alt theatre
cultural diversity and the stage
Volume 14, No. 2 $8

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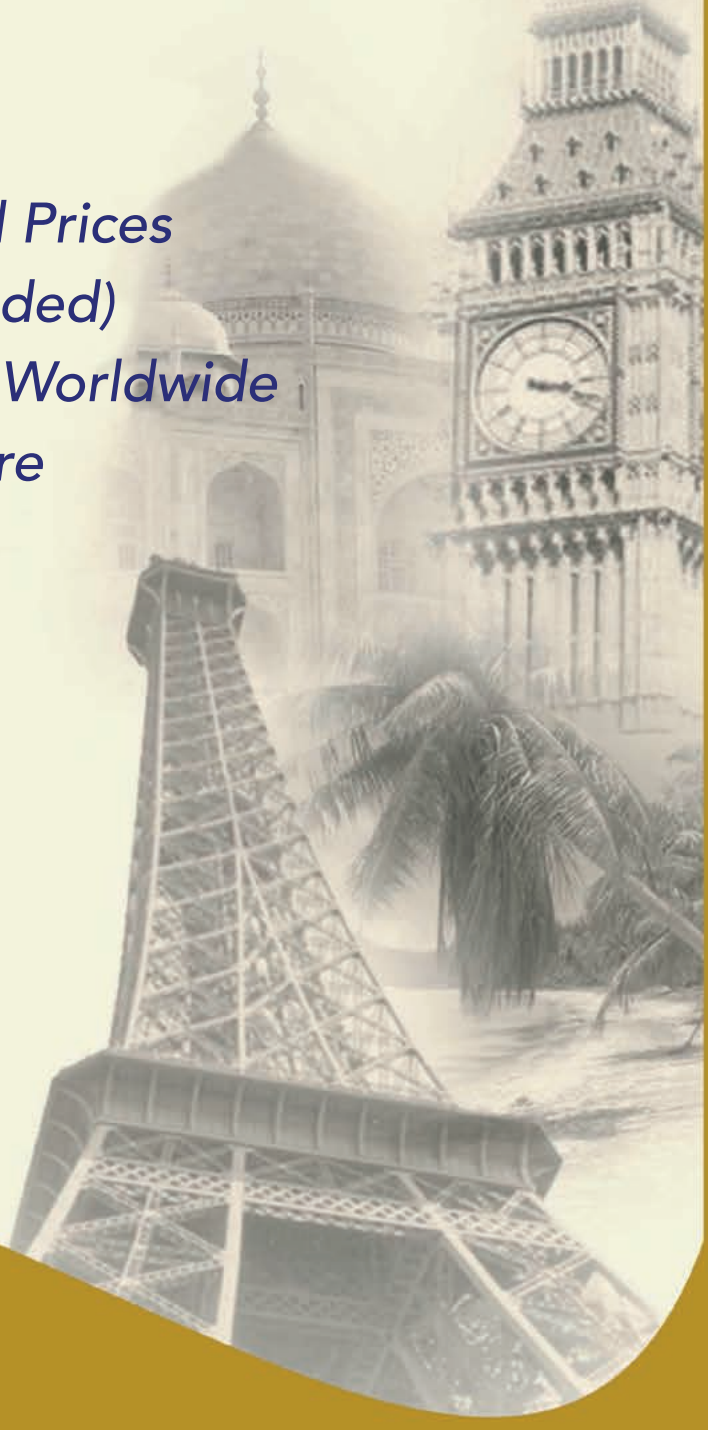

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alt.theatre
cultural diversity and the stage
Vol. 14 No. 2

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

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Founded in 1998, *alt.theatre* is published three times per year 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

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

Teesri Duniya
THEATRE
"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

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© Jill Janvier (Photo by Jill Janvier).
Mariel Belanger begins construction of a tule mat lodge.

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.

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Contributors 14.2

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Mariel Belanger is a member of the Okanagan Nation. She graduated from Media and Communications General Arts and Sciences in Ottawa, and from the NAPAT program at Enowkin, and has trained as an actor in Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver. Mariel currently trains at the Actors Foundry.

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Curator of the *Return to Place* Series, author of *Ancestral Village Practices Performed on Campus*: Page 22

SHAWN BRIGMAN

Shawn Brigman is an enrolled member of the Spokane Tribe of Indians and descendent of regional Salish Plateau bands (San Poil, Sinixt, and Shuswap). As a traditional artisan for thirteen years, his creative practice has been one of project-based ancestral recovery efforts in Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia, exploring and transforming the way people read Plateau architectural space by celebrating the physical revival of ancestral Plateau art and architectural heritage

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SHEILA CHRISTIE

Sheila Christie is an associate professor of English and Drama at CBU. Her research and artistic practice include dramatic literature, fanfiction, stage management, and applied theatre (particularly theatre for social change). She is dedicated to helping students, community members, and fellow researchers develop the skills and experiences they need to make the world a better place and foster hope in the face of local and global challenges.

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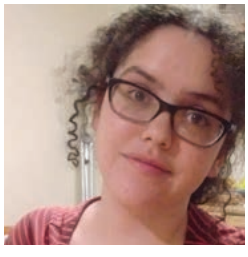
SIGNY LYNCH



Signy Lynch is a PhD Student in Theatre and Performance Studies at York University. Her research investigates how direct audience address in contemporary performance can help audience members and performers to negotiate the complexities of inhabiting a twenty-first-century globalized Canada.

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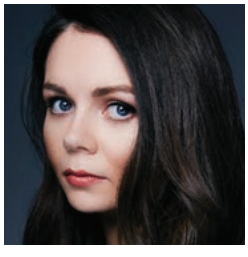
SARAH ROBBINS



Sarah Robbins is a PhD student at the University of Toronto's Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies (CDTPS). Her research interests focus on equity in theatre, particularly equitable training practices at Canadian post-secondary theatre arts institutions. She holds an honours BA and a diploma in Professional Actor Training from the joint theatre and drama studies program at University of Toronto Mississauga and Sheridan College, and an MA from CDTPS. Currently she is working with the Playwrights Guild of Canada and the Equity and Diversity in the Arts Department at the University of Toronto Scarborough on the P.L.E.D.G.E. Project, and acts as a Core Member of "Got Your Back Canada."

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MARGO TAMEZ

Margo Tamez (Nde' [Lipan Apache]), is a poet, historian, advocate for Indigenous rights, and associate professor in the Indigenous Studies program at UBC (Okanagan campus). She is the award-winning author of *Naked Wanting* (2003), *Raven Eye* (2007), and chapbook, *Alleys & Allies* (1990). Her poetry and prose have appeared in numerous anthologies and literary journals, and she has recently been awarded the 2018 Banff Poetry Studio residency.

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KRISTJANNA GRIMMELT

Kristjanna Grimmelt spent the past two years as a Cuso International volunteer working in women's rights advocacy in Honduras. In addition to co-authoring *Chasing the Dream*, a community play for Grande Prairie's centennial, she has earned the *Alberta Views* magazine short fiction prize and translated the poetry of Moisés Villavicencio Barras in *Contemporary Verse 2*. She is from Peace River, Alberta.

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JILL JANVIER

Jill Janvier is a proud member of the Cold Lake First Nations. She is studying her Bachelors of Fine Arts at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, in Kelowna, BC. Her artistic specialties are in photography, sculptural arts, and painting.

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KATE KRUG

Kate Krug practises Interpretive Political Sociology with a particular focus on genders, identities, sexualities, Queer theory, and critical pedagogy. She is currently engaged in an autoethnographic adventure with the working title "The Stone Prince Project: Reflections of a Renaissance Butch." When she is not plying her trade as a teaching academic, Kate can be found hanging around the beaches of Cape Breton photographing assorted waders and/or the moon in daylight.

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JACKSON TRAPLIN

Jackson Traplin is a musician, poet, and practising subversive. He is Hakwaala (Cow Creek) of the Umpqua, named for a place where the Cow Creek and the South Umpqua river systems merge. Like these two waterways, Jackson's work is a confluence of sound and imagery that is a celebration of his people's resilience.

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RAHUL VARMA

Born in India, Rahul Varma is a playwright, essayist, activist, and artistic director of Teesri Duniya Theatre, which he co-founded in 1981. He co-founded the theatre quarterly *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* in 1998, with Kapil Bawa. He writes in Hindi as well as English, a language he acquired as an adult. Some of his recent plays are *Land Where the Trees Talk*, *No Man's Land*, *Trading Injuries* (radio drama), *Counter Offence*, *Bhopal*, *Truth and Treason*, and *State of Denial*.

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YELIZ BIBER VANGÖLÜ

Yeliz Biber Vangölü completed both her BA (1999) and MA (2002) degrees in English at Ataturk University in Erzurum, Turkey. Having been granted a Higher Education Council scholarship in 2002, she went to England to pursue her doctoral studies at the University of Leeds. After finishing her PhD thesis in 2008, she returned to Erzurum where she has been working as an assistant professor since 2010. Her fields of academic interest include contemporary British drama, Shakespeare and the Renaissance drama, feminist literature, and mask theatre.

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Editorial 14.2

Systemic Discrimination Creates Cultural Hegemony in the Arts[1]

BY RAHUL VARMA, PLAYWRIGHT AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF TEESRI DUNIYA THEATRE

Editor's note:

As we mark our first issue of 2018 and our twentieth anniversary as a publication, we are committed to celebrating the magazine's role in providing a platform for diverse voices to debate issues related to the arts, politics, and identity. To that end, this issue's editorial features an opinion piece written by alt.theatre *co-founder and artistic director of Teesri Duniya Theatre, Rahul Varma. Rahul's tireless advocacy of the work of minoritized artists in his multiple roles as artist, administrator, and activist has supported* alt.theatre *and countless other initiatives and projects over the last two decades (and longer!), and it is only fitting that his words open our issue.*

*Also included in this issue's strong collection of articles and reviews is the second instalment of our series "*A Return to Place—Embodied Story Practice."[2] *Curated by Mariel Belanger, the series unpacks the theories and practices underlying the 2017 UBC–Okanagan Indigenous Art Intensive. "*A Return to Place" *continues here in 14.2 with five reflections by Mariel and fellow Indigenous Art Intensive guests Shawn Brigman, Jill Janvier, Jackson Traplin, and Margo Tamez. Together they share their perspectives on the collective construction of a tule mat lodge, used by the Plateau and Sylix peoples in what is now Washington state and British Columbia, on the UBCO campus. The lodge and its construction are a venue for performance, a place of visioning—and a permeable shelter for a matriarch.*

Thank you, readers, for supporting alt.theatre *and the many artists and scholars whose work fills our pages. It is an honour and privilege to curate this space. We have some exciting plans to mark our anniversary year. Stay tuned for more details in our next issue and on altheatre.ca!*

— Michelle MacArthur

The discrimination towards Indigenous, visible, and English-speaking minorities in the arts largely goes unnoticed. In response to recent charges of systemic discrimination against culturally diverse arts, *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* (CALQ) cited a set of procedures, protocols, and statistics to disprove those charges. CALQ pointed out that its vision of diversity and inclusion is contained in the *Plan d'action pour la diversité culturelle 2016-2019*. However, at the same time that CALQ announced the *Plan d'action*, it denied or diminished funding for some of the most prominent culturally diverse organizations in various disciplines.

CALQ's CEO, Anne-Marie Jean, argues that 43.4 percent of all applicants are diverse, of which 52.6 percent received funding. However, that 43.4 percent is a combined figure that merges individual artists and organizations who self-identify in terms of ethnicity, visibility, culture, race, indigeneity, art form, disability, and sexual orientation into one "diverse" category. The charge of discrimination against CALQ is specifically directed at cultural diversity, which considers the particular situation of a visible minority group, consisting of people of African, Asian, Arabic, Latino, and mixed-race origin. In other words, visible minority or culturally diverse applicants represent only a fraction of the 43.4 percent of diverse applicants according to CALQ's definition.

Systemic discrimination cannot be disproven merely by pointing towards procedures, protocols, a *Plan d'action*, and (selective) statistics. One also needs to demonstrate the absence of a marker of inequity, which can be measured by patronage and material conditions afforded to certain groups over others. The most concrete marker of inequity is the superior patronage offered to white Francophone organizations in comparison to organizations made up of visible and English-speaking minorities and Indigenous companies across disciplines. For example, in the dance field, at the top are Les Grands Ballets, Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal, and others, receiving $600,000 to $2.5 million, while the culturally diverse companies Nyata Nyata and Sinha Dance sit at the bottom with $41,000. Similarly, in the theatre field, the top recipients include Maison Théâtre, Théâtre aux écuries, and Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, receiving upwards of $225,000 to $1.5 million. At the bottom are English-speaking, culturally diverse companies such as Black Theatre Workshop with $54,000, and Teesri Duniya Theatre, receiving anywhere from nothing to $25,000.

