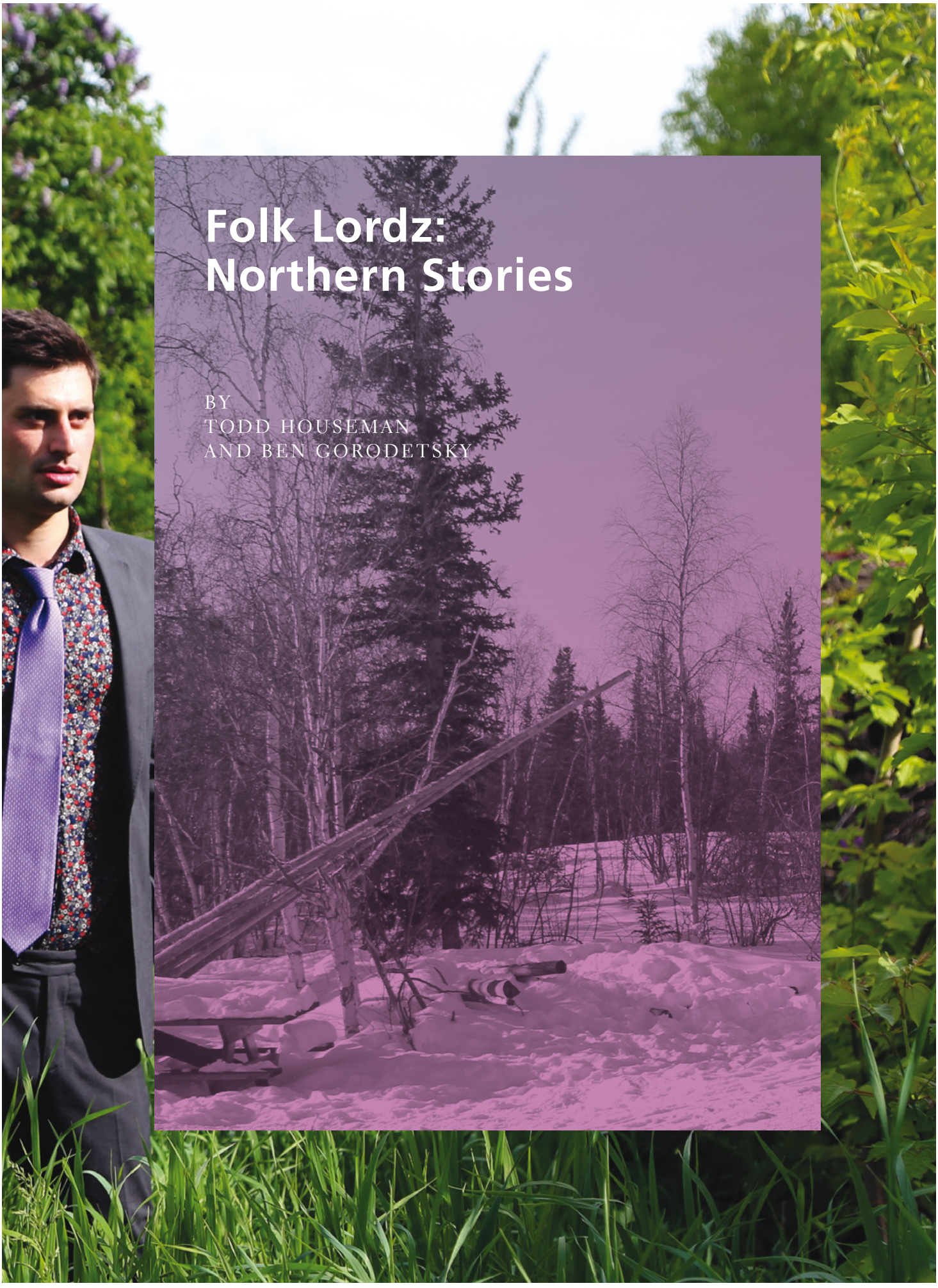
responsibility. For example, if towards the end of a play, a Muslim male character beats up a woman or commits an act of terrorism (or both!), be very wary. Intentionality matters and it is painfully transparent.

What is exciting to me is how we as theatre artists address these lenses of national security, patriarchy, and liberalism. I'm not saying that we can't apply these lenses to Muslim characters or to plays that are somehow about Muslims. Judging from my theatre company's production history, I'd be an absolute hypocrite to even suggest that. And of course we can't ignore the cultural zeitgeist, with all its fears and phobias. But being the good liberals that we are means we're sometimes susceptible to the allures of an unexamined liberal racism: first humanize the Muslim character, then demonize him; make him nuanced, then make him predictable; make us like the brown man, then make us fear him. Certain audiences may eat this up, but as an artistic director, these are tropes I studiously avoid. Muslim playwrights, in particular, should avoid pandering to audiences' worst fears about Muslims in hopes of attracting mainstream approval. Exploiting one's "insider status" and "lived experience" as cover for making gross generalizations about Muslims is bad practice. Criticize, call out, air dirty laundry, demand change, by all means, but success needn't come at the price of "authenticating" arguments peddled by those who inflict harm on Muslims.

I want theatres to support playwrights in creating new narratives about Muslims, and to pay attention to existing narratives that already acknowledge, interrupt, and subvert my three lenses. Egyptian-American playwright Yussef El Guindi and Tunisian-Swedish playwright Jonas Hassen Khemiri succeed brilliantly at this, wielding tremendous irony, deception, and poetic justice along the way. El Guindi and Khemiri never shy from interrogating the relationship between the profiler and the profiled, ascribing sympathy and suspicion to both, and enabling their characters to compete for our benefit of the doubt. They confront the threat of Islamist terrorism, be it real or imagined, through the complex, self-conscious vantage points of the Muslim suspect and those trained to detect him. By illuminating a "Western gaze" over the gender politics and perceived anti-liberalism of Muslim communities, and by casting a watchful eye over colonial impulses within Western feminisms, these artists deconstruct and expose the folly of a "with us or against us," "clash of civilizations" sort of world. El Guindi's plays *Back of the Throat*, *Our Enemies*, and *Language Rooms* and Khemiri's plays *Invasion!* and *I Call My Brothers* all stand out as prime examples.

Surely there is room for a plethora of Muslim representations, emanating from mass media to Broadway to storefront theatres. And it is all too often the dearth of representation, and its incumbent burdens of representation, that focus our attention on the negative, stereotypical, and formulaic. After all, representation we fear or condemn today may seem banal or ahead of its time a generation from now. But there's no reason why the evolution we have witnessed in queer representation cannot have parallels in Muslim representation, albeit on its own terms. With conscientious artists leading the charge, my triumvirate of Muslim representation—national security, patriarchy, and liberalism—will be rendered reactive, reductive, and woefully dated. Hopefully sooner rather than later.

This article grew out of papers delivered by Khoury at Silk Road Rising ("Muslim American Artists: Reshaping the Narrative," 9 March 2015) and Princeton University ("The Dramaturgy of Political Violence: Ayad Akhtar, Aasif Mandvi, and Muslims on U.S. Stages," 6 April 2015).



Folk Lordz: Northern Stories

BY
TODD HOUSEMAN
AND BEN GORODETSKY

Folk Lordz is an improvised theatre show that intentionally weaves three specific genres: a First Nations origin story; a Chekhovian character drama; and a cultural or contemporary genre determined by the audience. As performers, we've both had a long interest in cultural identity, and have regularly explored those themes in our seventeen years of combined professional improv experience. We created Folk Lordz in 2014 as part of Rapid Fire Theatre's Bonfire Festival of New Forms in an effort to build a long-form improv format rooted in dramatic structures from our respective cultural backgrounds. We chose the Chekhovian character drama to reflect Ben's Russian identity, and the First Nations origin story to reflect Todd's Cree identity.

We've performed Folk Lordz at the Vancouver International Improv Festival, Winnipeg Fringe Festival, Edmonton's Thousand Faces Festival of Mythic Art, Toronto's Combustion Improv Festival, the 2015 Toronto, Winnipeg, and Edmonton Fringe Festivals, and regularly with Rapid Fire Theatre at home in Edmonton.

