alt theatre
cultural diversity and the stage

VOL. 13 NO. 2 | $8 |

Makram (Matt) AYACHE | Sherry BIE | lee williams BOUDAKIAN
Thom BRYCE MCQUINN | Jill CARTER | Anoushka RATNARAJAH | Jenna RODGERS
Franco SACCUCCI | Donna-Michelle ST.BERNARD | Laine ZISMAN NEWMAN

KEEP IN TOUCH

VISIT ALTTHEATRE.CA

AND DISCOVER 18 YEARS OF DIVERSITY AND THE STAGE

SUBSCRIBE OR GIFT A SUBSCRIPTION

AND RECEIVE 4 ISSUES PER YEAR

IT'S EASY TO DO:

Go to **alttheatre.ca** and follow to the subscribe page, then fill in the purchase order using your mailing address or the address of the gift subscription.

OR Send an email to **admin@alttheatre.ca.** Let us know if it is a gift and we will include a gift card with the first issue of the subscription.

CALL US

AT 514-848-0238

CONTENTS 13.2

UPCOMING
in alt.theatre

ARTICLE Lina de Guevera explores how theatre can be used to open communication between police and diverse communities. **DISPATCH** Rebecca Benson and Tracey Guptill discuss their experience creating and performing *Anybody Can Be Pussy Riot*, a live late-night feminist talk/variety show in Kingston, Ontario. **BOOK REVIEW** Emer O'Toole reviews Charlotte McIvor and Matthew J. Spangler's *Staging Intercultural Ireland: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives.*

alt.theatre
cultural diversity and the stage
Vol. 13 No. 2

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

alt.theatre welcomes suggestions or proposals for interviews, news, pieces of self-reflection, analytical articles, and reviews of books, plays, and performances. Submissions to ***alt.theatre*** are vetted by at least two members of the editorial board as well as external reviewers where appropriate. Contributors retain copyright of their articles with the understanding that any subsequent publication will cite ***alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*** as the original source. ***alt.theatre*** retains the right to distribute copies of published articles for educational and promotional purposes. Please query the editors before submitting any work for consideration: info@alttheatre.ca

Founded in 1998, ***alt.theatre*** is published quarterly by Teesri Duniya Theatre – an intercultural theatre company with a mandate to produce socially engaged theatre that reflects Canada's social and cultural diversity. ***alt.theatre*** is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography.

Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales Du Québéc/Library and Archives Canada ISSN 1481-0506

For more information, contact *alt.theatre* magazine at Teesri Duniya Theatre
460 St-Catherine W., Suite 916
Montreal QC H3B 1A7
Tel. 514-848-0238
email: info@alttheatre.ca
www.alttheatre.ca

facebook.com/alt.theatre
facebook.com/teesriduniyatheatre

twitter.com/alt_theatre
twitter.com/Teesri_Duniya

alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage
is published quarterly by

Teesri Duniya
THEATRE

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
© Diane + Mike Photography. The cast of Chromatic Theatre's production of *Medea* in rehearsal. (L to R) Justin Michael Carriere, Carly McKee, Jenna Rodgers, Chantelle Han, Makambe K. Simamba, Ali DeRegt.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested $157 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 157 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.

Conseil des arts et des lettres Québec
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL
Canada Council for the Arts
Conseil des Arts du Canada
TATA
FSC www.fsc.org
MIXTE Papier issu de sources responsables FSC® C016245

CONTRIBUTORS 13.2

MICHELLE MACARTHUR

is Assistant Professor at the University of Windsor's School of Dramatic Art. She holds a PhD in Drama from the University of Toronto, where her dissertation focused on the critical reception of feminist theatre in English and French Canada. Her work has appeared in *alt.theatre*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Theatre Research in Canada*, and several edited collections. In 2014-2015, Michelle was the lead researcher for the Equity in Theatre initiative, a national campaign focused on redressing gender inequities in the Canadian theatre industry.

Editorial:
PAGE 8-9

AARON FRANKS

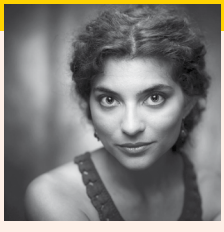
is a researcher, performer, geographer, dad and co-founder of the RAFT applied performance and research company with Rebecca Benson. He worked as an actor from 1996 to 2006, and has degrees in Social Justice and Equity Studies (MA, Brock) and Human Geography (PhD, Glasgow). He recently worked with the Centre for Indigenous Research Creation at Queen's University, and is currently a Mitacs postdoctoral fellow in Indigenous policy at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Ottawa.

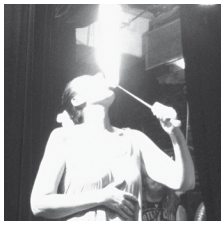
Features Editor

SARAH WAISVISZ

is a playwright and performer based in Ottawa and Playwright in Residence at Great Canadian Theatre Company (2016-2017). She is co-Artistic Director of Calalou, a company dedicated to the development of stories by underrepresented communities. Recent works include her solo show *Monstrous* and its follow-up *Griot!*. Sarah holds a PhD in francophone and anglophone Caribbean Literature and has published in the fields of diaspora literature, trauma, the human rights humanities, and Afro-Caribbean cultural memory.

Reviews Editor





SHERRY BIE

is a doctoral student at U of T (OISE) researching contemporary models of theatre training for a diverse ecology. Bie received her MA in Theatre and Performance Studies at York University (2014). She was the Artistic Director of the English Section of the National Theatre School of Canada (2001-2012). Performance highlights include work at The Vancouver Playhouse, the National Arts Centre, Caravan Farm Theatre, Canadian Stage, and the Odin Teatret in Denmark.

Decolonizing the Storyteller's Art:
PAGE 10-19

JILL CARTER

(Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) is a Toronto-based theatre practitioner and Assistant Professor with the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies; Indigenous Studies; and the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto. Her research and praxis are based in the mechanics of story creation, the processes of delivery, and the mechanics of affect.

Decolonizing the Storyteller's Art:
PAGE 10-19

MAKRAM (MATT) AYACHE

is the founder and Artistic Producer of In Arms Theatre Collective. He is an actor, artist, teacher, and activist but often questions what it means to even "be" anything. In the midst of his current, existential self, he finds time to teach high school, perform and create theatre, and build community. Recently accepted into the University of Alberta's Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting program, Matt hopes to continue his lifelong passions of asking questions, telling stories, and creating social change through art and education.

On Being (Un)Popular:
PAGE 20-25

FRANCO SACCUCCI

is an educator and graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. Franco is grateful to have taught in high schools, youth centres, and theatre spaces. Their research investigates affect theory and the cultural study of emotion in drama/arts pedagogy. Currently, Franco is working on drama research in schools, writing poetry, and an intergenerational devising project at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

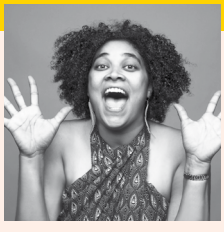
On Being (Un)Popular:
PAGE 20-25

DONNA-MICHELLE ST.BERNARD

aka Belladonna the Blest, is an emcee, playwright, and arts administrator. Her works for the stage include *Dark Love*; *They Say He Fell*, *A Man A Fish*, *Cake*, *The House You Build*, *Salome's Clothes* and *Gas Girls*. Her upcoming work includes *Sound of the Beast* at Theatre Passe Muraille 2017.

Curator of The Principles Office Series:

PAGE 26



LEE WILLIAMS BOUDAKIAN

is a queer, non-binary trans, Southwest Asian-Armenian-Liverpudlian mixie. Born in Scarborough General Hospital and following in the footsteps of their mothers, grandmothers, and the many that came before them, lee has moved numerous times, wrestling with a constant sense of impermanence towards justice, ancestry, and love. They work as an interdisciplinary artist, writer, performer, producer, and facilitator currently based in Vancouver, unceded Coast Salish territories. Love projects include Kalik, ShapeShift Arts, Dear Armen, and The HyePhen Mag. lee arrives at art-making as acts of resistance, world and future visioning, and celebration towards liberation and healing.

Dispatch:

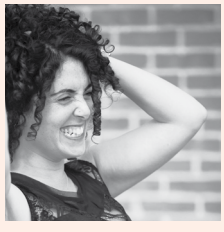
PAGE 32-36

LAINE ZISMAN NEWMAN

is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto's Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies and the collaborative programs in Women and Gender Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies. She received her MA in Drama in 2010 and her MFA in Documentary Media in 2013. Her practical and academic work focuses on the influence and distribution of spaces in queer women's performance practices in Canada. Laine's creative and scholarly work has been published in *Canadian Theatre Review*; *The Rusty Toque*; *Able Muse*; *Studies in Documentary Film*; and *Journal of Dance, Movement and Spiritualties*.

Dispatch:

PAGE 32-36

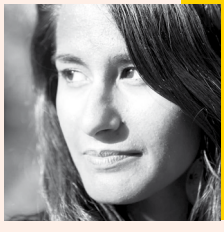


ANOUSHKA RATNARAJAH

is a queer, mixed-race femme, and a multi-disciplinary and transnational artist and organizer. She has worked as a producer, performer, writer, and arts organizer in Vancouver, Montreal, and New York. Her most recent creative projects include *Capital, Alice!*, an anti-capitalist, *Alice in Wonderland*-themed musical; *Toasted Marshmallows*, a documentary film and community-building project exploring what it means to be a mixed-race woman in North America today; and *Dear Armen*, an immersive theatre experience inspired by the life of Armen Ohanian, an enigmatic Armenian performer and anti-Armenian pogrom survivor. Upcoming work includes *(Untitled) Boxes* in partnership with Kalik and the solo show *Mixed Vegetable*.

Q2Q:

PAGE 32-36



JENNA RODGERS

is a mixed-race director and dramaturge based in Calgary. She is the Artistic Director of Chromatic Theatre – a company dedicated to producing and developing work by and for diverse artists. She is a Co-Producer of the Calgary Congress for Equity and Diversity in the Arts (CCEDA), and is the Associate Dramaturge at the Playwright's Colony at the Banff Centre. Jenna holds an MA in International Performance Research from the universities of Amsterdam and Tampere.

Navigating the Chasm:

PAGE 27-31

THOM BRYCE MCQUINN

is a writer and critic. He holds a PhD in English from York University. His main research interests are modern American theatre, contemporary Canadian theatre, queer theory, cultural studies, camp, and addiction studies. Past topics for his speaking engagements include the works of Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee, performance artist Nina Arsenault, rap and video artist Cazwell, Hawksley Workman's play *The God That Comes*, and LGBTQ culture. Thom currently lives in Toronto.

Compulsive Acts:

PAGE 37-39

BACK TO SCHOOL

BY
MICHELLE
MACARTHUR

Three days after excitedly accepting the position of editor-in-chief of *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*, I was offered, and also accepted, a tenure-track assistant professorship at the University of Windsor's School of Dramatic Art. This happy collision of events has borne several opportunities for cross-pollination between my two roles. I have a vested interest in how *alt* can be used in the classroom to enrich syllabi and spark discussion and debate, and find myself mining our archives for material offering alternative perspectives to those dominating our textbooks. For example, later this term students in my first-year Nature of Theatre class will read Catherine Hernandez's Principles Office column from our last issue. Her wide-ranging discussion of everything from arts funding models to theatre's disconnection from the world's conflicts and injustices provides a vital starting point for our unit on the future of Canadian theatre and a counterpoint to the course textbook's handling of diversity, which silos the topic into a single chapter rather than integrating it into a holistic approach.

My work at *alt* also informs how I view the academy. Engaging as an editor with articles that examine art, politics, cultural diversity, and activism from myriad approaches has sharpened my critical perspective as an educator. What is the role of post-secondary institutions in sustaining the glaring inequities in the Canadian theatre industry exposed and examined in the pages of *alt*? What are our responsibilities as educators and administrators in redressing these inequities and ensuring our work has a positive impact beyond the ivory tower? In a time of "alternative facts," when the rights of minoritized and marginalized individuals are under constant threat, how can theatre programs foster critical, ethical, and active citizens? University, college, and conservatory programs play a key role in Canadian theatre ecology, training the next generation of practitioners and influencing everything from their tastes to their creative processes. If Canadian theatre is #sowhite, to borrow the hashtag from my last editorial, then our training grounds bear significant responsibility.

Higher education should be scrutinized on several levels for its contribution (or lack thereof) to diversity and equity in theatre, from the students we recruit and admit to our programs, to the faculty and guest artists we hire to teach for us, to the works and artists we choose to include on our stages and in our curricula. These activities do not operate independently, but are highly imbricated, which also means that failures in one area tend to perpetuate shortcomings in another. For example, a drama department with an all-white faculty may encounter problems attracting culturally diverse students, who, failing to see themselves or their experiences reflected in the program or teaching staff, may choose to go elsewhere for training; when poor recruitment efforts result in a homogenous student body, this same drama department will not be able to cast plays that reflect the diversity of the communities that surround it; a season of plays by and about white people then has a further alienating effect on audiences and prospective students... and the cycle continues.

In preparing for this piece, I asked my editorial assistant Rachel Offer, a BFA acting student here at Windsor who just started with *alt* in the fall (welcome, Rachel!), to look into the last five seasons of our main stage to see how many plays by people of colour were produced here. She found that one play in the last five years (each year consisting of a season of six plays) was written by a non-white playwright. These statistics are sadly not an anomaly: two other Canadian schools with comparable BFA programs had only slightly better results, with one school featuring four plays out of 32 written by playwrights of colour, and another with two out of 24. The gender breakdowns of playwrights at our three schools also reflected inequities: 27% of the plays produced at Windsor in the last five years have been written by women, compared to 19% and 20% at the other two institutions looked at. These findings are in line with Nicholas Hanson and Alexa Elser's research on gender and theatre productions at post-secondary institutions. Their study looked at a sample of 434 school productions over a three-year period in Canada, from 2012 to 2015, and found that 18% were written by women, 73% by men, and 9% by mixed-gender partnerships—lower participation rates than in professional theatre (36). Their conclusion—that "the typical school play is not just an artistic showcase; it reifies a canon of celebrated works and restricts the participation of women" (39)—can be extended to failures in producing culturally diverse works as well. The lack of diversity on our university and college stages not only limits the opportunities afforded to marginalized and minoritized students, but also enforces the idea that artistic work of value is created by white men. Our graduates carry this idea into the professional theatre world—whether consciously or not—and they must contend with it in their roles as audiences, arts workers, and theatre practitioners.

I focus on post-secondary productions here partly because it is top of mind, as my department has just announced a season of six plays for next year that shows no improvement on our track record, but also because our university and college stages reflect the constellation of systemic inequalities discussed earlier. While it is easy to excuse production choices by saying they reflect the resources available to us, we need to stop blaming our shortcomings on the students we don't have, and start to look more critically at our practices and the (broken) systems that support them. Catherine Hernandez suggests several strategies to redress these deep-seated inequities: hiring more diverse teaching staff; educating teaching staff in anti-oppressive values; implementing a "much more aggressive diverse ap-

plication process to ensure the student body is multicultural"; and diversifying the curriculum beyond the canonical (white) narratives that dominate it (30). Prioritizing racialized students, as Hernandez argues, "means we are incubating theatre creators with different perspectives" (30). If we do not prioritize racialized students—and Indigenous students, and LGBTQ students, and women students—then we perpetuate the status quo in our post-secondary institutions and in Canadian theatre more broadly.

