theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

Volume 15, No. 2 *$8*

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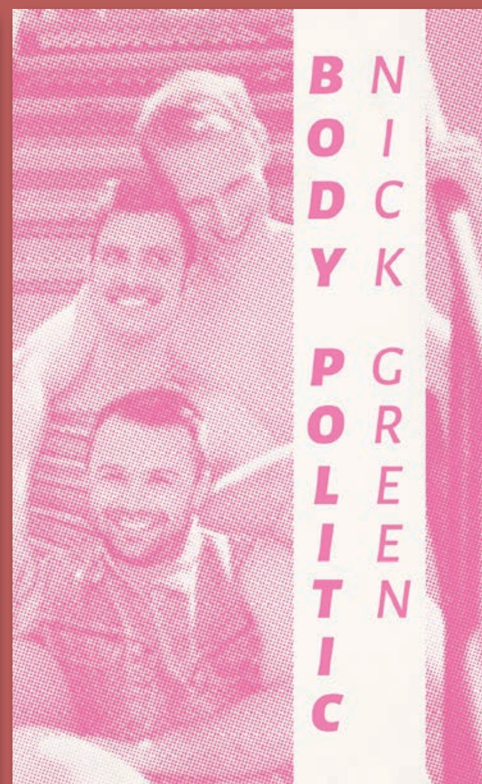

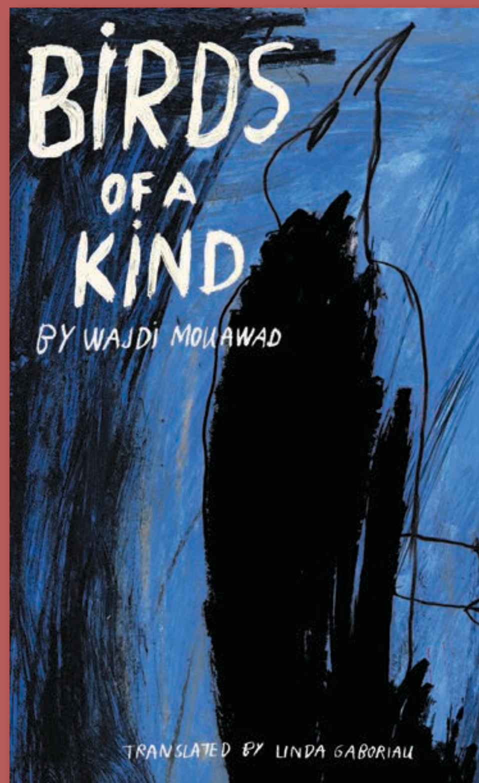

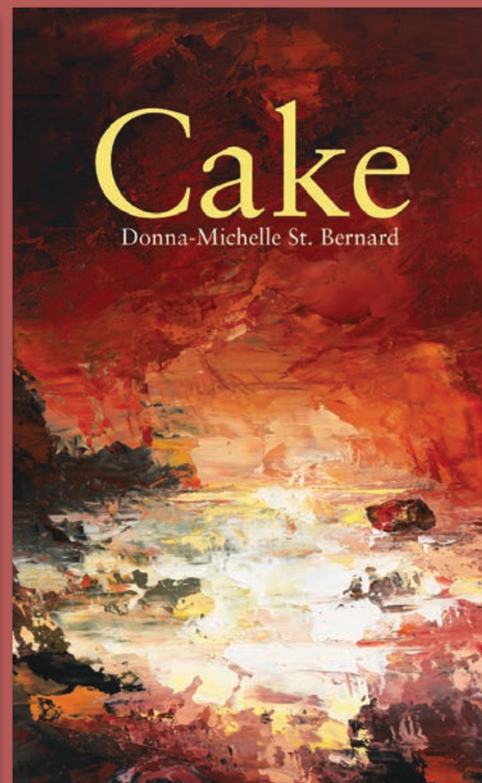

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cultural diversity and the stage
Vol. 15 No. 2

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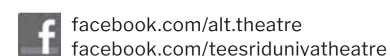
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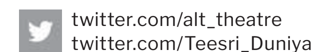
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Contributors 15.2

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Rebecca Burton is the Membership and Professional Contracts Manager at Playwrights Guild of Canada, where she co-founded Equity in Theatre (EIT), an initiative redressing the underrepresentation of women in Canadian theatre (2014 – 2017). Rebecca is also an editor, educator, researcher, and (feminist theatre) practitioner with a BA in theatre and history (University of Guelph), an MA in theatre (University of Victoria), and PhD ABD status (Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Toronto).

Photo by Dahlia Katz .

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Photo by Rebecca Benson.

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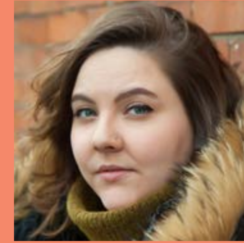
HAYLEY MALOUIN



Hayley Malouin is a theatre critic, maker, and philosopher from Toronto. She holds an MA in Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts from Brock University. As a scholar, her research focuses on public performance, political protest, and circus, with intersecting interests in immanent and differential ontologies. She is the co-editor of Performance Matters Vol. 4.1-2, titled Circus and Its Others. As a maker, she has performed in both Canada and Ireland. #FuckFord

Photo by .

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DANIEL McNEIL

In his teaching and research, Daniel McNeil brings together African and Black Diaspora Studies, Media and Cultural Studies and other related fields of inquiry to map the cultural and intellectual histories of Black identities that may be read within, across, against, and outside the nation-state. He has previously held the Ida B Wells-Barnett Professorship of African and Black Diaspora Studies at DePaul University in the United States and taught Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Hull and Newcastle University in the United Kingdom. He is currently the Visiting Public Humanities Fellow at the University of Toronto and an Associate Professor of History at Carleton University.

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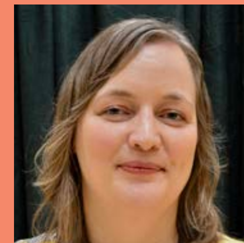
FIONA RITCHIE



Fiona Ritchie is Associate Professor of Drama and Theatre in the Department of English at McGill University. She is the author of *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) and co-editor (with Peter Sabor) of *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). Her research interests include gender and theatre history in the long eighteenth century and Shakespeare production and adaptation from the seventeenth century to the present.

Photo .

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MYRNA WYATT SELKIRK

Myrna Wyatt Selkirk is an Associate Professor at McGill University where she teaches acting and directing. A few of the productions she has directed at McGill are *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Richard III*, *The Vibrator Play*, *Cloud 9*, *The Good Person of Sichuan*, *Zadie's Shoes*, *The Sea*, *Tooth and Nail* and *Bonjour la Bonjour*. Myrna's work and play is heavily influenced by an intense study of and fascination with clown and mask in both training and performance.

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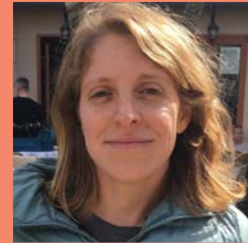
KATIE ZIEN



Katherine Zien is Associate Professor at McGill University. Zien's pedagogy and research treat performance in the Americas. Her 2017 monograph, *Sovereign Acts: Performing Race, Space, and Belonging in Panama and the Canal Zone*, investigates performances of imperialism, race, and sovereignty in the Panama Canal Zone in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Zien's current project examines theatre and militarization during Latin America's Cold War.

Photo .

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Editorial 15.1

BY AARON FRANKS

We're back. Thanks for staying with us; we think you'll be glad you did. Issue 15.2 features skillful excavations of race representation, gender injustice and inequity, "toxic criticality," generational trauma and (un)belonging, and intersectional casting as a tool for addressing much of the above plus dis/ability—all in performance, all moving from stage to page.

These are all potentially very wounding things. And we should keep open the option for outrage, the possibilities for shock, even disgust—there is a role for the unruly energy of anger. But does performance already confront us (or equip us) with "qualifiers"? As much as performance might distil conduits into our pain and other affects (Sarah. Kane.) it also has a sociality that offers plural experiences, plural encounters, plural conduits (Howard Barker—we go to performance "armoured with a friend"). What about writing about performance—even more mediated? Hayley Malouin's piece on embedded criticism addresses that question of mediation. Performance operates on affective and social levels, mediated by place and context among other things. Writing about performance introduces different mediations and different possibilities: possibilities for invention and discovery that stand on their own and are not diluted substitutes for "the real thing."

When I list topical aspects of the articles above as I did, as one might list terms for a Google Scholar search, the contents read like entrants in a catalogue of oppressions. An internet listicle for the woken-hearted. But please read on, and don't trust the editor's leaden categorizations. Writers, performers, critics, history, bodies, music, memes and tv, artefacts and treasures, and many tremendous images and poetics of the same, are all at play in this issue. We do things, including performing and writing, to change things. Our contributors are generous with both.

There have been changes at alt, behind the scenes. Community manager Mercedeh Baroque has left alt to continue her work with the Silk Road Institute, and former web editor Hayley Malouin has left us with a legacy of great online reviews and reviewers. Thanks to them both. Joining us are Clare Raspopow as manager and Shayne Lovsin Couture who has joined Teesri Duniya Theatre and also works closely with alt as we continue that relationship and strengthen our operational foundations. Welcome to you both.

We are excited to be building on our twenty years of tenacity, and will soon be creating and sharing more and different ways of experiencing alt. One way is by improving the way we integrate our web and print content and the means of access we provide our digital subscribers. We are also very much looking forward to working with creators, writers, and potential guest editors as we launch our call for contributors for volume 16 – *spaces, places, faces*. That doesn't mean we're jumping issue 15.3; we are happy to say our production schedule is back on track and that that issue will be out in November (right around the corner). But we are able to look ahead with confidence, and we hope you continue to do the same with us.

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"Why on earth are you talking like an extra from *The Wire*?"

Photo by Andrew Alexander.

An extended review of *Sal Capone: The Lamentable Tragedy of*, written by Omari Newton, directed by Diane Roberts

BY DANIEL McNEIL

The Wire did not achieve many of the conventional markers of success for an American television series. It did not win any Emmys or Golden Globes, its viewing figures were low compared to other hits on the HBO network, like *The Sopranos*, and its creators repeatedly had to fight for the show to be recommissioned (Jones). What may, on the surface, appear to be a failure has also been used to celebrate *The Wire* as one of the greatest achievements in television history—a gritty, authentic portrayal of careerism, corruption, and dysfunctional institutions in the post-industrial American city that refused to compromise its artistic integrity (Lander). At elite American universities such as Berkeley, Duke, and Harvard, social scientists have taught courses on *The Wire* in the hopes that it will help their largely upper-middle-class students put "faces and stories" to concepts such as poverty and urban deindustrialization (Bennett). According to William Julius Wilson, a Harvard professor who teaches "Urban Inequality and *The Wire*," the HBO show is a more poignant and compelling portrayal of "the systemic urban inequality that constrains the lives of the urban poor" than that of any published study (ibid.).