However, in the past year of developing and touring, we felt a need to deepen our research around First Nations storytelling. Our original research came from Todd: the knowledge and resources gained through his upbringing as an urban Cree person living off-reservation, as well as his personal research through community outreach, textbooks, and conversations with scholars and peers. As the form grew, so did our desire to connect with Elders from First Nations communities in order to better learn and understand traditional storytelling forms. We were introduced to different Indigenous storytellers from different communities, and eventually with support from the Edmonton Art Council, we found ourselves heading north to a Dene community in the Yellowknife area.

We wanted to learn as much as possible about storytelling from people connected to their roots and their land and who were still telling generations-old stories. We were excited to integrate what we learned about Dene oral traditions with what we already knew from Todd's knowledge of Cree storytelling, and further develop our intercultural improv format. Here is some of what we learned.

* * *

DAY 1

— Ben

With bags in hand and a bubbly bounce in our steps, Todd and I walked up the stairs to our tiny little "First Air" plane. The sun was just beginning to peak over the horizon as we fell asleep in our seats, dreaming of breakfast sandwiches and Northern adventures. In a few short dream lengths, we were bounced awake and greeted by a vast white expanse, dwarfing the little town of Yellowknife in its embrace. We sat in our lobby and eagerly waited. This sitting and waiting was to become a staple of our Northern experience, but we didn't know that yet. Eventually, a middle-aged Dene man hustled in, wearing hunting-camo snow pants and holding a cup of Tim Horton's coffee. He looked us up and down and said, "You got anything warmer y'wanna put on?!" This was Bobby Drygeese, our guide and main man. He runs a Dene culture camp and is very active in his community, both as a council member and as a defender of traditional culture. We piled into his truck and he showed us N'Dilo and Dettah, both Willideh Dene communities that neighbour the Yellowknife settlement.

The truck ride (over an eight-kilometre ice road on Great Slave lake!) was filled with many stories. Some were of the kind we expected, like the one about Yamuzha, a mythic hero who shaped the landscape through his adventures. We saw beautiful hills and trees that are said to have originated through Yamuzha's journeys.

Other stories were less expected, like the complicated relationships different Dene groups have with each other around questions including who signed the treaties, which language is dominant in local media and culture, and how industrial consultation does not always include all groups and stakeholders.

Then Bobby took us on the coldest goddamn ski-doo ride of our lives, out onto the lake, in order to pull fish nets from beneath four inches of ice. Todd and I bounced along on snowmobiles, with every bump threatening to throw us off. We were out there with a group of Dene men, and children on spring break. The grownups worked so methodically, gloves off, unaffected by the intense cold, as Todd and I stood with the kids doing funny little dances to stay warm. We pulled seventeen big fish out of the water. They were bleeding, flopping, stinking, and freezing on the ice surface. The net was tangled and frozen, but the men worked on it with patience until it was ready to go back under water.

The passion and method with which Bobby and company worked was infectious, and served to highlight the importance of what we would hear time and time again on our trip: *We live off the land*. We learned that most stories revolve around, most political battles are fought for, and the history of Dene people is inexorably linked to the Dene's right to live off the land.

DAY 2

— Todd

After a customary wait in the lobby, Bobby arrived and took us away to Dettah to meet with Elders in the Elders' lodge. After the previous cold day on the ice, the prospect of sitting down and talking to a storyteller in a heated home was very welcome. We met with three elders who told us many stories and reflected on times in their lives when they were learning stories.

We first met Peter Sangris, a storytelling Elder in Yellowknife and an eighty-year-old hunter and fisher. Peter was hard of hearing, and had an incredible smiling face that was complemented by the sunglasses he wore and the tiger print inner lining of his jacket—it made for a very stylish look.

Previous pages: Foreground image: © Ben Gorodetsky. Travelling around Yellowknife.
Background image: © Andrew Paul. Todd Houseman and Ben Gorodetsky as the intercultural improv duo, Folk Lordz.

Bobby left and we sat across from Peter. We presented him with a pack of cigarettes in honour of the plains Cree tradition of contracting someone with tobacco, and he began to tell us stories. Peter knew many stories, but couldn't quite remember all the details. He spoke at length about how things used to be and how things have changed. He told stories about the diminishing number of caribou and associated it with blasting caused by the mines, with the dust that rested on the grass that the caribou grazed on.

The second storyteller we met at the Elders' home was George Tatsiechele, who was younger than the other Elders and was described to us as an Elder in training. George explained that he came from a storytelling family: When he was younger he would listen to his father and his father's friend tell stories so important that George would pass up playing with his friends outside to listen. Soon he was telling incredible stories about an extraordinary medicine man named *Sack'lee*, which means "sunbeam" in Dene. Sack'lee was given his name because when he was a child he was heard laughing in great commotion in his tipi. When people arrived to see why he was laughing, they saw him hanging on a sunbeam shining through a hole in the tipi cover, and everyone realized he possessed great medicine power. George also told us about how Sack'lee could manipulate metal. A Hudson's Bay trader asked Sack'lee for a stack of beaver pelts as tall as the trader's musket barrel. Sack'lee's stack was too small, so he bent the gun to make it the right size. The trader told him that he no longer had a use for a bent gun and gave it to Sack'lee. Sack'lee took the gun home, bent it back, and had himself a brand new musket.

We thanked George, and Bobby Drygeese brought us to Berna Marten's nice orange house in Dettah. Berna, like Peter and George, recalled living in the bush, and went into great detail about where she lived with her family on White Beach point, which was only accessible by boat during certain times because the wind was too extreme. They would spend all summer living in a tent with a stove inside, living directly off the surrounding land. When she was young, she would visit an old woman who would tell her old stories. The woman would cook moose and caribou for her, and tell tales about the land and animals, and Berna would sometimes fall asleep licking the grease off her fingers.

DAY 3

— Ben

Today we heard reasons as to why some storytellers wouldn't meet with us. Some were simply looking after their grandchildren on spring break or had to leave town on short notice, but others feared bad medicine and energy. They had resolved to not share their stories with people whom they did not know or trust. This was upsetting to us. We have no malice in our hearts. But this is not our land, so we have to respect their rules and their feelings.

We ended up hanging out with Mary Louise Drygeese, Bobby's mom. We got dropped off there after witnessing a short drumming ceremony at the museum for a group of ATCO gas executives which made us feel—weird. So we were quite pleased to be back in Dettah, sitting in a cozy kitchen with an elder. Her stories mostly stayed in the personal realm: she didn't tell us legends, but reflections. She described how she never knew the meaning of the word "bored." Between gathering wood, visiting the nets, hunting in the bush, tanning hide, sewing clothes, preparing dryfish, and taking care of her siblings, no time remained for any sort of boredom. She told us how she missed the quietness of that lifestyle.

At our request for a mythic or monstrous story, she told us of her one encounter with Na'Ka, a Bigfoot-type bushman. Her family was travelling on a fishing trip and stopped on an island overnight. The dog team they had with them could not stop weeping and howling, so her father went to go look. He instructed little Mary Louise to stay in the tent because there might be a Na'Ka skulking around in the night. She recalled how her heart was pounding and how profusely she was sweating, unable to sleep for fear of being gobbled up by an island monster. Thankfully no one was gobbled (except for fish), and Mary Louise lived to tell us this story!

Later that evening we met up with Tiffany Aylik, an Inuit multidisciplinary artist who had much to share with us about using traditional knowledge for the creation of contemporary art. It was wonderful to feel like we had an ally in this complicated work we were navigating, and she generously shared many stories with us. Sitting inside of an igloo she had built with the help of local students, she told us the traditional origin story of the northern lights that draw so many to the majestic North. The lights, she told us, are a huge game of soccer being played in the sky by the spirits of people who have passed from this earth. Instead of a ball, they play with a skull. Opinions differ on whether it is a human skull or a walrus skull, but all agree that if you whistle too much and draw the lights too close, you run the risk of getting your own head knocked off by that skull.

DAY 4

— Todd

We started our day without Bobby, as the Elder we were scheduled to meet was going to meet us at our hotel. We were met at our inn by an Elder named Paul Andrew, who used to work for CBC as a radio-show host. We gave him tobacco and he began by saying that he didn't know many of the stories we were looking for but he did know why people told stories. As an Elder in the community, Paul Andrew's job was to pass on information and wisdom to young people, and so he educated us about stories. He told us that stories were everything, and that learning from stories is as much a skill as telling a story.