The articles featured in 13.2 also address the connections between diversity in education and training and the professional theatre world. In "Decolonizing the Storyteller's Art through Land-Based Practice," developed from their contribution to the working group *Energizing the Acting Community—Realism in Actor Training and Performance*, Jill Carter and Sherry Bie highlight the absence of Indigenous voices in mainstream actor training and practices. Asking whether developing "an energetic, transformative theatre that serves a multi-ethnic, multiply-abled population" means "tossing out European forms, theories, and stories," Carter answers in the affirmative: "[I]f those "others" are not granted admittance to the training grounds (as students and instructors) or granted a platform to speak from, then the inclusion of their forms and/or knowledge systems amounts to little more than misappropriation." Carter and Bie propose an "expanded notions of realism" that considers the land and its ancestors in its processes; these processes of decolonization offer "possibilities of re-worlding that might find their genesis in classrooms and rehearsal halls, then mature to realize their promise on public stages."

Franco Saccucci and Makram (Matt) Ayache also examine how what goes on in the rehearsal hall affects and is affected by the world outside of it. In "On Being (Un)Popular, Pedagogical, and in the Prairies," they reflect on their work using a popular theatre model within the context of a university. They founded In Arms Queer Theatre Company (now known as In Arms Theatre Collective) as students at the University of Alberta to provide a space for LGBTQ "artists and activists who would use their own personal stories to create provocative, engaging, and intentional art, aimed at educating and community building in our mid-size prairie city." Their article details the insights they gained as they negotiated their values as popular theatre practitioners and their formal training as educators, leading them to conclude that queer theatre in 2017 must be educative—not only in its role engaging with the general public, but also in creating opportunities for participants themselves to learn from one another.

Jenna Rodgers, a Calgary-based director and dramaturge and author of this issue's Principles Office column, conceives of mentorship in a similar way, where teaching and learning factor into both ends of the equation. In "Navigating the Chasm," Rodgers reflects on the barriers connected to race, class, and gender that prevent people from ascending from "emerging" to "established" artists. Like the other contributors featured in 13.2, Rodgers turns her attention to education and training, examining how mentorship might be restructured into a process that is educative for mentor and mentee, evolving beyond oppressive practices that "perpetuate inequity" and finding "ways to decolonize theatre practices." Her argument here underlies the other pieces in this issue and Hernandez's article as well: redressing inequities in our training grounds starts with rethinking entrenched notions of artistic value and the practices that spring from them. This process begins when educators commit to going back to school, reconceptualizing ourselves as learners, not just teachers. I hope that these articles, and the rest of the offerings in this issue, will open up further reflection and discussion about the connection between our training institutions and the landscape of professional theatre in Canada.

Before signing off, I want to acknowledge Aaron Franks and Sarah Waisvisz's work on this issue, as it marks their official start as *alt*'s new associate editors. Their bios are included in the contributors page so you can get to know them a little better, and to this end they will each be contributing pieces in future issues as well. Sarah has also been busy online, commissioning reviews for *alt*'s revamped website. Our hope is that by curating regular reviews on culturally diverse and politically engaged theatre across Canada for our website, *alt* can shine the spotlight on companies and artists that do not typically receive a lot of coverage in the mainstream media. We also hope to provide alternative perspectives on theatre and performance occurring in the mainstream, bringing race, gender, class, sexuality, and other facets of identity into the foreground of critical discourse. If you have a show that you would like covered by *alt* or if you'd like to write a review yourself, we welcome you to contact Sarah at reviews@alttheatre.ca. We also welcome you to keep the conversation going by responding to our reviews online at any time through our website or social media.

WORKS CITED

Hanson, Nicholas, and Alexa Elser. "Equity and the Academy: A Survey of Theatre Productions at Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions." *Canadian Theatre Review* 165 (2015): 35-39.

Hernandez, Catherine. "So . . . Why do we do this?" *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*. 13.1 (2016): 28-30.

DECOLONIZING THE STORYTELLER'S ART THROUGH LAND-BASED PRAXIS: A RE-CREATION STORY

BY
SHERRY BIE AND JILL CARTER

Sherry **S** and Jill **J**

This conversation takes up an invitation to engage in a larger conversation with the working group *Energizing the Acting Community—Realism in Actor Training and Performance*, which took place at the annual Canadian Association for Theatre Research/ L 'Association canadienne de la recherche théâtrale conference in May 2016. As we are culture-workers who nurture the artists and "midwife" the stories that imagine new worlds into being (or that reify the old), it fell out quite naturally that our ruminations touched upon models of decolonization—possibilities of re-worlding that might find their genesis in classrooms and rehearsal halls, then mature to realize their promise on public stages.

The story we present here reflects a re-worlding process we undertook to prepare ourselves to sit at the table we had been invited to. This process was developed by Hawaiian scholar Poka Laenui as a socio-political model of decolonization to be taken on by a collective (community, state, nation). Unsurprisingly, it has proven to be a most efficacious model in the personal and familial realms, for the artist (as a dramaturgical model, for instance), and in the classroom, as it offers a possibility of repair in a world shattered by conquest. It tasks us with the **recovery** and **rediscovery** of traditional epistemologies, languages, and ceremonial life. Then, as we begin to take stock of what has been recovered, **mourning** for what has been lost or broken sets in. Mourning is a necessary consequence of any endeavour dedicated to re-righting a shameful history of conquest and correcting the egregious harms wrought by colonial agency. It is, as Laenui reminds us, a necessary stage in the process of decolonization (152). And it is dangerous. We risk becoming mired in it. But it is only the second stage on the journey of authoring a world unbroken by conquest, and we must push past it. Mourning must somehow carry us through the stages of **dreaming**, **commitment**, and finally **action** (Laenui 152) into full recollection and recovery of what it is to be a human being and what it is we owe each other and the rest of the Creation.

Recovery/Re-discovery

"Standing deep within the natural world, the ancient Pueblo understood the thing as it was—the squash blossom, grasshopper, or rabbit itself could never be created by the human hand. Ancient Pueblos took the modest view that the thing itself (the landscape) could not be improved upon. The ancients did not presume to tamper with what had already been created. . . .The squash blossom itself is one thing: itself. So the ancient Pueblo potter abstract[ed] what she saw to be key elements of the squash blossom—the four symmetrical petals, with four symmetrical stamens in the center. These key elements, while suggesting the squash flower, also link it with four cardinal directions. Represented in its intrinsic form, the squash flower is released from a limited meaning . . . [and becomes] intricately connected within a complex system of relationships."

–Leslie Marmon Silko,
Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit, 1996

The voice of the Indigenous theatre maker/teacher has too often been missing in the mainstream discourse/practice of training and performance. In response to the working group's desire to "energize the acting community," the Indigenous theatre artist incites the Western (non-Indigenous . . . me?) artist to consider an expanded notion of realism. To consider the whole biota—a wholeview (cosmology) that includes the land and the ancestors.

S The land is a place I go to when I'm processing story, rather than recovering a voice or sourcing a story. Walking is central to that processing. I seek the tidal flat to walk through and wrestle with complex material. I walk in the old growth forest to unravel and find the rhythm of a difficult idea/feeling. In these instances the land is the specific (chosen) container for an action. My understanding is that this is a different process than the praxis of my Indigenous colleagues who (in Jill's words) "regard every element of the biota as a cherished relative and companion storyteller." However as I articulate this perceived difference, I wonder if this perhaps is part of the lesson the Indigenous artist brings to the non-Indigenous artist—to re-member the presence of the story in the land, merging process with original voice. Or perhaps the relatively recent arrival of the non-Indigenous storyteller is at play here. The Indigenous people have walked on this land for tens of thousands of years. The ancient ear of the Indigenous artist is finely tuned, acutely responsive to the voice of the land.

These are the origins, motivations, and web of relationships that we are exploring in Jill's Indigenous Performance class. She challenges us to articulate our relationship with the living land and then reconsider our work within that context. We read the academic writing of Leanne Simpson, Diane Glancy, and Floyd Favel that reveals theory as a leavening agent to practice. We are discovering the performance impact of the verb-based Anishinaabemowin (Algonquian languages), comparing these to the more static structure of English. Jill speaks of her easy embrace of the Stanislavski-based teachings of Uta Hagen as one layer of many in the Indigenous performer's "real." Indigenous dramaturgy—my actor's imagination is alive with new ways in.

The voice of the Indigenous theatre maker/teacher has too often been missing in the mainstream discourse/practice of training and performance. In response to the working group's desire to "energize the acting community," the Indigenous theatre artist incites the Western (non-Indigenous... me?) artist to consider an expanded notion of realism. To consider the whole biota—a wholeview (cosmology) that includes the land and the ancestors.

J For some years, the discussion in training circles (and in the academic circles) has concerned itself with the need to free the craft from the "oppressive" aesthetic of realism, to discard the "well made play" and to "energize" actors' training by focusing on alternate styles and stories from other cultures. What seems to be missing, quite often, from these programs is the inclusion of the other bodies that carry those alternate knowledge systems and aesthetic practices in their cells. Does the development of an energetic, transformative theatre that serves a multi-ethnic, multiply-abled population truly rely on tossing out European forms, theories, and stories? It seems to me that if those "others" are not granted admittance to the training grounds (as students and instructors) or granted a platform to speak from, then the inclusion of their forms and/or knowledge systems amounts to little more than misappropriation.

My first exposure to "professional" theatre training pulled me into close intimacy with the teachings of Stanislavsky and his "disciples." My "primers," as a young apprentice to the art, were Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art*, *An Actor Prepares*, and *Building a Character*; Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting*; and Sonia Moore's *The Stanislavsky Method*. What I took from my early training (and perhaps I missed the point) was that the aesthetic of realism bases itself in the production of an accurate reflection of the world the artist wishes to reveal, address, celebrate or destroy. Elin Diamond articulates it quite simply as "a mirror held up to nature or reality" (vi). I apprehended that, as Diamond cautions us, "[b]ecause [a realistic aesthetic] naturalizes the relations between character and actor, setting and world, realism operates in concert with ideology. And because it depends, insists on a stability of reference, an objective world that is the source and guarantor of knowledge, realism surreptitiously reinforces... the arrangements of that world" (4-5). But *that* world was "other" to me. And I sought to understand its workings. The "quaint devices" that I was learning to operate—"perspectival" spatial design, proscenium stages, and the arrangement of stage properties and performing bodies—did *not*, for me, "surreptitiously reinforce" the arrangements of the world these devices purported to mirror. Rather, they opened a window onto another reality, which was

previous page: © Jill Carter, 2012. Monique Mojica on Serpent Mound at Curve Lake. Indigenous ancestors in those mounds look out. Looking out, how do they perceive us?

not my own, and helped me to craft the tools with which to diagnose and to intervene upon the lingering vestiges of colonial invasion and the legacy it has wrought.

The "reality" mirrored through these quaint devices cannot be regarded by the Indigenous viewer as a relevant reflection of the facets of existence that live on—above, beneath, beside, and *despite* the violent excesses of colonization: they do not reflect a world in which its denizens might "go to school in dreams, write in iconographic imagery, travel in Trickster's vehicle, talk in metaphor and always walk around" (Linda Akan, qtd. in Archibald 18). The world reflected through the prism of Diamond's proscenium is not a world that needs to speak its mysteries in metaphor or to cloak the sacred with symbolism (Glancy) because there is nothing left to protect in this world. There is no *thing* that is universally acknowledged as sacred in the Western world—except, perhaps, the human "worshippers" themselves. These were important lessons for me to learn. And I am grateful for them.

An Indigenous "realist," for example, may be called upon to put herself onto the land.

S You have suggested that perhaps this is where the "malaise" begins for the would-be theatre worker, in our preoccupation with the material world —"a world overrun with reality television reunions, YouTube stars, and selfies, a world that reverberates with the choral outrage of activists and public intellectuals crying out for the transformation of material circumstances and the redistribution of material goods." Do Canadian artists risk being caught within a singular mode of apprehending a too-thin plane of material existence?

J The genre of realism may rely upon a captured reflection in a mirrored surface. But the degree to which it entraps the viewer in a static, naturalized, and unalterable existence relies precisely upon the type of mechanism that is employed to cast back some likeness of creation, the plane of reality that will be accessed, and the faculties upon which the reflected image will imprint itself. An Indigenous "realist," for example, may be called upon to put herself onto the land. Her purpose here is not to bring back into the performance space a *reflection* of human-to-human relationships against an elemental backdrop that works on the human organism, but rather to discover and come to understand a specific relationality: the mirror she devises "reaffirm[s] the urgent relationships that human beings have with the plant and animal world" (Silko 69). She *recovers* an alternate real(m) that lies beyond mere seeing alone.

Is she resting quietly? Is she weeping with exhaustion or despair? Is she raging? The body is taut, and the shoulders, tense. The hands are balled into fists. Is she pounding on the earth? The toes dig into the grass. Is she trying to sink into the earth?

Consider the image in Figure 1—a reflection of a real moment in time. One viewer contemplates a verdant landscape within which a female form lies prone atop a grassy knoll. Is she resting quietly? Is she weeping with exhaustion or despair? Is she raging? The body is taut, and the shoulders, tense. The hands are balled into fists. Is she pounding on the earth? The toes dig into the grass. Is she trying to sink into the earth?

One witness *reads* the image and uses her ocular faculties to try to interpret the "object" under scrutiny—an "object" that *exists to be read*. A viewer trained in alternate ways of "seeing," by contrast, sees a woman who is, herself, *reading*—and *being read by entities other than the humans who gaze upon her.* Her body is taut with concentration. There are energies speaking to her, filling her, informing her person.

This is, in fact, the captured "reflection" of a devisor-performer who has, in the

FIG 1

© Jill Carter, 2012.
Monique Mojica on Serpent Mound at Curve Lake. Indigenous ancestors in those mounds look out. Looking out, how do they perceive us?

course of her research, entered into an intimate relationship with Serpent mound (Peterborough) upon which she lies and with the unknown woman buried there, face to sky. The grave is unmarked—obscured from prying or hungry eyes. Yet, the presence of the woman it protects has been inexplicably apprehended by Guna-Rappahannock artist Monique Mojica (lying face-to-face with her) in this moment in time through faculties other than physical sight.