Somewhere above the bottom are a handful of companies receiving varying degrees of support based on their artistic contribution, but also on their checking-off the diversity box to project the optics of inclusion. But diversity isn't merely a single body on the stage, or a passing reference in the text. Diversity lives in stories that critique communities' social world, political standing, and relations with others.

Another marker of inequity is the absence of cultural diversity in CALQ governance, leadership, general administration, and its jury. CALQ's juries are predominantly, if not exclusively, white and Francophone, adjudicating the artistic productions of the English-speaking minority, people of colour, and Indigenous communities. As a public body, CALQ is obliged to be equitable, impartial, and fair. However, fairness can be guaranteed only by clear rules to ensure equity and by a non-discriminatory policy to maintain racial and cultural equality in the arts. CALQ has neither. Ms. Jean argues that 14.9 percent of CALQ jury members are diverse, which is higher than Quebec's 12.6 percent immigrant population. However, in Montreal, where the bulk of visible minorities live—and where many CALQ applicants reside—the immigrant population is 23.4 percent (according to the 2016 census). Moreover, only the past year's jury was "diverse" and results have been more disastrous than ever before.

CALQ's differential approach towards arts and culture has produced a three-tier art world that is characterized by a hierarchy measurable by the level of patronage, difference in infrastructure, and rules of assessment. The top of the hierarchy is the art world of white Francophones, which, on account of history, is perceived as formal, hence legitimate, and patronized by CALQ. Below it is the art world of white Anglophones, rendered legitimate by Anglo-Eurocentrism, which only occasionally includes diversity, largely to win monetary favours. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the art world of visible minority, multicultural, and Indigenous artists.

The art world at the bottom is stereotypically perceived as informal, low-status, and folkloric—a word that can be traced to René Lévesque's declaration that "multiculturalism really is folklore" to give an impression that "we are all ethnics." This notion was injuriously vocalized as "money and ethnic votes" by Jacques Parizeau on the night of the 1995 referendum. That night, political othering was legitimized, blame was assigned, and Quebec society was divided into "us and them"—the fallout from which has not been remedied by the Bouchard-Taylor Commission or the defeat of the Quebec Charter of Values. In fact, political othering was legitimized with Bill 62 being made into a law and the cancellation of public consultation on systemic racism. Political othering extends into the domain of the arts as well.

Hierarchy leads to cultural hegemony, in which the processes of art-production and "excellence" are mediated by race and culture. As a consequence, the excellence of the art of visible minorities is judged from the Occidental viewpoint. This view upholds standards and values of the dominant group, pre-supposing visible minority art, which may be different in form and content, is inferior, thus providing a basis for devaluation or exclusion. This assumption engenders further stereotypes about visible minority artists: that their cultures are exotic and that their art is folkloric, conceptions that carry nostalgic appeal to the Occidental mindset. This is why a hegemonic jury process immersed in Occidentalism fails to equitably evaluate racialized communities and complex political theatre, such as that of Teesri Duniya Theatre, which refuses to attune to the stereotypes and nostalgia of the dominant group.

Hierarchy leads to cultural hegemony, in which the processes of art-production and "excellence" are mediated by race and culture.

One among many examples of Occidental hegemony can be seen in Théâtre du Nouveau Monde (TNM), an institution steeped in Euro-French whiteness. In 2017, the TNM mounted a play by one of the world's most progressive playwrights, Bertolt Brecht—*The Good Person of Szechwan*—featuring 18 white actors playing diverse characters, without a single actor of colour, perpetuating the dominant culture's view that characters' cultural authenticity means nothing. By rewarding such a monumental aesthetic aberration, the hegemonic system not only reinforces cultural superiority of everything white-Euro-French, but it also normalizes the cultural order of the dominant group. It is therefore not surprising that CALQ keeps rewarding blatant racism such as blackface and yellowface while excluding cultural diversity.

Cultural diversity is as ancient as the origin of life. It has to be preserved and promoted by implementing artistic and cultural equality. It is imperative that hierarchy, hegemony, and inequality be removed from art patronage.

Notes

1. A condensed version of this opinion piece appeared in *The Montreal Gazette* on November 14, 2017.

2. In the first installment of "A Return to Place" in 14.1, the photo of Mariel Belanger holding the tule mats on page 28 was taken by Jill Janvier, not Sierra Belnager-Lee, and the photo on page 32 featured Peter Morin's students. Wendy Wickwire, mentioned on page 32 of Belanger's article "Peter Morin: Expert Time-Travel Conductor," was an anthropology student, not an archeology student.

BY KATE KRUG & SHEILA CHRISTIE

COMMUNITY TRANS/FORMATION:

Performing Transgender Children's Narratives in Gendered and Nongendered Spaces

Our presentation of two transgender children's plays in the 2015 Lumière Festival in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, was initially motivated by Kate's experience at the YMCA in the late fall of 2014. As a butch lesbian, Kate walks through the world under the trans umbrella as a gender-nonconforming person of the female persuasion.[1] In the winter, a down jacket covers up her most obvious "feminine attributes" and she is frequently read as male, especially in the very early morning when she is also more of a baritone than a tenor or alto.

About 7 a.m. one winter morning, Kate encountered another female YMCA patron outside the Y on her way to an early aquafit class. They engaged in conversation about the weather as they walked into the buildings. When they got to the door of the women's change room, the other woman stopped, blocking the doorway, to finish their conversation before entering. Once they finished, she looked at Kate and said, "You can't come in here; this is the women's change room," to which Kate responded, "It's okay, I can go in." After two or three rounds of this, the woman relented and walked through the door, leaving space for Kate to enter. Once inside, Kate was easily recognized and hailed by the class regulars. While this was by no means the first time Kate had been misgendered at the door of a women's washroom or change room, it was once too often.

As a member of the local trans support group, Kate felt she needed to use her positions of privilege (i.e., class, age, ethnicity, status) to take the incident up with YMCA management. She arranged a meeting with the CEO of the Cape Breton branch, Andre Gallant, to talk about the issues of access for trans and other gender-nonconforming folk who might choose to use the YMCA. Gallant was committed to finding ways to make Kate feel more comfortable, including setting up workshops for his staff to address issues of inclusivity and to problem-solve how to meet Kate's need for safe space. He was just as clear that while he could require his staff to attend a workshop, he could not compel Y patrons to do so. The kinds of accommodations the organization could make were limited to finding ways to make the current physical spaces (only recently renovated) work for Kate. Overall, the Y treated Kate's gender nonconformity as the "problem" needing accommodation, which spurred the social justice activist to look for other ways to incite change.

The idea to use performance, and specifically the Lumière Arts Festival, as a strategy for social change came from Sheila. Founded in 2011, Lumière Cape Breton is an "art at night" festival featuring "art in unusual spaces." The allure of Lumière for artists and community members alike is the social and creative energy the event generates. Cape Breton has been in economic decline for a number of years now, as it shifts from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. As with many urban environments, Sydney's downtown core is largely deserted once the shops close at 5 p.m. Lumière transforms this part of the city into a space filled with talent, energy, enthusiasm, and hope. It produces an intense sense of community: people walk about between the various installations chatting with their neighbours and co-workers, connecting with people they see every day or only occasionally. This event brings out the best in this community, and gives people an opportunity to share that best with one another. For Sheila, the festival resonates with her work as a medievalist, where she studies how theatre creates community in historical contexts. The Lumière Arts Festival provides her with a contemporary, and thus liveable, experience of this same phenomenon.

The original festival curator, Laura Baker, wanted to see more theatre represented at the festival, but found it challenging to coordinate performances outside of purpose-built performance spaces. There needs to be a good reason to stage a production outside of a theatre in order to justify the extra effort it takes to manage logistics in spaces not designed for theatre. Sheila hypothesized that a theatrical project would work best in Lumière if it resonated with its performance environment and capitalized on environmental theatre and the transformative potential of site-specific theatre. Whereas traditional theatre assumes a distance between audience and performance that creates a "safe space" for spectators, theatre in found spaces disrupts this "safe" or "neutral" experience. Amy Cordileone and Rachel T. Whorton note that "site-specific performances . . . engender a transgressive freedom among those present" because these performances create "unconventional relationships between audiences and actors, as well as immersive (rather than distanced) perspectives" and "often situate spectators so close to the action they become part of it as observers or participants" (300). Keren Zaiontz similarly describes how audiences in nontraditional venues are co-opted as "role players and aids to the performance" (167). Audiences witnessing environmental and site-specific theatre performances also become hyper aware of how the space is co-opted for performance, how the themes of the performance intersect with the regular use of the space, and how they, themselves, participate in constructing and disrupting spatial ideologies. In particular, performance within an everyday environment can potentially change spectators' relationships to that space, continuing to resonate for them in future interactions with the space. Sheila needed the project to justify the site-specific approach by intentionally incorporating the resonant potential of a found space within Lumière's geography.

Like Kate, Sheila also takes seriously her position of privilege and the importance of championing those who face systemic oppression. This also became a personal issue for her when her child actively chose a genderqueer identity at the age of three, packing up his "boy" clothes in favour of dresses and assuring his mother that he wouldn't be needing pants and shirts anymore. Sheila found herself having to police the doors of men's washrooms, assuring people that her child was in the right bathroom. The gendered spaces of bathrooms and change rooms can be difficult and even dangerous to navigate for folk whose gender presentation does not "read" as consistent with their sexed bodies.

The challenges that trans individuals face around access to washrooms and other gendered spaces became a matter of open conversation in 2016 when the governor of North Carolina approved the North Carolina Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act, which required schools and other public agencies to restrict access to bathrooms and change rooms based on sex assigned at birth.[2] Shortly after, the retail chain Target declared its intention to "Stand for Inclusivity," inviting "transgender team members and guests to use the restroom or fitting room

Above: © Sheila Christie (Photo by Sheila Christie).
Top: A performance of *Backwards Day*. Bottom: Cast members rehearse *Princess of Great Daring*.

Page 10: © Sheila Christie (Photo by Sheila Christie). Early rehearsal in the YMCA change room with co-director Kate Krug.

facility that corresponds with their gender identity." Both positions inspired many reactionary boycotts.[3] Bill C-16 (called a trans rights bill)—which amends the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code to include gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination and of groups targeted for hate and propaganda—received Royal Assent on June 19, 2017. While this accomplishment is certainly cause for celebration,[4] it is notable that it was twelve years in the making; similar bills were passed in the House of Commons in 2011 and 2013 but were killed by the Senate. Opponents of these bills employ rhetoric focusing on the notions that these rights threaten freedom of speech by requiring that folks respect names and pronouns of choice, and that access to gender appropriate segregated spaces physically threatens women and girls—arguments that were circulating in the public discourse as we prepared for the 2015 Lumière Festival.

Even without the backdrop of these large-scale, dramatic controversies, access to gendered spaces is especially difficult to navigate in relatively small and conservative communities like those found in Cape Breton. Census data from Statistics Canada in 2011 puts the population of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) at just over 97,000 (a generous estimate even five years later), but this population is dispersed over a geographical area of just over 2,400 square kilometres, with a population density of 40.0 per square kilometre (as compared to, for example, Halifax's population density of 71.1, or Toronto's of 4,149). The CBRM's population is effectively spread out through a series of small "towns," including Sydney, North Sydney, Sydney Mines, New Waterford, Glace Bay, and Louisburg.

Despite the relatively small population, there are trans-identified kids in every school in the CBRM, and over 140 members, mostly youth and caregivers, of the local transgender support group on Facebook. Although a remarkable number of trans and queer youth live in the broader community, they have a hard time connecting with each other, as there are often only one or two public buses a day serving each small community. Moreover, the broader community is very conservative; in many circles, "gay" is still an inappropriate word to mention in front of children, even though some of Cape Breton's most famous exports are queer—Ashley MacIsaac, Daniel MacIvor, and Bryden MacDonald, to name a few. This community is very much in need of transformation if it is to be a safe space for the many queer and trans youth who call it home.

We believed that a performance at Lumière had the potential to make a significant impact in this relatively small community. In 2014, over 6,000 people attended the festival, suggesting a significant audience base.[5] The festival could function as a bridging event to connect marginalized and mainstream communities, while the performance itself could act as the "workshop" that would draw people's attention to the fraught gender politics

around public spaces like the change rooms at the YMCA—politics that make them profoundly unsafe spaces for trans and gender-nonconforming people.

Our first idea was to present Flamingo Rampant Press's trans-affirming picture book, *The Adventures of Tulip, the Birthday Wish Fairy* in a change room of the YMCA. We wanted to bring people into the very space that is so often dangerous for trans and gender-nonconforming people and to have them experience an empathetic story of a trans-identified kid. Using a children's story as the medium for our message was a strategy to address and defuse anxiety about gender nonconformity, allowing us to sidestep audience preconceptions around the politics of sex, gender, and sexuality and to defamiliarize the conversation by making it about children rather than adults. Similarly, using YMCA change rooms allowed us to address and defuse the moral panic[6] that conversations about gender- or sex-neutral change rooms incite without directly engaging in a conversation about the gender politics at the root of this moral panic. Staging our project in the change rooms was also part of a strategy to humanize trans and genderqueer people for our largely cis-gender and otherwise privileged audiences. We wanted the Gender Change Room project to be a vehicle for making trans realities visible and "real" in the very spaces that marginalize and endanger trans individuals.