Paul told us that babies still in the womb are told stories so that their minds become more attuned to hearing stories when they are born. The storyteller can see what a child will become through the stories they listen to, which helps determine their role in the community and the types of stories they will need in order to begin their training. Paul described storytelling as

Foreground image: © Andrew Paul, Ben Gorodetsky and Todd Housemann as the intercultural improv duo, Folk Lordz
Background image : © Ben Gorodetsky. Travelling around Yellowknife.

almost a training manual: oral literature that can educate the listener in all manners of life within the community. Listeners learn about the chores of life, which he described as the regular day's work that one needs to know to survive—chores like tanning hides or cooking meat. Elders, Paul tells us, have computer-like brains, trained to memorize perfectly the stories they hear from a young age.

Paul tells us that life is a road, and all the storytellers one meets in life are standing on the road behind you. If you've listened correctly to the stories, you'll have many people to look back on. The people behind you lead to where you'll end up on the road, in front of you. We see how this relates to our improv training, in that when improvising the best way to conclude a story is by looking at what has already been declared true in the world of the story.

After our session with Paul Andrew, we spent the day eagerly waiting our meeting with Lawrence Nayally. Lawrence was originally going to be our guide on this research trip, but ended up being unavailable. Luckily he was able to meet with us for one night, and he told us many, many stories. He brought us to the side of a lake near Giant Mine, which he called his "office," saying it was a place better suited for telling stories. We stood by the side of the lake and heard story after story about the origins of people and animal people, and stories that contained facts about nature.

The stories Lawrence told us were told to him by storytellers when he was training to become a storyteller himself. He told stories about Yamosha, a trickster-like character who helped create many truths in nature today. He told stories about the powers possessed by women and by shamans. Lawrence created a story map: Each story he told was complemented with illustration of where exactly that story took place. In Dene oral storytelling, Lawrence explained, the genre is defined by the storyteller, and it is up to the listener to interpret the lessons to be drawn from each story.

DAY 5

— Ben

Today we were guests at an Elder meeting at the Goyatiko language centre in Dettah, run by linguist and social activist Mary Rose Sundberg. She had brought together a group of four elders: Modest Sangris, Madeline Beaulieu, Peter Sangris, and Mary Lousie Drygeese. The Elders could speak in their native tongue, and Mary Rose facilitated live interpretation via headphones. Here are some of the stories they shared with us:

—

Old man and grandson are canoeing on a muskrat hunt along a river. The man tells his grandson to be absolutely silent so to not scare muskrats. While they paddle, the boy gets tangled in a branch and lifted out of the canoe. After a while the man turns back and realizes he's not there. He paddles back and sees his grandson hanging off a branch and asks, "Why didn't you say anything?" "You said to be absolutely silent, grandpa, I didn't want to scare the muskrat!"

—

Squirrel was wet and cold, so he slept close to the fire. But he slept too close, so his fur got singed, which is why squirrels have a stripe down their backs today.

—

Raven was always trying to trick people and lie to people. To punish him, people pulled his beak off. Raven became sad and hungry and wandered around the camp, looking for his beak so he could eat. He decided to fool people. He moved sticks and logs across the river to make it look like Na'Ka coming towards the camp. He went to each tent, warning people. When the people all went to the banks to look at the invaders, Raven rummaged through their tents looking for his beak. The only person who stayed was an old lady, who in fact was the one who had his beak. He convinced her to give it to him, and hastily pushed it into his head, a little crooked, and continued to look for food. That is why, to this day, raven has a crooked beak.

—

Wolverines and martens are in-laws. That's why a wolverine will eat anything trapped in your trap, except for a marten.

—

A man was cooking a fat moose, but he was hiding it from his blind and hungry wife. The wife heard a loon in the distance, so she crawled on all fours to the water. There she met the loon and asked him to help her see again, so the loon told her to get on his back. They dove underwater once, twice, three times, and after the third time, she could see. She returned to camp, weak from hunger, but saw, and confronted her husband. She clubbed him on the head, and taught him a lesson.

DAY 6

— Todd

This was our second day with the Elders at Goyatiko, with new translators. These translators often reminded us that the stories are easier spoken and understood in the Dene language. They told us the English translation lacks some of the heart of the stories, but still reflects the lessons.

One of the characters we learned of was the trickster Chi'zo. Chi'zo always claims the guilt of any accusation, but always seems to escape before the end of the story. I think the place of tricksters in these stories is to offer a lesson on how not to act. These stories show tricksters repeatedly getting into trouble, and I think these characters teach people the ethics in a community by showing the actions they shouldn't perform

Madeline, the oldest of the Elders, recalled a story about a woman who found a piece of gold and gave it to a priest, who in turn brought miners to the area. This, we were told, is a momentous part of the Dene history, as the woman's discovery led to the arrival of more miners and the present-day discomfort many Dene people have with the presence of mines. We were also told of two old chiefs named Et'zo and Eceh'cho, whom some of the Elders' parents and grandparents had the honor

of meeting, and how one of the chiefs is buried with a sword given to him by an early European trader. Young people now often search the island he was buried on looking for the sword. I found myself wondering if, in a few generations, these people will perhaps become characters in stories—maybe one day tricksters themselves.

We listened as each Elder told us a different version of the same story about Sack'lee. It was interesting to see how stories evolve, and it lent evidence to my hunch that trickster characters develop through changing first-hand accounts of real people.

Stories are told to educate the community—in ethics, geography, politics, history, theory, and personal development. The storytellers we met were entertaining educators, and to learn how to improvise this way will be difficult, but we can only grow from here. I can see that the source of the power in the stories we are hearing is clearly in their relationship to the land. I am thinking about how our format can evolve to reflect modern lessons, and to engage with the geography of the locations where we perform.

DAY 7

— Ben

Today, our last day in Yellowknife, we took an hour-long drive east to Cameron Falls, a stunning waterfall trail through snowcapped hills covered in skinnytrees. Surrounded by silence, we reflected on what it could mean to centre "the land" in our practice.

* * *

The stories we heard and the experiences we had in the North were beautiful, complicated, and unexpected, and we are certain it will take us many years and many performances to fully comprehend and integrate the knowledge we received. That being said, there are a few grains of wisdom we think we can lay out now:

The land is king. All the stories we heard revolved around specific places, and the lessons they taught were meant to aid in the hunt and survival in these regions. Creating narrative rooted in geography is not a common structure for us improvisers, but we are inspired to move in that direction and honour the storytelling styles and histories we have learned.

Stories mutate, everyone tells them differently. We heard similar stories from different folks, and they were all subtly different. From the time of the elders to present day, many stories have evolved and have come to mean slightly different things. We see this as being in line with our work as improvisers, creating new stories. This is not to say we wish to disregard the past. On the contrary, we see evolving old stories and devising new ones as a new take on a traditional oral history practice.

Storytelling is all around us. It is traditional and contemporary. We met so many inspiring people who showed us how powerful it is to look forward while knowing the power of the past. If traditional storytelling forms are not practised, they are forgotten. But if they cannot adapt, they may lose their value. Traditional and contemporary worlds and art forms can and should coexist, and a wealth of artists and activists are doing this work today. We feel honoured to be in their ranks!

We were excited to integrate what we learned about Dene oral traditions with what we already knew from Todd's knowledge of Cree storytelling, and further develop our intercultural improv format.

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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR THE POSITION OF EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

OVERVIEW

alt.theatre is a professional journal published quarterly by Teesri Duniya Theatre. The editor-in-chief reports to the Board of Teesri Duniya Theatre and is responsible for all aspects of the editorial content of the magazine, including writing editorials, ensuring a steady stream of submissions, managing the receipt and assessment of articles, making final decisions regarding revisions and intention to publish, overseeing copy editing and graphic layout, and ensuring that the magazine is published on schedule. An editorial board assists the editor in identifying, soliciting, and vetting content. The editor-in-chief also works in partnership with *alt.theatre*'s project coordinator on grant writing, advertising, revenue strategies, pricing, costs, and circulation management.