This picture documents an early moment of revelation within Monique Mojica's process—a process that has carried her into sustained "embodied engagement with effigy mounds and earthworks" (Mojica 242) across Turtle Island, as she researches her latest show in development *Sideshow Freaks and Circus Injuns*. Out on the land, she has rehearsed and learnt a series of specific actions through which to express that relationship. Mojica's flesh records and documents the knowledge (the stories and songs) that the land relates to her. It records and documents the story of her ever-growing relationship with the land in each new encounter (221), and thus she begins to build a somatic vocabulary through which to embody that relationship. Within this approach, the solid elements belonging to the "real"—elements, perhaps, that might be in some way represented or that might actually be brought into the performance space—reveal themselves to be portals, connecting performer and witness with unseen realities. This "effort required to connect [her] body to the inscriptions made on the land through extraordinary knowledge of [her] ancestors is [her] *realism*" (242, emphasis added).

S There are many layers of existence, and Indigenous aesthetic practices have tradi-
J tionally privileged the dis-covery of realities beyond the fleshly realm. Be that as it may, we are not looking to a "not...but" dialectic to inform our process (i.e., not the material but the spiritual, or vice versa); rather, we propose a wholeview process that embraces and facilitates a balancing of "both" with "and."

Mourning

Let nothing be called natural. In an age of bloody confusion, ordered disorder, planned caprice, and dehumanized humanity, lest all things be held unalterable!

– Bertolt Brecht,
The Exception and the Rule (1937), Prologue.

S The "natural" as gateway to the inalterable. What meaning does naturalism, or "the natural" have for the Indigenous artist?

J During a recent event at which I spoke, a young woman stood up and offered a land acknowledgement. We were (in Takaronto) on the traditional, unceded lands of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, and as such she acknowledged we were all on "occupied" land. I was somewhat saddened. This young woman had already entered mourning and invited us all to take up residency there with her "on occupied land." But it is important to recognize and to acknowledge that the Mississaugas of New Credit have, for good or ill, entered into a modern treaty with the government and settled the fraudulent Toronto Purchase. The Greater Toronto Area may be occupied, but its occupants are under treaty. We are all treaty people. And herein lies the invitation to dream—to move beyond mourning and to envisage the enactment of right relationships emerging from a collective recognition of the unseen limbic connections[1] that mediate the spaces between one and another—between human and non-human, between spirit and flesh. What does "treaty" mean to the settler? How does this inform his understanding of what it means to be in relationship?

S I think of listening. I recall Ryan McMahon (*redmanlaughing* podcast) preparing to talk with Onaman Collective[2] members Christi Belcourt and Isaac Murdoch about their vision of reconciliation. Inspired by the generosity of the land, their views have changed from a rights-based process to one that prioritizes giving reciprocities, a responsibility-based agenda. Belcourt proposes that to restore the balance on the planet, to reconcile our relationship to the earth, we need to give. All the time. Belcourt and Murdoch have committed to this path. In order to earn reconciliation.

We witness a flabbergasted McMahon processing their radical vision for reconciliation:

> A couple of holy shit moments... The key to reconciliation is: giving. I can't even bear the thought of Anishinaabe people... giving even more? Is that really the key to reconciliation? I think it is... Challenge of reconciliation. It will push us all to different places we don't think we can go. I don't have that little place in my heart built. I am not there. But apparently I need to know the budget of the space that I need to build. I need the dimensions and I need to hire a carpenter because the space does not exist inside of me. Giving. How did we get here?... I am swallowing my foot so as not to say anymore. (McMahon, 33:00)

McMahon wrestles with the mic on, in our presence. He endeavours to absorb the Onaman vision—Indigenous giving as the way to reconciliation. Curtapulled back, he struggles in real time to find a place in his being for their provocation. As radical as their proposal is, so, too, is his commitment to reconciling their offer. The goal is urgent, real. And so too his willingness to let us see him in crisis, stumbling to digest, mourning the shift, leaping into the abyss, dreaming. Visible. Unprepared, unmanaged. A rare, necessary performance that reveals a spirited, brave command of the real in performance.

This process of engagement includes a space for mourning. Letting go of the horizon one expected, the outcome one knew. Loss of the friendship, the familiar. We see the query, the effort, the commitment, the action. Mourning the loss is crucial if the possibility for change is to come into being. Dreaming comes next.

We share a focus on listening in our curriculum. McMahon makes evident the vitality of naked listening alongside a commitment to struggle audibly in a public space. To work toward resolution, without the promise of arriving. McMahon models the dynamic potential of acting in a zone of crisis, a place of filter-less response, making real the public act of re-creation. Transformation

is the task; he seeks resolution in community. Is this a shift from the personal, a return to the civic role of theatre? Prioritizing communitas, theatre as a public space where we rehearse (perform) an uncertain leap?

Accompanied by a well-tuned instinct for purposeful silence—McMahon makes space to mourn the precarity of what is lost, acknowledging that the skills to proceed are as yet unavailable. Change is necessary, uncertain. The unknown is named, but not breached. Mourning (public and private, individual and collective) is an important part of the Indigenous process. How might we non-Indigenous mark these difficult passages? I suggest we too must take time to mourn. McMahon's foot-in-mouth time—we need quiet space. (Do we want to include this space in our play making process?)

McMahon offers his map—he will do the work, build space in his being for this proposal—in preparation to enter the uncharted geography where conciliation dwells (This is not re-conciliation; we have not yet arrived.). Is there a parallel action (map) to consider as we re-imagine an energizing theatre that has the reconciling function of a traditional (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) storytelling circle?

J In the midst of mourning, dreaming begins.

Dreaming

High priests and shamans were the world's first actors.

> What shamans do is tell stories; they sing and dance and mime their metaphorical journey through the spirit world where they descend to the land of the dead in search of lost souls. They plunge into a trance state with the help of their drum and they become the mouthpiece of the animal-masters, of the powers that inhabit a place. The dead and the ancestors speak through their mouths, in a word, they update the myth; they reinterpret it in an attempt to answer the collective angst, the pathological chaos, the sickness. (Durand 57)

Some years ago, I saw Ted Chamberlain read from *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* During the discussion that followed, Chamberlain passionately asserted that the purpose and function of story are to help us stand and withstand in the face of death. For the Anishinaabeg, creation is a web of story. We are each a bead in the tapestry, each a thread in the weave. We live forever within story because we have been woven into it. Our tellings of that story on the page, in wood, on birch-bark, through our earthworks, or through our corporeal instruments reflect and affirm this knowledge. With each new telling we invoke (literally *re-present*) those who also live in the story although they have ended their visit on this earth. We re-call them to the present moment because our need to see them is so great. We need to remind ourselves that our lives do matter, that our actions do resonate—that, yes, we do indeed continue on, and our struggles are not in vain.

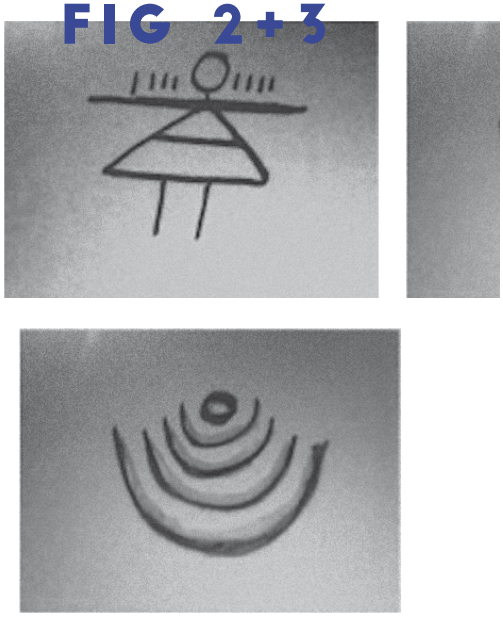
Our process of creation reflects this knowledge. Our reception of the story reminds us of this teaching. Our "actor" becomes the subject of the telling: mimesis is not an art we need to master; it is within us—a gift of nature; and if we weave the story respectfully, our instinct to engage in mimesis will result in the complete transformation of the moment of telling. We stand in the face of death, and we neither deny nor defy. Death is part of the story also. We stand to meet death; death stands beside us. And in the moment of the telling, death parts the veil and shows us that we need not fear: we live in the story... forever...

This is the work of re-worlding that so many Indigenous artists (Deba-jeh-mu-jig, Yves Sioui Durand, Floyd Favel, LeAnne Howe, Jani Lauzon, Monique Mojica, etc.) have undertaken. This is work that summons, for a moment, our dead into the circle and that bids them dance. It is work that asserts life in the face of death, that enlists hope to smother despair, that re-members the dismembered and connects the fragments of a dislocated sense of self and personal history. It is work that knits into our bones the certainty that our Indigenous ancestors dreamed our coming and that they are happy we are still here. This is work that reaches back into the ancient Indigenous imaginary to re-cover traditional epistemologies and practices and to distill from these the aesthetic principles through which to craft communal healing.

The project of re-worlding presents devisors, performers, and those who train Indigenous actors with the challenge of devising a curriculum through which the Indigenous performer might transcend the expected address to the Western (visual) human (see RCAP, IV, iii) to communicate perpetual movement and process and to ensure that this mode of communication informs and is informed by relationship. How might we begin to access the pathways that nest within our cells and rest within our bones to connect ourselves to the knowledge systems of our ancestors—scripts painstakingly inscribed by those ancestors "not simply *on* the land but literally through *the medium* of the land itself" (Mojica 220, quoting from Chadwick Allen)?

For over 25 years, (individually and as erstwhile collaborators) Favel and Mojica have laboured to access these pathways and to devise exercises and training modules that will help contemporary storytellers to do the same. A key exercise included in the process of Favel and of Mojica (during the first phase of *Chocolate Woman's* development) is the somatic inscription of pictographs that she then committed to paper to render the pictographic notations, which became her script. On page or stage, the pictographs map the unseen connections between the three worlds (sub-earth, earth, and skyworld) charting a course for the human actors who are relationally positioned to and in relationship with these tangible invisibilities.

FIG 2+3



© Jill Carter. Renderings by Jill Carter.

FIG 4

© Ric Knowles. Monique Mojica in *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* (2011). Here, her body inscribes a pictograph, which denotes the Light Bearing Warrior whose story she recounts.

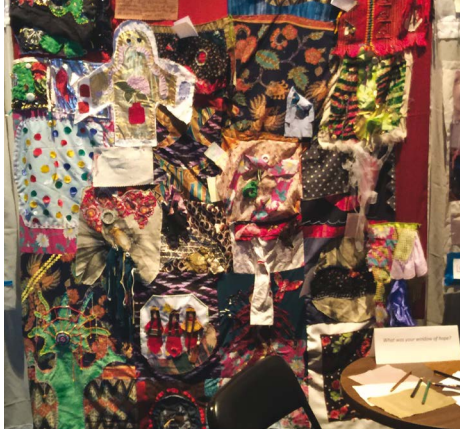
This hand-drawn copy (see Figure 2+3) of two symbols (originally, abstracted by Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule in his set design for Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*) constitutes my own rendering of symbols one might find in Guna medicine chants documented in pictograph. Such documents, it seems to me, function as facsimiles of literal "prescriptions." Here, a stricken female (the nature of her illness represented by the vertical lines emanating from her arms) requires the intervention of a healer who will travel through four layers of reality (represented in Figure 2) to battle with the entity that has abducted her *burba* (or life force).[3] In the realm of the material or the earth plane (represented by the circle in Figure 3), the gatherer of plant medicines will be able to identify the correct plant (because she is able to identify the specific plane of existence that each plant occupies). The Guna specialist, like the Pueblo artist, creates a point of focus that allows the viewer (*in relationship*) to make contact with "all the spirits" of the thing itself (Silko 29).

Mojica's rediscovery, renewal, embodiment and notation of these connections relied upon recovering traditional Guna aesthetic principles, upon learning to read the sacred texts and medicine chants, upon learning the old stories, upon putting her ancestral language in her mouth, and upon placing her feet upon the white sands, the dense rainforests, and the coastal mountains of Guna Yala. This intense encounter with ancestral land gave Mojica the (somatic) vocabulary through which to disseminate "sacred text"—a realistic reflection of an *action* of spirit from a real(m) beyond mortal sight (see Favel, in Forsythe 9).

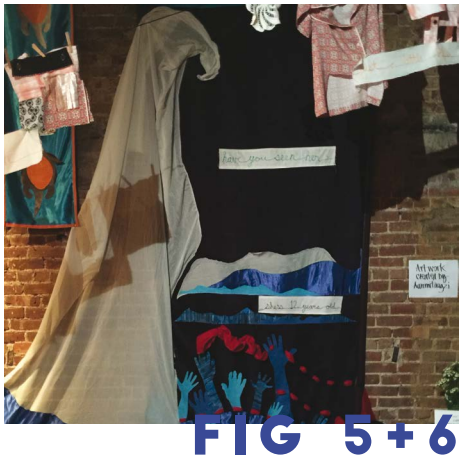
Commitment

So Jill, in class we spoke often about the re-creation story, how in each telling the process of creation re-occurs. Performing in the present moment is important for the non-Indigenous theatre, too. Yet I think we have different ways of perceiving what this actually means, what re-creation means and more importantly what it does. In Western theatre, by and large, time (past, present, future) and experience are not *conflated*, as they are in Indigenous ceremony. I am interested in understanding the Indigenous model of re-creation more finely.

What if we came to the theatre to enter a space where multiple layers (generations?) of spirit were at work, how would that alter the theatrical event? What would we bring to the encounter? How would we prepare differently? It might become important (energizing) to develop a more nimble reciprocal space (or structure) that is open-ended, unfinished—to leave a space for the action to be completed by audience and performer(s) together on the day.



© Jill Carter, May 2016. Company and Community Installation for *Material Witness* (La MaMa Theater, NYC).



© Jill Carter, May 2016. *"She's Twelve Years Old": Calling Out to the Missing and Murdered.* Company and Community Installation for *Material Witness* (La MaMa Theater, NYC).

FIG 5+6

BORNE UP BY A MULTITUDE OF SISTERS, I FELT WHOLE DESPITE THE PHYSICAL SCARS I BEAR. DESPITE MY FRAGMENTED UNDERSTANDING OF MY OWN HISTORY AND IDENTITY, I KNEW BELONGING DESPITE A LIFETIME OF MESSAGES THAT TOLD ME THAT I WAS ONE WHO SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN BORN. I KNEW THAT MY MOTHER LOVES ME, THAT I CAN AND SHOULD DRAW BREATH WITHOUT APOLOGY.

Throughout the nations, Indigenous artisans have always deliberately woven a "flaw" into their creations to allow the spirit of creation to escape the piece they are completing, so that the work will be able to continue throughout the generations. When Spiderwoman Theater began in 1974, it embraced this aesthetic, and has continued to do so throughout two generations of practice. In relinquishing the authority with which the unassailable "perfection" of the product endows its creator (the one who arranges and communicates story) space is made for the witness/auditor to enter and participate. Audiences become highly invested co-creators in the project. Relationship and reciprocity are sustained throughout the encounter. The story is never over. It is told to be retold by multiple voices across time. With each new telling, the lives and doings of a new generation are woven into the story, and with each new telling, new worlds are born.