As it turned out, *Tulip* was already in development for performance elsewhere, but the publishers offered us *Backwards Day* and our pick of a new collection of books being released the following year. Since *Backwards Day* featured the experiences of a trans boy, we also chose *A Princess of Great Daring*, featuring a trans girl. One condition from the publisher was "that casting make *every effort* to cast people of color in the roles to be performed" (e-mail correspondence, 25 May 2015). Flamingo Rampant is dedicated to producing children's books that model intersectionality around genders, races, classes, religions, sexualities, and identities, and they asked that we do the same in our adaptation of their books to the stage. Honouring their request, we ensured that our casting call and preference for diverse casting was widely publicized, which in turn allowed us to cast actors reflecting a range of gender, racial, and neuro-diversity, including hiring a trans-identified actor.

In the end, we performed the plays for three different audiences in three different spaces: first, as a dress rehearsal during a potluck for the transgender support group in a community hall; second, during Lumière, with performances in the men's and women's change rooms of the YMCA; and third, as a remount at the annual conference of the Gay Straight Alliance, performed in the Boardmore Playhouse at Cape Breton University (CBU). Each performance venue and audience produced a different experience that helps to refine our understanding of how to capitalize on theatre as a tool for social transformation.

Our performance for the transgender support group was a success as a dress rehearsal, but we also noticed significant discomfiture and an air of unsettledness in our audience dynamic at the beginning of the performance. We believe it was the result of a couple of intersecting processes at work in the room.

First was the transformation of the physical space from an open-framed meeting space to a more formal performance venue. Because we had to create our stage space in the middle of the hall, which was also set up for the group's potluck, we did not have any real "backstage" space or a clear performance venue distinct from the potluck space. That meant our production intruded on the safe meeting space for the group—a space that is a rarity in the everyday lives of the members, a significant number of whom are queer and trans-identified youth from across the CBRM. Even though many of us were members of the group and had attended events before, our co-opting of the space for performance initially created a sense of dissonance for precisely the same reasons we focused on site-specific performance in the first place. The difference was that while we wanted to disrupt the heteronormative spatial ideologies of the change rooms in our Lumière performances, we did not want to threaten the fragile safety of the support group's already co-opted space. Our plays ultimately reinforced the group's agency, but the experience highlights how the transformative potential of site-specific theatre can be threatening, even violent, for vulnerable audiences whose access to or use of a space is not guaranteed.

Staging our project in the change rooms was also part of a strategy to humanize trans and genderqueer people for our largely cis-gender and otherwise privileged audiences. We wanted the Gender Change Room project to be a vehicle for making trans realities visible and "real" in the very spaces that marginalize and endanger trans individuals.

Another contributing factor in the tension of this performance was the anxiety about what these representations of trans folk would look like. All too often, even the most well-meaning representations of trans folk fall into the trap of perpetuating the marginalization of gender nonconformity by representing difference as the source of the problem. As the plays proceeded, however, it became clear that our audience (trans-identified youth and their adult caregivers) responded positively to seeing themselves and their realities represented as ordinary and commonsensical—things that cis-gender people take for granted. By the end of the second play, the depth of emotional connection to the material and production was palpable in the room. The moment in *Backwards Day* when the Mom tells her trans kid that she loves him "backwards and forwards" elicited a chorus of "awws" from the audience, many of whom were also in tears. In some respects, this performance alone was worth all of the work; at subsequent gatherings of the support group, many members referred to the event as a watershed moment.

At Lumière, our original plan was to offer three performances of each play, spaced out to provide ample opportunity to refresh the actors and reset the stage between performances. However, the popularity of our plays, the length and simplicity of our production of *The Princess of Great Daring*, and the liberal spacing in our scheduling allowed us to run the shorter play twice in succession, which we then did for the rest of the night. Performing at Lumière was very different from our experience with the transgender support group. First, the audience was much broader, including families, teenagers, queer, and straight folk. Family members of the performers came, including those still having trouble accepting our trans actor's gender identity. While some audience members may have felt themselves represented in the scripts' trans characters, others would have identified more with the parental characters struggling to accept their children—or even felt that they could not identify with any of the characters. For this broader audience, the impact of the performances was less about affirmation and more about transformation.

The venue—the men's and women's locker rooms in the YMCA—was a crucial component of this transformation. These spaces presented particular challenges, especially with respect to sightlines and the number of audience members we could accommodate at any one time. But the change rooms resonated in important ways with the texts and allowed the audience to become more conscious of their interactions with these gendered spaces. We made an effort to highlight the transgressive nature of the audiences' experiences of the spaces. In one case an actor climbed over a bank of lockers during the performance (much to the delight of the children); in another we shifted the audience around the space during the performance; and in yet another, we threw wrapped bubble gum over the audience. By combining, on the one hand, empathetic and celebratory plays depicting the journey of trans children with, on the other hand, a physical transgression into spaces where gender is usually policed, we made the audiences simultaneously more empathetic and more aware of their own privilege. The CEO of the YMCA confirmed this transformed perspective when he said, "I get it now. I want to have some of those signs to put up in the change rooms, the ones that let people know that everyone knows which change room they are in." He had made the leap to a completely different angle on the issue of trans-friendly change rooms, shifting from viewing the trans person's comfort as a problem that needs solving to a sense that the problem stems from the fact that cis-gender folk police public spaces to reflect the expectations of the sex-gender binary (i.e., the problem is transphobia, not trans folk).

The third public performance of the plays was a capstone event for an annual Cape Breton Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) conference held at Cape Breton University. That event brought high school students from all across the island together to talk about their experiences and to develop strategies for building supportive communities within their schools. We performed the plays in the university's Boardmore Playhouse to a reasonably full house, over 200 GSA students plus their teachers and other assorted CBU faculty and staff. Also in attendance was S. Bear Bergman, the author of *Backwards Day*, one of the founders of Flamingo Rampant Press, and the keynote speaker for the conference. The reactions from this audience were similar to our first audience: responsive and emotionally connected. Two reactions highlight an important difference, however. Kate recalls watching one audience member anxiously as he sat motionless and unexpressive through the performances, only to learn later that he was so still because he was crying. This person, as a trans individual, reacted with the same reserved intensity as the transgender support group audience. In contrast to this moment, the performance had to pause for a full minute in the scene when "bubble gum falls from the sky" in *Backwards Day*, while the GSA youth scrambled for bubble gum, engaging joyfully in the play's transgressive invitation. Given that the majority of attendees identified themselves as queer or allies, rather than specifically trans, the play for many celebrated transgression of social norms more generally, affirming a more accepting world view that these youth had come together to explore in the conference. While the plays were affirming for both trans and queer audiences, the trans audiences had the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the characters, while other allies saw their values reflected.

One unexpected transformative effect of the Gender Change Room Project was its impact on the life of our trans-identified actor. As is fairly common among adolescent trans folk, he rarely left his house except to go to school or to work. His sense of discomfiture in the body he was born into (which gets diagnosed as gender dysphoria) and his anxiety about not being seen as who he is in public spaces—or at home for that matter—operated as a barrier to having a life outside his house. Being involved in the Gender Change Room Project quite literally pulled him out of his comfort zone, and we watched him gain confidence as a person throughout.

The project also had an important impact on us as scholars and artists. It is tempting to characterize a collaboration between an English professor and a sociologist as a bit like the owl and the pussycat joining forces. And yet, this project was so deeply rewarding and successful precisely because of the diverse backgrounds and skill sets we brought to the endeavour. The theatrical process demonstrated to Kate a new understanding

of meaning-making as an interactive and necessarily social process. She also has now begun to incorporate spoken word and performance into her own teaching and social justice work. For Sheila, working with Kate helped her accept that interactions across diversity are opportunities to evolve, not tests that one can pass or fail. Kate's attention to detail and commitment to ethnographic practice suggests ways theatre scholars can more clearly demonstrate the impact of theatrical performances without resorting to statistical metrics. Exit interviews and surveys risk changing audiences' experiences through the act of measuring them, whereas ethnography provides a means to interpret the data that audiences provide through their physical behaviour and responses to performance.

Our journey to stage transgender children's plays in public change rooms reveals how each performance context shapes the show and the audiences' reactions, demonstrating the potential of the intersection of space, audience, and content to achieve real change. In the case of this project, we were able to use the YMCA change rooms as a performance venue to shift the emphasis from accommodating individual trans folk to dismantling systemic transphobia, while the other performance contexts contributed to audiences' sense of belonging and confidence in their identities and choices. In addition, what started as a way to bring a workshop on transphobia to the public also changed how we approach our own teaching and research, enriching our work through a deeper understanding of each other's disciplinary practices.

© Sheila Christie (Photo by Sheila Christie).
L: A rehearsal for *Backwards Day*. R: *Backwards Day* in performance.

By the end of the second play, the depth of emotional connection to the material and production was palpable in the room. The moment in *Backwards Day* when the Mom tells her trans kid that she loves him "backwards and forwards" elicited a chorus of "awws" from the audience, many of whom were also in tears.

Notes

1. We use trans throughout this article to represent a range of gender identities not encapsulated in the normative, cis binary that assumes a "natural" relationship between sex, gender, and gender expression. We employ trans as an umbrella term that includes transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, and other folk who colour outside the lines of the sex-gender binary as it operates in our culture. We note that this term can be problematic, as it can reinscribe the binary rather than erase it.
2. The text of the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act is available online at http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2015E2/Bills/House/PDF/H2v4.pdf.
3. Target's statement on inclusivity was published on their corporate blog, 19 April 2106, https://corporate.target.com/article/2016/04/target-stands-inclusivity.
4. The full text and progress of the Bill is available online at http://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?billId=8269852&Language=E&Mode=1.
5. The final count for 2015 was 7,000 (email Christie MacNeil, 5 May 2016), and our shows played at capacity to over 300 people during the evening, with many more turned away at the door for lack of space.
6. The term "moral panic" is used to characterize situations in which the media and political representations of the issue tend to demonize a marginalized group (in this case trans folk) and exacerbate existing fears or concerns about some cultural more (in this case the sex-gender binary). Stanley Cohen characterized moral panic as "condensed political struggles to control the means of cultural reproduction" (xliv). The North Carolina Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act passed in March of 2016 can be understood as an effect of the moral panic around transgender folk and public washrooms.

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A Conversation with Hope McIntyre:

"FemFest 2017: Coming of Age"—Filling the Gaps and Adapting to Change

BY SARAH ROBBINS

When Hope McIntyre and I spoke during the last week of July 2017, major news stories included US President Donald Trump's ban on transgender people joining the military, Canada's response to Trump's travel bans, the fallout from Brexit, and the international premiere of the film *Wonder Woman*. Amidst the changing socio-political climate in North America and beyond, discussing the vitality of the Canadian theatre arts felt not only critical, but also like the socially responsible thing to do. Since McIntyre and I spoke, major revelations about systemic gender inequity and harassment in the workplace have sparked the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, placing renewed emphasis on the topic of our conversation—equity in theatre—and problematizing the notion of a perceived post-feminist era wherein gender equality is achieved and feminism is no longer relevant.

Sarasvàti Productions' Artistic Director Hope McIntyre found a moment between preparations for last fall's FemFest to speak with me via Skype about the growth of the company she founded almost twenty years ago—from challenging beginnings in Toronto to a thriving community in Winnipeg. "FemFest 2017: Coming of Age" marks the 15th anniversary of this Canadian international feminist theatre festival. The theme looks back at the festival's history and engages conversations of "growing up, maturing, and accepting oneself" (Sarasvàti.ca).

McIntyre admits that when she created the company in 1998, she was acting in response to the dismal statistics of women's underrepresentation in the Canadian theatre arts revealed in Rina Fraticelli's seminal 1982 report. Prepared for Status of Women Canada (an agency of the federal government), *The Status of Women in the Canadian Theatre* revealed the glaring gender inequity on professional Canadian stages, highlighting that despite women accounting for the vast majority of post-secondary theatre students and audience members, they accounted for only 11 percent of artistic directors, 13 percent of directors, and 10 percent of playwrights (Burton, "Adding It Up").

Now, thirty-six years after Fraticelli released her report and fifteen years after McIntyre founded her company, Sarasvàti enjoys celebrating their own triumphs while keeping an eye on the future.

For the anniversary, "there's a bit of that retrospective of looking back at where we've come from," says McIntyre, "but we also wanted to make sure that we were reflecting the changing theatre ecology." The ambitious eight-day event indicates at once a passionate and flourishing artist community, and a curious dilemma regarding the continuing need for the feminist theatre festival at all.