The position offers considerable opportunity for the development of a unique editorial vision and voice. The ideal candidate will have superior writing and editing skills, strong connections to culturally diverse theatre artists and practices in Canada and abroad, and a deep interest in building upon the solid intellectual and aesthetic foundations already established by *alt.theatre*. This is a one-year initial appointment subject to longer term renewal. Affiliation with a university is not required, although the institutional support provided by such a position would be an asset.

The editor-in-chief may serve from any location; residency in Montreal is not required.

HIRING TIMELINE

THE DEADLINE TO APPLY
IS JANUARY 13, 2016.

Short-listed candidates will be invited to interview in late January, and the hiring decision will be announced in early February 2016. The editorship changeover will take place over the course of February and March 2016.

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THE TASHME PROJECT: REVITALIZING JAPANESE CANADIAN IDENTITY THROUGH THEATRE

MATT MIWA

You may know some of the facts surrounding the forced removal and internment of 22,000 Japanese Canadians from the coast of British Columbia during World War II. Perhaps you know of the evacuation policy that granted the B.C. Security Commission possession rights for all Japanese Canadian personal and commercial property within a hundred miles of the coast, and the extent to which the population was dispersed following the war, settling where they could east of the Rockies or face deportation to Japan. And that although no Japanese Canadian was ever successfully charged with treason, the population remained disenfranchised and labelled "enemy aliens" until 1949. Perhaps you know that official redress was successfully pursued and awarded in 1988 after a decade-long campaign, marking the end of official policy dealings between government and Japanese Canadians.

But what do we know of Japanese Canadians in 2015, now into their fourth and fifth generations? Our present predicament, as a people and a culture, is still deeply affected not only by those facts (both known and unknown, even amongst ourselves) but by how the first generations reacted to that adversity: with the mantra, "*Shikata ga nai*"—"it cannot be helped." These words are at the heart of the older generations' survival and perseverance, but they are also what have led younger generations of Japanese Canadians to our ambiguous relationship with the past, one that tempts us toward a very real abandonment of cultural memory and identity.

As much as *shikata ga nai* served as a coping mechanism and as a cultural practice, this mentality was, in the aftermath of internment, pushed past its limits. Throughout the generations, the internment was left behind, no longer spoken of, and the main prerogative of *shikata ga nai* became to assimilate into the "Canadian way of life." While it did push younger generations to persevere and survive in the context of our new lives, it also turned sour.

In my father's generation, the third generation, the pressure to balance *shikata ga nai* with the incongruent social realities of new—and racist—"assimilated life" necessarily produced outraged youth. Neither *shikata ga nai* nor greater society offered space to engage with this outrage, and so it remained a private, corrosive burden, leaving unhealed wounds. The cauterized outrage of the third generation psyche has been passed on to following generations, and our collective memory smolders with unspoken anger.

Today we are a diluting ethnicity and culture: Amongst visible minorities in Canada, Japanese Canadians have the highest rate of intermarriage, which according to the 2006 national census is into the seventy-five percentile range. Our fourth and fifth generations, now quarter and one-eighth Japanese, stand far enough away from history and straddle enough ethnicities and cultures that, without an articulated sense of Japanese cultural pride, it is easier to embrace the resolved cultural identities of their *other* kin.

What will become of Japanese Canadians?

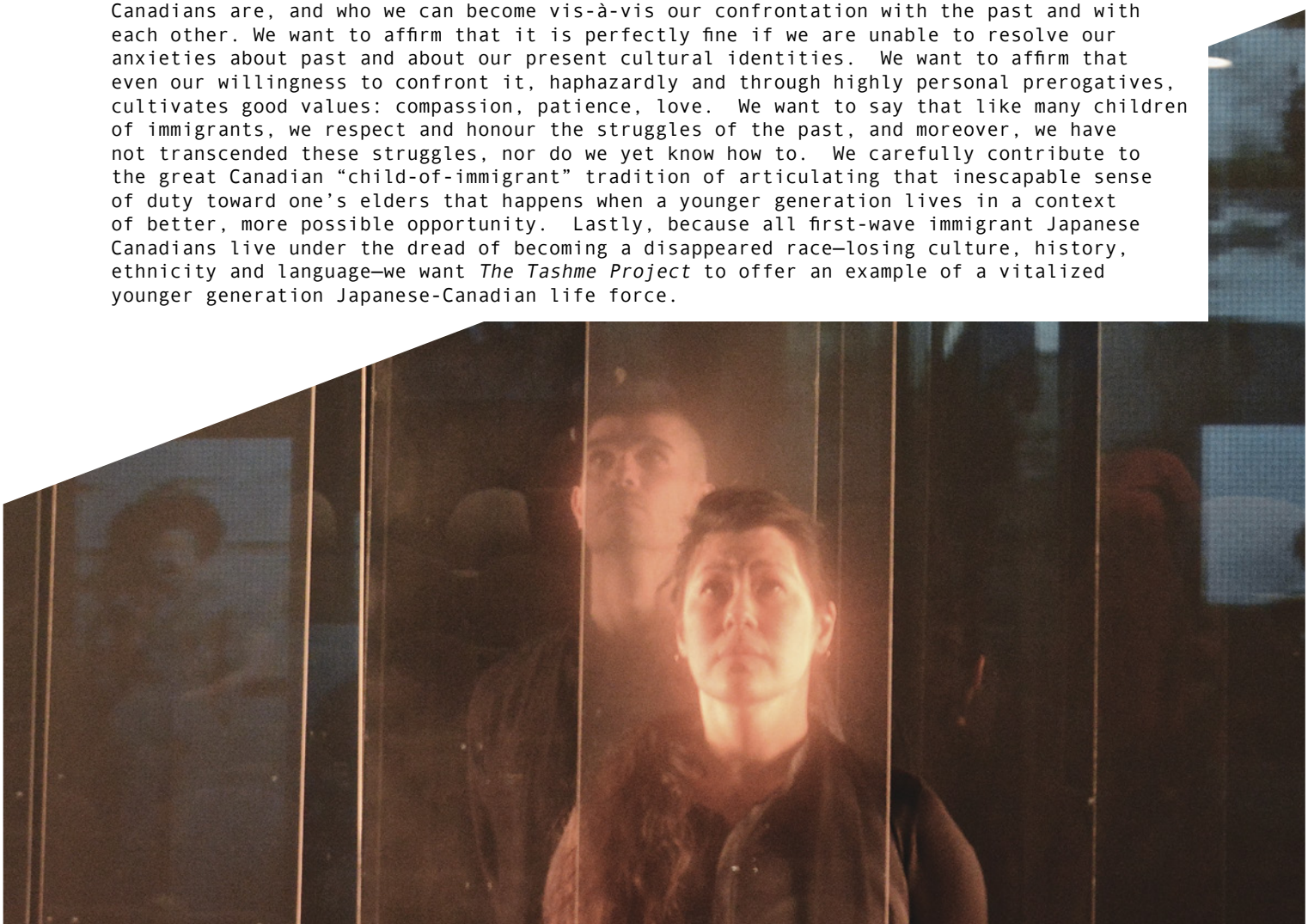
The Tashme Project: The Living Archives, which premiered in May 2015 at the MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels), is the theatre piece that I have been co-creating with Julie Tamiko Manning for the past five years. In it, we present a verbatim oral history of internment and its aftermath, edited together from over thirty interviews with Nisei (second-generation Japanese Canadians) from across the country. Breaking through the practice and history of silence in which we were raised, we sat down with our elders and asked for and received stories of internment. Well practiced in *shikata ga nai*, the Nisei themselves were *all* reluctant at first, but what was promised to be half-hour interviews almost always extended to two-hour sessions. Our life-long curiosities were finally satisfied, and the murky picture of our families' past—our legacy—was fleshed out.

For those who have been brought up around cauterized family wounds and alienated from the past, theatre holds multiple potential horizons in the search for memory, identity, and community. Internment was such a defining collective experience, yet the ways in which we do or do not remember it remain at odds between generations. And so the prospect of intergenerational dialogue gives voice to our theatre. With fierce feeling, commitment, and empathy for our tribe, we embrace the energy and focus of a healer in our theatre creation process.