In May 2016, La MaMa Theater (NYC) premiered the re-creation of a work that catapulted Spiderwoman Theater to the world stage in 1976. *Material Witness* is a retelling, as it were, of Spiderwoman's *Women in Violence*. Now, 40 years later, a new group of women is in conversation with the old story, with its former tellers (their director Muriel Miguel, as well as Gloria Miguel, now speaking to them onstage from her experience as Elder and guide), and with a contemporary audience of women in violence who wove *their* experiences into the greater whole. Their witnesses spoke back—on stage, from the front of house, and from the place of witnessing. Our missing and murdered were there; our words greeted the actors and fellow witnesses as they entered the performance space; our mothers, aunties, sisters, and friends spoke to us from every corner of the room. And we spoke back – into story, our hearts rising to dance with the actors on stage.

The Indigenous artist *sees* her witness, just as the Indigenous specialist sees the apprentice. Artist and specialist enter into conversation with witness and learner. The work, then, is a catalyst to conversation—an invitation to wholly participate. A reminder that we are all responsible for the stories we tell,

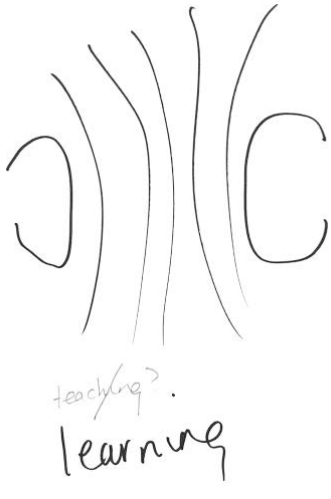
FIG 7

© Jill Carter. *A Multitude of Sisters*. Company and Community Installation for *Material Witness* (La MaMa Theater, NYC, May 2016).

the stories that are told to and of us, and the meaning that we create in the encounter. This, it seems to me, is an assertion of a commitment to *respect*—to honour—all of the creation and a primary lesson in realizing commitment in action.

S I see a "both.. and" lesson in this paradigm as we approach the way to decolonization. Relinquishing authority as co-inhabitants of this land and as storytellers? What happens when we relinquish authority? What does that look like? That is a question to explore. There is hard work to do to prepare the space for that work to begin, work that includes facing the issue of the land. How do we resolve the difficult issue of 'proprietorship'—how do we re-establish relationships on the land, in our theatres, across the spaces that affirm (or deny) our (re-) creation myths? Are these not the issues that define curriculum? If we accept that this work is to be done, then we also accept that every class we teach is a step toward or away from the possibility of decolonization and re-conciliation. Once I inhale that reality, once I accept the overwhelming reach of the overdue ask, I find energy in leading a class that struggles to enact its purpose. I see Jill's artist/master in conversation with the witness/learner. I see those roles invert and revert. Learners all—unstable, out of balance, seeking a place of preparedness—we look to each other to fortify our resolve.

FIG 8



© Sherry Bie. Ear to Ear. Rendering by Sherry Bie.

Action

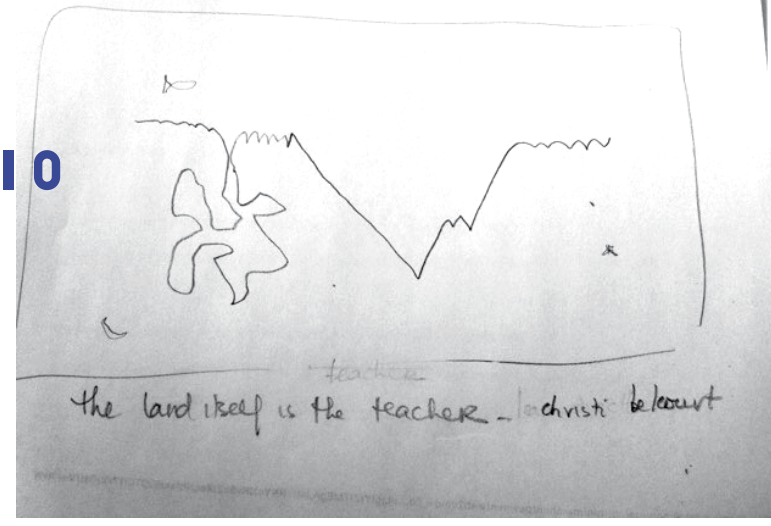
S This "messy," unfinished tapestry of thoughts and questions is the "tobacco" we bring to the table. It is an offer that invites collective participation in the generation of new ideas (and the recovery of ancient knowledge systems, praxis and principles) to re-story—together—our lives on these ancient territories, now known as "Canada."

In this liminal space, perhaps, we can begin to open ourselves to different modes of seeing and hearing, and to embrace alternative realities—the "both... and" aesthetic—without discarding one in favour of another. Here, perhaps, is where we can begin to story into action—action in the audition room, action in the rehearsal hall, stage-action, and the actions involved in reception and assessment—a (re) creation story that begins with our collective decolonization.

J The Anishinaabeg have long lived within a framework of seven foundational teachings. Embodied and enacted together each day throughout one's life, we are taught, leads one to achieve a balanced relationship with the creation on all four planes of being. These teachings are generally translated as nouns when they appear in English: wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. In Anishinaabemowin, they appear to us as verbs—a series of seven perpetual actions humans must undertake to maintain the delicate balance of life: Gikendaasowin, Zaagidwin, Maanaajiwin, Zoongideyewin, Gwuyukaajwin, Dabasenimoowin, Debwemowin. We are at every moment to *do*, wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth.

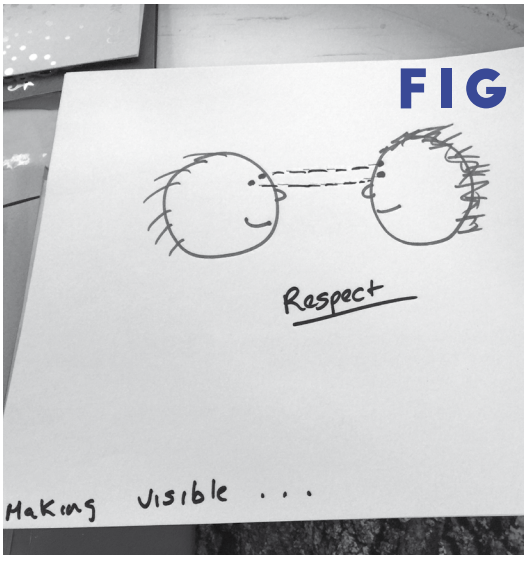
Almost all of my students (regardless of their background) reverence these teachings and cite them often. And then I ask them to *show* me or to describe to me how they "do respect." Invariably, these students describe elevated feelings to me, not actions. The pictograph method, utilized and brought forward by artists like Favel and Mojica, counters this problem. It concretizes the abstract and brings it into the "real" by distilling concept to action. Respect, for me, is an action: I consciously and conscientiously see

FIG 10



© Sherry Bie. Inspired by Michif artist Christi Belcourt in conversation with McMahon. (14:35, The Onaman Collective Interview, *Red Man Laughing* Season 5). Rendering by Sherry Bie.

FIG 9



© Jill Carter. An Exercise in Activating the Teachings: Respect. Rendering by Jill Carter.

humans and non-humans as they were meant to be seen—as sacred, necessary relatives who are participating (with me) in the ongoing processes of creation.

To train students in the *doing* of respect we might have students first story its motion in pictograph and then take that distilled action into day-to-day activity: to apprehend the sacred in the mundane and to allow that apprehension to infuse every encounter, every conversation, and every task in each moment. What sort of somatic vocabulary / action-score might they create if they were to repeat this exercise for each of the seven teachings? To what representations of "reality" would we then be committing ourselves and the generation of artists to whose training we are now privileged to contribute? What new worlds might we (co-)write into being?

S The re-worlding starts here…
J

NOTES

1 In their *A General Theory of Love*, Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon dismiss the notion that the nervous system of an individual mammal is self-contained; as the brain develops, so does the mammalian creature's ability to share an intangible intimacy that they call "'limbic resonance'—a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other's inner states" (63).

2 Onaman Collective takes its name from the enduring red ochre paint that is used both as a traditional source of healing medicine and art making (pictographs). Artists Issac Murdoch, Christi Belcourt,and Erin Konsmo formed the collective in 2014 to explore ways to converge land-based art creation with traditional knowledge, Indigenous languages, youth and Elders.

3 This interpretation of the original figures, here copied and rendered by me, was provided by Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule, who served as Guna Cultural Advisor and Set Designer for Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* (see Carter, *Repairing* 317). The symbols themselves, I copied from the abstracted symbols DeLeón Kantule created for the set design. Developmental workshops for this work began in 2007 under the direction of Floyd Favel, and the show premiered at the Helen Phelan Gardiner Playhouse in Toronto, ON in 2011 under the direction of José Colman.

WORKS CITED

Archibald, Joanne. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

Brecht, Bertolt. *The Exception and the Rule*. 1937. Qtd. at /en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Bertolt_Brecht.

Chamberlain, J. Edward. *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?: Finding Common Ground*. [Reading] Hart House Library, University of Toronto, 4 November 2003.

Diamond, Elin. *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Durand, Yves Sioui. "Ondinnok: The First Nations Theatre of Quebec." Trans. Meg Moran. *Canadian Theatre Review* 150 (Spring 2012): 56-60.

Forsythe, James. "The Pains Cree Grotowski." *alt. theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 2.2 (2002): 9-11.

Glancy, Diane. "Scene 5: Endnotes on Salvage: Writings on the Process of Writing Native Theatre." *North American Indian Drama*. Alexander Street Press, 2009. Web.

Laenui, Poka. "Processes of Decolonization." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Ed. Marie Battiste. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000. 150-160.

McMahon, Ryan. "The Onaman Collective Interview." Audio blog post. *Red Man Laughing*, 7 September 2015. www.redmanlaughing.com/listen/2015/9/red-man-laughing-s5-the-onaman-collective-interview.

Mojica, Monique. "In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities." *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre Volume* 2. Ed. Roberta Barker and Kim Solga. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012. 218-242.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996). www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1307458586498/1307458751962.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Spiderwoman Theater. *Material Witness* (formerly *Women in Violence—The Next Generation*). Performance. Dir. Muriel Miguel. La MaMa Theater, New York City. 12-29 May 2016.

How do I start a theatre company?

Matt asked David Barnet, his then professor at the University of Alberta and the artistic director of the intergenerational Edmonton-based theatre group, GeriActors.

Well, I started the Catalyst Theatre in my basement with a few friends.

ON BEING (UN)POPULAR, PEDAGOGICAL, AND IN THE PRAIRIES: THE EDUCATIVE CAPACITY OF PARTICIPATORY SOCIAL JUSTICE THEATRE IN CANADA

BY MAKRAM (MATT) AYACHE
AND FRANCO SACCUCCI

You started Catalyst Theatre?

Matt didn't realize he was talking to the founder of one of the biggest theatre companies in Edmonton.

In his characteristically humble fashion, David redirected the conversation to the original question.

You just do it. Bring together a group of dedicated people, and begin.

Inspired by his conversation with David Barnet, Makram (Matt) Ayache founded In Arms Queer Theatre Company (now known as In Arms Theatre Collective) in 2014, eventually becoming its artistic producer. In 2015, Franco Saccucci joined the company as its education facilitator, providing LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) inclusivity workshops, consulting with artists, and helping create storytelling sessions. Our plan—somewhat naive but truly hopeful—was conceived in order to create a community-based LGBTQ theatre company in Edmonton. We envisioned the birth of a community of artists and activists who would use their own personal stories to create provocative, engaging, and intentional art, aimed at educating and community building in our mid-size prairie city. The bottom line was to create a heightened education experience for both artist and audience, the learner and the teacher.

This reflexive essay is a culmination of the many thoughts and ideas that surround the journey of a community-based theatre company with a queer mandate in Edmonton, Alberta, in its first year of existence. We reflect not only on the learnings from the first year of In Arms, but also on its impact on our work and identities as artist-educators. As we are trained and practice as teachers, we cannot help but reflect on this experience as educative for audiences, for artists, and for us—a blurring of lines at times between who taught and who learnt.

As we begin to reflect on the conditions of a new theatre, we see how easy in theory the idea of a public theatre is, and how different in execution it has proved to be. The pressures of this public, democratic space "for the people" remind us of theatre's educative role, its role in popular education, and its role in creating just and knowledgeable societies: a similar mandate of the Canadian public school system. At times during our early work with In Arms, our neoliberal teacher training led us to conflicts with our principles of popular education. Whereas popular education is education for and by the people, public school teaching is less democratic, more teacher-centric, and creates much larger power dynamics between learner/teacher. As this essay accounts, we struggled to stay committed to our principles of popular education in the pursuit of an activist theatre company. Our own philosophies of education and activism struggled as we tried to keep a non-hierarchal, grassroots community arts group, while still working towards an artistic and educative product. Our capitalist teacher selves, driven by product, discipline, and power, struggled with our activist and artistic selves, which were driven by process (not product), group decision making, and anti-power.

– ON BEGINNINGS

In Arms Theatre Collective was born out of two specific experiences. For both of us, our work from 2013 to present day as Youth Leaders in the University of Alberta's Camp fYrefly (Canada's only national leadership retreat for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirited, intersexed, queer, questioning, and allied youth) introduced us to a world of activism that aligned with our values. Our experience at the camp planted words and actions in areas of our minds and hearts where these values sat intuitively. It was like being awakened, an awakening that we have heard other educators, activists, and artists describe when they recall their initial understandings of social justice. Like our fellow camp leaders, we asked ourselves, "Where do we go after a four-day leadership retreat that delivered on its promise to be a life changing experience?" We were afraid of relapsing—falling back asleep, so to speak.

Both of us entered our final years of a degree in Education, majoring in Drama and English. A year of teaching internships, and we were quickly sucked into that hurricane. The hurricane of "falling asleep." Also known as getting too comfortable in neoliberal teaching practice. For Matt, the second experience came accidentally, when he enrolled in David Barnet's class in 2014 because it was the only available one that fit his graduation requirements. His work with GeriActors, under David's experienced leadership, allowed him to find parallels between the learning process at Camp fYrefly with the potentially pedagogical relationship between actors and audience. Almost serendipitously, Matt began cultivating a practice of community-based theatre: it was the perfect interspace of education and theatre, and he felt like he was home, awakened again.

We remember clamorously walking into the studio at the University of Alberta, setting up the chairs, arranging the overhead projector, and reviewing our slides in the minutes before the participants arrived for the first community pitch for In Arms. We had sent out a call through the Drama department's email server and garnered a surprisingly enthusiastic response. "Interested in being part of a queer theatre company? Come for the information session on November 10 in FAB 2-43." Like any artists, we had a healthy amount of self-doubt and when the first knock came to the door, the nervousness stunted us. The questions arose for us: Can we even be leaders in this kind of work? Do we have the artistic experience to helm this project? Are we ready for this kind of commitment and labour?

Regardless, the group poured into the room. Twenty-six people showed up to that first session. Matt shared the eight-month plan, outlining the three phases culminating in a show in the 2015 Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival. Phase one would entail a series of community-building workshops crafted by Matt and a host of guest facilitators. Phase two would take the group through the core set of storytelling workshops, where participants would share stories that would inform the development of the script. The final phase included rehearsing a completed script and putting up the show.