After operating Sarasvàti Productions for two years in Toronto, McIntyre moved her company to Winnipeg hoping to forge a unique home and identity. She recalls, "I found it challenging in Toronto to compete with very commercial theatre." By relocating to the prairies, McIntyre took advantage of a smaller theatre scene to create work "that aligned with [her] values, that helped to create social change, and tried to address the inequity in the theatre." She was inspired to move to Winnipeg by a friend who assured her of "how supportive the theatre community was"—a quality that has informed McIntyre's work from the outset.

While working with the Women's Caucus of the Playwrights Guild of Canada in the early 2000s, McIntyre confronted how Sarasvàti would continue to challenge the inequities of Canadian theatre. Several members of the caucus were women who had been actively engaged in addressing gender disparity in Canadian theatre in the 1980s. With the caucus, McIntyre says that she began by "talking about equity and how hard it is for female playwrights to get their work out there, to be showcased. A couple of the [middle aged] women in the caucus at the time said, 'We have had this conversation *so* many times, going back to Rina Fraticelli in the eighties, and we need to actually *do* something.' So I thought that the best thing I could do was to establish a festival."

When FemFest first started in 2003, the event was modest in terms of production and technical support, but was dedicated simply to "presenting the work, producing the work, and creating opportunities for female playwrights." Over the years, the event has grown in scale to meet the demands of artists seeking a space to share nontraditional stories and experiences. "In our first year, we gave each show a $50 budget for production elements as well as providing administrative support," says McIntyre. "Now our full productions have full support with a budget over $10,000." Overall the full festival budget has almost quadrupled from 2003 to 2016.

Building on mainstage productions, the Sarasvàti team has thought creatively about matching the festival's form to the content of nontraditional and nondominant storytelling. This includes the opening night cabaret featuring multidisciplinary artists, the One Night Stand series where playwrights may workshop a piece with participation from the audience, and the Bake-Off competition for new playwrights. The Bake-Off is a special program, admits McIntyre, "particularly for emerging playwrights because it challenges them to actually write something. As a result of the Bake-Off we have been able to support the world premiere of four different plays in the last four years." This is a significant accomplishment given—as continued studies into the gender inequity of Canadian theatre indicate—that women's works often get stuck in the developmental phase but do not make it to full production. FemFest's support of works in various stages of development aims to redress this reality and lead to further opportunities for participating artists. The festival "just kept sort of *morphing*," says McIntyre.

I asked her more about the importance of adaptability—or "morphing"—to the survival of a community relegated largely to the fringes, and what fundamental choices have contributed

This page:
© Sarasvàti Productions (Photo by fubar). FemFest performance of *Tomboy Survival Guide*.

Page 16:
©Sarasvàti Productions (Photo by Janet Shum). Prairie Caravan Tribal Bellydance perform at FemFest opening night cabaret.

© Sarasvàti Productions (Photo by Janet Shum). *Two Indians* featuring Melanee Deschambeault and Erica Wilson.

to the festival's success. Community building is as much the company's purpose as is the development of new women-driven theatre. "One of the things that I've heard from my colleagues," McIntyre says, is their not feeling comfortable "going out for beers at the bar after the show." Much of the networking and mentorship that occurs in the theatre community takes place outside of performance spaces, in the artists' personal time—time that for many women is dedicated to other challenges like raising families or elder-care. Moreover, while not directly mentioned in our conversation, #MeToo has spotlighted an anxiety of possible harassment and assault as a significant factor in women's participation in professional networking outside of regular working hours. McIntyre wanted to reduce the limiting choice of family or career through building networking into the foundation of FemFest. Meetings that were happening naturally during the festival led the company to "introduce more concrete mentorship by involving community members in some of the productions of the festival." An example is *Immigration Stories* from FemFest 2012, where immigrant women were supported by actors on stage to share personal experiences. "It was really interesting watching these women learn about theatre and learn how to tell their stories in a theatrically engaging manner. And then these women taught us as artists a lot about their culture and their background."

A key development for Sarasvàti's goals has been "relaxing the definition of gender, and focusing on also providing the marginalized more opportunities." She notes that "last year FemFest included a trans playwright/performer in the festival. People kept saying to us, 'You know, your festival is for female playwrights. What if someone who is not gender binary applied?' And I would say, 'That would be great! No one ever has.'" FemFest 2017 commenced with *Tomboy Survival Guide*, a music- and story-driven collaboration between transgendered playwright/performer Ivan Coyote and musicians Sal Zori, Pebbles Willekes, and Allison Gorman. Presenting *Tomboy Survival Guide* reflects the work Sarasvàti is doing to remain responsive and responsible. "It's a great hybrid that we're going to be able to showcase and illustrate. The festival has been able to open up to other forms of performance and other definitions of gender, and all of that is also part of *our* growth."

Furthermore, the FemFest team "started looking at diversity—cultural diversity—in addition to wanting to have gender parity." On the schedule of last year's mainstage productions is Indigenous Canadian playwright Falen Johnson's *Two Indians*, a drama that asks the question, "When the words missing and murdered, truth and reconciliation, occupation and resistance are everywhere, how do two Mohawk women stand their ground?" (Sarasvàti.com). With FemFest's 15th anniversary falling on the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederacy, the play puts pressure on celebrations of Canadian history and identity.

In 2012 McIntyre spoke with Shelley Scott for *alt.theatre* in Scott's article "Talking to Each Other at the Margins: The 2012 Women Playwrights International Conference and FemFest 2012." In that article, Scott argues for the value of the feminist theatre festival as a counterpublic space for women, a point she also makes in a 2014 piece about women's theatre companies. Scott explains, "Part of my project in defending women's companies as generators of new work is also to counter the still-common perception that women's theatre is for feminists only, that it is separatist in focus, and speaks only to the 'converted.' The misconception remains that women can and do participate fully in Canadian theatre, rendering women's companies obsolete" (104). Scott argues that because in actuality women are so underrepresented across the board in theatre, women's companies and festivals provide a vital platform for their work.

Michelle MacArthur takes up a similar argument in her 2015 study of equity in Canadian theatre, but cautions that these festivals can have a paradoxical influence: "Because women are given a platform in these instances, it is argued that they don't need one elsewhere. In reality, these attitudes serve to further silo women's work and make it difficult for marginalized women to affect change in the mainstream" (58). MacArthur recommends that increasing funding for women's festivals and theatre companies will aid in advancing women's work beyond the developmental stages but that this strategy should be used alongside other equity initiatives that help women access mainstream spaces. I asked McIntyre if FemFest still feels on the margins, to which she responded:

> The last statistics that were conducted by the Playwrights Guild for the 2015/16 season showed that female playwrights still represented under 30 percent [authorship of productions]. That says to me that unfortunately we're still in the margins. The festival is still needed. For us, it would be a dream come true that we wouldn't need to have a festival dedicated just to female playwrights because they were being produced equally everywhere. Then we could just focus on doing an amazing festival period. But we're not there yet.

FemFest's endurance points to the necessity of such counterpublic spaces to showcase women-driven theatre.

As McIntyre mentions, the "Playwrights Guild of Canada Annual Theatre Production Survey, 2015/16" indicates that women authorship of plays produced in Canada for the previous theatre season is less than 26 percent (Burton). The annual equity reports published by PGC illuminate an uncomfortable reality: that Canadian theatre has made minimal progress towards gender parity in thirty-five years. Despite national studies like those by Rebecca Burton and Michelle MacArthur, change for gender equity is insignificant, raising the question of how the Canadian theatre arts have become so disconnected from our artist communities?

Within the last six months, since the sexual harassment and abuse scandal surrounding Harvey Weinstein first broke, two major revelations of overt harassment in Canadian theatre have surfaced. In January, Albert Shultz, the artistic director of Soulpepper Theatre, was sued by actors Hannah Miller, Patricia Fagan, Kristin Booth, and Diana Bentley for sexual misconduct. One week later, former students of the George Brown Theatre School alleged that they had been abused by the program's faculty. Similar allegations across industries appear in the news almost daily, rendering the idea of a post-feminist era ridiculous, but sparking hope that open discourse will incite real change.

Gender parity is only one factor in a large web of fostering the vitality of the theatre arts, with the ultimate goal of supporting artists of all identities. FemFest reimagines itself and its objectives to remain responsive to the needs of the Canadian theatre arts community. The festival's relationship to its community has proven integral to its enduring success. The festival's relationship with funding bodies, however, is one that remains fickle. McIntyre told Scott in 2012 that using the word "feminist" as a descriptor of the festival had not been beneficial in securing funding. I remarked that since the inauguration of President Trump we have seen a boom in North American feminist activity from previously

Despite national studies like those by Rebecca Burton and Michelle MacArthur, change for gender equity is insignificant, raising the question of how the Canadian theatre arts have become so disconnected from our artist communities?

complacent groups, which hopefully shows changing attitudes towards equality. McIntyre, who is a professor at the University of Winnipeg, says "I still find that in my first-year students there is a hesitation to use the word feminist. I think it's because it comes with so much baggage." She adds,

> What I find really interesting is that funders are obviously more open now to feminism and women's work. Yet with all the changes at Canada Council focusing a lot on accessibility for those who are differently abled and focusing on ethno-cultural diversity, there is no mention of gender parity. So even though we are not at parity yet, the funders aren't recognizing that goal as part of their need for diversification. It doesn't help us as much to be a feminist theatre festival as it does to say that we're also ethno-culturally diverse.

Canada Council director Simon Brault's 2017 "Manifesto for the Arts in the Digital Age" fails to mention the role gender equity plays in maintaining the vitality of Canada's theatre arts; however, the recent decision made by the Canada Council to rescind a planned grant increase for Soulpepper Theatre after the allegations against Schultz surfaced suggests a change in attitudes towards gender equity issues. How this renewed commitment to equity in the arts will be reflected in the forthcoming changes to Canada Council guidelines for promoting safe and harassment-free workplaces remains to be seen.

Funding for FemFest has been a challenge for Sarasvàti over the years, and adjusting terminology has helped the charitable organization secure the means to allow the festival to grow. Beyond playing the funding system, how do nondominant artists and productions contribute to, and benefit from, the push for vitality of the Canadian theatre arts? McIntyre argues that "there needs to be some room to evaluate and recognize work in a different way. I'm all for high-quality professional art, and artistic merit is important, but unfortunately our current ecology has a huge gap." By reducing the importance that our funding agencies place on professionalization and experience, the funds might find their way to the artists who have been historically excluded from the table. Historically the goals of feminist theatre—including and not limited to encouraging women theatre artists and their works, challenging the influence of the canon, and decentring dominant perspectives—differ from those of mainstream theatre and funders. Now in the wave of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, the mainstream may find itself glaringly out of touch.

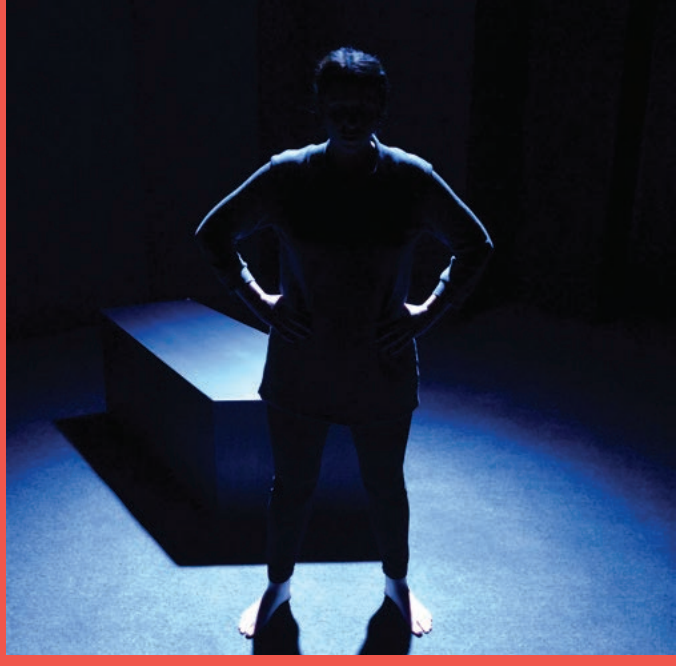
In terms of what Canadian theatre companies, educational institutions, and funding agencies can do to address these gaps, McIntyre believes that there needs to be a "letting-go of the old guard. We have to open up opportunities for a new generation and younger artists from different representations. Some of that has to happen right at the board level, because we still don't even have anywhere near close to cultural parity on our boards of directors." There is a paucity of statistical data demonstrating ethno-cultural makeup of Canadian theatre's boards of directors; however, from a cursory glance at major theatre companies across the country, lack of gender or cultural parity is clear.