In contrast to American academics who use *The Wire* to instruct their students about the lived experiences of citizens that they may otherwise ignore, African Canadian dramatist Omari Newton has used the show to illustrate characters who prefer American fictions to Canadian realities. In the second scene of Newton's *Sal Capone, The Lamentable Tragedy of*, Naomi, a 12-year-old African Canadian, asks her 18-year-old brother Freddy, aka the poet/MC Sal, "Why on earth are you talking like an extra from The Wire? I need Freddy, my big brother, can we leave "Sal Capone" in gangster fairytale land?" As part of his response, Sal expresses

incredulity that his sister knows David Suzuki but not Martin Scorsese (Newton 20, 21). How can she be more interested in figures who have received awards and prominence for translating scientific knowledge to a broad cross-section of Canadians than filmmakers who have translated the intersection of wealth, criminality and ambition amongst ethnic Americans with such artistry and flair?

The exchange between Naomi and Sal is one of many conversations in *Sal Capone* that demonstrate the poly-consciousness of African Canadians, who find themselves squeezed between a desire for recognition from the Canadian establishment and a search for Black authenticity that is often dominated by the freedom dreams of African Americans (Hudson). Yet in researching this reflection piece about *Sal Capone*, I did not find any reviews of its brief run at the National Arts Centre that explored its relationship to the history of Black theatre in Canada. Nor did I discover any reviews that placed African Canadian identities in conversation with Black diasporic thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon, who have diagnosed the sickness of societies that fail to develop a coherent notion of a Black adult. I found, instead, reviews that read *Sal Capone* as a Canadian version of *The Wire*—reviews that asked how the play would translate the rage, violence, and creativity of racialized and marginalized individuals in Canada for a predominantly white, middle-class, Canadian audience. In addition to my brief reflections on the play, I thus put down some preliminary markers to unsettle the tendency to reduce *Sal Capone* and other explorations of Black being to "sociological plotting subsumed within the paternalistic hold of the Canadian nation" (Hudson and Kamugisha 7).

SAL CAPONE AND BLACK CANADIAN THOUGHT

The stage directions for *Sal Capone* explicitly announce the play's interest in the politics and poetics of authenticity by setting the action in "Real City … a hybrid of Downtown Montreal and Vancouver's infamous downtown East Side" (Newton 2). They then announce the banal Canadian sounds that threaten to confine and define the characters of the hip-hop crew Sal Capone: "inane talk radio is heard. Talk of the local hockey team, local politics and celebrity news. A dark, pulsating Hip Hop beat fades in (Newton 3). The play proceeds to ask whether the hip-hop crew named "Sal Capone" will fade in to become another part of the sports-politics-social media complex. Will they follow the wishes of their manager and "sell out" to get radio play? Alternatively, will they respond to the police shooting of Sam, their award-winning DJ, to critique state brutality and the "unacceptable face of capitalism" in an underground concert?

Such a brief synopsis suggests the dimensions of the play that feel like they are set in the 1980s or early 90s—a time in which rappers released records proclaiming, "Fuck the police," and found it difficult to get their messages heard on mainstream radio. It is not clear how such dramatic devices resonate in our contemporary moment, when the living members of NWA produce *Straight Outta Compton* (dir. F. Gary Gray, 2015), a commercial film that made

"It may be productive—morally as well as politically—to consider the play as another example of how Black Canadians push for inclusion amongst those protected by the state."

over US $200 million at the box office, and recording artists talk more about their battles to receive royalties from Spotify and other streaming services than their struggles to feature on radio playlists. The play's treatment of homophobia in the crew also feels somewhat anachronistic in an age in which Azealia Banks, Janelle Monae, and Frank Ocean are just a few of the artists to have disrupted heteronormative conventions on their paths to fame and success. In short, *Sal Capone* does not demand that its audiences are familiar with the latest developments in a North American hip-hop scene that has incorporated diversity and inclusion—not to mention Toronto and the 6ix—within its arsenal of marketing strategies.

It may be productive—morally as well as politically—to consider the play as another example of how Black Canadians push for inclusion amongst those protected by the state. Consider, for example, Sal's lament that the killing of their friend did not receive national attention ("Nothing on CBC. Not a god damn word" [Newton 54]). Newton is an incisive analyst of the expectation that more vocal, assertive, "American" performances are required to fight back against Canadian indifference, and describes the character of Shaneyney as an Indigenous, transgender woman who adopts the "armor" of a female, African American sex worker when she speaks directly to the audience (ibid. 2). *Sal Capone* is also able to dramatize the world-weariness of people of colour in Canada who recognize that when they are given media attention, there is a tendency to flavour their stories with caricatures borrowed from Netflix and Hollywood. Jewel, a 17-year-old Filipino Canadian who is a fierce MC and best friends with Sal and Sam, mocks local news sources who present evidence of Sam's recreational drug use as if he was "El Chapo" (ibid. 54). *Spoiler alert:* the play ends with Sal's younger sister Naomi alienated from the assumption that Canadians should demonstrate deference to the police and other public institutions. She kills Canadian myths softly by pronouncing, "fuck the police," in a "cold and unemotional" manner (ibid. 99). Then Sal Capone's "Cop Killing" song starts to play, and we fade to black.

SAL CAPONE AND WHITE CANADIAN CRITICS

The responses to *Sal Capone* in the Ottawa media were rather predictable to readers familiar with stereotypes that associate Blackness with irrationality, rhythm, animism, oneness with nature, sensuality, and so on. One felt the ghost of the famous Senegalese poet and politician Leopold Senghor pronouncing, "L'émotion est nègre comme la raison hellène" (Senghor 24), when one read reviews that praised the play as "passionate," "compelling," and "intoxicating" (Saxberg) in a manner that evoked the fans of *The Wire* who believed that African American actors from drama schools in London and New York were authentic characters from the streets of Baltimore (Jones). Other reviews criticized the "anger," "rough, raw poetry," and "cacophony of noise" that made it difficult for them to comprehend the performance (Portman), evoking the practice of suburban viewers who turned on the subtitles to decipher the African American vernacular English in *The Wire* because they felt it needed to be made more intelligible (Akbar). In short, reviewers apprehended *Sal Capone* as a window into the hurt, pain, and rage of Blacks in Canadian cities in the context of a Black Lives Matter movement. They often mentioned that Newton began writing the play after the killing of Fredy Villanueva, an 18-year-old Honduran-Canadian youth shot by the police in Montreal, and alluded to Justice for Abdirahman Abdi, a 37-year-old Somali Canadian who died after a violent encounter with Ottawa police. They did not interpret *Sal Capone* as an artistic creation that dramatized the ability of young people of African descent to analyze and theorize the violence and terror of modern society.

Amidst celebratory reviews that savoured the emotional intensity of the performance, as well as critical commentary that expressed frustration with the play's structure and sound design, Patrick Langston's review for *Artsfile* is worth quoting at length for its attempt to address the difficulty of communicating the brashness of hip-hop to an audience that, in the critic's view, may be more familiar with the worlds of jazz and classical music:

> Clocking in at just under 90 minutes, the finely wrought show is loud, violent and immersive. Like the hip-hop that underpins it, it's more rhythmic than melodic. And, being hip-hop, it's littered with the N-word and other language that never seems to lose its ability to make white, middle-class audiences like us cringe.
>
> It is, in other words, the story of people marginalized by power structures that try to cut off every attempt by those people to express themselves and claim a bit of what the rest of us enjoy.

Langston's desires to address the ethics of translating a hip-hop culture with roots in Black and Brown working-class communities may be productive in the fight against white supremacy; his blunt emphasis on a white, middle-class "us," which presumes that the audience shares his racial and class position, may simply be reflective of white normativity. The focus on a white middle-class audience not only overlooks members of a Black middle-class who may cringe at the use of the n-word and wonder why so much of a claim to Black authenticity is invested into forms of hip-hop that are in practice and sentiment Black *adolescent* culture (Gordon). It also omits to mention social identities such as age, which may be more pertinent to the struggles of some middle-aged or elderly members of the audience as they decode the story of a multiracial group of teenagers involved in the hip-hop group Sal Capone.

SAL CAPONE AND FRANTZ FANON

The politics and poetics of Frantz Fanon—a Caribbean psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary who fought for France during the Second World War and the Algerian resistance against French colonization—continue to inspire people around the world to confront the shame and pain of racial hierarchy and neocolonialism. Many scholars and practitioners are drawn to a thinker who succinctly acknowledges the absurdity of race

"I am conscious of the assumptions that art and commerce that prominently featured racialized and ethnic minorities are tools to be leveraged to advance more harmonious race relations"

thinking and the need to transcend racial illogic "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man" (Fanon 231). They are also intrigued by an intellectual who is always already aware of the lived experiences of people in a world that is governed by race thinking. "One can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely" (ibid. 161, n25).

In the performing arts, Fanon's chapter on the lived experience of the Black man in *Black Skin, White Masks* has been particularly generative. In oft-quoted passages, Fanon perceives that he has been fixed "by the legends, stories, history and above all *historicity*…battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships" (ibid. 112). He illustrates his point by suggesting that young Blacks in the Caribbean could go to the movies and identify with Tarzan against the anonymous Blacks positioned in the background of the mise-en-scène, but the Black migrant in the West finds it more difficult to do so because "the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the savages on the screen" (ibid. 152–53 n15). Besieged by anti-black racism and coloniality in Europe and North America in the 1950s and 60s, Fanon quickly learned that one could not be Black without problems. "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theatre are watching me, examining me, waiting for me" (Fanon 140).

What was to be done in a context that has failed to develop a coherent and nuanced notion of a Black adult? In a world in which all Blacks are "always-already an-other …[where] each Black stands in for and substitutes for all other Blacks" (Keeling 95)? Fanon did not presume that Black liberation should be limited to the petty-bourgeois desire to erect wall between the savages on screen and a professional-managerial class that strove for assimilation into a system that afforded whites the luxury of mediocrity. While contextualizing the understandable eruptions of rage at forms of dehumanization in an anti-Black world, Fanon also noted that such eruptions merely confirm a hellish cycle and are anticipated by colonial modes of representation that presume rage and anger to be essential characteristics of Blackness (Keeling 105–106). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon proposed that we must wait. We needed to lie in wait to identify idiocy and mendacity. We needed to come to terms with rage and grievance in the interval—not to surrender to these feelings or ask radicals to go slow, but to put our resentment to work in support of the struggles of diverse postcolonial peoples for liberation. As noted in the oft-quoted final prayer of *Black Skin, White Masks*, we need to work through the readings of our bodies to always make us people who question (Fanon 206).

SAL CAPONE AND ME

In the interval, before the performance of *Sal Capone*, I did not expect to see myself. I have come to terms with the encroachment of middle age and the fact that I will not be able to claim student discounts forever. I feel somewhat distanced from contemporary hip hop, and I feel a certain sense of mourning for the communal politics and poetics of hip hop, house and techno from Detroit, Chicago, and New York in the 1980s and 90s. I watch the people in the theatre. I examine their comportment. I wait for them to respond to the performers on stage.