Can we even be leaders in this kind of work? Do we have the artistic experience to helm this project? Are we ready for this kind of commitment and labour?

The energy was palpable and the buzz was enigmatic, a mixture of fear married to excitement in the best possible collaboration. It served as a fuel that took us back to the drawing room in preparation for the many months ahead.

– ON QUEER GEOGRAPHY

Never during (or before) this process did we consider how our geographical location played a role in the creation or necessity of this company. However, in hindsight, it had everything to do with it. The need for this company was a call to respond to the lack of a consolidated queer theatre presence in Edmonton, and a hope to become like one of the other many queer theatres this country offers. The Frank Theatre in Vancouver and the famous Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto both prove to be gold standards of queer theatre in

previous left page © Makram (Matt) Ayache. Creative team members of In Arms Queer Theatre Company's *(Un)Known Stories*, 2015.

Canada. Conversations with Chris Gatchalian, artistic producer of the former, proved to be invaluable. Gatchalian shared advice on how to structure the company and gave insight on the funding process. Buddies in Bad Times inspired us from afar, creatively and artistically. By exploring their history and works, we were charged to see how In Arms would take shape. However, Edmonton was a different place, which brought a different set of contextual variables. Calgary's queer theatre, Third Street Theatre, seemed a more realistic exemplar, as they work from a similar sociocultural landscape as us. Jonathan Bower, Third Street's Artistic Director, encouraged us to get involved with existing queer theatre artists and troupes in Edmonton. He also advised some pragmatic approaches on how to market the theatre company. It gave us hope that Third Street Theatre was able to sustain itself in the Prairies.

In aligning with community-based practices, to speak to our Edmontonian audience, we needed Edmontonians to tell their stories about their experiences of gender identity and sexuality in the city—these stories would then form the basis for our Fringe show. This was also important so that the experiences on the stage were authentic to the context of the place, allowing audiences to better engage with the stories and learning. However, with all the nostalgia, memory, and identity that a place brings, it was difficult to try and perform a show that fully captured the experience of a queer Edmontonian. Beyond the mosaic that constitutes queer identities and queer theatre, we continue to ask ourselves if racialized, non-English speakers, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples were well represented. Were the experiences of trans(gender), non-binary, HIV positive, and sex workers represented in our creative process? These

Beyond the mosaic that constitutes queer identities and queer theatre, we continue to ask ourselves if racialized, non-English speakers, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples were well represented. Were the experiences of trans(gender), non-binary, HIV positive, and sex workers represented in our creative process?

are central intersections of many queer Edmontonians, and capturing all of these intersections is crucial to the role of a truly community-based theatre. Yet, we had difficulty recruiting LGBT Edmontonians from diverse experiences to participate in the project. And, if the story and performer of that story aren't there throughout the process, how could we equitably devise a performance with that narrative in it while upholding standards of performer-created/devised theatre?

For those other prairie cities hoping for queer theatre collectives to arise: begin. But, begin small. You have to begin somewhere, and there is a network of us in Canada supporting you. From Victoria to Halifax, the Canadian queer theatre landscape is emerging, although the development is clearly different from city to city. This year, Simon Fraser University and The Frank Theatre in Vancouver hosted Q2Q: A Symposium on Queer Theatre and Performance in Canada, a conference dedicated to the reflection and advancement of Canadian queer theatre.[1] This is only one of the many exemplars of the consolidated efforts across this country working toward the development (and sustainability of) Canadian queer theatre.

– ON THE PROCESS OF "PROCESS-BASED" DRAMA

As with any community-based or popular theatre project, a tremendous amount of the growth is for the artists as well as the audience. In Arms was not going to be the exception. Like any popular education initiative, it was important for In Arms to operate by the people, for the people. If we could architect a model community, then our art would inevitably echo those values. We wrote a constitution for the collective, and one of our points stated that we are a community that collectively manages all aspects of the theatre company but the final decision is that of the artistic director. Much like the GeriActors, this non-hierarchal, but inescapably hierarchical, approach to the structure of the company gave us a managerial distinction that sought to emphasize qualities of social equity and equality. This structural distinction awarded us funding through the University of Alberta's Public Interest Research Group (APRIG).

We graciously accepted this support, but in many ways it was a point of contention for the popular educators in us. Upon getting funding by a university group, we realized we were university students, inspired by our university training, working on university ground. Were we removing ourselves "from the people"? With our model of operation, who was left out? How was our mandate compromised? In other words, how would our work engage LGBTQ people who cannot easily access the university? This left the questions: Were we truly a community-based theatre group for the people, by the people? Or a group by the students, for the students? And, in turn, was this still community-based theatre? How did student involvement, and more specifically university involvement, compromise our pillars of equity and access? Would all community members want to travel to the university to rehearse? On the other hand, innovation and learning often stem from the "public" research University. Were we to blame? Nonetheless, as with any student group, the early months of the project were fizzing with potential energy and the artists were excited for what was to manifest from this point. Possibilities were endless.

In the beginning stages of devising the piece(s), we welcomed participants to come to as many or as few workshops as they wanted. We figured that if someone needed to be in

previous right page © Makram (Matt) Ayache. In Arms Queer Theatre Company workshop participants, 2015.

© Makram (Matt) Ayache. Creative team members of In Arms Queer Theatre Company's *(Un)Known Stories*, 2015.

this kind of space but could not perform in the final show for reasons that are all too common in the LGBTQ community, then we couldn't stop their participation. Yet, as well-intentioned as the revolving door model was to the workshop process, this fluid participation became a distraction and lowered the group's dedication and morale, due to inconsistent and sporadic involvement. In relation to our experience as school teachers, imagine this: if students in a class were permitted to come and go as they pleased, only attending classes when they felt it was necessary, how would this affect the entire class? This made us wonder: How can we uphold the principles of popular education, but maintain accountability? To ensure attendance and dedication, we were tempted by the processes of assessment and hierarchy. What is the role of the classroom without the test? Without a grade to add to a transcript? Did we have to re-establish this workshop process as a certificate program to ensure commitment? Finally, as teachers, we had been trained to work in a way that went against popular theatre principles. This proved to be very difficult, and in turn pushed us to question if using a popular education model for this community-based theatre practice was really the best choice for an emerging theatre company. Maybe we were theoretically well-versed in popular education, but in praxis, under-qualified.

In *A Primer for Philosophy and Education*, Sam Rocha encourages us to not "attend learning" for the reward, to take risks without attached grades, and to build community beyond the neoliberal educative requirements of "collaboration and participation." We had to remember that genuine community building and the heartfelt desire to risk, perform, and share needed to remain at the centre of this process, or we would be giving into the neoliberal demands that often exert pressure on our public school teacher identities. But yet, for both of us, our "teacher-selves" of expecting participation, assessing quality of work, and working within a hierarchy provided an intrapersonal divide within us as we struggled to become popular theatre educators.

Collective members also held competing points of view on what kind of production we wanted to create. Rather than realizing and accepting that this was part of the artistic creation process, in fear we gripped the reins tighter than we should have. The collective collaboration and decision-making model didn't play out as expected in the second phase, and we felt ourselves relying on our hierarchical model from public school teaching in order to get "results." Queerness demands diversity of style, thinking, performance, and understandings. This is what we ask in the psychosocial world, and this is what should be asked in the creative space of a queer theatre company. Though we encouraged diversity and dissention, production dates neared and our anxiousness for product began to outweigh our initial commitment to process. However, we learned that only in retrospect, and we place much blame for the lack of collaboration on our leadership style. In the nebulousness of non-hierarchical organization, we found ourselves spearheading much of the directing, writing, and producing. This was not an appropriate strategy in a queer theatre company that founded itself on principles of communal operation. Interestingly, in the post mortem of the Fringe show, it was expressed by many that a hierarchal model of operation would allow more freedom and direction at each level. And in the second (and current) year of the company, we transitioned into a hierarchal model, eliminating number 11 of our constitution, our funding, and possibly our principle of popular theatre. Was this for the best or worst? We couldn't tell, but, the need for this company in the community was clear and the organization had to foster sustainability. In this case, that was a hierarchy, which we do not necessarily look at as a failure.

Perhaps queering the organization of the company distinguished us. By "queering" we mean opposing and actively challenging capitalist notions of productivity and hierarchy. Yet a capitalist hierarchical business model won, but we're not sure if this means that the queerness of the company diminished. Does In Arms maintain its integrity as a queer theatre company or did it sell its values of equality and equity in favour of productivity, and in turn the structure that works against equity? What does queering the structure and organization of a theatre company (or any non-profit dedicated to social justice for that matter) look like in a neoliberal capitalist world? Is it possible?

Despite all matters of strife,
the show must go on.
And it did.

The show *(Un)Known Stories*, co-directed by Matt Ayache and Stuart McDougall, featured a full female cast and wove multiple stories siphoned from the participants of the company during the workshop phase in a mosaic. The show centres on six different stories that explore asexuality, bisexuality, and lesbianism. Two young women navigate a new relationship, another deals with the fallout of coming out to her mother, and yet another two struggle to reconcile their faith and their sexuality. The show was full of humour but had earnest moments of a human struggle for love and acceptance. Actors played various roles as the stories interwove on stage and came together at the top and the bottom of the show. It closed with a simple statement: "I am… Human."

The cast and crew were chosen, through an audition and application process, by the participants of the company. Celeste Birgalis, Ashleigh Hicks, Kelsi Kalmer, Rhiannon Perley-Waugh, and Maggie Salopek played multiple characters throughout the series of vignettes that made up the show. Caitlin Hart and Brianna Kolybaba worked as designers and Krystal Johnson stage-managed the production. The official script was put together by Matt Ayache, Ashleigh Hicks, Liam Salmon, and Marco Visconti by weaving together the tapestry of stories that Phase Two's storytelling workshops produced. Production helpers included Sarah Culkin, Silverius

Does In Arms maintain its integrity as a queer theatre company or did it sell its values of equality and equity in favour of productivity, and in turn the structure that works against equity? What does queering the structure and organization of a theatre company (or any non-profit dedicated to social justice for that matter) look like in a neoliberal capitalist world? Is it possible?

Materi, Andrea Ruschin, and Franco Saccucci, who served in administrative and background roles, from managing the Facebook page, helping in marketing, and providing educative consultation. *(Un)Known Stories* garnered a 4 out of 5 star review in the *Edmonton Journal* where a self-identified "cis-straight man" said he found a lot relatability and humanity in the show.

We couldn't help but reflect on this review and wonder whether we had done our job. Since a non-queer person has learnt and empathized with a queer narrative, had we succeeded? Was, in fact, the role of this community-based theatre company for the education of the audience, or for us? It was after the dust had settled and the reviews had been written that we finally asked ourselves what the role of a community-based theatre should be. Our teacher-selves argued that it is educative, but yet we did not know who the learners were. Who was teaching: was it the facilitators for the performers, or was it the performers for the audience? How were we to assess this learning? We eventually came to the realization that we shouldn't be concerned with this dichotomy of teacher/student, as this wasn't a schooling experience; it was educative and somehow we all taught and learned. The conclusion of the show came with a sense of pride for what it had accomplished with the audience, but that was noticeably paled by the sentiments of dissatisfaction in the feedback from the participants. Here, our teacher identities were torn up. We've been taught that success of learning equals high grades, and that means we've done our jobs as educators. But in this model of popular education, we had to stay in the intermediate space of wonder: **Did we do our job?**

– A FINAL NOTE ON OUR ANXIOUS, PEDAGOGICAL, AND ARTISTIC SELVES

All of the parts of our selfhood came alive and died several times during this process: we realize none of these parts have a life without each other. Our educator identities learned from the artistic, and the artistic identities worked with our educator identities, all in the pursuit of why we do what we do: to educate and create. In this moment, we stay confident that the role of a queer theatre in 2017 must be educative. We continue to live in a culture where schools opt-out of queer education, where religion and sexuality collide, and where Pride Inc. reigns as the national component of "queer" visibility. The role of queer, community-based theatre is not only that of a teacher, but of a learner. As much as we had to reexamine the pillars of popular education, hierarchy, productivity, and maintaining personal philosophies, we all came out of this year having learned about each other and ourselves, which has and always will be the role of the theatre.

In Arms Theatre Collective is currently in its second year of production. Its second mainstage show, Fix/Flux, *is directed by Stuart McDougall, designed by Brianna Kolybaba, and devised by five Edmonton actors. The show uses queer source material to explore permanence and progress. Fix/Flux premiered on September 28, 2106.*

NOTE

1 To read more about Q2Q: A Symposium on Queer Theatre and Performance in Canada, see this issue's Dispatch by lee williams boudakian, Laine Zisman Newman, and Anoushka Ratnarajah.

WORK CITED

Rocha, Samuel D. *A Primer for Philosophy and Education*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014.

© Makram (Matt) Ayache. In Arms Queer Theatre Company members during the creative process, 2015.

SERIES: THE PRINCIPLES OFFICE

— For Volume 13, *alt.theatre* is running a series of short articles (one or two per issue) called The Principles Office (PrOf), curated by artist Donna-Michelle St. Bernard on behalf of ADHOC (Artists Driving Holistic Organizational Change). ADHOC is a national advocacy organization dedicated to the sustained forward movement of ethno-cultural and socially diverse performance works, processes, and traditions.

PrOf offers a platform for practising professionals to engage in a nuanced analysis of contemporary issues in the performance community. With a focus on clarity, values, and distinction of voice, PrOf features disparate views in an ongoing conversation where it is not impolite to eavesdrop.

In the articles that follow, contributors have been asked to reflect on a shift in position, perspective, or practice.