Elaborating on boards of directors, McIntyre offered an amusing anecdote about a Canadian regional theatre company that a few years ago compiled a season of five women playwrights: "Everyone celebrated a full season of women. But the artistic director said, 'Well I didn't even think about it, I just chose the plays I wanted to do.' Of course, it was an anomaly. Not all of his seasons even have parity, but that *one* year he was celebrated for that. Which is fine, but when he said he didn't think about it: I think that's the problem." When equity means undoing a fundamentally unjust and exclusive tradition, for McIntyre not thinking about the significance and impact of programming selections is unacceptable. With the firing of Shultz by Soulpepper's board of directors, hiring practices for Canadian theatres are under increased scrutiny.

The 2017 Toronto Fringe Festival championed the cause for equity last summer using the hashtag #FringeFemmeTO. Glenn Sumi for *NOW Magazine* wrote that the "hashtag to celebrate women playwrights, directors and choreographers at the Toronto Fringe, really broke through and got people discussing gender parity in theatre"—an achievement that did not go unnoticed in Winnipeg. McIntyre expressed delight in the Toronto Fringe achieving more than equity, and stated that she would be keeping "track of the Winnipeg Fringe to see how we compare to Toronto. We're seeing that there are a lot more female artists creating their own work, but they are still relegated to the fringe festivals and other festival circuits." As MacArthur's 2015 report indicates, women outnumbering men in fringe festivals is a country-wide trend (23). It may not be as productive to celebrate gender equity in fringe festivals as it is to celebrate the individual successes of the women artists. The 2017 Toronto Fringe makes clear that women are producing work. What isn't clear is the futurity of that work.

Judith Thompson, a guest artist at FemFest 2012, returned to FemFest 2017 to conduct another masterclass, and the Sarasvàti team looked to the playwriting veteran for a repeat of the successful workshop. "We thought, if we could have anyone at our fifteenth anniversary, we would love to have Judith back." Mentorship and role modelling are integral aspects of FemFest's emphasis on artistic development. Beyond her reputation, Thompson is a staple in the Canadian theatre canon. "Judith

Now in the wave of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, the mainstream may find itself glaringly out of touch.



© Sarasvàti Productions. (Photo by Janet Shum)
FemFest performance of *Watching Glory Die* featuring Stephanie MacDonald.

has had such a long career," says McIntyre. "Her career span is something that as a playwright myself I can look to as a possible career. It's that role modelling. I would say that we're still at a point that in most universities [students] are studying far more male playwrights than female playwrights. Judith will often be that exception. She really represents everything that we want FemFest to achieve for female playwrights." Thompson's most recent play, *Watching Glory Die*, which premiered in 2014 through collaboration with Nova Scotia's Mulgrave Road Theatre, ran at FemFest 2017 as part of its Canadian tour.

Anxiety over futurity is prevalent for many women theatre artists—across Canada and abroad. This year's FemFest is an opportunity for participating playwrights to have their work staged and hopefully to connect to other festivals in a larger circuit. Securing one production is difficult; securing the illusive second production can feel impossible. As McIntyre notes, "If we can help premiere not just new works by women, but also provide a longevity for them so that they can have their work seen over a longer period of time, that's great." To create more possibilities of a second production, Sarasvàti was in contact with artists presenting at the Winnipeg Fringe taking place at the time of our interview. Considering FemFest's futurity, I asked McIntyre what she envisions for her company moving forward. "I hope that it continues to morph. I don't want us to ever get to a point where we're no longer responsive to the needs of the community. My hope for Sarasvàti overall is that it's going to move beyond me as the founding artistic director. I'm not going to be that artistic director holding on to the past saying, 'That's not the way we do things!'"

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Ancestral Village Practices

© Jill Janvier (Photo by Jill Janvier). Mariel Belanger begins construction of the tule mat lodge.

In my n'syilxcen introduction to the first keynote artist panel of University of British Columbia Okanagan's 2017 Summer Indigenous Intensive, I welcomed the students to Syilx territory. I welcomed the mentors and spoke to my excitement in witnessing their new works, such as Peter Morin's Time Travel Machine.[1]

Being a local Indigenous artist, I wanted to ensure there was visible Syilx representation. There are few academic performance artist storytellers in my territory, so I do my best to represent the values of my nation well. In order to do that, I needed help. I needed to call up my personal power—*sumes* ("shumish").

Dr. Shawn Brigman (Spokane, Sinixt) describes *sumes* as "an Indigenous leadership way of knowing, being and seeing the world." If *sumes* is expressed in creativity, then dreaming in story is how I express mine. The idea for constructing this tule mat lodge came to me a long time ago, in a story I envisioned as I listened to my granny Mary Abel speak in a recording from the late 1970s. She spoke of a *sqilxw* (people of the land) village site—a small permanent site where a community might live the whole year around. She spoke specifically of the headman's house, a long house as compared to the others.

I needed to know what that would feel like.

I had a vision to embody.

I hadn't ever seen one constructed until I saw an image on Facebook, researched and recovered by Brigman, of a thirty-foot oval tule mat lodge. Instantly my grandmother's voice had come to my

Performed on Campus

BY MARIEL BELANGER

mind as I pictured what this scenario would look like if I were standing on a nearby lookout. I imagined people setting up camp, breaking down camp, cooking, fishing, and gathering house-making materials. I saw a multitude of commerce and community activities conducted in this permanent village. And so in March 2017 I began writing a grant to bring Brigman up the territory to UBCO.

I projected a place where I could continue the imagining of daily life, from the inside of the structure. The offer of a protected natural environment would have been a good reason to build a tule mat lodge in a given area. Facing west, this place was physically located between Parking Lot J, the maintenance yard, University House, the EME building and the pond of the university grounds. When you stand at the pond, you have the vantage point of a long way north and south down the valley. Geography was a key consideration for matriarchs when deciding where a village site would be.

I forgot we were constructing on a geothermal subterranean holding tank used to heat and cool the university. I imagine now that it was like building on an anomaly of time traveling land. I knew exactly what I was looking for and scouted the terrain. I listened to the advice of the mentor homemaker to find—in the place we were—exactly what was necessary to construct what we needed to build. And what we needed to build was an ancestral family dwelling to embody the knowledge contained within a village site.

We came together to learn how a summer village site would have been. I enlisted Adrienne Vedan of the Aboriginal Support Services to help with a food offering for the visitors of our first constructed community gathering. Upon completion of the tule mat lodge construction devised by Dr. Brigman, I invited guests and elders—especially my mother, Hilda Belanger (née Abel), who is matriarch of my family—to come witness the ancestral lodge. Gathering on site with the whole "community" that first day really set the stage. In my practice, when a story works its way to the surface, it works to find an audience.

I loved my time alone in the tule mat lodge. I listened to my granny tell stories and sing through the digital recordings stored on my laptop. I imagined the comings and goings of the ancestral family. I imagined lying in the dark talking about the stars as they appeared beyond the opening of the smoke hole. I watched the sun caress the tules as it set behind magic western mountains. During the poetry reading in the tule mat lodge with Jackson Traplin and Dr. Margo Tamez,[2] who both wove their memories through the landscape of words, I imagined my ancestors in that space, telling of their great hunting accomplishments to the council gathered.

Dressed in my fox ribbon skirt—a contemporary traditional storytelling regalia—I presented myself as host and matriarch of the space. I performed my poem titled "Tribal Teachings,"[3] before guiding those who gathered to move on. When I wanted to wear the white dress on the first day, as symbolic of a woman building her first home with her family, it had seemed too literal for some reason. But in documentation and embodied history telling, doing it ceremonially in the white dress alone—with just family — visually depicted the intent more honestly

I realize now that I literally need to be standing on the northern side of the river where the visiting Okanagans would have been—in the dress, getting into the canoe and paddling across the water, following the echo of their voices. I physically follow pathways in the land to learn the embedded knowledge. I look forward to knowing the feeling, following the places of connection.

I was able to teleport there, maybe because the ground was reconstructed. I could imagine the little hill being the wind stopper, the pond above where we gathered.

Up until breaking camp with Brigman, my daughter, and her boyfriend, I didn't understand fully the connection between Indigenous architecture, frameworks for governance, and women's place in the village social structure. I perceive it now from the view of rebuilding matriarchal value systems. The only audience needed were those of us participating in the deconstruction, and Jill Janvier documenting my performance piece *Moving Camp*—embodying the importance of Interior Salish women in community systems of governance, because tule mat lodge technology was governed by women.

Notes

1. See Mariel Belanger, "Peter Morin: Expert Time-Travel Conductor," *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 14.1(2017): 31-32.
2. See this issue of *alt.theatre*
3. Originally published in 2001 in the McMaster University *School of Social Work Journal*, https://sqilxw.wordpress.com/2012/12/04/tribal-teachings/

Reflections on the "tukʷtniɬxʷ– Tule Mat House":

Indigenizing the Built Environment

BY SHAWN BRIGMAN

During my undergraduate studies in the School of Architecture at Washington State University (2000–2004) my intention was to manifest ancestral Plateau architectural themes into studio design projects. At the time, studio professors did not support exploring Indigenous architectural themes or Indigenous principles of design on any level. To keep my sanity during this time, my general studies courses included a class titled Native Americans and Music, and one of the class projects included harvesting cattails from a campus pond to make cattail mats. That meaningful experience of harvesting, processing, and then sewing a cattail mat stayed with me during my educational journey.

Immediately after graduating from the School of Architecture, I continued my educational journey by enrolling in the Master of Science degree in Recreation Management at the University of Idaho (2005–2007), where I also worked as a summer youth counsellor and instructor for the Northwest Nations Upward Bound Program. It is during this time that I returned to the cattail mat as an architectural materiality for designing culturally relevant youth programming for my Masters thesis. My theoretical goal was to provide culturally relevant recreation opportunities with the creation of a full-scale conical-shaped tule mat lodge using tule reeds rather than cattails.

My awakening to the positive transformational influence of ancestral Plateau architectural creations came during the summer of 2007 after finishing my post-graduate studies at Lincoln University in New Zealand, where I studied Maori leisure/recreation patterns. Visiting with the vice president of Lincoln University, Hirini Matunga (Maori/Tongan) noted that an Indigenous outdoor recreation paradigm can be based on family, work, and recreation all linked as one, as a means to preserve cultural identity and promote group cohesion while also integrating the work with leisure. In Eastern Washington State, activities such as these are an important Indigenous mechanism for linking people and place, while exploring the natural environment and cultural traditions of our ancestors. It was my intention to empower native youth and adults to visit their ancestral lands to learn about tule reeds that grow in ancestral wetlands. The participants in the 2007 summer youth program learned how to harvest tule reeds, dry them, sew them into mats, and then construct an original architectural piece.

Today, long-term planning for my ancestral art and architecture recovery practice may also bridge cultural differences between mainstream architecture and Indigenous architectural ways of knowing and being. As a result, I aspire to advocate a new contemporary style of Plateau art and architecture for regional Plateau tribes. With a focus on re-introducing ancestral-inspired art and architectural heritage, transformational questions that inform my creative practice in the traditional Plateau art and architecture arena are as follows:

To what extent can a contemporary artistic built-environment express the unique character of ancestral Plateau architectural forms and aesthetics such as the conical tule mat lodge, tule mat longhouse, pithouse, or sturgeon nose canoe? Can a contemporary Plateau-inspired built environment accommodate traditional ways of learning, knowing, and being as manifested from these ancestral art and architectural forms? Can a contemporary built-environment reflect Plateau culture in ways that honour tradition, sustainability, and innovation?

In the past I have displayed tule lodges for increased visual literacy awareness in

This page: © Jill Janvier (Photo by Jill Janvier). The completed tule mat lodge.

Opposite page: © Jill Janvier (Photo by Jill Janvier). Mariel Belanger and Shawn Brigman work on constructing the tule mat lodge.

the context of recovering ancestral Plateau built-environments. Invited display opportunities have included participating in Indigenous Peoples Day in response to Columbus Day celebrations in university settings, summer powwow celebrations, a native village encampment for the 25th Lewis and Clark Anniversary Celebration, and Unity in the Community gatherings.

Most recently the tule lodge transformed into a tattoo house on the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO) campus as part of the 2017 Summer Indigenous Art Intensive. The use of the ancestral tule lodge form on the UBCO campus as a contemporary tattoo house was inspiring to witness as Dion Kaszas tattooed Mariel Belanger. This was a rewarding opportunity for me to serve through my architectural creations while safely housing Mariel and Dion during this sacred meaningful tattooing process. By visiting this contemporary Indigenous space during the tattoo demonstration, participants in the Earthline Tattoo Training Residency had the opportunity to learn, discover, and feel this new architectural place-making event, leading to a richer experience for all in attendance.

I have often displayed my tule mat lodge at summer powwow celebrations over the years, and I have come to view the construction process of "putting on an architectural regalia" as a visual theatre performance. As families arrive to set up campsites and prepare their personal regalia for dance in grand entry, my tule lodge construction process serves as an architectural dance during the duration of the powwow. At the conclusion of the final day of the powwow, the architectural regalia (tule mats) is also taken off, rolled up, and safely packed away until the next dance attendance.