I don't cringe at the play's use of the n-word or feel assaulted by the sound design like the theatre critics who presume a white, middle-class audience. However, I do cringe at the awkwardness of the (multiracial) middle-aged and middle-class crowd that is coaxed to wave their hands in the air like they just don't care. It feels like a copy of something that has already been parodied endlessly, and indicative of the fate that awaits underground music when it goes blinking into the overground and is appropriated and misappropriated by corporate and official culture. I wonder if we may announce a "stages of the cross" for a liberal, secular age in which middle-aged and middle-class audiences move from tentativeness about participating in an "edgy" art form to gleeful abandonment that they get to embrace stage-managed conviviality, and then on to embarrassment and guilt that their participation in settings that bring together different classes, races, and ages happens so rarely and, when it does, may feel somewhat contrived. I turn my attention to the reports about Kendrick Lamar's Pulitzer Prize award and wonder if they might make members of a white middle class feel less likely to express their discomfort with hip hop in public. I think about how Jay Z and Kanye function as middle-aged rappers and whether they will be paraded as figures who are as exceptional/exceptionable as the young prodigies in jazz and classical music. In other words, I hope that the play not only addresses the desire of subaltern subjects for recognition but also acknowledges the limits of this recognition (Iton 202).

A few days after the performance, I joined a Community Talking Circle that brought together local artists, activists, police officers and community members to consider how the play related to their work nurturing thriving communities. I worried about an event that had the potential to regurgitate platitudes about collaboration as a positive good for intercultural exchange (as if the word does not also refer to people who work with the enemy during wartime). I am conscious of the assumptions that art and commerce that prominently featured racialized and ethnic minorities are tools to be leveraged to advance more harmonious race relations, as when the Toronto Metro Police Services Board Youth Issues Forum offered screenings of *Boyz n the Hood* (dir. John Singleton, 1991) in the hopes that it would help alleviate some of the anger and rage directed from the Black community to the police. I have visited Library and Archives Canada to read the proceedings of a symposium designed to "strengthen the dialogue between Police, Aboriginal/Visible Minority Communities and the Media," which was held a few days after the Yonge Street uprising in May 1992. I am aware that such events tend to centre their agendas on Black role models, family structure and drug culture rather than invite discussion about state brutality, extremism and militarism. I have become accustomed to a liberal tradition in Canada that considers the creation of "new cadres of community leaders who are familiar with Canadian institutions and practices" to be one measure of multiculturalism's success (Kymlicka 12–13).

The questions generated by Omari Newton, Diane Roberts (the director of *Sal Capone*), and Sarah Waisvisz (artist in residence and community engagement coordinator for NAC English Theatre) anticipated many of my concerns. One striking question posed to the panel asked us to reflect on a play that dealt with the escalation of a gathering into something the police would then call a riot. Another asked for our thoughts on the use and abuse of the terms "rally," "protest," and "riot" as well as our reflections on forms of non-violent protest. We were, therefore, able to carve out the theoretical and political space to discuss Fanon. We noted that Fanon abhorred the use of physical force but knew that it was pointless to privilege nonviolent commitments when any attempt to challenge the presumed legitimacy of a colonial system is a form of violence. He knew that the mission of his generation was to propose a form of Black consciousness that inspired people from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean to establish new forms of belonging with time, space and each other. He did not waste time trying to figure out ways to contain, manage, and monetize the awesome and unpredictable power of diversity with pat answers—he opened space for subsequent generations to develop provocative, penetrating, and incisive questions about what passes for health, truth and value.

Our wide-ranging discussion also addressed the pitfalls of an age in which journalists only tend to see resistance in large-scale marches on Washington, and movements for social justice have been televised and turned into spectacles on social media with cartoonish heroes and villains. We wondered if these types of protest are legible to journalists because they do not have the time or ability to challenge the tyranny of advertisers who need to see lots of bodies or followers that matter to them in spaces that they find familiar and accessible. We noted that terms like revolution and rebellion seem to have been marginalized, repressed, or co-opted as the mainstream media claims the mantle of the resistance. We even displayed some scepticism and self-deprecation about the esteemed guests and experts, associated with universities or special interest groups, who are called upon to contextualize movements that threaten to rock the system. However, it may have all been too abstract to pierce through the middle-class setting in which civility and politeness dictate that audience members nod, describe one's words as eloquent and interesting, and then translate such thoughts and feelings into dry and technical debates.

I couldn't help but feel Fanon, lounging with the spirits, generating questions for public servants, community workers and social scientists who, on the one hand, seize dramatic, creative and imaginative portrayals of marginalized or racialized groups as authentic depictions of poverty while, on the other, presume that solutions to societal problems need to come from serious, literal-minded, practical work that emphasizes the surveillance, recognition, and dissipation of racialized groups. What would happen if our cultural critics took seriously the search for a Black fantastic in which markers of racialized ethnic difference cease to be objects of normative supervision *in the first place*" (Valluvan 221, emphasis added)? How might our plays, and our criticism, break free of sociological plotting to represent the informal, extra-institutional, messy, and complicated forms of interdependence that "exist where one set of habits flows into others and *all of them* are altered by that encounter" (Gilroy et al. 176, emphasis added)? How might we also recognize a radical, translocal imagination in which the ultimate goal of Black art is not to make room for Black aesthetic registers within Canadian multiculturalism, but to acknowledge artistic practices that do not foreclose substantive political engagement and may be read across, within, against, and outside the nation state (Iton 201–02)?

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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Canadian Theatre Here and Now

Part 1: Playwrights Guild of Canada and its Women's Caucus

BY REBECCA BURTON

When I last wrote for *alt.theatre*, having just completed a study on the status of women in Canadian theatre, I condemned the sector for systemic discrimination and called for "an industry-wide revolution in consciousness" (7). That was 2007. This series investigates the current state of affairs in the Canadian theatre industry in relation to the goals of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Where are we now? Are the recent rumours true? Has there been great and sudden change?

I will tackle these questions head-on in Part Two in a later issue of *alt.theatre*, but here in Part One I begin with a case study: looking at the EDI initiatives of an industry stakeholder: Playwrights Guild of Canada (PGC). The activities of PGC exemplify what I believe to be one of the most significant changes in Canada's theatre ecology in the last decade: a move from institutional interest in EDI to institutional action around it. As the PGC demonstrates, in this respect positive change has occurred over time. Stakeholders are introducing concrete actions to effect change, but it is often difficult and slow-going due to various challenges, such as entrenched biases, participants' differing perspectives, and limited resources.

PGC is a national arts service organization representing Canada's professional (and emerging) playwrights. Approaching 900 members, the guild has a mandate to "advance the creative rights and interests of professional Canadian playwrights, promote Canadian plays nationally and internationally, and foster an active, evolving community of writers for the stage" ("Who We Are"). In addition to its usual duties, which include administering amateur rights, facilitating play readings, engaging in advocacy efforts, running the Canadian Play Outlet (a physical and online bookstore), and negotiating a collective agreement with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, PGC also dedicates time and energy to EDI.

Pluralism is embedded in the organization's vision as one of three lenses (promotion and protection are the other two). PGC actively works "to create more visibility and representation for women, people of colour, people with disabilities, Indigenous and LGBTQ+ playwrights," providing "a safe and supportive community," as well as programs and services for "greater inclusion and accessibility" ("Home"). On offer are general opportunities—as with Pathways to PGC, which invites people to create customized initiatives in and for their own communities. There are also curated events, such as the 2019 International Webinar Series for Playwrights, which on the PGC side featured Indigenous perspectives throughout, a nod to the International Year of Indigenous Languages. PGC's employees also partake in EDI actions, such as anti-oppression workshops, or most recently, a week-long pilot project of immersive Indigenous cultural competency training.

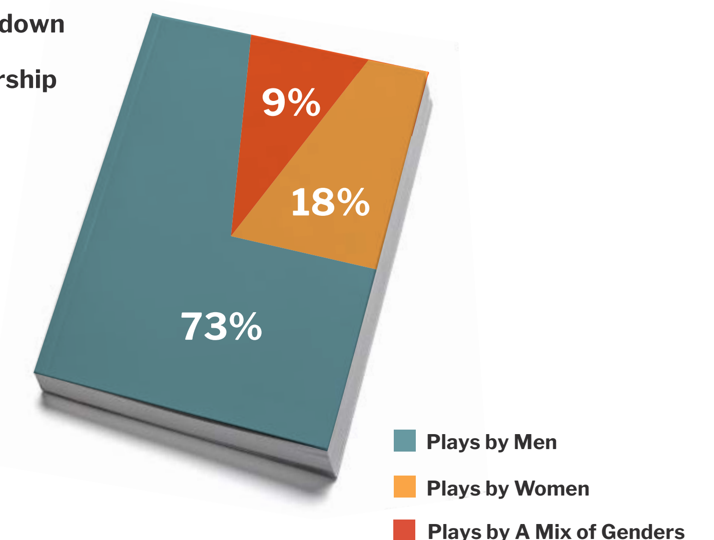
More often than not, PGC's outwardly focused EDI initiatives are spearheaded by its Women's Caucus, which is composed of PGC's women members.[1] The Women's Caucus functions more or less autonomously, except that it is administratively and financially supported by PGC, and the executive holds veto power should actions run contrary to PGC's vision. According to the website, the Women's Caucus "meets annually, publishes a monthly newsletter, and pursues various initiatives that advocate for women playwrights, improve the underrepresentation of women in the industry, and encourage greater pluralistic and inclusive arts practices" ("What We Do"). In the last few years, the caucus has increased its EDI efforts and focused on more sustained and intersectional activities, starting with the Equity in Theatre (EIT) initiative (2014–2017),[2] and continuing after its demise with the PLEDGE Project, the SureFire List, the Bra d'Or Award revamp, and the CASA Award.

As PGC's membership and professional contracts manager, and staff liaison to the Women's Caucus, I participated in the execution of these projects, and I witnessed firsthand the challenges that arose along the way, starting with the need for engaged and reliable leadership. Traditionally, the Women's Caucus is overseen by a chair and deputy chair who are most often elected by acclaim, but in 2017, the governance model shifted to a committee of five in an attempt to make the workload more manageable. Even still, there have been both staff and member changeovers, but an advantage of the committee structure is that it remains stable and intact even with (some) personnel fluctuations. The women who form the Women's Caucus Committee donate their time as a labour of love,[3] since the positions are not paid—given that the caucus operates with an annual budget of $200. With the economic restraints and concomitant leadership challenges, it is no small feat that the Women's Caucus has managed to launch several long-term, purpose-built initiatives to redress industry problems.

In her 2015 study, "Achieving Equity in Canadian Theatre: A Report with Best Practice Recommendations," Michelle MacArthur identifies four key areas for change: education; mentorship, networking, and extended training; administration; and advocacy and awareness. The initiatives undertaken by the Women's Caucus in the last three years cover this spectrum. In the realm of education, the PLEDGE project was devised to help counter the discovery that on average 18 percent of the mainstage plays produced at Canada's post-secondary training institutions are written by women (see Chart 1) (Hanson and Elser 37).

CHART 1:

A Gendered Breakdown of Mainstage Play Production Authorship at Canadian Post-Secondary Theatre Training Institutions, 2012–2015.



Although racialization was not included in the study, it may be stated with absolute certainty that the numbers for Indigenous women and women of colour are much lower still. Utterly deplorable, these statistics, among other things, indicate a glass ceiling affecting the economic survival of women playwrights; pedagogically, the perpetuation of patriarchal methodologies (e.g., canonization) that safeguard the dominant culture and "other" all else; and for students, a biased, exclusionary, and incomplete training experience. Conversations and surveys with educators revealed that aside from not knowing good plays by women, they especially need but have trouble finding large-cast plays to accommodate class sizes and student populations.