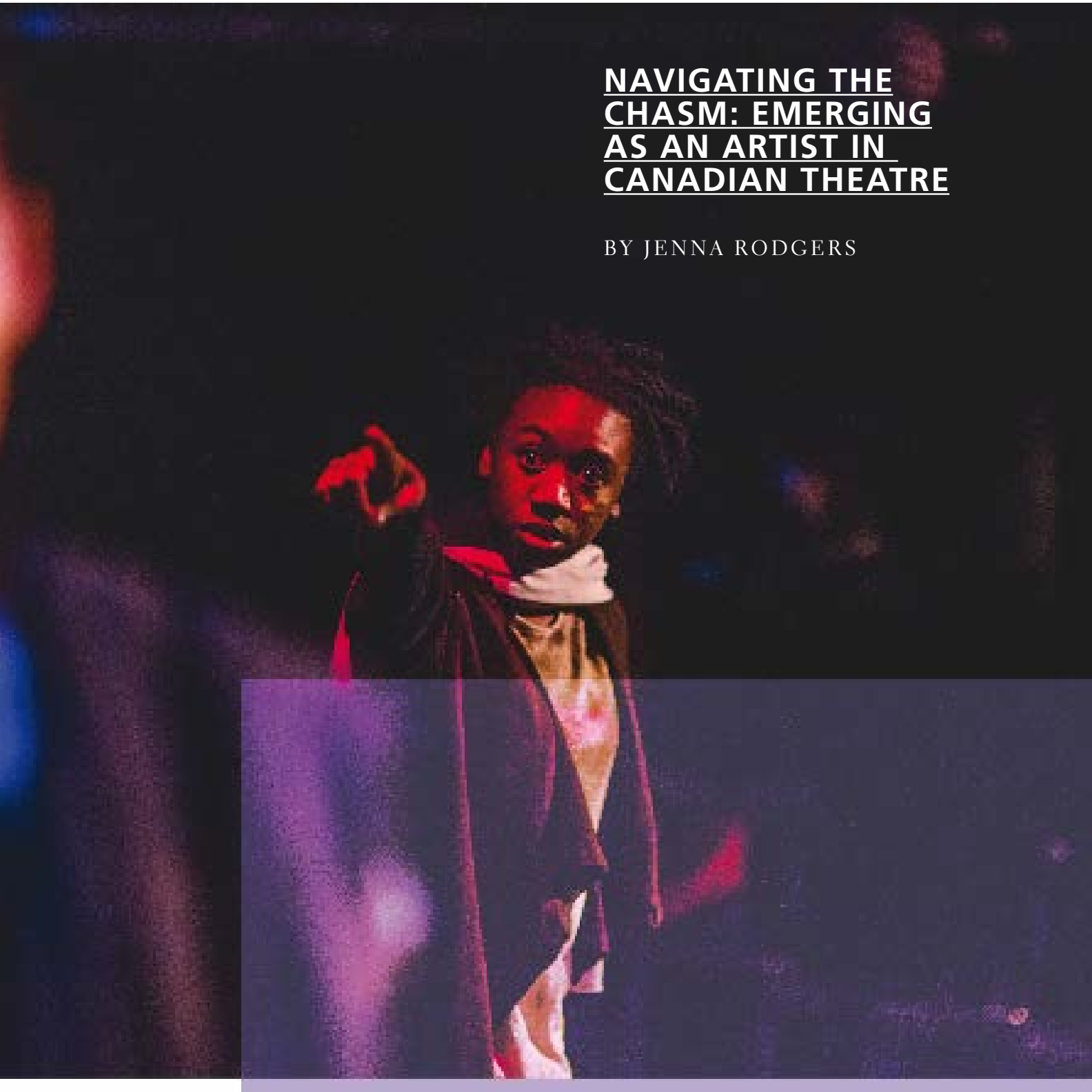
BECAUSE CHANGE

IS BEAUTIFUL.

CURATED
BY
DONNA-MICHELLE
ST.BERNARD

NAVIGATING THE CHASM: EMERGING AS AN ARTIST IN CANADIAN THEATRE

BY JENNA RODGERS



I'm going to make a resume for myself as a "Professional Assistant Director." No, really. I've amassed more assistant directing credits than anything else on my professional resume. Until last month, I had been paid less for the sum total of all my assistant directing gigs than I was for my last dramaturg "honorarium."

I am an artist in that murky space between emerging and established. I am a woman of colour. I am young-ish; having recently turned 30, I have often been accused of being a millennial by several (established) artist peers. I run a small company, Chromatic Theatre, that focuses on producing and developing work by and for diverse artists. I often work with teens and new graduates. I also work with Brian Quirt and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity as the associate dramaturge of the Playwrights Colony.

In Calgary, the city I call home, I am working towards making a name for myself in the theatre community; yet despite all of my experience, I am struggling to find people who will view me—a young woman of colour—as a professional director. A friend and colleague who is only a couple of years senior to me once gave me the advice to drop the word "emerging" from my vocabulary, that self-identifying as emerging stops being useful at a point. In an industry that seems to have plenty of opportunities explicitly for emerging artists (grants, internships, bursaries, etc.), and limited opportunities for anyone who claims to be mid-career, when does one stop emerging? Is there somewhere we have to go or some invisible threshold we have to cross to find ourselves in the land of established artists? Or is it simply a decision one makes to stop emerging in the long journey of self-identification? Navigating the gaping chasm between emerging and established artist is no easy task, and no one provided this entitled millennial with any sort of GPS.

It's no secret that the theatre is not a lucrative industry. We earn our keep through a series of internships, through frantic grant writing, and through a magic combination of luck and opportunity. There is a long held belief in Western society (acknowledging that all I know, truly, is Western, in practice) that one needs to "put in their time" or "pay their dues" in some sort of unpaid, self-sacrificing, almost martyr-like condition in order to be "worth their salt" in their chosen industry. In a neoliberal, capitalist state, this becomes especially true in industries where resources are scarce. While fortunately, most internships in Canada are paid,[1] the number of unpaid internships, according to the *Economist*, continues to grow as, "anti-discrimination and unfair dismissal rules have been tightened, and minimum wages raised, in many rich countries."[2] At the 2016 Professional Association of Canadian Theatres Conference in Calgary, several theatre companies reported posting a deficit the previous year, so with an ongoing economic downturn and no end in sight, it's not surprising that we make good use of the willing and able bodies that are throwing themselves into our industry with the hopes of finding their big break. Unfortunately, this doesn't only hold true during times of recession, and it becomes difficult to untangle where emerging ends and established begins, leaving me asking, *When will I ascend to the next phase of my career?*

As a woman of colour, I am all too aware that when we look at underrepresented communities, bridging the gap between emerging and established is even more challenging than it is for artists who fit the popular expectation. All across North America we are faced with the overrepresentation of white people. On the stage and the screen, across North America, only a tiny percentage of the faces we see represent Indigenous peoples or people of colour.

In 2015, the UK arts organization Create developed and launched a survey in collaboration with Goldsmiths, University of London, the London School of Economics, and the University of Sheffield that aimed to assess class divide amongst Britons, specifically in creative industries.[3] Ultimately, the survey determined that "if young people don't have parents that are able to support them in their pursuit of a creative career then it is an extremely hard to break into the industry." Gone are the days when 20- somethings can play ingénues: women must first get an arts school education, followed by specialized (expensive) training at an institution for higher learning, followed by at least five years of "emerging" in their field (i.e., working for "the love of the industry") before any director in their right mind would trust them to act in a play. For many people—especially immigrants and people of colour (who probably aren't going to play the ingénue anyway)—ten years without getting paid is simply too long to make the theatre a viable career.

Does this sound familiar? Class hasn't seemed to grasp the collective attention of the theatre community in Canada, but from experience I can say that it is rare to find a professional artist who can't comfortably rely on a support

Previous page © Diane + Mike Photography. Makambe K. Simamba as Nurse in Chromatic Theatre's production of *Medea*, 2015.

BUT, THERE IS HOPE FOR US.

network (familial or otherwise) to cover financial shortfalls in between contracts. This leads me to ask the question: Are the only people able to make the leap to "established" those who come from wealthy, supportive families?

In October, I was in Ashland, Oregon, for the National Asian American Theater Conference and Festival (ConFest), organized by the Consortium for Asian American Theaters and Artists (CAATA). On a panel about Asian American directors, the solution offered to those of us who are early career was to enter a formal post-secondary specialized program like an MFA, or to find a mentor who would usher us into the established stratosphere through equity-centred programs like the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's FAIR program (Fellowships, Assistantships, Internships, Residencies). The former assumes that we have the resources to take on further education—or at least a willingness to take on (further) debt.

The latter doesn't quite apply in Canada. While many theatres here have a desire to be more inclusive, that often doesn't stretch beyond tokenistic programming and rarely spans across more than one season. That said, there is a growing handful of companies that are diversely mandated, but the fact remains that leadership and mentorship opportunities from within our own community are few and far between. If we do seek these artists for mentorship, we will most certainly be operating on a smaller scale than the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and we run into the age-old problem of asking marginalized communities to address inequities that were borne of the larger structure in the first place.

Whether in the real world or in the education system, most of the mentors available to us do not come from our cultural communities. We are reliant on learning from the mainstream, from others who have worked their way through a system that may be broken. Or maybe we need to flip our thinking to see that the system is working and what we need to do is break it. Sometimes it feels like the best we can hope for is to find a mentor from the mainstream who is interested in a reciprocity—someone who is not only willing, but genuinely committed to making lasting change in the greater theatre ecology. Ideally, this mentor can also be receptive and understanding about how our practices might necessarily diverge as a result of the differences in our age/gender/sexual orientation/or race. This seems obvious—all practices are divergent at a point—but for people of colour, or people from any minority community, we are working against systemic oppression that conditions the general public to not immediately see us as leaders. Educational systems and formal mentorship can easily succumb to the notion that there is a right way and a wrong way to do a job; however, when people of colour enter the equation, it becomes apparent that practices that have worked for centuries do so in service perpetuating inequity. All I know is that if I cannot find a mentor from within my own community, the mentor I am seeking must be open and interested in finding ways for their practice to evolve beyond that which we know. They must be interested in finding ways to decolonize theatre practices, and acknowledge the ways in which our current system can be oppressive.

I find this is hard to explain to someone who hasn't had lived experience. As a woman of colour, the systemic challenges I face mean that even if I work ten times harder, even if I'm well trained and capable, it is a steep uphill battle to occupy a leadership role. Not only do I have to run a rehearsal room, but I also end up working with people who often mistake me as a representative for an entire culture, people who don't take me seriously because I'm young and "unseasoned," and people who expect me to lead like a man but not without simultaneously fulfilling their inherent expectations of a woman to consistently offer compassion and sympathy.

With so few people of colour helming theatres that have the capacity to produce a multiple-show season, currently the work opportunities from within our own community are scarce. Directors and playwrights who double up as Artistic Directors often employ themselves first—usually not for self-promotion, but to save costs. Every opportunity these small companies offer to an emerging artist—or even a mid-career artist—comes at a cost to the company. When a good artist helms a company that is just scraping by, employing a new artist becomes a risk.

Risk. I think this is a problematic word. It connotes danger, and discourages change. In a liberal-minded industry, it shifts our thinking into conservatism—fiscal or otherwise. Far too often I've heard emerging artists wish someone would "take a risk" or "take a chance" on them. And if they do get an opportunity, they thank their "good luck." These words discredit hard work and talent, and undermine pride in their developed skill set. Again, another barrier: our language is part of a system that repeatedly suggests to us that we aren't good enough.

© Diane + Mike Photography. Ali DeRegt as Chorus in Chromatic Theatre's production of *Medea*, 2015.

But, there is hope for us.

In 2015, the Canada Council for the Arts announced that they are changing their funding model and streamlining 147 programs down to six. These changes are fast approaching, as they begin to go into effect in January 2017. There will no longer be a dedicated equity program, but instead the Canada Council is encouraging us all to move towards equity, diversity, and inclusion, by building equity practices "into our processes from the moment an application is submitted until it has been assessed."[4] Change makes us all nervous, so I understand the widespread hesitancy towards the new funding model—especially from established organizations. Personally, I do not believe that the new funding model threatens long-standing arts organizations. I do, however, believe that it makes our national funder much more adaptive and responsive to new models of working. Several of my contemporaries blur the lines between their practices, identifying as inter- or multi- disciplinary artists. And for those of us who find ourselves in that liminal space between established and emerging, we can take solace in the fact that those categories are no longer in use by the Council.

So, on a hope and a prayer we emerging artists forge forward, still eager, still hopeful, with questions in our minds, waiting to see if we make it through to the other side and can serve as responsible leaders for those who have yet to come. We can make conscious choices to shift our language; to stop using words like "emerging" or "risk." We can cry out "fuck the system" and fight for change. But I feel that this shouldn't just be the plight of the emerging artist. I don't want to cross some magic threshold and suddenly be established and blissfully forget what it felt like to be emerging. I want to hold my emergence close. I know things need to change. I know I need to keep fighting to pay people in my fledgling company because if we keep allowing ourselves the excuse that people have to "put in their time," we will continue to exclude the marginalized. We will perpetuate the existing hegemony, which dictates what "good" art is, and we will miss out on the beautiful, emerging, undiscovered. I will use my newfound voice (or at least the voice that people are newly taking more seriously) to continue to debunk systems of power that exist in our workplace. To speak out against inequity and speak up for necessary change.[5] Because change is beautiful.

© Diane + Mike Photography. Makambe K. Simamba as Nurse in Chromatic Theatre's production of *Medea*, 2015.

NOTES

1 Labour regulations are determined differently from province to province. While most theatre internships are paid, you can read more about the legality of unpaid internships on the Canadian Intern Association website: http://internassociation.ca/what-is-the-law/

3 See the Panic survey at http://www.createlondon.org/panic/survey/

4 http://canadacouncil.ca/council/blog/2015/06/new-funding-model-faq: Note that at the writing of this piece, this webpage was no longer live on the Canada Council website.

5 The organizations that are already doing this work at provincial and national scales. These include, but are not limited to: the Ad Hoc Assembly, Alberta Aboriginal Arts, Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario (CPAMO), the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance (IPAA), Prismatic Arts Festival, Stage Left Productions, and Visceral Visions.

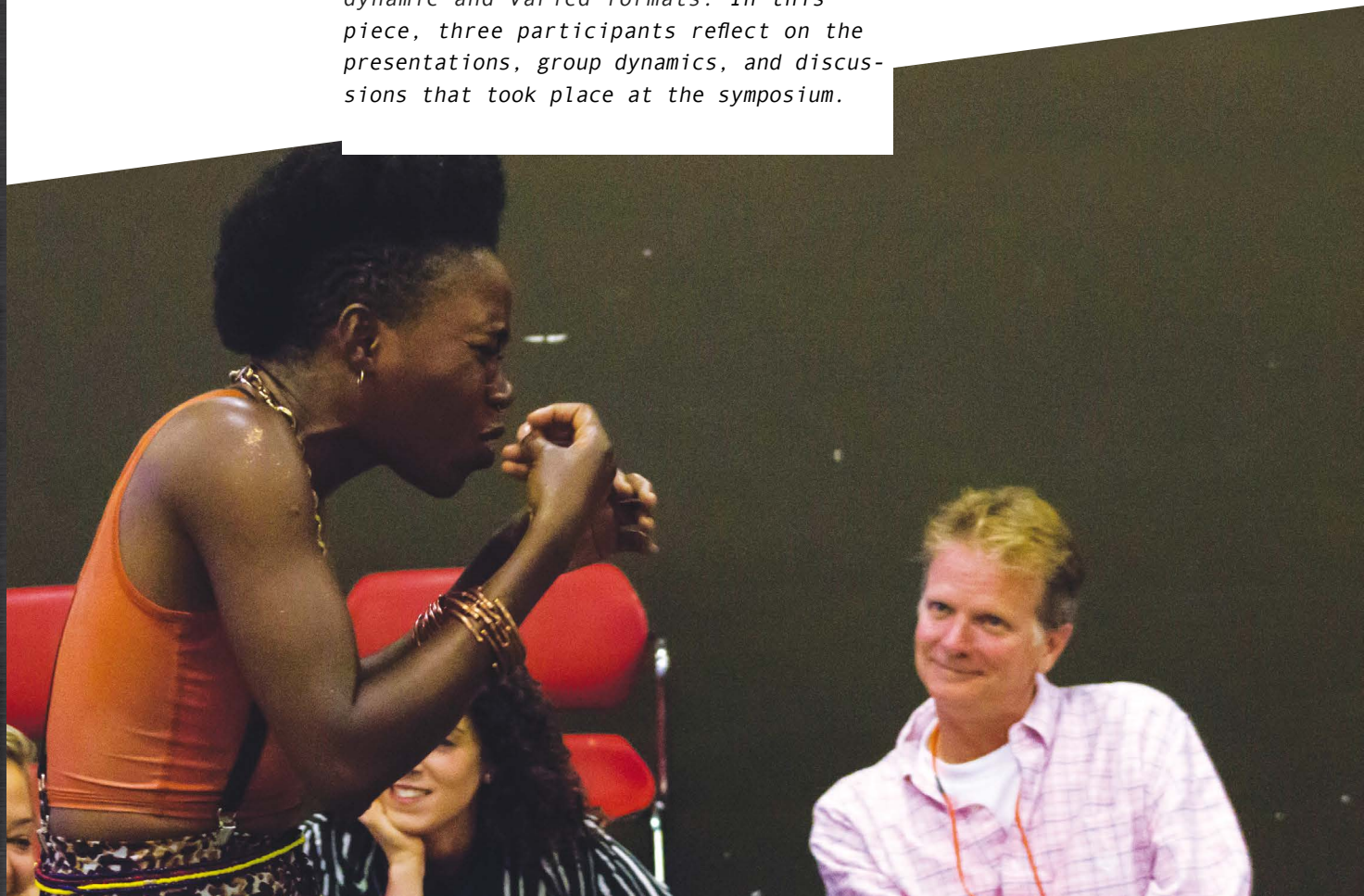
WORK CITED

"Temporary, Unregulated and often Unpaid, the Internship Has Become the Route to Professional." *Economist*, 6 September 2014. Web.