Deconstructing the lodge (taking off the architectural regalia) alongside performance artist Mariel Belanger and participating youth at the UBCO Summer Indigenous Art Intensive was a validation in learning, discovering, and visioning Indigenous ways of knowing and being for all involved.

Reflections on Constructing the Tule Lodge

July 11–14, 2017

BY JILL JANVIER

When I arrived to help set up the Tule Lodge, I was very pleased to find about a dozen people there to help. The project mentor, Dr. Shawn Brigman, was busy unloading all kinds of materials from his truck while project coordinator Mariel Belanger was similarly busy. In the blazing thirty-degree sun, it didn't take them long to get everyone moving. One of our first tasks was to erect two very large tipis with just three poles.

Over the two days, construction of the elongated lodges required consistent teamwork—for example, people had to help hold mats or extremely long poles in place while others aligned or tied them. Being a part of this process strongly reinforced the need for family and community unity in Indigenous tribes since time immemorial. This empowering experience validated those things Indigenous people have in common—industriousness, kinship, values, architecture, and land-based knowledge.

As an experiential learner, I witnessed the flow of knowledge in Syilx family and community systems based on an "each one, teach one" methodology. Mariel facilitated a learning opportunity on multiple levels with varying audiences, including Syilx youth, Australian exchange students, university students, professors, and artists. While many participants embodied the construction, the deconstruction of the lodge was completed with only four people. Mariel wore her wedding dress during this entire phase as a testimony to the colonial onslaught on Indigenous teachings.

After a couple days of digesting this experience, I came to recognize how invaluable ancient knowledge is in the process of reclaiming Syilx presence on and in connection to the land. I was honoured to witness and participate in such an indescribably nourishing experience. I trust that each of the many others who helped or visited the lodge walked away with their own unique memories but a similar sense of gratification.

Under Construction

BY JACKSON TRAPLIN

Tule Mat Lodge,
Cultural construction.
Wind rain barrier,
Providence; protection.
In-house insurgence,
Refuge from predation
Earthwork cathedral,
Beacon asylum.

Tule Mat Lodge,
Subversive submission.
Seminal creation,
Borne by tradition.
Uninhibited,
Re-Generation.
Inhabited by minds,
Hearts of Nations.

I wrote this piece as statement whereby the lodge acts as a kind of chrysalis where transformation can happen, as a space where ideas of cultural resilience can proliferate, and lastly as a place of protection against the onslaught of colonialism (if not physically, then spiritually, culturally, and emotionally).

Above: © Jill Janvier (Photo by Jill Janvier). Leafy details.

Nde' Poetics: A Daughter of Rivered Remembering inside the Tule Mat Lodge

BY MARGO TAMEZ

The fight for territory, for cultural differences and for sovereignty is a fight for life itself and for every living being in all its complexity, diversity and transformative power. Maybe that is why assimilation will never be a desirable option.

– Wanda Nanibush, "A Fight for Life Itself"[1]

I.

In my lifetime, violent states, corporate pirates, and militarized societies have unleashed destructive processes and death at a colossal scale against countless human beings, nonhuman sentient beings, plants, roots systems, stone peoples, and water worlds. I was born in 1962 to parents and an extended kinship community of interrelated Lipan Apache, Nahua, Comanche, Basque, and related peoples of the Rio Grande River Indigenous societies. In

© Shawn Brigman (Photo by Shawn Brigman).
Mariel Belanger gathers materials for the tule mat lodge.

only four generations preceding mine, the Indigenous Peoples of our region endured and survived armed dispossessions, genocides, erasure, impunity, and legislated non-recognition. I was born in southern Texas to a diverse Indigenous community that survived the despair, confusion, and devastation wrought by three successive massacres organized and enacted by political interest groups, armed settlers, and officials of both the US and Mexico's military.

Genocidaires in a well-armed settler society developed and normalized numerous economic benefits derived from their institutionally and legally entitled and privileged ethnic-racial interests vested in supremacy. Born of the legacy of land-blood wars between settlers and Indigenous peoples, the legacy of hidden official memory remained buried; however, there is power in naming sites and processes of crisis—that is the psychotic break an entire society endures in the shadows when the normalcy of a numbed society is enslaved to hidden histories of atrocity: the 1872 Remolino Massacre, the 1916 Cameron County killing fields, and the 1919 executions in El Ranchito and La Encantada, Texas. When stated factually, without affect, and coherently, this works to establish a new space for accounting, reparations, and establishing a new "house" of truth, law, governance, and cooperation in the struggle against impunity.

These violent processes and the accounting of these are in the Nde' peoples' journey to be, belong, know, and uncover our truth. In search of truth, I established the decolonial "foundations" for my grandparents, my parents, and my own generation's actual experiences and memories of living in a shadow of existence, and being raised inside the shadows of the white supremacist's imaginary. This imaginary housed all Indigenous peoples under numerous lethal and illegal categories of identity that served the myth-filled memory and bank accounts of the oligarchical order of "deep" south Texas. The Nde' resistance to dispossession and refusal to submit to the shadowy world and the shadowy house of settler myth are founded in colonial and imperialist domination.

The Nde' restoration of the house of peace and truth has re-emerged in the post-9/11 and walled world, and the Nde' house functions to serve the truth by confronting and exposing daily doses of deceptive distortions and to bring into relief the realities of a significant and diverse Indigenous society of war and genocide survivors. These foundations of our current, real authority of our long memory, long history, and long endurance permeate the personal entrapment I have experienced as a norm within an open-air prison system called Texas, called the USA, called Mexico, called North America—and to refuse to be, think, know, and exist in the prison colony any longer. In my lifetime, conflict, war, and violence, and the menial condition these impose upon the human and environmental condition, pervaded consciousness.

I cannot remember a time when war was not a constant narrative, was not a saturating song, slogan, or advertisement on television, or in Sunday mass in the parish church, imposing a debt, weight, and threat upon dissident consciousness. I grew up inside the world called the Vietnam War, and this was a house made of metal, bullets, politicians, extreme wealth and extreme poverty, gluttony and hunger, inebriation and thirst. This "house" persistently worked to displace, erase, and replace the ancestral *em*place*ment* the Nde'-Nahua-Comanche peoples of the Lower Rio Grande, of the Nueces, of the Frio, and of the Guadalupe rivers made, lived, and knew as "home." This "house" of the settler society made homeless the peoples' languages spoken for millennia. Our Indigenous mother-tongues made our world in relation to intergenerational knowledge disseminating and spatializing a deep-time and deep-place consciousness to express, embody, enact and articulate Indigenous peoples' imagined, felt, and known "home." The house of a war without end disconnected the peoples through depopulating our knowledge, by enforcing a mythology, and by dictating a way of being and knowing that prosaically inebriated our beingness and belongingness. These and related processes impacted, wounded, and scarred the Indigenous spirit, thought, mind, and body over time, coping and adapting to life under the house of war. By the 1960s, I remember our collective existence felt as if we were being suspended and mesmerized against our will. I was raised in a community struggling against being coercively, reluctantly held hostage in a frustrated, disconnected consciousness.

In the house of war without end, the state, the church, the society, and their laws dictated the spirit, the Indigenous mind, the memory, and the will to march, bend, genuflect, and bow. The house of war bombed our dreams into fractured shrapnel fragments, splintering earth with millions of ruptured, haemorrhaged memories. Our dreams burrowed into dormancy like sharp obsidian knives, re-planting our consciousness of crisis into Mother Earth. In this time, we endured the imposition of the conditions of menial labour for the settler cattle ranchers, the settler cotton growers, the settler-nation's army, navy, marines. We and our lands enriched the house of the priest and nuns, the teachers, the factories, the mines, the shipyards, the construction, and the shopping mall.

In this period, the invention of new laws to dismantle the Nde' peoples' sovereignty took hold in 1972, through an Indian Claims Commission decision that dismantled, dislocated, dismembered, and dispossessed more than 6.5 million acres of Nde' unceded lands and territory in Texas. With the house of

War deeply saturating the peoples' spirits, minds, memory, and will, a profound despair took hold across the land. The Nde' seemed to wither collectively under despair and desperation, barely to exist and survive. Decades passed and the connectivity of Nde'—a proud Indigenous nation—seemed to all but die under the mythology and distortion story spread throughout the land like gangrene: "unrecognized Tribes." A long, dark cloud of time and memory surpassed the Nde' peoples' capacity to rise up and defend Nde' Aboriginal rights to unceded lands and to reclaim Nde' ***gową gokal nzhuu***, the Nde' beautiful house of Law.

This long time and space of the War Without End came to a close, but not without a great struggle inspired by Nde' ***isdzáné***, Lipan Apache women. In this time, the new beginning of Indigenous resurgence seemed to be ignited from sparks of the Nde' isdzáné who refused to eat the food of the machines any longer, and refused to drink the chemically saturated water, and refused to watch the mind-numbing television, and refused to read the spirit-defeating propaganda. And they refused to disrespect their bodies, and refused to be disrespected by others, and these refusals prepared them to refuse to cede one more inch of land to the descendants of their ancestors' oppressors. And for two long years the Nde' ***isdzáné*** protected and defended the sacred medicines, the sacred water, the sacred nonhuman sentient beings, and the sacred sky, and the sacred earth—against the War Without End society demanding to construct a colossal gulag prison wall through the heart of Nde' grandmother territory. "Not one more inch," said the grandmother. "Not one more inch," said the daughter. An Indigenous mother–daughter rivered remembering, buried and protected into the hearts of the Gochish (lightning) Nde' river peoples, sparked and flickered, flickered and sparked, and illuminated the heart-sight within the Nde' women's undefeated spirits.

Being of Dene kinship, one day, the Nde' grandmother sent her daughter on a long-walking, ***nakaiye'*** journey across the backbone of ***niguusdzán***, earth is woman. She said, "Go to the Big Water peoples in the far away ancestral places, my daughter. Find the place where the ancestors returned many times and spaces ago. Share the knowledge of Nde' struggles and resilience. Share the rivered remembering. Share the ancestral ways through the dance and feasting. Reunite with the ***nkaiye'*** descendants. Go and return to the ancestral places, and warn the peoples there of the builders of the War Without End." The daughter of the rivered remembering set out on her long walk, nkaiye, and visited amongst many peoples in the Nskapipikuni, Cayuse, Umatilla, and the Syilx.

The daughter shared a vision given to her in dreams she hid away from the soldiers of the War Without End, which instructed her that when all the peoples come together a big circle will be formed. And in the circle, the people will sing their old horse songs. When the people remember their horse songs and sing them to the Horse People, all the shadows and distortions of the War Without End will disperse and recede. For the Nde', the biggest distortion and mythology of all is the story of the "recognized" and the "unrecognized." To the Nde' this mythology is one of the most dangerous distortions that deceives the peoples into false consciousness. To the Nde', the Dene Unity process cannot be fulfilled until the Horse Songs are sung, in order to dispel the ravages and despair of this song perpetuating Dene fracturing, division, subjugation, and destruction: those who have belonging and those who do not. The great task of the daughter of rivered remembering is to bring forth the heart-light from within Nde' consciousness, and to express this light of Nde' insight to the rest of humanity.

II.

In 2017, the daughter of rivered remembering arrived in a new place, where the descendants of her ancestors' kinship circle were undergoing a major resurgence. Their women and girls had emerged into their eloquent and courageous struggle for their unshackling from centuries of oppression. A woman carrying many gifts and burdens initiated a gathering and unification of Indigenous peoples to encircle themselves around the story of the tule mat lodge. She, Mariel, worked collaboratively, with an Indigenous relative, Shawn, and together they demonstrated Indigenous women's knowledge, revitalization, leadership, creativity, innovation, and a search for rebalancing that the War Without End had thrown into despair and disorder.

Shawn and Mariel created and opened a new space and place within and inside the tule lodge. The daughter of rivered remembering entered into the tule mat lodge, immediately immersed into the scents of cedar bows, water, and earth penetrating each reed, and a saturation of life-force. As more people entered the tule mat lodge, the lodge herself seemed to enclose each one, drawing the people together, and the daughter of rivered remembering quietly closed her eyes, offering a silent prayer from within her thought, and sending her prayer out through the insight from the grandmothers still in the struggle in the face of the colossal gulag wall in Nde' unceded territory. The daughter of rivered remembering slowly opened her eyes, and listened to quiet murmuring of the peoples from many walks of life. She heard the grasses within the lodge make "sshhhh sshhhh sshhhh" sound as breezes entered from beneath the reeds.

Mariel offered a gift and acknowledgement to her ancestors, and to the land, to the water, and to her territory. She provided a story that wove each human inside the tule mat into self-awareness, beingness, and presence. She summoned the grandmother medicines, to firmly instil knowledge and standing and recognition of the peoples gathered in collective witness. She asked the daughter of the rivered remembering to speak and share the story and the insight and the memory from the struggle in the shadows of the wall.