The PLEDGE project was developed in direct response to this feedback, as a corrective countermeasure to help combat the underrepresentation of women creators in our schools. PLEDGE provides educators with a database of large-cast plays by Canadian women, searchable by different filters (cast size, genre, length, theme, and identity factors) to assist with a myriad of situations and student demographics. To directly engage with schools and increase the project's impact, a component was introduced inspired by the US initiative One Play at a Time, for which educators make public declarations to teach plays by women. The name PLEDGE, an acronym for a "Production Listing to Enhance Diversity and Gender Equity," additionally points to the pledge aspect of the action.

PLEDGE is a joint project of PGC and its Women's Caucus along with Equity and Diversity in the Arts (EDA), an initiative of the Department of Arts, Culture and Media at the University of Toronto Scarborough. Instigated by Dr. Barry Freeman, PLEDGE exists as a result of funding from the EDA, which paid for the building of the website and the hiring of researchers to populate the database, while PGC and the Women's Caucus provide administrative and promotional support.[4] Officially launched in 2018, the project's website has received approximately 3500 visits in one year's time. It would be ideal

for the numbers to increase further, of course, but of greater concern is that only two pledges have been logged to date. While PLEDGE is intended to inspire educators, clearly there is a problem with engagement and uptake, and in turn, with the project's impact and efficacy.

To generate new strategies and make stronger connections with the intended audience, a PLEDGE panel was held as part of the University of Toronto's 2019 Festival of Original Theatre. Many ideas emerged, such as extending academic outreach efforts to other disciplines and international associations, adding video excerpts of plays to the website, and getting students involved, perhaps with a nation-wide trailer contest. While these are all excellent suggestions, they require time, effort, and money, so either a team of volunteers or hired employees would be necessary, neither of which is possible at this time due to a general lack of resources.

While vital to the project, one-time funding from the EDA established but cannot sustain the PLEDGE project. The EDA granted PLEDGE a second influx of money for 2019, which will be used to update the website, create promotional print materials, and conduct a targeted outreach campaign. The goal is to improve the project's visibility, thereby increasing audience engagement in order to influence diversifying curricula and programming choices at Canada's postsecondary institutions, which are in dire need of transformation. The project's future is precarious (a common scenario for many social actions), given uncertainty around future EDA funding. But for now, PLEDGE exists as a tool to help educators work towards equity.

As with PLEDGE, the SureFire List identifies plays by women as a means to help counter the problem of underrepresentation. This tool targets the professional theatre sector, placing it in MacArthur's administration category. This Women's Caucus action is modeled on a successful US initiative, the Kilroys List, and it complements other similar projects, such as the 49 List.[5] The SureFire List aims to provide ADs, directors, and producers with a programming aid to help increase productions of plays by women in the professional sector. According to PGC's National Production Surveys, conducted annually since 2012, plays by women account for less than 30 percent of the nation's total offerings (see Table 1), and less than 35 percent of homegrown shows (see Table 2), with little change occurring over time (PGC Annual Production Surveys, 2012/13, 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16, and 2016/17).

When it comes to programming work by women, false assumptions and stereotypes prevail, such as the misconception that women playwrights are few and far between (this is not the case, as women currently form 54 percent of PGC's membership), that their writing is inferior (somehow dubbed lacking in universal experience, though women comprise half the world's population), and that their plays are risky to produce (the assumption being that no one is interested in "women's stories," though women outnumber men as audience members). The stereotypes and statistics are much worse for Indigenous women and women of colour, and as a press release states, "Canada's stages need to reflect the actual demographics of its population, and The SureFire List provides a resource tool that can help encourage and contribute to that transformation" (PGC, "The Women's Caucus"). The list is community-generated, offering a sustainable action for the Women's Caucus, since it does not require much money. The caucus asked 202 "Recommenders" (producers, artistic directors, directors, dramaturges, theatre critics, academics, and other theatre aficionados) nationwide to email their "top three 'passion picks' of full-length plays that are unproduced or under-produced (meaning, fewer than three professional productions), written by Canadians who identify as women, trans, or gender non-conforming" (Burton, "The SureFire List"). A total of 199 playwright and 285 play suggestions were submitted by 128 Recommenders (a 63 percent return rate). The top 23 ranked plays constitute the SureFire List, which is impressive for its diversity, not only in terms of identify factors (racialization, age, region, and so forth), but also for aesthetic and stylistic differences ("SureFireList").

TABLE 1: A Gendered Breakdown of Play Production Authorship in Canada—Compared across PGC's Annual Production Surveys, 2012/13–2016/17

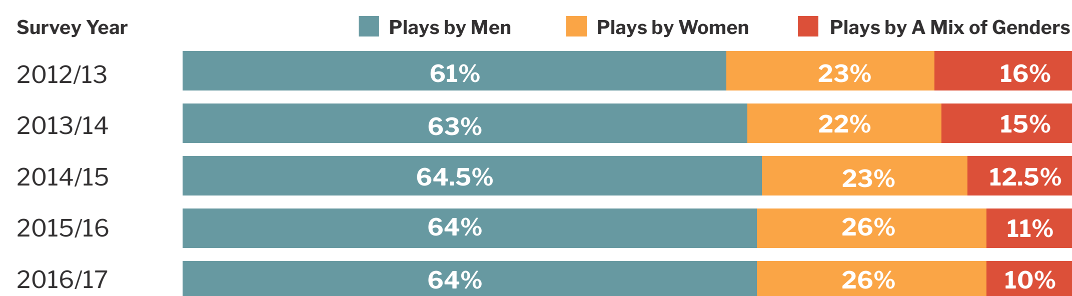
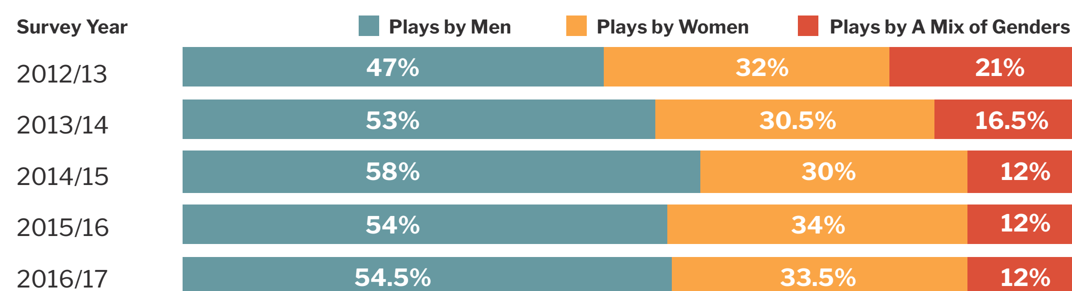


TABLE 2: A Gendered Breakdown of Play Productions by Canadian Authors—Compared across PGC's Annual Production Surveys, 2012/13–2016/17



Given the vast wealth of submissions received and the significant regional differences that emerged, additional listings were created to provide access to the full data.[6] The Women's Caucus Committee planned an aggressive PR campaign, but after the press release went out in October 2018, some caucus members criticized the multiple listings for creating a hierarchical impression suggestive of merit and quality, which was not the case or the intent. Critics also interpreted the anonymity and confidentiality of the Recommenders (implemented to ensure unbiased responses) as establishing an exclusionary and non-transparent club. Issues also emerged around the chosen name, and the phrasing "Canadians who identify as women, trans, or gender non-conforming," which can derogatorily suggest that those who "identify" as women are not actually women. While many members applauded the initiative, the internal controversy led to the raw data listings being removed from public access, leaving the 23 plays to stand alone, and the PR campaign was cancelled, effectively obscuring the List's existence. Needless to say, the project did not live up to its potential and intended purpose.

The list's reception offers a valuable lesson in EDI advocacy: having material resources in place is not enough; there must also be group cohesion with regard to a project's purpose and execution, or ideological differences can lead to impasses that make it difficult to move forward. There has been much discussion about the matter since (revisions were offered up, alternate methodologies proposed, and more precise wordings developed), and a survey was sent out to the Women's Caucus in March 2019 to determine the fate of the SureFire List and other caucus actions. While some members vehemently oppose the SureFire List, the majority are supportive, as 85 percent voted to repeat it with adjustments in 2020. Members also affirmed that the Women's Caucus should stay the course and continue its present EDI efforts despite the sometimes controversial and difficult nature of the work.

The longest-running initiative of the Women's Caucus is the Bra d'Or Award (BDA), which incentivizes equity via recognition and commemoration, positioning it in MacArthur's advocacy and awareness grouping. The origins and purpose of the award are recounted by Marcia Johnson, who first suggested the idea:

> I was at the PGC AGM in Montreal (circa 2003) and we [the Women's Caucus] had started to devolve into complaining about how men had things so much easier and how difficult it was to be a woman playwright. I was still just an associate member and I wanted to hear about what I could do; not about how impossible it all was. Someone suggested that we shame directors or ADs who had bad track records when it came to producing plays by women. I thought that we shouldn't focus on the negative. In fact, why didn't we spend our precious energy celebrating a person or institution that had promoted, showcased, or supported female playwrights? Everyone loved the idea and immediately said that I should be the one to spearhead it.

Taking responsibility and a leadership role, Johnson later introduced the idea as a full member of PGC and the chair of the Women's Caucus at PGC's AGM in Calgary, where it was officially adopted. First awarded in 2006, the BDA recognizes "an individual for his/her/their efforts in supporting and promoting the work of Canadian women playwrights" ("Awards").

An accomplished list of BDA winners has emerged over the years, including artistic directors who lead by example, programming gender-balanced seasons.[7] While winners such as Bob Metcalfe and Rachel Ditor cherish their awards, the BDA suffered from a lack of monetary accompaniment and visibility, as past prizes consisted only of a paper certificate presented at an industry event. As such, the BDA was placed on hiatus for two years, during which time the Women's Caucus identified areas in need of improvement, and a subcommittee of members and award recipients was tasked with finding solutions. The BDA was re-launched with modifications in conjunction with International Women's Day on 8 March 2019. One major challenge remains yet to realize the BDA's full transformation, and that is sustained funding. Money is required to grow the award further and increase the overall impact, so the Revamp Committee will focus on that objective for the remainder of 2019.

While the BDA celebrates the efforts of allies on the home front, a more recent Women's Caucus initiative, the CASA Award, assists women playwrights abroad. Falling under mentorship, networking, and extended training, the CASA Award provides "support, financially and artistically, [for] an experienced woman playwright living in South Africa" ("CASA Award"). The idea was sparked at the 2015 Women Playwrights International (WPI) conference in Cape Town,[8] when Women's Caucus attendees noticed the plays offered for sale did not include South African women. Investigation revealed that few such publications existed, due in part to oral traditions of resistance, but also to the steep obstacles faced by women playwrights in South Africa. Women's Caucus members wanted to help, and they theorized that $5000 CAD would cover the equivalent of a three-month residency (complete with writing space and dramaturgical support), which could make a big difference to a playwright.

Beverley Cooper spearheaded the initiative, striking a subcommittee to build the new award from the ground up. Through WPI's chairperson, Amy Jephta, a partnership with the African Women Playwrights Network was formed, the services of South African theatre makers were enlisted as jurors and mentors, Canadian playwrights were recruited as dramaturges and mentors, and the Theatre Arts Admin Collective in Cape Town and the Hillbrow Theatre in Johannesburg provided writing and workshop space. International cooperation aside, the CASA Award would not be possible without an ongoing funding source, as the Women's Caucus's fundraising efforts are insufficient to support a project of this size. Thanks to the beneficence of an anonymous Canadian sponsor, the CASA Award is fully funded for five years, secure until 2022 (Cooper).