A SYMPOSIUM ON QUEER THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN CANADA

by
Laine Zisman Newman,
lee williams boudakian,
and Anoushka Ratnarajah

Co-sponsored by Simon Fraser University and the frank theatre company, Q2Q: A Symposium on Queer Theatre and Performance in Canada was held in Vancouver, BC, July 20-24, 2016. The symposium aimed to bring together performers, practitioners, scholars, and community members to discuss the current state of queer theatre in the country, its histories, and its future(s). The symposium included performances, panels, roundtables, and networking events. Performers and practitioners presented together on the same panels, and the lack of strict presentation guidelines resulted in dynamic and varied formats. In this piece, three participants reflect on the presentations, group dynamics, and discussions that took place at the symposium.



LN

Laine Zisman Newman:
Canadian theatre, both historically and currently, is predominantly led by a privileged few, who occupy the vast majority of major artistic roles — artistic directors, directors, and playwrights — and receive the majority of support and resources. The Q2Q symposium created a much-needed space outside of a dominant straight norm for the queer community to connect, evaluate practices, and discuss how queer theatre fits into the broader theatre landscape: How does it complicate or challenge normative dynamics and how does it replicate and perpetuate them? Throughout the symposium, the persistent oppressive practices and ideologies in queer theatre became abundantly clear, and many of our discussions provided an important opportunity to begin to identify and confront these realities, while highlighting new and innovative artistic works being developed in the country.

lwb

lee williams boudakian:
It is interesting to think that this is the first national symposium of its kind in Canada (though I have to doubt the validity of this statement, as I write it). Surely there have been innumerable gatherings where queer theatre communities from different parts of this country have had opportunities to share and dialogue with one another? That the answer is no, not of this kind, leads to what is quite possibly one of the larger take-aways from the conference itself: It is essential for our communities to have spaces to gather and critically reflect on where we come from and where we are at, so that we may have a say in where we are headed and create opportunities for change.

AR

Anoushka Ratnarajah:
Q2Q was able to pull in theatre artists from all across the country, and did so fairly successfully, so the conference wasn't merely a bi-coastal representation of what theatre in Canada looks like. There was a concerted effort to bring in and prioritize queer and trans artists of colour, but we still only made up one third of the attendees. And when a room is occupied by a majority of white people, particularly white cis men, QTIBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Intersex, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) and women of colour find ourselves once again struggling for space, voice, and legitimacy. This is not to say that acts of white allyship did not take place over the week — they did. Still, it's significant that the representation of Canadian queer theatre at Q2Q was still dominantly white, cis, and male — even in queer spaces the hierarchies established by patriarchy, white supremacy, cis supremacy, etc. were obviously still in place. It was a clear parallel to why theatre in this Canadian queer context is inherently less accessible for QTBIPOCs at every level, from barriers to attending or teaching at institutional fine arts programs; to being underrepresented in scholarship, in positions of influence and power on granting bodies, and as artistic directors; to being extended roles that are more than tokenism. →

LN

At times the queer theatre community can feel incredibly small, especially in the context of Canadian performance. In many ways, this can create a false assumption of cohesion and unwavering kinship. One of the most interesting and compelling experiences I had throughout the symposium was the ways in which this assumption was simultaneously reified and challenged. Discussions of divergent histories, oppressions, and silenced or absent voices confronted the very notion of a monolithic "queer theatre community" and exposed how certain privilege is afforded to white theatre practitioners who inhabit or identify with queerness. At the same time, there was a desire to learn together, to listen, and to reflect on the multiple diverse histories and experiences within the room.

lwb

As a mixed-race, queer, non-binary trans artist, I am acutely aware of the ways that the stories and communities I am connected to are too often absent. Not only in broader theatre and arts communities (where queer voices are often marginalized), but I/we am/are unfortunately too familiar with "queer spaces" also being exclusionary, impenetrable, very white, and very cisgendered. It is important to break through the myths that queer communities are cohesive or even representative. It is important to recognize that "queerness" is not inclusive or intersectional simply because it is "queer." And it is important to not only "know" that multiple and simultaneous oppressions exist in our communities, but to actively make space for the stories and voices that are not currently being heard. I was reminded of these facts over and over throughout the conference, where intersectionality was simultaneously what was highlighted and what needed/needs the most work. There were many great discussions, varied perspectives, and different approaches and/but the thread that ran through all of it was a call for queer theatre to more fully realize itself as necessarily connected to Indigeneity, race, gender, class, ability, and the incoming generations of theatre-makers.

AR

The highlight of Q2Q for me was definitely *Intersecting!*, which was a QTIPOC exclusive day when we gathered to share stories and strategies for moving through a dominantly white queer theatre environment. We also created a working set of recommendations for the larger conference: suggestions for white queer theatre scholars, professionals, and practitioners to use their respective privileges to centre and uplift QTIPOC artists and theatre practices. The fact that this convergence of queer and trans people of colour theatre professionals began the conference was deeply meaningful in my experience; it created a sense of safety and solidarity that I was able to revisit during some of the more frustrating moments that came up throughout the rest of the week. And d'bi.young anitafrika's performance (an excerpt from *She Mami Wata and The Pussy Witch Hunt*) brought life into the room. Her unapologetic and magnetic presence was absolutely transfixing and reinvigorating. She literally took over the physical space with her body and voice, transported us away from the ivory tower and academic banter and inquiry and just *took us to a specific time and place.* She gave us real people. She gave us what theatre should give us — an ecstatic collective experience, laughter, outrage, and a view into a fully realized world.

lwb

Another striking moment in the conference was the panel *Queer Theatre & Performance Now* facilitated by Gein Wong and notably featuring d'bi. young anitafrika, Mel Hague, and Laine Zisman Newman. The overarching themes of the panel were about addressing privilege and bringing attention and critical awareness to queer theatre practitioners *now*, who act as the current gate-keepers for what gets the spotlight and who gets access to it.

AR

Our access to stories and a platform to share them are not finite. We can create an arts culture that is exponential in its reach and representation. But perhaps the more awkward conversation is the one that is simmering underneath the panic of the privileged when we start to have conversations about equity — that opening up space for marginalized artists necessarily means the power balance is upset, that white men will lose what they have. And maybe it's your turn to sit out, to be silent, because your ideas are old and boring, and the future of theatre should be as loud and brown and black as possible. What you built was never for us, so maybe we actually don't even want what you have at all — maybe our theatre past, present, and future don't look anything like what you've built because your inheritance plan was only for others like you, and our inheritance is Indigenous and immigrant and colonized and decolonized

and multi-national and borderless and so much more exponential than anything you could imagine. So maybe you can keep guarding your power, maybe you can fossilize there, and we'll be over here at the party with the better food, the louder laughter, the throatier songs, and the wilder dancing.

LN

Though there were brilliant and engaging works presented at the symposium, which addressed a wide range of subjects, the histories of white gay cis-male performance monopolized conversations. By focusing primarily on a singular historical narrative of theatrical progress, the story of queer theatre and performance in Canada was narrowed and limited. While there was acknowledgement of whiteness, settler colonialism, and patriarchy at the symposium, there was little recognition of the active *whitening* of history: How might queer performance not only prescribe to a normative historical narrative but also perpetuate it?

lwb

There were some important missed opportunities to note because they serve as insight(s) into how we can stop perpetuating a normative historical narrative. The conference opened with the panel *Queer History,* featuring dominantly white cis voices and white histories. While the panelists brought forward many meaningful ideas and elements of queer histories, the glaring lack of indigenous, black, migrant, and people of colour voices to help define the conversation meant that narratives essential to queer histories in Canada were absent. It was significant to open the conference with reflections on where we come from, to explicitly ask the questions: *"What is the historical genealogy and legacy of queer theatre and performance in Canada?"* and *"Why is it important for queer theatre artists working today to know about their forbears, inside and outside the theatre? And who are yours?"* However, the narrow definition/representation of history highlighted, for me, that my forbears still don't make the cut in defining queer history or queer theatre.[1] It left me feeling alienated from the outset, and this feeling of alienation was confirmed throughout the conference as I witnessed other missed opportunities where instead of making space, Indigenous and people of colour were pushed to the periphery of discussions, talked over, and critiqued for speaking out.

© Katrina Tadros. d'bi.young anitafrika performs *She Mami Wata and The Pussy Witch Hunt* at Q2Q: A Symposium on Queer Theatre and Performance, 2016.

AR

The queer theatre history presented and assumed by the majority (white, cis male) panelists and participants at the conference was, in my experience at least, typically canonical — that is, white/western/colonial/male/cis/able-bodied/academic etc. There were moments of interruption and attempts to de-construct this assumed queer Canadian history, to present alternative theatre practice or literature by queer artists of colour, queer trans people or queer women. These interruptions were essential and important and occasionally they led to deeper discussions around decolonizing and de-institutionalizing theatrical knowledges and practices. At other times these moments hung in the →

air uncomfortably before the conversation was directed back to familiarity, and quite a few times dominant voices worked to directly shut down the conversation.

One moment that was particularly frustrating for me came when I was participating as a panelist in *Queer Theatre to Come*, expressing my frustration with the continued centring of whiteness and masculinity in the current queer theatre ecosystem. I was quite forcefully confronted by a white woman, also a queer theatre practitioner, someone who had been practising for years and considers herself my elder. She expressed her frustration with the inter-generational gap and conflict between queer theatre artists, particularly as someone who considers much of her work as laying a foundation for artists of my generation. Comparing the work of artists in her cohort to the trajectory of western feminism, she ended her comments by saying to me, "I will say to you what my mother said to me: You can stand on my shoulders, but don't kick me on the way up."

What she didn't realize, and what I tried to communicate (imperfectly) is that white queer women are not *our* mothers. And it's not about kicking the previous generation in the face on our way up. Because we are not on the same ladder. White women didn't build a ladder for me or other queer women of colour—they created spaces and work for themselves. Every wave of western feminism has asked women of colour to wait. So we built our own ladders and staircases and elevators. As a queer woman of colour, every step I take is in the imprint of my ancestors and the queer artists of colour who came before me, not towards a vision of queer performance that is by and for white queerness. This is an act to de-centre whiteness in my own creative practice. Why is this frightening to a particular demographic and generation before me? Because it has nothing to do with them, and that's something whiteness doesn't know how to handle.

LN

I think what I learned most from these conversations was how badly these conversations are needed. I question how to create safer spaces that don't put the most marginalized folks in the queer community in the most vulnerable positions. It seems that at times our attempts to achieve equity still centre on the needs of white folks and put the onus of educating on QTPOC artists. After what was truly an enlightening, invigorating, complicated, and difficult few days, I have a strong impulse to look towards the future positively. By no means is this an attempt to erase the issues of racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, which surfaced during the conference, but my desire to end with a focus on the positive stems very much from the two individuals with whom I had the honour to write this piece. Both lee and Anoushka contributed to the final panel on the future of queer performance. The panelists in that session exhibited such honesty and bravery, and exuded such a strong creative force, that it was impossible not to leave the room inspired by new queer work in Canada. The future of queer theatre is full of surprises, of self-awareness, and of revelation. It leaves me hopeful that, going forward, we will be in good hands.

lwb

So, now that the first queer theatre conference of its kind has happened... let's have another! And as we approach the next one, it feels important to ask: How might the container of a queer conference change/be different? How might we further queer what we call theatre and our place in it? How might we radically re-approach the spaces we create, who we invite to speak, and how we set them up to feel able to speak and be heard? It is clear to me that whatever the future of queer theatre is, it involves a reshuffling of power and access. So, let's not just talk about it, but actively take steps to do that.

AR

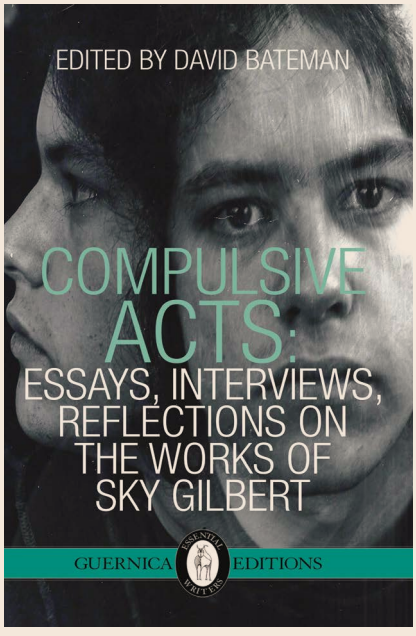
It was significant that the panel representing queer futures in theatre was composed almost entirely of queer and trans people of colour, women, and gender queer artists. I can't help but feel that this deliberate programming was in itself a beautiful possibility for the future of queer performance in Canada. The conference was recorded in its entirety, and it will likely be a valuable teaching and learning tool moving forward, as well as an archive of the events that took place over the week.

NOTE

1 While multiple organizations are compiling databases and lists of works by marginalized and equity-seeking communities, which include some works by queer IBPOC artists (see for example: Ad Hoc Assemblies "Catalogue of Works; IPAA's "Indigenous Body of Work"; and Fu-Gen's "The 49"), this kind of survey and list has yet to be compiled exclusively for IBPOC queer theatre works and histories in Canadian theatre.