Inside the tule mat lodge, the gathered came to know the meaning of Nde' women's (re)claiming of place and the Nde' ***isdzáné*** rejection of the mythology and distortion. She especially honoured her ancestors through poetry, which instils an awareness of the Nde' peoples' anguish, loss, and reconnection and repair of those millions of shard blades planted like seeds and now re-emerging in need of intimate nurturing, healing, and reconnection. The daughter of lightning peoples and rivered remembering—kneeling and listening alongside the relations—grasped the grass with her fingers. Belonging and recognition inside the tule mat lodge opened and we shaped a new, emerging space of Indigenous being, knowing, doing, and repairing—beyond borders, walls, myth, and war.

Note

1. In Leanne Simpson, Wanda Nanibush, and Carol Williams, "Introduction," *The Resurgence of Indigenous Women's Knowledge and Resistance in Relation to Land and Territoriality* 6 (2012), 4, www.yorku.ca/intent/issue6/notefromtheeditor/notefromtheeditor.pdf.

Juggling in El Salvador

BY KRISTJANNA GRIMMELT

On a hot evening in the small community of Suchitoto, El Salvador, a little boy is having trouble getting to sleep.

The actor playing the boy (César Guardado) elicits laughs from the youngsters up front when he panics over mice—represented by hand puppets—crawling over his bed and the blanket he loves. The boy's mother (played by Estela Abrego) and grandfather (Hector Vides) rush onto the bright, hand-painted set to see what's wrong.

Translated by local dramaturge Tito Hasbun and adapted by Canadian director Jerry Silverberg, the play is an adaptation of *Something for Nothing*, a children's book by Canadian American Phoebe Gilman. Here, it is known as *Mi Cobijita* (My Blanket) because of the central metaphor: the blanket is a gift made by the grandfather and it follows the boy through life. "This play has a strong, big idea that all things change," says Silverberg.

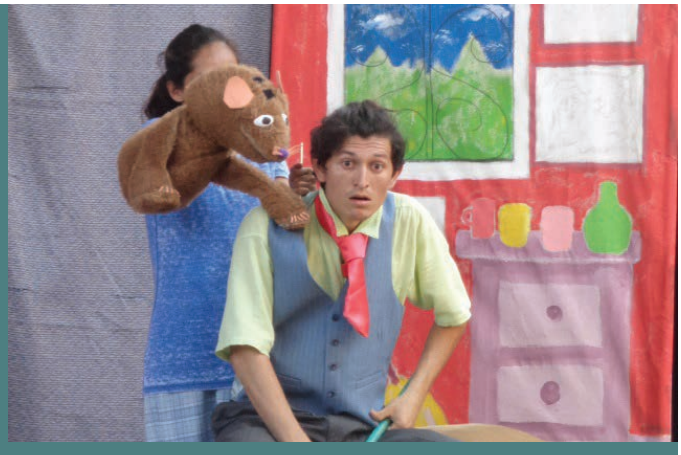
Like me, Silverberg is volunteering through Canadian organization Cuso International with a local nonprofit group. I volunteer in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of neighbouring Honduras, as a communications specialist in women's rights. Silverberg is working with EsArtes, a partnership since 2009 between Primer Acto, a local organization, and Canada's Stratford Festival. EsArtes offers a theatre training program to youth, community outreach, and a roster of plays each year.

In 2014, I co-wrote a historical play for Grande Prairie, Alberta, that was based on the community theatre philosophy of British playwright Ann Jellicoe: to gather and re-interpret a community's own stories with local residents. I learned of EsArtes at that time and, when I moved to Central America two years later, wanted to see it for myself.

Raul Sanabria—a local greenhouse owner and artist who converts used tires into colourful, macaw-shaped planters—gave me a ride into town after my seven-hour bus ride from Honduras. His son and wife are involved in EsArtes. He told me that Suchitoto has always been a creative place; the famous Salvadoran filmmaker, Alejandro Cotto, started an arts and culture festival in Suchitoto and the local theatre bears his name.

After learning to live with a heightened awareness in Tegucigalpa, a busy and sometimes chaotic capital city, I felt relaxed in Suchitoto. I can freely wander the cobblestone streets, stopping at *pupusa* restaurants and shops selling indigo-dyed cotton. "Suchitoto' means "flower bird" in the indigenous Nahua language; today, the town is a site of national cultural heritage. In the 1980s, however, the town was a scene of confrontation between guerrilla groups and the government—it was almost completely abandoned.

In an interview in 2017, co-founder Edward Daranyi told me that the idea behind EsArtes is to recreate the economic stability in Suchitoto that the Stratford Festival brought about in Ontario following the loss of the railway in the early 1950s. He rejects the notion that EsArtes imposes a colonial model—just as the British model was imposed on Stratford. "Since the inception of this project, it has been about 'what



Top: © Jerry Silverberg (Photos by Jerry Silverberg). *Mi Cobijita* in performance—*Grandpa and the Mouse*
Bottom: ©Kristjanna Grimmelt (Photo by Kristjanna Grimmelt). Edward Daranyl with the cast of *If I Could*.

Page 29: © Jerry Silverberg (Photos by Jerry Silverberg). Clockwise from L: Jerry Silverberg juggles as EsArtes participants look on.
Jerry Silverberg teaches mime at a school in San Martin.
Mi Cobijita rehearsal.

"Since the inception of this project, it has been about 'what kind of stories do you want to tell, what kinds of things are important to you?'"

kind of stories do you want to tell, what kinds of things are important to you?'"

Each year actors perform at least one locally written play; the previous year, local plays dealt with topics like teen pregnancy, gender dysphoria, and illegal immigration. They often draw on elements of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Other works—for example, a recent performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—are chosen by the local board and adapted. In *Mi Cobijita*, originally a Yiddish folk tale, a long Jewish cultural scene was cut; as the main actor was an excellent juggler, juggling became a central motif.

EsArtes co-founder Tito Hasbun, who left El Salvador for Canada during the civil war, believes that youth who become involved with EsArtes develop a confidence that helps them avoid violence. El Salvador has one of the world's highest homicide rates—over 80 per 100,000 inhabitants according to the US Department of State in 2016—largely concentrated in people ages 15 to 29. Tegucigalpa, where I live in Honduras, has a similar situation.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, it is due to the interconnectivity of drug trafficking, corruption, and gangs. In both countries, roughly a third of the population lives below the poverty line. Lacking other options and struggling to survive, youth become easy recruits for gangs.

However, Hasbun is hopeful about the youth involved in EsArtes. About 600 youth have participated in EsArtes in the past eight years, Hasbun says; going forward, he is optimistic about a new children's theatre troupe: "We need to start to foster these values in children."

Leydi Arce, a former participant who travelled to Canada last year for the World Festival of Children's Theatre and in 2014 for the Stratford Festival, credits EsArtes with steering youth she knows from violence. "I think EsArtes is changing small worlds, creating change in each mind of each child." When she and her brother, Manuel, got involved, her father told her that she was wasting her time. But today he is proud—Arce has landed a job teaching workshops for Teatro Yulkuikat in San Salvador. She hopes to continue violence prevention through theatre in the capital.

Hasbun told me that the longevity of EsArtes is a strength. I would agree. As someone working in international development, I do believe it is possible to collaborate in a different culture—but that it takes patience and mutual respect. After extending my own Cuso International placement to two years, I feel I have done some good work and a lot of learning—with a team of women who at turns have forgiven, frustrated, and inspired me, just as I have them.

The night before I left Suchitoto, cast and audience members of *Mi Cobijita* celebrated Silverberg's *despedida* (going away party). He would be starting up his regular gig in Toronto as the artist-in-residence of a local park. Although it was past nine o'clock at night, many of the children from a juggling group Silverberg had been running gathered outside to play.

Living in Tegucigalpa, I had forgotten what it was like to hear children playing at night without gates, barbed wire, or guarded doors. I ran out onto the quiet street to join the jugglers—getting them to show me what they'd learned, knowing I might forget how when I went home. But this sense of a healthier—and therefore freer—community wouldn't leave me.

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Theatre Review

LUKUMI

BY SIGNY LYNCH, FEATURING UCHE AMA AND AISHA BENTHAM

Written by **d'bi.young anitafrika**
Music co-composed by: **d'bi.young anitafrika** and **Waleed Abdulhamid**
Directed by: **Eugene Williams**, with music direction by **Waleed Abdulhamid**
Featuring: **Aisha Bentham, Savannah Clark, Sedina Fiati, Uche Ama, Daniel Ellis, Najla Nubyanluv, Sashoya Shoya Oya, Julene Robinson,** and **d'bi.young anitafrika**
September 22 – October 14, 2017
Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, Ontario

This review is an experiment. It's a response to a pattern of theatre criticism that often presents the opinion of one person as an objective measure of a show's worth. In focusing on star ratings, and seeking above all to define what is good or bad in a production, these reviews often seem more interested in evaluating a piece's commercial worth than exploring its artistic contributions. To de-centre my experience, and to give readers what I hope is a deeper engagement with the work, some of the cast members of Lukumi have kindly shared their perspectives. These perspectives, which provide a different kind of insight into the show, are to be read alongside my experience and should be considered just as much a part of the review.

One of the first things that struck me about *Lukumi*—the final instalment in playwright/composer/performer d'bi. young anitafrika's Orisha Trilogy—is its shocking urgency. The dub opera is an uncompromising celebration of Black resistance and resilience, even as it presents a call to action, warning us of the impending environmental disasters facing humanity. In a post-apocalyptic landscape (brought richly to life by designers Rachel Forbes and Michelle Ramsay), the remnants of humanity are forced to live in caves and hide from the brutal new world order. From this darkness, a hero, Lukumi (played by anitafrika), emerges to fight against the capitalistic forces that have destroyed the planet, razed natural landscapes, and caused an epidemic of infertility through toxic spills. The show follows Lukumi as she undertakes a vision quest to the Ancestor Tree in order to save the world while resisting a colonial mindset of internalized racism.

As I watch, parallels emerge—clear and often chilling—between the fictional world of the play set in 2167 and the fraught political climate of today. Soldiers of the capitalist super-conglomerate The One World Army chant "you will not replace us" to the Black rebels they fight, echoing the words of the neo-Nazi protestors in Charlottesville last year. Meanwhile, Lucius Dechausay's film work presents the contemporary political and environmental moment through an affecting montage (featuring Trump, Kim Jong Un, and fracking) that makes current events seem a credible start to the apocalypse. Equally prominent are parallels between contemporary activists and the Ahosi rebels, whose songs (co-written by anitafrika and Waleed Abdulhamid) and movements (choreographed by Dr. L'Antoinette Stines) occasionally sample popular protest songs, linking their actions to an important tradition of Black performance and protest and reminding us that these protest movements might be our only hope facing the oncoming environmental devastation. In recognizing that the same forces that cause institutionalized racism and mass incarceration in the West are also responsible for climate change, the show makes clear that all these struggles are connected, and that anti-racist methods must inform any efforts to confront ecological destruction.

Lukumi is as spectacular to watch as it is politically poignant. The show takes the form of a dub opera, a performance style that mixes Jamaican popular performance forms with a rich dub tradition. The resultant piece is visually and aurally luscious and operates on multiple levels of meaning-creation—for me particularly the sensory, gestural, spiritual, and mythological. The entire cast offers strong performances, most of the performers taking on multiple roles including the Ahosi Mino (the survivors and rebels of this post-apocalyptic world); the animals who confront Lukumi on humanity's environmental impact; and the Orisha, deities in the Yoruba pantheon.

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In the second act, after being chosen for the journey, Lukumi makes her way through eight layers of the earth to find the Ancestor Tree. The journey Lukumi takes is not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual and is played by anitafrika with an enrapturing vitality. Through the teachings of the animal guides, Lukumi gains the confidence and assurance to face the lack of clear solutions the Ancestor Tree provides—a journey of personal development that echoes the principles of anitafrika's own Anitafrika Sorplusi Method. However, her transformation from uncertain hero to empowered leader does not seem to signal a victory for all humankind, but rather serves as a challenge to the audience. As Lukumi leaves the theatre with the Orisha pantheon at the play's end, she leaves the audience with the weight of our own actions and decisions. Lukumi is a hero, the show seems to say, but she is not our saviour. Instead she models what each individual audience member must do to meet the environmental and humanitarian challenges ahead, a task that the piece makes clear is the individual responsibility of all.

For me, a real source of the performance's strength and—despite the dark and dire subject matter—its ultimate hope is the way it ties contemporary issues to age-old myth, spirituality, storytelling, and tradition. One way the show frames Lukumi's journey is as the mythical journey of the Orisha Oshun. It is this divine scale that allows *Lukumi* to succeed (where other shows that attempt to address climate change have failed) in both capturing the massive scale of the problem and giving the show enough weight to confront it—and to even imagine possible solutions.