Created in the spirit of communal healing and cultural revitalization, *The Tashme Project* is our response to the ambiguity in which we were raised toward the past, the internment legacy, and above all cultural pride. As theatre makers, we seek to create a space and an authority whereby a community can speak earnestly and sincerely to *itself*, and look to dissolve the trepidation—read *shikata ga nai*—that inhibits our attempts at meaningful dialogue. We use theatre toward restitution. We seek to look beyond the achievement and the history of redress into the inarticulate, shamed, and outraged inner world that persists unresolved, both within ourselves and in our elders. We implicate the Nisei, our elders who as children persevered through internment and who now witness our great cultural schism with alarm. We openly reveal our desperation: "*Memory Keepers,*" we say to them, "*there is more value and need in your personal histories than any of us have ever acknowledged. We do so now!*"

Our piece is for both Japanese Canadians and for larger audiences. When we two performers convey the thirty-odd testimonies of our elders, it is an invitation to communion for Japanese Canadian audience members. Given the extreme personal connection and prerogative both Julie and I have as performers and as non-fictive stage figures, we can be observed as both reciting and *overhearing* our elders' stories. This simultaneous speaking enacts a visceral emotional and spiritual transformation in us, and we offer this transformation as a gesture of love, reverence, and faith to our tribe, and as a manifestation of the "wounded healer" archetype to the audience at large. We appeal to all of our audience to interpret our recitations in a sacred context.

Through *The Tashme Project*, we want to articulate who contemporary Japanese Canadians are, and who we can become vis-à-vis our confrontation with the past and with each other. We want to affirm that it is perfectly fine if we are unable to resolve our anxieties about past and about our present cultural identities. We want to affirm that even our willingness to confront it, haphazardly and through highly personal prerogatives, cultivates good values: compassion, patience, love. We want to say that like many children of immigrants, we respect and honour the struggles of the past, and moreover, we have not transcended these struggles, nor do we yet know how to. We carefully contribute to the great Canadian "child-of-immigrant" tradition of articulating that inescapable sense of duty toward one's elders that happens when a younger generation lives in a context of better, more possible opportunity. Lastly, because all first-wave immigrant Japanese Canadians live under the dread of becoming a disappeared race—losing culture, history, ethnicity and language—we want *The Tashme Project* to offer an example of a vitalized younger generation Japanese-Canadian life force.



OWNING OUR ROOTS ON DANGEROUS ROADS

MENKA NAGRANI

For the tenth anniversary of my company, Les Productions des pieds des mains, I took on the major challenge of creating a dance version of the play *Le Chemin des passes-dangereuses* (Down Dangerous Passes Road) by Michel Marc Bouchard. I founded Les Productions des pieds des mains in 2004 with the aim to create socially engaged productions that question our society on artistic and political levels. The aesthetics of my work lie at the intersection of modern dance and experimental theatre. Starting with the premise that dance could find a home in a play originally written for the theatre, I chose this particular text of Bouchard because it is anchored in Québécois culture. I wanted a play that would allow me to develop a contemporary aesthetic inspired by Quebec's traditional art forms, such as step-dancing (*la gigue*) and traditional music.

In this age of globalization, I often wonder what remains of my cultural and artistic roots and how I can reintroduce this heritage in the context of a contemporary creation. Bouchard's text—both rural and urban, abstract and realist—seemed to be the perfect setting to accommodate a meeting of tradition and modernity. In reflecting the reality of day-to-day existence in rural Quebec through local colloquialisms, the play touches on the very essence of Quebec culture. The text, traditional in its themes and the context of its story but contemporary in its form and writing, resonates with the spirit of contemporary step-dancing, a dance form that mixes traditional step-dancing, and contemporary dance.

With this interpretation, my endeavour was to harness step-dancing's dramatic potential. I used the hammering power of the dancers' feet hitting the floor to reflect the spite and aggression found in the dialogues. The finesse with which the dancers perform their steps added weight and emotion to their characters' inner monologues. Rhythmic subtleties and variations enhanced the dynamics of their interpersonal relations. All of this resulted in a production firmly rooted in Quebec's history, not only through its subject matter but also through a corresponding and unique body language.

My creation is both a study of aesthetics and an assertion of a point of view, the latter being expressed through dance as opposed to dialogue. My aim is to awaken the spectator to the fact that Quebec step-dancing is a rich and complex art form that still holds its own within the spectrum of modern-day Quebec culture. I want the audience to be transformed by the idea that this traditional form of expression, which remains largely unexplored by today's artists, is far from dead or obsolete: that it has the potential to be reinvigorated by being embodied within a contemporary approach. This idea is echoed by

philosopher Giorgio Agamben's words in *Qu'est-ce que le contemporain?* (Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2008 [originally published in Italian]), which I translate here into English: "Contemporaneity is based on its proximity to its source, which pierces nowhere more strongly than in the present."

When considering traditional dance and music in Quebec, the notions of identity loss and cultural self-destruction come to mind. It appears as though these traditions, after being an integral part of our daily lives for centuries, were laid to waste during the Quiet Revolution in favour of an opening up to the outside world; as historian Pierre Chartrand explains, "We threw out the baby with the bath water; step-dancing went with it."[1] Today, the presence of Québécois traditional music at our festivals and on our radio stations is minimal, despite its origins as a national culture. Quebec has a surprising number of exceptional traditional music bands that are popular at music festivals all around the world—except for in Quebec. Our traditional heritage is immensely rich, and yet the popular belief is that traditional music and dance belong to the past. They are perceived as unrefined and are often ridiculed by mass culture.

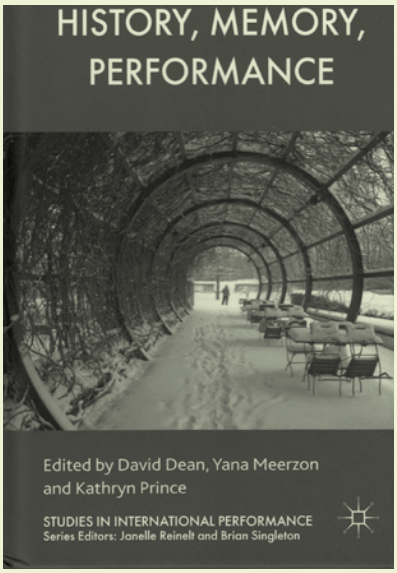
Staging a contemporary Québécois dramatic text using step-dancing is a way for me to take affirmative action on a social issue dear to my heart: our society's lack of pride and knowledge about its original culture. Returning to the basics, to the foundations of our artistic lineage, is a way for me to resist the influence of mass culture and the standardization that it generates.

—

1 Quoted in *Retro* (film), by Nancy Gloutnez and Philippe Meunier, presented at Tangente, Montreal, in 2009 during the Biennal de gigue contempoarine.

BOOK REVIEW

BY
LOUISE FORSYTH



HISTORY, MEMORY, PERFORMANCE. EDITED BY DAVID DEAN, YANA MEERZON, AND KATHRYN PRINCE. LONDON: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2015. 307 PP.

History, Memory, Performance invites performative presence in an "interdisciplinary experiment" designed by David Dean, Yana Meerzon, and Kathryn Prince. The collection examines historical drama through a wide range of social, temporal, and geographical contexts, asking whether we can know anything with certainty—in a personal or collective sense—in either the present, with its incessant processes of change, or the past, with its increasingly complex accumulation of disparate folds. The book contains an informative introduction, illustrations, a rich bibliography, and fourteen essays by authors from six different countries touching on a range of performance events occurring internationally and across the centuries. These well-written essays throw into sharp relief the rich potential for innovative creativity, fresh representations, radical new knowledge, renewal of practices in theatre criticism, and social change. These emerge when artists and scholars explore the dialectically energized spaces opened between present ambiguities and past events released from the tired myths of facile but tenacious traditions that have served too long the political interests of the privileged and the powerful.

This "interdisciplinary experiment," strongly influenced by the emergence of Performance Studies, assumes that all meaning-making initiatives are performances. The volume explores questions about the nature of performance, not just as an essential element of theatricality but as the underlying process in all representations that weave the fabric of discourse and culture. Understanding the production of meaning in this way challenges the status of absolute authority usually attributed to experts such as academic historians. At the same time it welcomes representations performed by others, motivated by the view that knowledge, however partial, has not only cognitive sources, but affective and corporeal ones as well. These performers offer slices of history in various forms other than scholarly texts alone, thereby giving material immediacy to the experience of the past. Performance occurs in spaces of the present and lends itself to play and movement. It re-casts and brings to life images and happenings arising out of memory and imagination.