BOOK REVIEW

BY
THOM BRYCE
MCQUINN



COMPULSIVE ACTS: ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, REFLECTIONS ON THE WORKS OF SKY GILBERT. EDITED BY DAVID BATEMAN. ESSENTIAL WRITERS SER. 37. TORONTO: GUERNICA, 2014. 350 PP.

How does one approach the oeuvre of Sky Gilbert, surely one of the most influential queer theatre artists in Canada? Editor David Bateman takes up this daunting task in *Compulsive Acts* and the results are, by and large, successful. As he notes in his introductory essay "Compulsive Acts & Everyday Revulsions," Bateman has a "long history of responding to the . . . cultural generosity of Sky Gilbert," and he opens the collection by reminiscing about a lively exchange the two men had in the now long-defunct gay publication *RITES* (3). Bateman recalls that their first encounter, both in print and in person, was not what one would call auspicious:

> Before the initial *RITES* review appeared I met Gilbert for the first time in the lobby of the Poor Alex theatre [*sic*]. I introduced myself and had the audacity to let him know that a less than positive review [of *The Dressing Gown*] was about to appear, one that I had written. He responded by telling me to let my review speak for itself and we parted company. (4)

Nonetheless, this youthful volatility between the pair quickly dissipated. In fact, Bateman notes that not long after this clash, Gilbert gave a "quick and positive response" to one of the former's performance art pieces; ultimately, Gilbert would work to provide Bateman with his "first opportunity in Toronto theatre" (4). This anecdote accurately captures Gilbert's immense generosity towards his collaborators, and other artists in general, while also stressing the playwright's tireless devotion to the construction of new and quality work.

Bateman is remarkably candid about the difficulties he faced when confronting the work of a figure as controversial, creative, and "incredibly prolific" as Schuyler[1] Lee Gilbert, Jr., and Bateman observes that the collection "can by no means represent all of his work" (5). Rather than attempt to encapsulate the entire Gilbertian canon, Bateman focuses on what he sees as the twinned impulses at work in the playwright's texts: compulsion and revulsion. Reworking Gloria Steinem's title from her collection of feminist essays *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, Bateman astutely points out the artistic *modus operandi* Gilbert has used for roughly the past four decades,

along with what the editor sees as the intended effects upon his audience: "Gilbert sees cultural injustice, writes a play about it, and reveals all the outrage, revulsion, rebellion, and compulsion that these everyday narratives possess. To put it not so mildly, by doing so he liberates audiences, in a theatrical manner, whether they like it or not, from the tyranny of political and cultural oppression" (5). His assessment of Gilbert's work as a whole is informed and perceptive, and this is one of the collection's true strengths: it demonstrates Bateman's keen understanding of the liberation[2] from the restrictions of sexual, gender, class, and political norms that the playwright has repeatedly sought for his audiences. Bateman himself is a performance poet, visual artist, drag performer, and writer who, like Gilbert, has maintained a deep commitment to queer representation throughout his career. Consequently, he holds specific insights into the creative process, both with respect to Gilbert and in general, and this expertise serves him well as the editor and curator of the collection.

Compulsive Acts marks the thirty-seventh volume in Guernica Editions' Essential Writers Series, a series of books that devotes one guest-edited collection to an individual author and seeks to include "essays by different critics, scholars, and colleagues, an in-depth interview, and biographical notes" ("Essential Writers Series"). It is indeed encouraging to see the press commit a full volume to Gilbert *qua* queer Canadian author, and place him alongside national literary luminaries such as Margaret Atwood, Nicole Brossard, George Elliott Clarke, Louis Dudek, Daniel David Moses, P.K. Page, Sharon Pollock, and M.G. Vassanji. However, one wishes that Gilbert's entry had a bit more gloss: a number of typographical and formatting errors give the book a rushed or unpolished quality. A further round of copyediting to increase readability would have been helpful.

The guiding structure of the series means that the collection is divided into four sections, which are occasionally confusingly arranged. The first is titled simply "Introductions" and includes the aforementioned introductory essay from Bateman along with other prefatory materials. The second section is an eclectic mix of critical essays examining specific works by Gilbert. The contributors to this edifying section are all respected artists in their own right and include Gilbert's life partner, Ian Jarvis, as well as artistic collaborators such as Hope Thompson, Keith Cole, Moynan King, and Ann Holloway. The third is purportedly a selection of interviews—though in fact it contains three interviews; song lyrics; reviews by Bateman of *The Situationists* (which won the 2011 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play, Independent Division) and 2012's *Dancing Queen*; and a verbatim note from Gilbert himself, cheekily titled "Sky Email From Palm Springs" (279). Finally, the fourth section includes a too-brief concluding essay from the editor, along with one of Gilbert's most recent plays, *To Myself at 28*. Taken separately, the sections are all certainly informative and hold the reader's interest. However, when organized together they appear as an almost informal hodgepodge, with the result being that no one topic or perspective (e.g., Gilbert's influences, his creative process, or his style as a director) seems adequately addressed.

The collection's jewel in the crown is J. Paul Halferty's incisive, cultural-historical approach to Gilbert's work in his "Crises and Community: Sky Gilbert, *Drag Queens on Trial*, and the Development of Gay Theatre and Community in Toronto 1975-1985." Here Halferty skilfully traces the evolution of Gilbert's work alongside well-researched summaries of queer Toronto-based history and developments in critical theory. The 17th of October 1985, he notes, was a true watershed moment in the cultural histories of both gay men and theatre in Toronto: it was the opening night of Gilbert's *Drag Queens on Trial* in a porn theatre on Bloor Street, in which Gilbert performed, in drag, for the first time. Writing in his memoir *Ejaculations from the Charm Factory*, Gilbert remembers thinking: "'Well, this is the end of my career . . . . [b]ut fuck, this is a funny play. And I'm going to go down in all my flaming glory'" (qtd. in Bateman 23). In fact, as Halferty points out, the opposite was true: *Drag Queens on Trial* put Gilbert on the map and laid the aesthetic-political groundwork for his entire career (23). After appearing at his opening with "a little rouge" and a "punkish fright wig," Gilbert was officially a *success à scandal* (23).

Halferty helpfully notes the especial place Gilbert already held before the première of *Drag Queens*—he was, after all, one of a small number of "out" Toronto artists in the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, and perhaps the *only* theatre maker who was positioning his work as explicitly, and radically, gay at that time.[3] The article demonstrates how Gilbert was "indelibly shaped" by the events of this period (55) which included the intense political campaigns of gay liberationist organizations such as *The Body Politic*, the 1981 bathhouse raids, and the sweeping conservative backlash to the call for equal rights from queer activists—the horrific harbingers of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As these crises erupted and he witnessed the cruelty, hostility, and indifference facing LGBTQ communities, Gilbert became less and less content to create work with palatable, middle-class appeal. Though he had what Halferty calls a "'cross-over' hit" with *The Dressing Gown* (1984), Gilbert quickly became almost fanatically devoted to producing plays that questioned heteronormativity and oppressive sexual mores, advanced a pro-sex agenda, and embraced experimental aesthetics.

Because of its focus upon a playwright so thoroughly concerned with intimate, often physical connection—both between characters onstage and between actors and audience members—it is logical that Bateman's collection contains pieces that skew towards the personal. Sarah Garton Stanley's contribution on *Rope Enough* (2005) is fascinating in its discussion of the author's tenure as former Artistic Director of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, the landmark queer theatre company Sky co-founded with Matt Walsh and Jerry Ciccoritti. With admirable frankness, Stanley reveals that while she remains "fiercely proud" (238) of her work with Buddies, she has also felt the need to produce her piece *The Failure Show*: "An apology for letting the ideas of a time, [her] time as artistic leader at BIBT, down" (234). Her essay is centred upon a startling incident at the general auditions for the acting ensemble of the National Arts Centre, during which Stanley witnessed a young man perform one of Ichabod Malframe's monologues from *Rope Enough*. Watching the actor's performance, Stanley is struck by a realization: "This was the first Sky Gilbert monologue I had encountered in a general audition.

I am not exaggerating by saying that I have seen well over 1500 auditions in my career" (234-35). Clearly, Gilbert's work is still considered too incendiary by a large percentage of the Canadian theatre community.

Like Stanley, actor Ann Holloway provides a piece that relies on personal reflection in order to springboard into larger points. In her essay "Women's Comedy of Resistance," her analyses of three roles Gilbert crafted specifically for her not only reveal the intense bond between the two artists, but also how Gilbert committed himself to the promotion of radical viewpoints: "As far as women having a voice in theatre, any theatre, it would have remained a pipedream for many of us in the 80s and 90s if not for Sky, who stood out as a facilitator for innovative theatre voices, queer voices, voices of dissent" (214). Holloway's essay sparkles with wit and insight. Regarding her start in theatre and how she came to work with Gilbert, she writes, "I was beating the bushes for acting roles when I ambushed Sky and harassed him about casting me in one of his plays. Some people schmooze; I harass. It cuts through the red tape a lot faster" (214).

Nonetheless, Bateman's strategy of selecting more intimate reflections from contributors occasionally backfires in that certain selections lack the sophistication and craftsmanship of the pieces by Halferty, Stanley, and Holloway. Hillar Liitoja's "Designs on *Wit in Love*," although a fascinating revelation of the generosity with which Gilbert has allowed other artists to re-fashion his work, comes perilously close to navel-gazing. The 45-page description of Liitoja's adaptation of Gilbert's novel into a performance is unnecessarily lengthy, and could easily have been shortened.

Bateman's inclusion of *To Myself at 28* is similarly problematic. Though it seems *de rigeur* to include new works in edited collections on major playwrights, one can't help but wish that this particular practice had assisted in emphasizing Gilbert's strengths as an author and theatre maker. The script involves "Me," played in the original 2013 SummerWorks Performance Festival production by Gilbert, aged 60, confronting the character of "Myself," aged 28, originally performed by "the very insightful and precocious" actor Spencer Charles Smith (307). Many of the playwright's thematic and philosophical preoccupations, as well as his concerns with the manipulation of form, are on display, including the tension between reality and performance; metatheatrical conceits; dream sequences; the eroticized male form; the painful experience of unrequited love; power dynamics; and gay bar culture and cruising, and thus it seems to be a logical inclusion. But the play also contains lines of dialogue so wooden and hackneyed that one wonders how any actor could breathe life into them (e.g., "Yes I'm going to say the word. Homophobia. Because of homophobia" [312]). The piece is brutally honest and brave in its representation of Me's youthful ambitions as well as his current worries, dark fears, and haunting by an image of "a lonely old man sitting at a table in a rented room with nothing but a single candle" (302). The play is also self-reflective of Gilbert's own psychic and creative responses to past criticisms of artistic endeavours: the older incarnation of Gilbert bitterly notes, "Because you did and said radical things you could fool yourself into believing that you don't care what other people think, but in fact, every bad review wounded you, every disapproving comment upset you, when you wrote your plays you wanted people to enjoy them, you wanted to make people laugh. It's abandonment issues" (299).

Still, it takes more than bravery and introspection alone to create great works of art, and ultimately the play is not able to rise above the level of an emotional, staged self-flaying. Its appearance in *Compulsive Acts* demonstrates not only the difficulty in producing collections on contemporary authors in general, but also the added burden of working on a playwright as seemingly inexhaustible as Gilbert who, as King observes in her essay, "currently produces two full productions each year" (154). I suspect that *To Myself at 28* will become a mere footnote in Gilbert's enormous, impressive body of work, more *Happy: A Very Gay Little Musical* (2008) than *Rope Enough* or *Drag Queens on Trial*.

Nevertheless, despite these flaws, *Compulsive Acts* is a worthwhile and illuminating book, and it will certainly serve as an ideal introduction to Gilbert for students, theatre practitioners, and lovers of (particularly queer) art and culture. The diverse nature of the material means that the reader is presented with a number of different perspectives and reflections on the man and his writings, and many of these are fresh and engaging. Moreover, the appendix includes a bibliography of Gilbert's plays, poetry, novels, editorials, and awards, along with a partial listing of performances of his work produced by others. The selected list of plays is particularly useful, in part because it reveals the many, many plays that remain unpublished. It is my hope that *Compulsive Acts* will not only encourage the publication of previously unreleased manuscripts but also promote further scholarship on an artist whose work has immeasurably enriched Canadian drama.

NOTES

1 Bateman's collection explains that the playwright was named "Schuyler Lee Gilbert Jr." after his father, and that Gilbert subsequently shortened it to "Sky" (143). Oddly, Gilbert's biography on the website for his own theatre company, Hammertheatre, states: "Born *Schuler* Lee Gilbert, Jr. in Norwich, Connecticut, he moved to Toronto to study theatre at York University and at the University of Toronto where he earned his Ph.D"(my emphasis). This nominal slippage is perhaps fitting for an author who has been preoccupied with the construction and/or deployment of different identities throughout his career. See, for example, Gilbert's notorious performances as his drag alter-ego "Jane," or texts that question the depth-model of identity via metatheatre, such as the virtuosic *More Divine: A Performance for Roland Barthes* (1994), *The Birth of Casper G. Schmidt* (1999), or the later *Will the Real JT LeRoy Please Stand Up?* (2007).

2 Bateman's perspective echoes scholar Robert Wallace's comments in his introduction to *This Unknown Flesh*, in which the latter writes that Gilbert's work seeks to demonstrate "that social barriers, at least temporarily, need not matter. Many in the crowd [at the opening night performance of Gilbert's *More Divine*] commented on the 'liberating' quality of the event" (12).

3 This is but one example of the meticulous research contained in Halferty's article. A footnote lists the handful of notable exceptions to this claim (i.e., Larry Fineberg, John Palmer, Paul Bettis, David Roche, and Brad Fraser). Nevertheless, Gilbert remains the sole Toronto-based artist to passionately advance a gay liberationist political agenda via his staged works between 1970 and the mid-1980s (119).

WORKS CITED

"Essential Writers Series." *Guernica Editions*. Guernica Editions.com, 8 January 2016. www.guernicaeditions.com/our_books/all/series/9/1.

"Sky Gilbert." *Hammer Theatre*. Hammer Theatre.org, 2016. Web.

Wallace, Robert. "No Turning Back." Introduction. *This Unknown Flesh: A Selection of Plays*. By Sky Gilbert. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995. 11-25.

NORKO
Voyages Travel

VOYAGES NORKO TRAVEL

Serving Travelers since 1970

- *Air Tickets at Discounted Prices*
- *Holiday Packages*
- *Tours to India and Pakistan*
- *Hotel Reservations, Car Hire*
- *Travel Insurance*

AIR CANADA · GULF AIR · PIA · SAUDI ARABIAN AIRLINES · TURKISH AIRLINES · Emirates · SINGAPORE AIRLINES · Austrian · BRITISH AIRWAYS

www.norkotravel.com
manager@norkotravel.com
1234 Stanley Street,
Montreal, Quebec, H3B 2S7
514-871-8888 1-888-871-8888