I hope they're taken aback. I hope they're taken aback, and I hope it makes them ask questions. I really hope they stop and say, "Wow, what am I doing? What am I doing right now to make this an issue? What am I doing to feed this problem?"

Uche Ama—Ahosi/Buffalo/Oya

Uche is a queer, Black performer.

Q from Signy: *What does the piece mean to you?*

This piece means everything to me because I come from a musical theatre background and my experience with theatre has not always been as spiritual, as connective with my cast, as connected to my history and my heritage—I've never experienced something like that doing a show. So this experience changed my world; it's changed my perspective of art. It's changed my perspective of what I want to do as an artist, because my whole life I've been, like, "I want to be a musical theatre performer." It's what I want to do, and I love it. And I still love it, but now, because of what this show is, I feel like there's nothing like this out there. Maybe I need to start writing it; maybe I need to start creating it with some of the people in this cast. So this show definitely means a lot. It's close to my heart, very close to my heart.

Q: *What message do you want an audience to take away from the show?*

The message I want them to take away is "Stop, and look." We as humans in the city are so fixated on the go go go of life, and "I've gotta go here, I've gotta go *here*, I have to do this, I have to do that." Coming here and taking in what that does to the human race really helps us see how easy it is to forget about things that used to be important. Once upon a time, the environment and our earth were something to fight for—we wouldn't be here without the earth. It's so important, so I'm curious as to what happened to let that importance fall by the wayside. So that's a message that I hope the audience goes away with.

Q: *What effect do you hope* Lukumi *has on an audience?*

I hope they're taken aback. I hope they're taken aback, and I hope it makes them ask questions. I really hope they stop and say, "Wow, what am I doing? What am I doing right now to make this an issue? What am I doing to feed this problem?" I say to myself for the last month, since we started working on the show: "Lukumi is everywhere." And climate change is everywhere. Especially the weather that we're experiencing right now. It's September and it goes from being 30 degrees to today where it's like 17 degrees and you want to wear a sweater and a scarf, and next week it's going to be 30 degrees again. So, stop, question. That's what I hope.

Q: *What advice do you have for an audience member encountering the dub art form for the first time?*

Listen. And ask questions, if you have questions. I would also recommend reading that article that Amanda Parris wrote in CBC about what dub is, the

This page: © Watah Theatre (Photo by ahmed barakat). The cast of *Lukumi*.

Page 31: © Watah Theatre. (Photo by ahmed barakat). Sedina Fiati, Savannah Clarke, d'bi.young and Uche Ama in *Lukumi*.

history of it, the importance of it in the Jamaican culture and why it is what it is. Even a person who kind of knows dub or has seen d'bi's shows in the past, that article really brought everything to light and prepares you for what you're going to experience here, I think . . . And you'll probably find yourself online when you go home, and that's definitely what we want. Google, find reputable resources, and research things that you're curious about if you don't understand something.

Aisha Bentham—Ahosi/Crow/ White Mask/Yemoja

Aisha Bentham is a Toronto-based (Ajax) artist/creator.

Q from Signy: *What effect do you hope the show has on the audience?*

I really hope that they enjoy it. I mean, we are talking about some really heavy, deep stuff in this show and I pray and hope that people will take that in; but, as well, I just want people to enjoy the show. It's beautiful. The music is so much fun, and the visuals and the different characters that we all play. I also really want people to come into this show with no expectation. Because this type of theatre is not like every type of theatre. And so, just coming in with an open heart, because really that's the most important thing—not coming in ready to judge.

We all go through change in different ways. This is a big show and we're talking about some really heavy stuff. Even as myself as an actor in this show, I still have moments of, like, "Oh my god." It's always new, even though I've been doing this for so long. And so I don't take it for granted that some people, it may not land for them right away; but like I said, I think a big thing is have an open heart and come in with the option for things to hit you. Because when you come in being, like, "Nope, okay, I'm here, they're there, this is their experience, this is not my experience," really coming in with the option of being, like, "This could be my experience," or, "This actually is my experience." But for some people it takes a little bit longer . . . We had a talk back last night and our director Eugene Williams talked about dub art form, and I'm still sitting with it, too. I'm not of Jamaican descent but that doesn't matter. The form is still coming out of me in ways that I'm still grappling with, and being, like, "Okay, what is this? How am I saying this? Where does this live?" . . . Just come in and be open-hearted

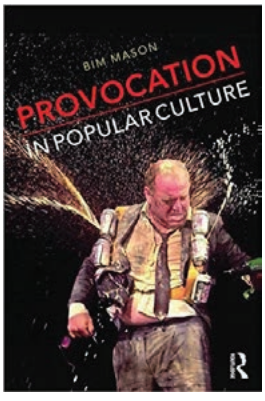
Q: *Do you have a favourite part of the show?*

This part of the show when the Ancestor Tree [performer Najla Nubyanluv] comes and starts to sing her song and Lukumi is about to start her journey, and you have all the Ahosi Mino on the stage, and the Ancestor Tree's singing to her, and she's saying, "Come to me Lukumi"—as if she's serenading her to come to her. And the drums are going and it's all very—every time it's different and every time it's so organic, and real. And it really transports you (at least myself as an actor on stage) into a space of—it's like you're not here in Toronto, Ontario at 8:43 p.m. Your space and time is no longer this solid form, it's malleable. And it really transports you into this other space, and I love it. I can never anticipate what's going to happen and I think that's the coolest part about that moment for me.

Q: *Is there anything else you would like to say?*

Climate change, deforestation, mining—these things are real. I think that's the hardest part for people to really grapple with. Because we're not touching them. We're not next to a family of trees getting uprooted to put a condo or a building. So just reminding ourselves that this is very real. And the closer that we get to earth, the more we will really hear its heartbeat. I know that's very poetic, but we need to do that more. And that's going to look very different for every person. You know, maybe for some people, that's when they go up to their cottages every weekend. Or maybe people just can't live in the city, have to live in the suburbs or up north. But whatever that means, you need to get closer to the earth to hear its heartbeat because it speaks to you. That's it.

Book Review



BIM MASON. *PROVOCATION IN POPULAR CULTURE*

London: Routledge, 2015. pp. 246, illustrated.

BY YELIZ BIBER VANGÖLÜ

This Darwin-meets-neuroscience viewpoint raises some serious questions about the sinister operations of gender bias.

In his second book, *Provocation in Popular Culture*, Bim Mason—an accomplished circus and street theatre practitioner and the co-founder / artistic director of the Bristol-based circus and physical theatre school Circomedia—focuses on the provocative work of several performance artists. Mason's meticulous selection of artists reflects a broad visual/performative spectrum that includes British anonymous graffiti artist Banksy, actor/comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, Russian feminist punk-rock group Pussy Riot, and Spanish clown activist Leo Bassi. In six chapters that draw on the mathematical theory of complexity/chaos and neuroscientific theories such as "the winner effect" and "the shock doctrine," *Provocation in Popular Culture* deals with "an area that combines a political agenda with populist entertainment, but which is neither political performance with aspects of popular entertainment, in the tradition of agit-prop, say, nor entertainment that simply aims to shock" (1). Such exactitude in the selection of performances that decidedly lie in-between the realms of politics and entertainment furthers the discussions in the book by not limiting them to the confines of a single terrain.

Mason starts his exploration by presenting the example of Philippe Petit, the French high-wire artist famous for his 1974 tightrope walk between New York's Twin Towers. Anchored in the story behind Petit's life-risking endeavour, the introductory chapter lays out the context, introduces the performers whose work is put under a critical lens, and sheds some light on the theories and terms used in the book. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 provide detailed examinations of the provocative acts and strategies of Leo Bassi, Sacha Baron Cohen, and Banksy, respectively. The reason Mason has selected these three performers becomes clearer through these chapters: each has his own distinct pattern of resisting and challenging the existing structures. In exemplifying these three different operations of provocation, Mason suggests three analogies—the fulcrum, the blade, and the border—an approach that is very helpful in defining patterns of provocation mainly through their relation to order and chaos. The discussion of Petit's tightrope performance at the beginning of the book provides an exceptionally illuminating example for the following chapters because his "feat is so extreme it brings to light features of provocation that might be overlooked in more subtle actions" (13). However, the differences in the performances of these three provocateurs are also revealed in how they relate to the phenomena of risk-taking, power, popularity, and playfulness.

Chapter 5 provides an interlude wherein Mason draws astute comparisons among the three performance artists of the preceding chapters in a more compact discussion. Particularly examined here are issues such as these artists' cultural status as provocateurs, the nature of their provocations, related financial issues, and ultimately their approach to their own performances. This chapter also includes a discussion of what Mason considers two types of specifically "female provocation": Pussy Riot and New Burlesque performances in the UK and the US. He sees the essential difference in these two types of "female provocation" in their attitude toward audience: Pussy Riot presents a self-image that, as a kind of "carnivalesque release," does not consider what others may think about them, whereas performances in the Neo-Burlesque genre are "very focussed on what others think/feel about the self-image being presented" (169). Mason concludes that "the confrontational attitude of Pussy Riot creates divisions, even amongst the opposition, and one result is a reinforcement of norms in the wider public"; in contrast, "Burlesque can be viewed as an insidious subversion of norms from the inside, subtly challenging hetero-male assumptions and entertainment norms" (175). While Mason praises the latter form of provocation here for its potential to subtly ingrain into established systems and change them from within, this seems to undermine the power of a more forceful form of provocation, as it may possibly reinforce what it strives to counteract. However, this argument potentially limits the range of provocative acts—a limitation that seems to be contrary to the nature of provocation in final analysis.

The last chapter of the book is reserved for Archaos and Cirque du Soleil, two contemporary circus companies—the former based in Marseille and the latter in Montreal—with completely different approaches to provocation. While Archaos

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operates outside of a consumerist ethics, challenging established norms, the latter company has shown "a gradual softening of radicalism towards a complete rejection of any hint of ideology, in order to suit the demands of the market" (199). This chapter, thus, lays out two models of existence within the contemporary circus practice.

Mason's book is strongest in its insightful observations about the artists, companies, and their performances and its discussion of the artist's uneasy and ever-changing status in society, the impact of audience response, and the relation between temporal-spatial circumstances and performances. The careful examination and categorization of provocative acts will, undoubtedly, be helpful to those struggling to understand what it is exactly that defines and constructs provocation and how transformation can be stimulated by different forms of action. Mason's brief anecdotes from his own personal—and provocative—performance history contributes to the book's strength. One memorable example details Mason's use in public street performances of huge latex head masks known as Big Heads (82–88). The book in this way balances a scholarly investigation with practical examples from Mason's four decades of first-hand experience.

One weakness is in the overburdening of Mason's depth of analysis of these practitioners' work by the variety of theories he draws from scholars including Mikhail Bakhtin, Naomi Klein, Ian Robertson, and Victor Turner. Though admittedly both supporting and giving structure to his arguments, some of the book's theoretical assumptions are questionable in terms of what they validate. One such example is Mason's observation of the relative lack of women using provocative challenges as performative expression in contemporary theatre. Mason suggests that the rarity of women in this field is a result of an intrinsic female quality, or lack. He describes Petit's feats as motivated by an obsession with adrenalin linked to the testosterone hormone provoking him to constantly strive for power, which, when achieved, leads to a thirst for still more power and ultimately results in "the winner effect" (13-17). This Darwin-meets-neuroscience viewpoint raises some serious questions about the sinister operations of gender bias; and even though Mason readily accepts that he "write[s] from a male perspective," he nevertheless tries to justify his stance by stating that "this area of work is predominantly a male one because it involves bravado, territorial domination, power negotiations and… may be connected to increased level of testosterone" (162).

These observations, and the patriarchal discourse they emphasize, produced an unsettling feeling in this reader. The claim that women are far less engaged in provocative acts because of their low level of testosterone or because they are disadvantaged compared to men who have "the greater culturally inherited confidence to confront others in power" (16) is, to say the least, wrong. Not only because it is precisely this rhetoric that endorses sexual discrimination, but also because there are many female artists and activists constantly staging scenes of provocation in the world such as Judy Chicago, Lady Gaga, Kembra Pfahler, and Deborah de Robertis, as well as the infamous group of feminist activists, Femen, among many others.

Despite Mason's attempt to include women provocateurs in a chapter, some of the ideas and theories he utilizes limit the book's scope to a discussion of "male" or "masculine" provocation. However, in the relatively short list of contemporary performance scholars interested in an explicitly political agenda, Mason's study of provocative acts of popular performance art forms is an invaluable text for performers to reconsider their own relation to social hierarchies, and it inspires counter-spaces or at least resistance in popular performance. For those who feel that politics and popular performance are irreconcilable given the differences in their goals and methods, *Provocation in Popular Culture* rather enjoyably presents the two-fold perspective of an artist-scholar who elucidates his experiences and observations based on examples of provocation in popular contexts.

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