Thus, in light of the argument that meaning-making is an embodied

performative activity occurring at a particular moment in time, the authors complicate the frequently presumed infallibility of facts emanating from documents, archives, expert testimony, or even photographs, witnessing, or recordings. Their examination of the phenomenon of performance, as it gives representation in the present to scattered leaves from historical accounts and flashes of memory imaginatively woven into new narratives, raises awareness of how present political realities—and their associated meanings, perceptions, interests, values, truths—determine our perspectives of the past. Particularly compelling in these essays is the demonstration of relationships between abuses, injustices, and violent events that have occurred throughout history and claims by power-hungry leaders to stand on unambiguous truths about the past and the present. Equally compelling is the examination of dramatic strategies used in a range of contexts by many theatre artists in representing painful events in the past, particularly individual traumatic events and those of catastrophic violence. Because these simply cannot be performed realistically, they must take on metaphoric and fanciful dramatic qualities to provide the distance that spectators need to reflect critically.

The impossibility of recapturing a moment of past time in its entirety and the fragmentary nature of that which can be known are not viewed by those who make and view historical drama as serious disadvantages. Instead, the intentionally shown gaps between certainties open us to fresh insight and innovative possibilities. The essays make way for new knowledge, new ways of seeing, re-shaped contexts, new "truths." The metaphorical forms they take in producing distorting lenses projected upon the "real" awaken sensation, imagination, and emotion.

The editors give pride of place to Greg Dening's succinct affirmation, "History—the past transformed into words or paint or play—is always a performance" (1). *History*, *Memory*, *Performance* explores the slippery and contingent nature of notions of past and present from a range of historical and cultural perspectives, showing its profound significance for the status not only of the field of history but also of the study of theatre, history, and performance. The essays show that truths about the past demand active, constant, and never-concluded negotiation. This transformation of how to view history has become increasingly striking as public historians perform their works (in museums, galleries, heritage houses, historic sites, memorials, commemorative spaces, film, television, on websites, blogs, Twitter). At the same time, as members of the many groups ignored by historians speak out ever more vocally and "hyper-historians" or performing artists reinterpret events in the lives of individuals, members of theatre publics can capture for themselves their own fresh meanings of the past. Such challenges to received conventions in history, theatre, and culture provide the energy for the "interdisciplinary experiment" of *History*, *Memory*, *Performance*, revealing the fallibility of representational practice and breaking down the disciplinary boundaries among scholars and public activists.

The influence of the pioneering theoretical and critical work of Freddie Rokem on contemporary historical theatre performances is evident in several of the essays in the collection, particularly as developed in his *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (University of Iowa Press, 2000). The editors placed Rokem's essay, "Discursive Practices and Narrative Models: History, Poetry, Philosophy," immediately following their introduction because of his theoretical and methodological insights into memory and remembering, travel and migration, autobiography, and historical context. Rokem reminds us that the lives of individuals amount to micro-histories that reveal the profound patterns of larger historical designs and larger existential and moral struggles. (6)

Rokem stresses that the representational performance of past events in the present creates a dynamic double perspective that, when carefully balanced, brings into brighter light the conjoined ethical ramifications of present and past events. His succinctly formulated "basic claim" could be seen as the over-arching claim of *History*, *Memory*, *Performance* itself:

> My basic claim is that the endeavor to "perform history" within aesthetic contexts [. . .] is constituted by a complex double perspective. On the one hand, such aesthetic representations present a lived immediacy of the historical event, an immersion into that historical reality, including the limited understanding (or denial) of what is happening as events unfold according to their sometimes perverse logic; while at the same time, these aesthetic representations also include some form of more general retrospective understanding of their consequences for us in the present, in particular regarding the ethical [. . .] dimensions of these events. Aesthetic representations of the past are constituted by carefully balancing the limited or limiting understanding a person living at a specific moment has, incapable of grasping the whole event of which he or she is a part, with some form of retrospective understanding that these historical events may have for us at any given point in time. (22)

Rokem raises the question of why the re-enactment of historical events matters, why what appears to be such a daunting challenge, so strewn with pitfalls, must be met: "Why do we need to complicate matters by making art about historical events?" (23). His response to these questions begins with Aristotle's *Poetics*, referring to the ethical dimension seen by Aristotle in artistic practices and their central function in the public sphere: All such practices are performative. However, performance, when it is explicit in its aesthetic role, has the unique ability to circulate throughout the public sphere and transform ways of seeing and being. "The fundamental ontological instability of the work of art [and its ethical dimensions] gives it a unique position within the public sphere" (26).

History, *Memory*, *Performance* achieves a fine balance between consistency in its theoretical foundation and a wide diversity of kinds of historical theatre studied and methodologies used. Assuming their own role as performers in their work as scholars and teachers, the authors study performances as they have created aesthetic objects and lent the appearance of reality (or revealed deception) in events in the past and the present. These interdisciplinary performances have taken place in many geographical locations and at many points in time. They have taken

the form of collective re-enactment of living history; choreography and dance; dramaturgical, historical, and literary writing; theatrical production inside and outside theatre spaces; film; public ceremonies, and broadly throughout a range of social situations. Several of the essays discuss theatrical performances in which an individual character embodied the "hyper-historian" discussed by Rokem: a fictional dramatic character whose performed experiences bring to compelling life a large story about a whole period or group of individuals. Rokem's example in this regard is Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*.

Katherine Johnson's "Performing Pasts for Present Purposes: Reenactment as Embodied, Performative History" is the only essay that does not draw upon the performance of one or more specific works, but rather on broad-based cultural performance at a moment in medieval history. Applying methods of ethnographic fieldwork, Johnson studies re-enactments carried out by the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) "Re/playing the Middle Ages 'as they should have been'" (40). Members of the SCA perform re-enactments of past events using costumes, sites, jousts, and feasts. While the SCA favours a "romantic" as opposed to a strictly historical respect for accuracy, its members perceive through their fictions that "experiential (re)doing" (51) provides its own compelling ways of knowing. All the body senses of the performers are engaged in such ways that "re-enactors [. . .] develop a relation to bodily experiences of past peoples, bringing their cultures a little closer to us" (51).

J. Douglas Clayton's "Alexander Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* as Epic Theatre" traces the tortuous path of reception through the centuries of this complex play, in which Pushkin offered indirect but sharp commentary on the Russian society of his time and challenged dominant myths about Russian identity in the past, while creating innovative and new theatrical form. The play's unique theatrical qualities and probing themes were not recognized until the twentieth century. Clayton succeeds in highlighting the problematics of reception in theatre, suggesting that performances offering fresh perspectives on past events and present conditions will not be received or understood by audiences, critics, and authorities if the audiences are not ready to empathize with the "truths" being dramatized and the form in which such dramatization is occurring. This study highlights, as do several other essays in the book, the almost inevitable political ramifications and obstacles that arise in social and critical spheres when alternate versions of past events are performed.

In "*Bent* and the Staging of the Queer Holocaust Experience," Samantha Mitschke studies the failure of reception in a compelling historical drama when critics are not ready for the complicating light it sheds on contemporary situations. Martin Sherman's *Bent* was performed at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1979. While audiences loved it, British critics detested it, hypocritically invoking aesthetic standards for their ideologically motivated negative judgments. Many of the same critics gave high praise to the play when it was revived in 1990. Two other essays explore in different contexts the powerful manipulative and even determining effect sociopolitical realities in the present can have on the performance and reception of drama from the past: Irena R. Makaryk's "Shakespeare Inside Out: *Hamlet* as Intertext in the USSR 1934-43" and Cláudias Tatinge Nascimento's "Contemporary Brazilian Theatre: Memories of Violence on the Post-Dictatorship Stage."