The first CASA Award, bestowed in 2017, did not attract mid-career playwrights as intended, so it was shared by three emerging playwrights instead: Kela Maswabi, Koleka Putuma, and Philisiwe Twijnstra. A pen-pal program was also established, matching 28 Canadian and South African playwrights in a peer-to-peer correspondence exchange. The

second CASA Award went to established actor, director, and playwright Rehane Abrahams, who began her residency in Cape Town in June 2019.

While there has been much learning along the way, and a few changes in protocol, the CASA Award has led to new networks and unanticipated outcomes in its two short years. In 2018, Twijnstra attended a reading of her work in Vancouver and connected with caucus member Sally Stubbs. Putuma participated in Toronto's Wee Festival, along with 2018 CASA Selection Committee juror Jenny Reznek, and they met with CASA organizers Beverley Cooper and Marcia Johnson. Putuma went on to win the Distell National Playwright Competition (dedicated to "discovering emerging South African talent and fostering new South African voices") with the script she worked on during her CASA residency. And the pen-pal program resulted in material assistance when a playwright in Zimbabwe experienced financial distress due to the politically tumultuous climate; "CASA was able to raise some funds…, helping her get through a very tough time" (Cooper).

With the rare confluence of committed leadership and secure funding, the CASA Award facilitates international mentoring, networking, and extended training opportunities, helping to grow a global EDI movement. The next WPI conference will provide additional opportunities to connect with women from all over the world; and PGC will be there, as it is slated for Montreal in 2021. We are looking forward to showcasing national initiatives and talent, strengthening international networks (via community-building, allies, and mentorship), and furthering advocacy and awareness, education and skills development, and play production possibilities.

As MacArthur's 2015 report states, "given the persistent and deep-seated inequities embedded in the [Canadian] theatre industry, it is clear that informed, coordinated, and varied responses are required if change is to occur" (51). PGC and its Women's Caucus recognize this, having implemented a gamut of initiatives and partnerships to help redress specific industry injustices on a national and international scale. Similar social actions are required across the board if institutional change is to become a reality. Taken up further in Part Two, evidence suggests that other industry stakeholders are tailoring their programs to redress EDI problems, particularly since the explosion of #MeToo, which ushered in new levels of visibility, accountability, and action. I can personally attest that there is no shortage of transformative project ideas put forth by PGC's members, staff, and executive.

The implementation of those actions, however, is another matter entirely, since actions require resources and these are in short supply. The Internet and shareware provide cost-effective delivery systems for assistive tools, making new databases and lists possible. But a rare alignment of circumstances is required for the actualization of large-scale projects, most particularly stable and engaged leadership, a unified front, and ongoing funding. Despite the difficulties and challenges, positive change is being realized over time, as Part Two of this series will illustrate. But this progress is incremental; the patriarchy and systemic discrimination remain intact for the time being, while we inch our way ever closer toward societal metamorphosis.

Top to Bottom:
Rehane Abrahams, 2019
CASA Award Winner.
Photo by;
Kela Maswabi, 2018
CASA Award Winner.
Photo by;
Koleka Putuma, 2018
CASA Award Winner.
Photo by;
Philisiwe Twijnstra, 2018
CASA Award Winner.
Photo by

Notes

1. All women members of PGC are automatically included in the Women's Caucus, but the term "women" is applied in its broadest sense. The WC supports sexual and gender self-determination. All people who feel they are women are considered women. This includes cis, trans, and other gender oppressed people.

2. Spearheaded by PGC and Pat the Dog Theatre Creation, EIT was "a multi-stakeholder initiative aiming to remedy existing gender and related inequities in the theatre industry." Between 2014 and 2016, EIT carried out a four-pronged agenda: a preparatory research study (MacArthur's 2015 report), an industry symposium (which spawned a one-day side conference with American groups), a website dedicated to equity in Canadian theatre (www.EquityInTheatre.com), and live performance events (including play reading series, social actions, and more) ("About"). In 2017, EIT partnered with like-minded organizations and continued to produce live social actions (e.g., annual hackathons, post-show talkbacks, and panel presentations) up until the group folded.

3. Presently, the Women's Caucus Committee consists of Kelley Jo Burke (Chair), Beverley Cooper, Marcia Johnson, Marilo Núñez (Deputy Chair), and Deborah Williams. I assist as staff liaison.

4. The website was designed and built by Mariel Marshall. A first phase of research for the database was carried out by graduate students Lisa Aikman (U of T) and Grace Phan (U of T), followed by a second phase of research conducted by Collette Radau (York U) and Sarah Robbins (U of T). Currently, Barry Freeman and Rebecca Burton carry out the administrative responsibilities associated with the project, while Alexa Elser volunteers her time, adding content and updating database entries.

5. Since 2014, the Kilroys have released "an annual industry survey of excellent un- and underproduced new plays by woman, trans, and non-binary playwrights," thereby providing "a tool for producers committed to ending the systemic underrepresentation of woman, trans, and non-binary playwrights in the American theater" ("About the List"). The Kilroys Lists have inspired other initiatives; Canada's first being "The 49," released in June 2016 for Fu-Gen Theatre's Walk the Walk: National Festival of Asian Canadian Women. A committee of four women consisting of Yvette Nolan, Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, Jenna Rodgers, and Mel Hague curated a list of forty-nine plays by women of colour that one could "program tomorrow" ("49 Plays").

6. In addition to the SureFire List, four other lists were compiled: one with all the ranked plays, a second with all the chosen playwrights, a third with all the play and playwright picks arranged by region (based on the playwrights' place of residence), and a final list with statistics pertaining to the Recommenders' response rates in each province ("SureFire List"). These lists are available upon request from PGC.

7. For a list of BDA recipients, visit the PGC website at www.playwrightsguild.ca/awards/bradorawardrecipients/.

8. Gail Nyoka provides an account of the 2015 conference in a dispatch for *alt.theatre* titled, "Report from Cape Town: Women Playwrights International," *alt.theatre* 13:1 (2016), 34–35.

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The Richards and Buckingham in the Coronation Scene. Photo by Catherine Bradley.

Three Richards

BY MYRNA WYATT SELKIRK AND FIONA RITCHIE

In March of 2017, Myrna Wyatt Selkirk directed a production of *Richard III* at McGill University as part of a year-long undergraduate course called Theatre Lab. This production was a highly collaborative endeavour, in which the students were co-creators of a distinctive interpretation of Shakespeare's play. The show was notable for its use of metaphor, mask, and multiple Richards, as well as its focus on Margaret and the other widows. Issues of diversity and casting also came to the fore. Here Selkirk joins her colleague Fiona Ritchie in conversation to explore the experience.

FR: ***Can you start by telling me a little more about the collaborative context for this production?***

MWS: Creative collaboration within the first-term course and second-term rehearsals is the essence of the Theatre Lab course. It is essential that you know that the production we're discussing was not the vision of one person. In the first term we explored the text and built the actors' skill sets through the use of character masks, clowning, and physical improvisation. Projects conducted by the actors included writing concept statements, which named the main action of the play and described the style of the piece. After being cast, students worked in groups to create movement and text-based performance proposals about an assigned part of the play. The requirement was that these performance presentations should be clear offerings of what they believed about their characters and relationships at that moment. They were asked to visually and viscerally capture the action and metaphor of a particular aspect of the play. Parts of many of these "happenings," as we called them, were incorporated into the final production, just as many of the students' concept statements influenced the staging of the play. The students and I were therefore co-creators of this version of *Richard III* from the outset. Additionally, I directed the production in collaboration with an assistant director, and the cast and the class worked in collaboration with two other courses, Costuming and Stage Scenery and Lighting.

FR: ***The student body of the contemporary university is much younger and more diverse than the casts of Shakespeare's plays. How did you approach working with undergraduates?***

MWS: Rather than seeing this as a problem, I saw it as an asset. There were fourteen students in the class, six men and eight women. The youth of the cast was capitalized on. No attempt was made to play age, and women played men without any effort to camouflage them as men. This was meant to be a conversation between the female body and the male role as a construct. In this production of *Richard III*, I explored the question of how each youthful, diverse body could illuminate Shakespeare's play about distant English history for a contemporary audience. The use of mask and the carnivalesque style of the production gave me a great deal of flexibility in casting because these elements created a non-naturalistic world for the play.

FR: ***Perhaps the most striking decision you made was to have Richard played by three actors on stage together at all times. How did this come about? What do you think this casting choice added to your interpretation of the play?***

MWS: Before the Theatre Lab course began in the fall of 2016, I had already decided to split the role of Richard. This was in part a practical decision based on fairness in casting in the course. In the past I have split roles and had different casts on different nights but I have also experimented with actors playing the same part on stage at the same time and it has much to offer. It is a great way to see various interpretations of a role on stage simultaneously and great for teaching about collaboration. For this production, I really pushed it to the extreme and had them physically connected as one being for most of the play. That is not something I had done before.

I cast Yves Abanda, Éléonore Lamothe, and Tom Gould as Richard. Care was taken to be conscious of what the casting of a black man, a white woman, and a white man as one character might mean to an audience. It is not simply that Richard is a divided or split human being. Rather, how do the visual identities of each actor immediately speak of our divided world? In one of our first rehearsals, I urged that we pay close attention to the images we were creating in terms of the story they told about gender and race. For example, I suggested that we be aware of how often Yves, who is black, carried the others or how often Éléonore, who is a woman, was carried. Reinforcing tropes might be a great idea or a bad one, depending on the point we were trying to make. At the very least we wanted to make conscious choices as much as possible. My interest was in using race- and gender-conscious casting, rather than blind casting.

FR: ***How did the three actors collaborate to develop an interpretation of Richard's character?***

MWS: I had a strong desire for the actors playing Richard to work together to create a halting hunchback, in order to play off of some past representations of Richard. In rehearsal, I asked the actors to create monsters. We played with how to stack, how to combine, how to move as one. One of our go-to monsters was named Megatron. The Richards came up with this image and named it. Megatron was the "bunch-backed toad" that Margaret invokes in her curse. He moved in a very cumbersome, ungainly way and kept the three actors physically connected and representing one being. The extremely fraught issue inherent in the script's use of disability as a metaphor for evil was mediated, I hope, by our choice to stage Richard in this way. The reason he was a limping hunchback in our production was because he was split into three. The three parts were meant not to work well together. We could have made beautiful movement, but we wanted it to be ugly, so that his internal struggle was embodied in his movement. Rather than look at Richard as physically disabled, we looked at inner conflict made manifest.

FR: ***The way the three Richards worked together changed over the course of the play as Richard's character changed. Can you give us some examples of this?***

MWS: In the beginning of his journey to consume anyone in his way, Richard charms, plays, and flirts. The actors worked together to intensify this. Other actors and later some of the

Left:
Megatron Richard III with Buckingham and Queen Margaret Watching. Photo by Catherine Bradley.

Middle:
The Widows.
Photo by Sean Carney.