Two essays address the impossibility of literal or material dramatization of the violence and trauma experienced by those who lived through the Holocaust and 9/11: Rachel E. Bennett's "Staging Auschwitz, Making Witnesses: Performances between History, Memory, and Myth" and Josy Miller's "Performing Collective Trauma: 9/11 and the Reconstruction of American Identity." The authors examine theatrical events in which the creators recognized in advance the unsuitability of any representation that claimed to confront whole truths about such events, for such representation could not fail to be unethical in its distortion of particular experiences. As well, the master narratives that used to give legitimacy to social myths supporting collective belief in shared identity no longer prevail. There is bold inventive artistry evident in the performances studied by Bennett and Miller. The artists have made innovative use of material devices, usually semiotically indirect, to speak to the imagination and memory of spectators. The plays have proven profoundly moving, disturbing, illuminating. In these performances, metatheatrical elements place spectators at a distance where they become witnesses in their mind's eye of events of unspeakable and unrepresentable horror.

Knowing that it is never possible to make a material return to the past despite the desire to have fuller knowledge of it, other essays discuss productions that play creatively and reflectively in the gaps between prevailing fragments of knowledge from the past and materially embodied performances representing such past in the present. Such shows exploit distances and differences—those which cannot coincide—to complicate received myths and interpretations of what has been. Jeff Friedman discusses this in his work on choreography: "Minding the Gap: the Choreographer as Hyper-Historian in Oral History-Based Performance." Argentinian dancer and choreographer Paula Rosolen performed a choreographic inquiry and a solo based on interviews and archival documents from German expressionist dancer and choreographer Renate Schottelius. Consciously "minding the gap" while ensuring that her own performance evoked rich presence, Rosolen adopted performance techniques that disrupted facile impressions and enhanced awareness in spectators that she was deliberately not trying to create the impression that she was reproducing in complete fidelity the art of Schottelius: "[O]ne can never totally identify completely with another individual's life world" (66).

Nancy Copeland's "Group Biography, Montage, and Modern Women in *Hooligans* and *Building Jerusalem*" examines performances in two plays set in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century that also play reflectively in the gap between past and present and so complicate received myths regarding women as gendered subjects and as women of modernity. Highlighting the partial knowledge in the present of situations in the past, the plays use "the montage principle" (86), whereby historical fragments are removed "from their embeddedness in a particular context" and mounted in "new juxtapositions" (87) creating new narratives so as to suggest fresh and coherent alternative meanings for the past.

In "Real Archive, Contested Memory, Fake History: Transnational Representations of Trauma by Lebanese War Generation Artists," Johnny Alam examines theoretically engaged consummate artistic performances in the present intended to highlight the distance between documentary evidence of a painfully conflicted past, however fragmentary, and received and sanitized myths, perched upon repressed memory, regarding that same past. The aim of these artists is to produce acknowledgment regarding "the national war-trauma" (184) and so to enhance the possibility of national healing.

Tanja Schult's "Raoul Wallenberg on Stage—or at Stake? Guilt and Shame as Obstacles in the Swedish Commemoration of their Holocaust Hero" is a case study of collectively paralyzing self-delusion in an ongoing present on a country-wide level due to the repression of a traumatic past through officially maintained yet deceitful myth. The myth, a "vapid image" (139), has served powerful political interests for many years. In the chapter "Un/becoming Nomad: Marc Lescarbot, Movement, and Metamorphosis in *Les Muses de la Nouvelle France*" VK Preston has similarly shown how social myths that lie serve the interests of power and politics, as well as how such myths can continue for centuries to have their deleterious impact. Lescarbot's fictional performances in both the play and the documentary history he claimed to write have been significant factors for centuries in injustices suffered in Canada by Indigenous peoples.

The final essay in the collection, Edward Little and Steven High's "Partners in Conversation: Ethics and the Emergent Practice of Oral History Performance," expands the search into a wide range of sources not usually heeded by those who write history. The essay is an account of the many events that were organized during the five-year research project *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations*. It is also a valuable critical reflection on the successes and pitfalls of the project. Little and High show that the practice of oral history performance involves the production of innovative dramatic narratives through the weaving into some measure of coherence of fragments drawn from a wide range of sources such as confessions, life stories, auto-ethnography, personal testimony, personal scholarship, and documentary exposés. The authors examine the strengths of the practice of oral history performance in light of the project's focus on ethical issues and objectives for political and social change. The key principles for ethical engagement in historical research, implemented in every facet of the project, were shared authority, self-reflection, and a commitment to the life story as a whole.

History, *Memory*, *Performance* is a rich and perceptive exploration from many points of view of what happens, has happened, can happen in historical drama. The essays in the collection make an important and original contribution to knowledge. They also point the way to new and promising research in the fields of both theatre history and history itself. They raise fascinating questions about the function of memory. My only reservation about the volume, which I have read with admiration, is the price. At $90 (US) it is unlikely to be within reach of many who could benefit from the insights of its authors. Why is it so expensive? This price will have serious impact on library collections, already so stretched by funding cuts. My dissatisfaction regarding the price is deepened by my finding of numerous typographical errors and a binding so weak that pages fall out when the book is opened widely in order to grapple seriously with the ideas proposed.

BOOK REVIEW

BY
STEFANO MUNERONI

LATINA/O CANADIAN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE. EDITED BY NATALIE ALVAREZ. TORONTO: PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS, 2013. 272 PP.

Latina/o Canadian Theatre and Performance, edited by Natalie Alvarez, is a ground-breaking book that successfully reconfigures the position of Canadian Latina/o theatre within the larger context of the Americas, sheds light on significant yet understudied Canadian artists and theatre groups, and expands the very definition of Canadian *latinidad*. It includes ten essays written by well-established scholars in the field of intercultural studies, postcolonial theory, and Latina/o studies, as well as essays by emerging scholars, new and veteran Latino/a artists, and artist-researchers.

While bringing together such a heterogeneous group of contributors to bear witness to the state of Latina/o theatre and performance in Canada is already an accomplishment in itself, the true importance of this edited volume is its effort to analyze Canadian Latina/o theatre within a hemispheric context. Alvarez draws on Arjun Appadurai's notion of "ethnoscape" to discuss the deterritorializing focus of the collection that emphasizes hemispheric alliances over national borders. Not only does the critical strategy of moving past national borders void the supposed subordination of Canadian Latina/o theatre to Latino/a theatre in the U.S., it also better contextualizes it along transnational interpreting frames. Addressing Latina/o theatre and performance outside the binding limits of geographical national borders allows for a more meaningful exploration of linguistic, cultural, and political commonalities existing within and without Canada, and allows critical discourse to move past the conventional construct of multiculturalism. In her detailed introduction, Alvarez addresses the selected essays within the history of Latina/o studies in Canada in order to contextualize the rich experience of Latina/o artists and scholars.

Alicia Arrizón opens the collection with an essay on Martha Chaves, a Nicaraguan-born stand-up comedian who left her country at the dawn of the civil war. Arrizón uses the notion of "intersectional humour" to explain Chaves's particular brand of comedy, which weaves and negotiates diverse aspects of her identity, including her middle-class status, her exilic position, her Nicaraguan upbringing and her Canadian coming of age, her lesbianism, and her multilingualism. By addressing her numerous subject positions, Chaves manages to deconstruct both stereotypes

and oppressive representations of Latinas/os in Canada. Drawing on *Fragile*, Chaves's one-woman show, Arrizón argues that the (dis)articulations of the artist's multiple identities are deeply tied to her strategies of survival as a gay feminist Latina working in a male-dominated and chauvinistic profession. Chaves's ability to elicit laughter from her audience shows and weakens binary strategies that cast Latinas/os in subaltern positions, and deploys her own composite identity as a site of resistance that is all the more powerful because it intersects and integrates various socio-cultural, linguistic, and sexual borders.