Right:
Fabric as snake.
Photo by Sean Carney.

audience described Richard as masturbatory in the early part of the play. During the wooing of Lady Anne there was a competition between the three parts of Richard, each asserting his own ability to win her and to be the best actor. When Richard encourages Anne to stab him, the two white actors offered the black actor up to be stabbed. We asked how it might read to an audience that it is the black man in this position. Are all of the Richards equally at risk? When not competing against each other during the courtship, they supported, encouraged, and calmed each other. And once they won her over, they celebrated together. Later in the play, our coronation scene clearly showed Richard's lack of ease in his body and in his new role as king. Megatron (the three Richards stacked together) lumbered in slowly, rocking from side to side and wearing an 18-foot long cape. Each actor's head was given a crown and they played the classic hat game from slapstick comedy (the same one that is in *Waiting for Godot*). They passed the crowns around, trying them on and trying to find one that was comfortable. When Éléonore put on Yves's crown it fell down around her neck for a moment. None of the three actors playing Richard were comfortable with their crown.

FR: *What other aspects of Richard's character did you try to get across?*

MWS: Shakespeare's Richard III is man in love with himself, fixated on himself. He is an outcast who can trust only himself, and even that ultimately fails him. He is a man yearning for the love of his mother, a man yearning to belong but with no skills to do so. We also saw him as a fool. A blind fool. He believes he has the license to break the rules but eventually the fool's license is revoked. Thus we costumed him as a joker or jester. My original concept for the production had been a post-apocalyptic fantasy world; but by November, because of course assignments and student research, this had shifted to a circus, fairground, carnivalesque world influenced by tarot cards. This meshed with our idea of Richard as a jester. This change in concept is another good example of the collaborative process and the need to be open and flexible when involved in Theatre Lab.

FR: *Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the title of the play, we've focused on the character of Richard up until this point. But your production also made the women central, in particular, the character of Margaret. When they don't cut her completely, directors often don't offer a clear sense of what she contributes to the action of the play. How did you approach this character?*

MWS: We were particularly interested in the women in the play as widows, and Margaret is of course the exiled widow of King Henry VI. She was on stage for the whole show, watching and sometimes controlling the action. We saw her as a prophetess or fortune teller and so gave her a pack of cards, which could have been either tarot cards or playing cards, that she threw as she cursed. "The Game" was one of the two main actions of the play that arose from the students' concept statements. The cards reinforced this metaphor and also referenced Richard, who was costumed like a joker. As each character went to their death, Margaret took their tarot card. Margaret foretells the deaths, and in our production she had a clear hand in them happening. She therefore continually reminded the audience of her prophecies. She ensured the demise of each character and that her curses were realised, without outright killing the characters.

FR: *Why do you think that widows are so important to this play?*

MWS: I don't know when it deeply clicked with me that all the women in the play are widows, but that connection between the women was a driving force for their relationships. Women are shaped by the need to retain power, which they do through their men; and thus they are shaped by the loss of those men. Through the women we see consequences. We see the effect of war and violence on a community. Women bear the brunt of these consequences, but they are also complicit.

FR: *So the emphasis on women's roles in the play allowed you to capitalize on the gender dynamic of the contemporary classroom and arose organically from the play text itself. How did you show the connection between the women in the production?*

MWS: This developed from our early collaborative metaphor-based work on the scene in which Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess visit the Princes in the Tower. As I always do, I asked the actors, "What is this like?" and Dorsai Ranjbari (the Duchess) responded, "It feels like we're trapped in a small space." I had them do the scene under a table and then asked the question again, to which Dorsai responded that it didn't feel quite right. So I asked them to use a tablecloth that was in the room and the actors held it over their heads like an umbrella or canopy. Anne joined them underneath it. All agreed that this felt right. They were protected and together. We kept the fabric in later explorations. It became an important part of the visual manifestation of our metaphors and was used to bind the widows together.

FR: *How were the women involved in the change in Richard's character over the course of the play?*

MWS: As the women began to band together, Richard's composite identity began to disintegrate. For example, when the Lieutenant refers to Richard as King, the four widows joined forces to interrogate him by wrapping the fabric around him like a snake. Margaret is present but not acknowledged by the other women. She has the snake by the tail. After the death of the Princes in the Tower, the four widows, including the dead Anne, performed a layered lament in Portuguese, Farsi, and English, with the echoing strains of "Ave Maria." Then, on his march to confront the threat of Richmond, Richard encountered the mourning widows and was rejected by his mother, the Duchess of York. We used the fabric to invoke her womb, which Margaret references with suffocating and animalistic imagery: "From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept / A hell hound that doth hunt us all to death." Once the Duchess released the fabric and exited the stage, the three

It is not simply that Richard is a divided or split human being. Rather, how do the visual identities of each actor immediately speak of our divided world?

Richards fought their way out of the fabric womb and threw it offstage in their fury. They lay scattered about the stage, their connection severed. So what might be seen as a kind of birth sent him closer to his own death. We see Richard fighting with himself. It becomes difficult for him to connect or to find comfort in himself. There was no Megatron or unified Richard past this point in the play. The split Richard interacted with the fabric first as a tent and then as a blanket. But objects and other selves that should provide comfort or protection ultimately do not.

FR: *How did you approach staging the Princes?*

MWS: We decided to use masks. All of the actors' hard work in the first term prepared them to meet these masks in a live way and to use them to gain new insights into the characters. We originally wanted to build innocence into the Princes' masks, but to our delight the masks created by assistant director Katey Wattam in fact brought out a wonderful bratty quality. These masks freed the actors to be dangerously aggressive towards Richard. Playing the boys in this way gave clear insight into where the murdering male soldiers in the play come from. Bratty princes grow up to be killer kings who use violence to attain power. And women played the Princes, which pushed the idea of maleness as a construct even further. These children are moulded by the deeply engrained desire for power, for ownership of space and of others. In that way they are like the widows in the play and so it was appropriate that the Princes be played by women in order to cement this link.

FR: *Another striking decision you made was to cut Richmond from the play entirely. Why?*

MWS: With Richmond not in the picture we see clearly that Richard is consumed by his own hunger. By watching the longings and conflicts manifest in one human being visibly divided, we connect to a contemporary conversation. My hope was that having Richard III played by a black man, a white woman, and a white man on stage together at all times would invoke race and gender conflicts going on in the world today. The system that is Richard fails because its parts do not work together symbiotically. Richard turns inward, trusts no one, not even himself. That isolation eats him from the inside.

FR: *What do you hope the audience took away from your production?*

MWS: The multiple nuances of a Shakespearean text may not always be readily apparent to us today. The use of mask, metaphor, and physical theatre in our *Richard III* brought to life the actors, the text, and the audience. The masks not only brought out amazing things in the actors wearing them, but the unmasked actors matched the energy of the masked figures and all engaged the audience. My contention is that the splitting of Richard, the highlighting of women's roles, the use of masks, and the physical manifestations of metaphors made the relationships, action, and story clear and meaningful to a contemporary audience. This combination of choices also made the play fun, funny, frightening, and poignant.

Princes.
Photo by Catherine Bradley.

Embedding:

An Alt.ernative to Reviewing

BY HAYLEY MALOUIN,
WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
MADDY COSTA AND
ROBYN GRANT-MORAN

**"Please don't publish it.
We wouldn't know how to face them.
I feel responsible—we feel responsible."**

I'm thinking about an email I sent to the professor of a theatre criticism course during my undergrad. The "we" is my project group, critically "embedded" in a local production. The "it" is our response to its premiere, having seen it come to fruition.

The gist of the matter is: we disliked the show and felt guilty about it. After all, we had been in the rehearsal room and had observed the various elements come together. We had written favourably and publicly about the show's potential, had earnestly believed in its intentions. Not enjoying the show felt like a betrayal. Weren't we, by way of being in the room, in part responsible for or complicit in its outcome?

I offer this anecdote as an invitation to consider this question of the critic's responsibility, and the critic's complicity. For whom is the critic responsible? To whom, or what, do we owe our criticism? How is the critic complicit, both in a work's creation and its effect in the socio-political milieu?

This article won't answer these questions head on. It will, however, offer up some considerations on responsibility, complicity, and criticality, particularly in relation to received understandings of power and hierarchy in theatre production, reception, and criticism. Specifically, it offers up the form of theatrical "embedding"—a form of theatre writing in which a critic sits in on rehearsal, observing the creation process of a show and writing about it from an insider perspective—as one potential way to navigate these sedimentary notions of critical hierarchy.

This article also serves as a next step in *alt.theatre*'s engagement with embedded criticism. Following Robyn Grant-Moran's two-part review of Jani Lauzon's *I Call Myself Princess* (a Paper Canoe Projects and Cahoots Theatre co-production in association with Native Earth Performing Arts) in Toronto in the autumn of 2018, it will consider a number of writers and practitioners who have made major contributions to the form: UK-based Andrew Haydon, a journalist and blogger who proposed the term in 2012; LA-based Andy Horwitz, founder of online arts and culture magazine *Culturebot*; and Maddy Costa, a UK-based writer who has spent the past seven years as a "critic-in-residence" for the Chris Goode & Co. theatre company, among others. We will explore how embedded criticism has the potential to disrupt hierarchies manifested along the axes of gender, race, sexuality, ability, and class, and which are as present in theatre criticism as they are in the surrounding cultural environment. This potential is of particular to interest to *alt.theatre*, as it's currently the only Canada-wide theatre magazine dedicated to questions of activism, social justice, and cultural diversity.

What do the concepts of justice, activism, and embedding offer one another? How do these notions enable new or different understandings of the critic's role?

In her 2016 article for *Canadian Theatre Review*, former *alt.theatre* editor-in-chief Nikki Shaffeeullah writes that spaces like *alt.theatre* "have at their centre an understanding that artistic excellence and risk are culturally constructed, and thus how they are defined varies widely." Shaffeeullah's point, that not only artistic excellence but also artistic risk are culturally constructed, is germane to *alt.theatre*'s mandate to provide "a forum for artists, activists, academics and others interested in issues of cultural diversity" ("About"). If artistic excellence and risk are culturally constructed, it follows that our documentation of this excellence and risk is similarly constructed, and that the position of the documenter—the critic—is particular and open to analysis. Here we might invoke Jill Dolan's feminist spectator. In *The Feminist Spectator* in Action, the follow-up to Dolan's widely influential *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, she writes, "The project of criticism in the twenty-first century remains dominated by writers who don't see culture's interaction with humanity quite as expansively [as the titular feminist critic]" (5). She continues: "In the U.S., for instance, the preponderance of white male critics write from unexamined gender and race biases that leave them ignorant about how theatre and popular culture can represent others. The theatre criticism establishment is shockingly white and male, though not necessarily heterosexual"(5).

Dolan defines "feminist criticism" as that which "participates in an activist project of culture-making in which we're collectively called to see what and who is stunningly, repeatedly evident and what and who is devastatingly, obviously invisible in the art and popular culture we regularly consume for edification and entertainment" (2). This project is not only invested in representation on the stage or screen; it's also interested in drawing back the curtain and exploring the means and methods of the production of these representations. Feminist criticism asks: Who and what are making culture, and how? *alt.theatre* asks these questions of performance in Canada. In this context, embedded criticism offers *alt.theatre* an opportunity to not only ask who and what are making culture, but also ask who and what are documenting, archiving, and reviewing this culture.