The second essay, by Jessica Riley and Ric Knowles, examines Aluna Theatre's production of *Nohayquiensepa (No One Knows): A Requiem for the Forcibly Displaced*, which premiered in 2012 at the Panamerican Routes/ Rutas Panamericanas festival in Toronto. Beatriz Pizano and Trevor Schwellnus, the founders of Aluna Theatre and co-creators of the piece, have become popular for their use of multilingualism on stage and for a new dramaturgy that both relies on a visual poetry to communicate and resists the authoritative aesthetics of realism, thus producing a long-lasting impact on the audience. In *Nohayquiensepa*, Pizano and Schwellnus confronted the destructive effects of Canadian mining in and around the Magdalena River in Colombia, a topic that directly implicated the audience in the story being told on stage. The artists drew on intermediality and interdisciplinarity to avoid superficial empathy, a quality that can be appropriative and instrumental in reinforcing hierarchies of power. Relying on cognitive studies and trauma scholarship, Riley and Knowles explain how Aluna's production of *Nohayquiensepa* thwarted identification between the reality of the story and the spectators through distancing techniques such as videos, images, and dance. Those strategies fostered an identification that was deeper than mere emotional projection and produced, to paraphrase Jill Bennett's words, an affective response that is more sophisticated and layered than a mere emotional projection (*Empathic Vision*, Stanford UP, 2005). This kind of response is ultimately predicated on the differences existing between individual experiences (as opposed to the empathetic universalization of the human experience) and thus can generate a deeper intimacy between spectators and performers. While providing a close reading of *Nohayquiensepa*, Riley and Knowles shed light on the outstanding work of Aluna Theatre, one of the most creative and original theatre companies in Canada. Hopefully they have also paved the way for more scholarly examination of its work.

The third and fourth essays in this collection provide close historical and thematic readings of theatre groups PUENTE, Double Double Performing Arts, the Apus Coop, and Grupo Teatro Libre, organizations that have been active for years but that have garnered little or no academic interest. Tamara Underiner's essay maps the activity of PUENTE, the longest-running Latina/o theatre group in Canada, and assesses its role in describing the experience of Latin Canadians. Underiner concentrates on "weaving" as her central metaphor for describing the aesthetics of this group; specifically she considers how the threads that are carefully woven in works such as *Journey to Mapu* (developed between 2005 and 2010) and *Crossing Borders* (1990) intersect the lines "between pan-immigrant solidarity and cultural specificity . . . and between calls for inclusion and targeted critique" (83). The tension between telling the stories of Latinas/ os coming from different countries in Latin America, and speaking to the pressing issues affecting the larger and diverse community of Latinas/os living in Canada is also the core of the essay by Jeannine M. Pitas, who considers the importance of Casa Maíz in Toronto in nurturing the work of three community-based theatres in Toronto: Double Double Performing Arts, the Apus Coop, and Grupo Teatro Libre. Pitas argues that these groups move past the idea of nation and look instead at the use of Spanish and shared stories of violent revolution, dispossession, and exile as values that reside at the very core of a new community. The social imaginary of these groups focuses on "creating a new Latin Canadian identity in the present rather than seeking to preserve those of the past" (91). While memory, both collective and individual, is often foundational to the work produced by these three groups, their focus is on the creation of a new pan-Latin American identity that distances itself from national borders and openly questions the viability of multiculturalism.

Hugh Hazelton engages the bilingualism in Alberto Kurapel's seven plays, written in French and Spanish over the twenty-two years that he lived in Quebec. Kurapel left Chile following Augusto Pinochet's *coup d'état* in 1973 and did not return to his home country until 1996. The essay weaves the time before and after Kurapel's exile with discussions of his theatre aesthetics, dramaturgical influences, artistic collaborations, and the creation of Compagnie des Arts Exilio, his own theatre company. The discussion of bilingualism coalesces around Kurapel's notion of "post-teatro," an eclectic style of representation that rejects Aristotelian dramatic conventions, embraces anti-realistic practices, criticizes political oppression and disenfranchisement of the poor, and ultimately showcases characters' fluid identities through their use of multiple languages.

Ramón Rivera-Servera's essay on Carmen Aguirre's *¿Qué Pasa Con La Raza, Eh?* (2000) contests the common view that theatrical, anti-realistic experimentations are more suitable to politics of representation, and argues instead for the role of "critical dance realism" (149), as evident in Aguirre's piece, in opening up transnational aesthetics within Canadian Latin American theatre and performance. If, on one hand, Rivera-Servera cautions against the picturesque and pastoral realism of the Spanish Fantasy Heritage, where Latin American history is exoticized and ultimately othered, on the other he argues that the mix of *cueca*, hip hop, and social dances in *¿Qué Pasa Con La Raza, Eh?* creates a framework through which to look transnationally at Latina/o history and the future of Canadian Latin American theatre and performance.

The three essays that follow Rivera-Servera's have Guillermo Verdecchia as a leitmotiv. Martha Nandorfy's sophisticated analysis of Verdecchia's *The Terrible but Incomplete Journals of John D* (1997) offers a novel reading of this important play through Boaventura de Sousa Santos's concept of "abyssal thinking," a Eurocentric construct predicated on unbridgeable differences between self and other. Nandorfy argues that Verdecchia's John D moves from abyssal thinking, exemplified by his inability to perceive the reality of the women and Latin American characters he interacts with, to a position of sympathetic curiosity that affords him the possibility for more meaningful and intimate encounters. The overcoming

of binary thinking comes as liberation for John D as he can finally let go of his fear of intimacy, and love even unknown others. The essay that follows, by Guillermo Verdecchia himself, looks at the representation of revolutionary politics in Carmen Aguirre's plays *Chile Con Carne* (2000), *The Refugee Hotel* (2009), *The Trigger* (2008), and *Blue Box* (2011). Verdecchia contends that "[w]hile the plays represent the transmission of a revolutionary impulse, they are also, at the performative level, a medium of transmission for this revolutionary heritage" (194). The recollection of the revolutionary legacy of Latin American history, argues Verdecchia, functions as a resuscitation of the past that keeps alive the memory of the Chilean resistance and projects its resiliency onto future struggles. Finally Pablo Ramirez's essay investigates the role of collective memory in Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas* (1993), possibly one of the best-known plays about the Canadian Latin American experience and one that defies nationalism in favour of "a borderlands collective memory" (201). Drawing on Susan Crane's notion of memory as a historical process and Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands, Ramirez explains how Verdecchia's desire to historicize the Latin-Canadian experience leads him to a "non-territorial, no-place space from which to articulate and explore memories and histories" (210). Returning home, as a place of stability and authenticity, is impossible. For Verdecchia, home is what Aztlán is to many Chicano playwrights: a discursive trope that allows him to reframe personal and collective memories and articulate his plural and composite identity.

Jimena Ortuzar's essay "Performing Imaginary Homelands" is the last of this collection. Ortuzar looks at *Imaginary Homelands*, an exhibit that took place between 2009 and 2012 at the Art Gallery of York University and displayed the work of nine Colombian artists-in-residence. The exhibit, which drew on Salman Rushdie's notion that exiles and migrants create and imagine home as a fictional construct, considered the gallery as a "third space," a liminal territory situated between Colombia and Canada; home and abroad; here and there. Emelie Chhangur, the curator of the event, invited the artists to engage in a process-based experience where diverse ideas, contexts, and points of view could meet in a meaningful intercultural dialogue, "an encounter of two places in the real and imaginary crossings of the participants" (227-228). Looking at exemplary works by Angélica Teuta and Nicolás Consuegra, Ortuzar explains how the exhibit drew attention to the numerous transnational and artistic borders that had to be crossed in order to create those pieces, how the artists' exilic position enhanced the hemispheric dimension of their work, and how the body is represented in the exhibit as the very site that allows transnational migration to become visible. Like the rest of the essays in the collection, Ortuzar's emphasizes the hemispheric nature of the Canadian Latina/o experience and invites us to use a more comprehensive critical approach when considering the multifaceted articulations of Canadian *latinidad* in theatre and performance.

Latina/o Canadian Theatre and Performance is paired with *Fronteras Vivientes: Eight Latina/o Canadian Plays*, an anthology that includes both recent plays such as Carmen Aguirre's *The Refugee Hotel* and Marilo Nuñez's *Three Fingered Jack and the Legend of Joaquin Murieta*, and classic ones such Guillermo Verdecchia's *Frontera Americanas* and Alberto Kurapel's *Prometheus Bound According to Alberto Kurapel, the Guanaco Gaucho*. The anthology is prefaced by Natalie Alvarez, who contextualizes each of the plays critically and historically. The publication of the essay collection and the companion anthology of plays will prove invaluable to scholars, artists, and university students working in the field of Canadian Latina/o theatre and performance.

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