An Embedded Definition

It is helpful to keep Dolan's concept of feminist criticism—and the question of who and what makes culture—in mind when considering embedding's role in the critical landscape. Simply put, embedded criticism can be defined as writing about theatre from a behind-the-scenes vantage point, usually in a serialized format and usually published online. While a theatre review evaluates a production, embedded criticism engages with its process of creation. In this embedded encounter, the relationship between the artist and the critic also takes on a different shape than that of a mere interview, in which the artist and critic come into close contact but remain at arms length due to the critical outcome's structural delineations. In essence, embedded criticism offers a possible solution or response to the border that is conventionally drawn between artists and critics, a barrier that positions the critic as the diviner of the artist's intent through witnessing their finished product, and which focuses primarily on the artistic merit (the "good" or "bad") of a production.

In contrast, embedded criticism focuses on a show's gestation, with significantly less interest in adjudicating this gestation as good/bad, worthy/unworthy, or art/not art. It highlights and prioritizes the process artists undertake when creating work, using this process—not product—as the jumping off point for critical engagement. Rather than the focus being on reviewing the work, the "critic" (ever a contentious term, but especially so from within the rehearsal room!) documents the process, maintaining a critical eye but setting their intentions elsewhere than adjudication. Importantly, embedded criticism does not negate the role of the critic as a critical voice; rather, it imagines modes of critical engagement that do not necessarily end in judgement. By foregrounding process, and by situating theatrical production in the larger context of its own creation, embedded criticism effectively enters into dialogue with artists. In a lecture to her third-year theatre criticism class at Brock University in 2019, Karen Fricker referred to embedded criticism as "seeing how the theatrical sausage gets made"—an apt description, although perhaps it would be even more accurate to call it "joining in on stuffing the theatrical sausage." Embedded criticism does not position the artist's work as an artefact subject to scrutiny; rather, it views the work as a conversation. To take Fricker's metaphor further, it's an invitation to tuck in and chew the fat.

The act of embedding calls the notion of a critic's objectivity into question. Edinburgh-based critic Mark Fisher writes in his 2015 book *How To Write About Theatre*, "We are often unaware of our own biases because they are so deeply rooted in our culture. Despite the best of intentions, none of us is free of the values and assumptions of our age" (237). Indeed, the whole notion of critical objectivity has been effectively kyboshed by a number of thinkers, including Fisher, who writes, "Critics are not neutral . . . they can hardly be said to observe laboratory conditions. The theatre is a contaminated space. It does not happen in a vacuum" (212). We can find affinities between Fisher's contaminated theatre space and Dolan's claim that "culture is not an innocent preoccupation. Television, films, theatre productions and performance, and other representational expressive media both shape and reflect who we are to ourselves and to one another"(1). In essence, embedded criticism, like feminist criticism, takes seriously the mandate to contextualize the work of art within the structural parameters of its social and historical setting.

Further, the insider-perspective that embedding makes possible may in fact provide the critic with an opportunity to dig deeper into themes and questions that they may only be able to address superficially in a traditional review. This is of particular value when considering work by and about individuals and communities who experience marginalization, in which the critic's contextual knowledge matters greatly.

> **"I don't know...There is still this fucking stupid idea that criticism is unbiased opinion: it carries this patriarchal notion of neutrality that is so false—and 'embedded' is somehow seen as corrupt, biased, lacking that neutrality."**

A Sort of History: 2012-ish to Present

UK-based theatre journalist and blogger Andrew Haydon proposed the term "embedded criticism" on his site *Postcards from the Gods* in 2012, borrowing it, rather controversially, from war reporting. Haydon muses that "the question of "embeddedness" is one that goes to the very heart of what we think a critic is *for*. Or what a critic's job is/should be." Reminiscing on a trip to Kurdistan with the Actors Touring Company (ATC) and their production of Roland Schimmelpfennig's *The Golden Dragon*, Haydon writes, "Being in Iraq and a journalist, jokes about my being "embedded" abounded."

Haydon's considerations on embedding—"Is it desirable? What are the problems? What are the benefits?"—have been subsequently expanded upon by Andy Horwitz, critic, curator, and founder of *Culturebot*. In his 2012 essay "Re-Framing The Critic for the 21st Century," Horwitz writes "Embedded Criticism further removes the writer from the traditional arts journalism model by encouraging the writer to engage with the artist's process over time in the dual role of dramaturge and expositor."

Horwitz proposes "a new framework for the critic in this emerging landscape and a vision for how the role can facilitate change and innovation sector-wide." He nods to "critical horizontalism"—a term coined by *Culturebot*—as central to this turn. In this framework, "criticism is a creative process unto itself and the writer exists in subjective relation to the work of the artist" ("*Culturebot*"). Importantly, the writer's response is not a judgement on a case made by the artist, but rather "the continuation of a dialogue initiated by the artist."

Horwitz argues that embedded criticism is the "practical implementation" of critical horizontalism. By acting as dramaturge, sounding board, documentarian, and/or critical observer, the embedded critic enacts "public-facing… 'horizontal' audience engagement strategies"("Re-Framing").

By Any Other Name, Please

It's important to note that the phenomenon this article has thus far called "embedding" has emerged out of both practice and theory—categories that don't always coalesce. While Haydon may have, half-jokingly, proposed the *term* "embedding," he is not the first to experiment with the *form*. Indeed, Haydon begins "Embedded" by referencing a session at Devoted and Disgruntled by writer Maddy Costa and artist Jake Orr. In the session, Costa and Orr ponder new potential channels of dialogue between people who write about theatre and people who make it, questioning whether it's even necessary to maintain a distance between these two types of theatre professionals. Haydon calls it embedding; for her part, Costa refutes the militaristic term.

Former editor and critic at *The Guardian*, owner of blog *Deliq*., and prolific writer across online and print media, Costa is perhaps the

leading authority on this kind of criticism. Given her central role in the concept's creation, it felt fortuitous to contact Costa and invite her to share her perspective on the form's development here. Costa currently finds herself transitioning out of the "critic-in-residence" role she has inhabited with UK-based Chris Goode & Co. for almost seven years. What insight can this unique position offer?

Maddy Costa: My experience [as a critic-in-residence] has mostly been with Chris Goode & Co, which is such a gift actually, to be given the trust [of one company]. One of my very first experiences in his rehearsal room—during research and development for the Blaise Cendrars Project, May 2011—was with the performer Jamie Wood, who sat filling a balloon with chunks of broccoli and [telling] me about how, as a performer, one is constantly being judged—how the rehearsal room and particularly the research and development room is one of the few places where performers can escape that judgement and be free, however briefly, to play. How important it was for me, coming into the room, not to damage that. I think I held tight to that for the next six and a half years of work.

The trust from Chris meant that I also had space to play, to redefine what writing from within a rehearsal process might entail. Anyone can write a rehearsal diary: what can I bring that's different or unique? How can I respond to the specific process, the specific materials in the room that I'm in? It's through these kinds of questions that I began to think about this practice of writing from the rehearsal room as a way of creating a "parallel performance," as much for people who might never see the performances themselves [as those who will], using the same materials, themes, and conversations as the makers in the room to create texts and other works online that convey the flavour of the work—but without supplanting the work.

My thoughts on [being a critic-in-residence] have changed so much over time. I've gone from being defensive about it—particularly in the face of people characterising the work as advertorial—to, as I say, creating this whole other way of describing it: parallel performance. This idea isn't just designed to get people into the room, because theatre is so specific in time and space. I actually want a readership that reaches far beyond that moment, those seats; [my writing] is designed to create an experience and interaction with the materials of the work for those who can never encounter the work itself. That seems to me far more interesting work that embedded writers can be doing.

Another thing that has changed, however, is my sense of the need for accountability. There's a lot of really bad practice in theatre, and the #MeToo movement has helped some of that be exposed, but everyone who works in theatre is so fucking scared of never working again if they speak up that no one speaks up and most bad practice passes unnoticed.

What do I see as the potential future [of embedded criticism]? Gosh, I don't know ...There is still this fucking stupid idea that criticism is unbiased opinion: it carries this patriarchal notion of neutrality that is so false—and "embedded" is somehow seen as corrupt, biased, lacking that neutrality. But again, this comes down to the idea of criticism's role being to put bums in seats—or save someone from buying a ticket for a show that is "rubbish"—and I'm just not interested in "consumer guide" writing. I'm interested in something more creative. So the challenge to my mind is how to square accountability with creativity. And so I think what I hope for is a future in which there is still this consumer guide criticism, because, sure, some audiences really want that; but also less secrecy and more trust in theatre ... and then for there to be this other writing, that isn't critical so much as a creative response to theatre. It's about spectrum, right?

...The word embedded is really easy; people latched on to it quickly, and I totally understand why. It's a word I sort of hold at arm's length when I use it. I was never embedded with Chris Goode & Co., that's part of the sense of gift; I was part of the company, maybe not right at first, but pretty soon after. The job titles I had were, first, "critic-in-residence" and, second, "critical writer." I much MUCH prefer those as terms, especially the first one—because everyone understands the term writer-in-residence, right? It's just as clear in its description of the work as embedded, and is less of a joke (Costa, "Intros – embedding").

Cast of *I Call Myself Princess*. Photo by Dahlia Katz.

While Costa's particular role within Chris Goode & Co. has undoubtedly been a unique one—one perhaps not easily replicated by other companies and critics—her framing of this encounter and relationship as a "gift" has powerful potential beyond her individual position. In this instance, Costa is neither merely archivist of the company's work nor interpreter of its value and meaning; her words co-exist as both an extension and reflection of the theatrical work. Costa's description of her role as critical writer *within* the actual matrices of the company further destabilizes the received hierarchy of critic-to-creator, by conceiving of the role of criticism as intrinsic to the gestation of creative work.

The coercive powers of hierarchy are persistent, however; and there is the potential for Costa's exchange of "gifts" to graft itself back onto the very structures it attempts to disrupt. Where, for example, is the space for dissent between critic-in-residence and creator in this equation? If criticism and creation are conceived of as equal, how does this colour, shape, or hinder criticism's responsibility to speak truth to power, to push back against authority?

It is clear from Costa's musings that the concerns of objectivity and critical agency do not disappear just because the critic and the creator may conceive of themselves as part of the same team. Indeed, Costa's departure from Chris Goode & Co. may instead signal that embedded criticism's half-life is not as long as one would hope it to be. Costa is reticent to make this claim, however. She writes, in a post on *Deliq.* announcing her departure,

> Does this mean "embedded" criticism doesn't work? How can we possibly know? Every process is different, every writer-maker relationship is different. Chris and I are just two people: we're not and can't be representatives of an entire industry . . . We've followed one path: there are still so many others not walked. All of them might help to build different relationships between people who make, watch and write about theatre.

An alt.ernative

We arrive, finally, at the threshold of *alt.theatre*. For this magazine, embedded criticism's most exciting contribution to the larger theatrical field is its potential to foreground work that is created by, for, and about communities marginalized by racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and other systems of oppression. By putting the critic and artist in dialogue, embedded criticism can enable an exploration of theatre's social, political, and artistic impact, and destabilize hierarchies of value that are propped up not just by mainstream news media, but also by the institutions that benefit from these hierarchies. Specifically, as a theatre magazine dedicated to questions of diversity, representation, and social justice, embedded criticism offers *alt.theatre* the chance to explore the relationship between theatre and justice—not just from the auditorium, but from backstage, from the rehearsal room, from the stage door.

As mentioned, this process has already begun: in the fall of 2018, Toronto critic, graduate student, and opera singer Robyn Grant-Moran "embedded" in Native Earth Performing Arts' production of *I Call Myself Princess* by Jani Lauzon, documenting her experience in *alt.theatre*'s online theatre blog. As an opera singer and member of the Métis Nation of Ontario, Grant-Moran was uniquely qualified to observe the creation process of this story of a young Métis music student discovering a hidden history of Indigenous opera through the work of settler composer Charles Wakefield Cadman and Cree/Cherokee performer Tsianina Redfeather. Grant-Moran was able to offer cultural and artistic insights into the production that few other critics in attendance could, contributing invaluable critical and documentary work to an urgent piece of contemporary Indigenous performance. Almost more importantly, Grant-Moran's work is evidence of how culturally specific criticism (that is, criticism written by individuals of a specific, usually marginalized, community) is not only a foundational aspect of anti-oppression in theatre writing—it's just good critical practice regardless. Grant-Moran is an intersectional expert speaking to her intersecting areas of expertise; we all benefit as a result:

> When I first learned of embedded criticism it immediately grabbed me. When I see a production, whether I personally liked it or not is only a small part of the equation... I work from the assumption that audiences can probably tell if a production is of quality from a technical standpoint, but may need a little help understanding the social, cultural, and historical context. This is especially important for racialized, disabled, and otherwise minoritized productions, as not everyone will have context for what they will be seeing. Embedded criticism allows for a deeper and richer connection with audiences!
>
> ... I'm most fascinated with what the creators are hoping to convey and how that lines up with their work. There is a lot that can be intuited by considering an artist's previous works,

Richard Greenblatt and Marion Newman in *I Call Myself Princess*. Photo by Dahlia Katz.

> and it's a great place to start when looking at productions. Getting in and learning about the creator's vision, where it comes from, how the cast and creative team relate to the work and to each other, however—that's the stuff that a conventional review can't offer. For me, discovering that and then comparing it with the "final" production is what makes the overall product that much more powerful (or, sometimes, not) (Grant-Moran, "Embedding thoughts").

In light of these remarks, I want to revisit the anecdote with which I opened this piece: in fact, we were incorrect to feel that we needed to love the production in which we were embedded. Rather, we needed to do justice to its context and to our roles as communicators of that context to audiences. This does not entail complicity in the show's outcome, as I thought at the time. Rather, embedded criticism imagines different modes of engagement, non-hierarchical and non-judicial, offering points of connection between artists, critics, and audiences that resist dominant hierarchies and enable nuanced discussions about art and the contextual socio-political milieu. One does not need to love a production to be embedded in it; one must simply want to do it justice.

Alternative theatre requires alternative criticism. I offer up *alt.theatre*'s foray into embedding as an addendum to Andrew Haydon's hypothesis—that embedded criticism invites us to rethink what criticism is *for*—and to my musings earlier in this article about the responsibility and complicity of the critic.

I suggest that, at its heart, theatre criticism is always about doing justice: doing justice to the art witnessed; doing justice to the potential of expansive, generative modes of expression to convey the complexity of human emotion and interaction; doing justice to the world and the people in it.

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Performance Review

REVIEW OF *THE TASHME PROJECT* AT CENTAUR THEATRE'S BRAVE NEW LOOKS FESTIVAL

Montreal

BY KATHERINE ZIEN

> JULIE: Are we being responsible, just [pause] asking all these questions and stirring up all these emotions and then just leaving?
>
> MATT: She's passing on something vital and no, we're not there afterwards and we're not [pause] I don't think we're doing anything wrong. I'm shocked by all the things they never told us, what they never asked us to remember. …
>
> And the consequences, we couldn't have known them before we asked. Besides, what do they expect from all this, from us through all this? I mean, who are we to them?

This exchange comes fifteen minutes into *The Tashme Project: The Living Archive*, a theatrical production co-created and performed by Julie Tamiko Manning and Matt Miwa, based on their interviews with people who lived through Japanese Canadian internment during the 1940s.[1] In the performance, Manning and Miwa, playing themselves, float ethical dilemmas that have arisen from their interviews. Julie displays reservations, her body resolutely still, while Matt rushes to defend their project, piling on rationales, his clipped speech and elevated tone betraying his own concerns. Seemingly simple questions—"What is your name? Where did you live?"—have produced a host of ethical, social, and emotional risks, as interviewees navigate the intimate, harrowing memory landscape of the internment camps. "Where did you live?" shades into, "Where did I live before we were forced into the camps? Or after, when we were scattered from our communities and forced to find menial jobs in far-flung regions of Canada?"

Beyond these and other questions, *The Tashme Project* raises urgent queries that hang unresolved: What are the complex reasons why we don't tell certain stories? How do we broach disturbing subject matter with those who have, by necessity, insulated themselves from it for decades? What compounding traumas are incurred in reencountering and revising, in adulthood, childhood memories of the camps? When are reparations enough, or not enough? What is a "living archive," and what are the stakes of creating one?

While working together on a different project, Manning and Miwa discovered that both their families contained people formerly interned at Tashme, and so they decided to interview survivors of internment. They ended up interviewing over one hundred *nisei* (a Japanese term used to describe the second generation, that is, people descended from Japanese parents but born in Canada).[2] Because they were interned as children, the *nisei*'s responses to the camp were qualitatively different from those of the adults around them. The interviewees playfully resisted and obfuscated, implicitly rejecting Manning's and Miwa's desires for a straightforward account.

This is where things got funny in multiple senses: at many junctures—and strangely for a performance about forced internment—the show elicited our collective laughter. The interviewees remembered the camps as "wonderful" places full of games, pranks, strategic victories, and minor moves toward freedom. Yet these then-children also recounted being stripped of their belongings, forcibly displaced, and in limbo: bored, deprived, and marginalized as the racialized other. And there was also the impossibility of returning to the places where they'd grown up.

"The interviews present challenges to straightforward processes of healing, transitional justice, testimony, or closure."

Performers Julie Tamiko Manning and Matt Miwa. Photos by June Park.

In the performance, Manning and Miwa embody their interlocutors, the *nisei*, who were children during their internment. Through a full-body gestural precision that is a kind of possession, the performers help us to see each person in their specificity: their quirks, sly humour, iconoclasm, stoic perseverance, stark courage, self-abnegation or resilience. Their voices overlap and dance together: sometimes a duet of the young, tentative interviewer and elderly respondent, or a syncopated waltz of two or more nisei recounting with each other. Manning and Miwa push their voices into low and husky registers; they hunch over, walking and sitting with difficulty. Sharp, isolated bursts of speech erupt from their lips as from a balky spigot. And we experience the gaps, pauses, breaths, tensions of memory, and physical ache that can occur when one is searching for a long-hidden memory, or for a belligerent memory whose traumatic contents press into the present.

The interviews present challenges to straightforward processes of healing, transitional justice, testimony, or closure. These challenges are compounded by several interviewees' expressions of *shikata ga nai*: "it can't be helped." As one interviewee, Kunio, puts it, shrugging, "I don't know what it would have been like if we hadn't gone through it." Teiko and Kunio say, "We never knew what else existed..." "So we can't compare." It's too painful to reckon with the possibility of having averted this path, which seemed as inevitable then as it seems, or should seem, wrong now.[3] Beneath veiled acceptance, some survivors still erupt in rage, while others smoulder. In their different ways, they have developed tools for survival in hostile conditions, stranded between the xenophobic white settler societies of Canada and communities in Japan (where many survivors returned after the camps) that don't consider them Japanese enough.

How do we make sense of this "archive?" And what happens when the material an archive usually contains—texts and objects—has been lost? We repeatedly hear that families could not take anything with them. Men were separated from women and children, and everyone was forced to leave behind things that, Manning recounts angrily, "would never become our heirlooms, never have any stories attached to them." Miwa confesses that he does not feel the intensity of the loss his ancestors experienced; he asks Manning how she is able to feel a strong connection to an absence. Perhaps this is our task, and the performance's goal: to feel, and share in the feeling of, a connection to things lost, places unmarked, and memories untold.

The play contains relatively few objects, but these few are meaningful. In particular, two boxes—a briefcase and an ornate lacquered Japanese serving box of several stacked layers called a *jubako*—both complement and do battle with one another. The briefcase is a way of both preserving and packing away memories for storage, a means of protection as well as occlusion. But the *jubako* signifies ritual and reinstates, in miniature, a semblance of order that the *nisei* have built around the past. At several moments, Manning opens the *jubako*, disrupting its order, rearranging its contents—curating its archive. This act, for me, felt like the prizing open of a tightly sealed vault, with deeply ambivalent results.

The dueling boxes materialize something that Manning and Miwa struggle to accept throughout the play: that part of the work of remembering lies in accepting memory's impossibility. An archive may—will—never be sufficiently complete. Stories might never be told, or they might be told in different way than one would like. Sometimes there are simply too many stories to tell: accounts proliferate and escape the curatorial control a researcher seeks to impose. Collective and individual intergenerational trauma will never be communicated smoothly. The play grapples with all of these—not pitfalls, but possibilities. Through seamless embodied portrayals, *The Tashme Project* both builds its titular "living archive" and confronts the questions that dog the construction of an archive: What is to be remembered? How can marginalized voices be heard? Who collates the information? And where do the gaps in the record lie?

In the end, the two containers work together to create a new assemblage. Manning opens the suitcase—the hiding place of archival matter—and arranges its contents, integrating them with the *jubako*'s ritual objects on the table. Inside of this collage-like shrine, she poses photo albums alongside oranges and freshly poured tea. This memento mori is a *mise en scéne* of witness to the generations whose stories have not been and will not be told—an archive hovering between life and death. Absences can, in this archive, be felt alongside the objects presented to us. The gaps and ghosts are present, showing why performance matters in embodying those things that cannot be encapsulated in the textual record.

Notes

1. The play has circulated on Canadian stages, in readings and full productions, since 2011. This particular production was directed by Mike Payette.
2. The parents of *nisei* (*issei*, the first generation) were born in Japan. Manning and Miwa are sansei, third-generation descendants and the grandchildren of *issei*.
3. Of course, such actions are legal in the United States, following the Supreme Court ruling upholding Trump's Muslim travel ban.

vol.16

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

alt.theatre magazine is excited to announce its themes for the upcoming Volume 16. We're looking for pieces—feature-length articles, dispatches, creative interventions, reviews—that bring critical energy and perspectives to:

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Where productions take place—from the playing spaces themselves to the neighbourhoods, towns, reserves, and cyberspaces they shape and are shaped by. How are theatres and performers using space to tell the stories needing telling? How does distance impact theatre in a territory?

Issue 16.2 traces

History and futures. Memory and projections. Maps and messages. The physical artefacts left behind by largely an ephemeral medium, and the residual effect of mounting a production or just existing as a company.

Issue 16.3 faces

Colour blind. Colour conscious. Colour mind. Identity, race, ethnicity, culture. Indigenous-, Settler- , and Newcomer-colours—including Whiteness. Who is pushing the boundaries of theatre, and the importance of visibility and representation.

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