**The Craft So Long To Learn:**

**Memories of a Prolonged Education in Canadian Theatre**

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This is a memoir about learning the craft.

It’s dedicated to my best teachers:

Sandy, Robin, Tracy, Monique, Yvette, Soheil, Nina, and Majdi.

And as always, to Christine

**Preface**

The Lyf so short, the craft so long to Lerne,  
Th’assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,   
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne,   
Al this mene I by love.

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*

This little memoir is a story about learning and loving the craft of theatre making. I don’t believe that my story’s exceptional, nor do I believe that I’m a natural storyteller, my bent being more analytical and dramaturgical than narrative or dramatic. I’m neither famous nor singularly accomplished, and although I’ve encountered and worked with some geniuses, I haven’t spent my life rubbing shoulders with celebrity. There is, moreover, nothing here about my, or anyone else’s, personal life: no revelations, no titillation.

But I do believe that my story, largely prosaic, is representative of a particular trajectory and history of theatre and theatre studies in the land now called Canada, a trajectory that begins before there *was* a formal history of either Canadian theatre or theatre studies, before a nationalist movement in the late 1960s and early 70s that, however problematically, brought theatre into being in Canada as a worthy activity and object of study. And it begins long before the majority of white settler Canadians, myself included, became aware of this place as a culturally diverse society built on stolen land and genocidal policies and practices towards its First Peoples—not to mention its Black, Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Latinx, Arabic, and other immigrant and refugee populations that have helped and continue to help build the country while suffering from intolerance, discrimination, and racism, official, systemic, deliberate, or casual.

What follows traces a dual trajectory of my professional life attempting to reconcile (creative) work *in* the theatre with (analytical) work *on* the theatre, at a period when professional and academic practices were at best separate endeavours and at worst actively hostile to one another. I’ve lived through a time, moreover, when Canadian Studies of any kind, Canadian Theatre, and Theatre Studies generally were in their infancy, and when, outside Canada, Canadian theatre and Canadian theatre studies were both unknown and felt by many to be uninteresting. My career models several shifts in Canadian theatre, theatre studies, and the culture at large as my interests and practices shifted from a generalized, depoliticized, and universalist interest in “the classics” through a Canadian nationalist and even regionalist phase, to an interest in cultural theory and most recently a focus on the intercultural, interdisciplinary, and transnational.

This memoir is, largely, the selective record of an informal self-education driven by love for the work, that began before there were many options for formal training in these fields, an education that in my later years is ongoing. Sometimes I feel it’s just starting. Stephen Leacock wrote that getting a PhD meant that you had been pronounced full, and no new knowledge could be imparted to you. The same could be said of other stages in an academic career, most resonantly becoming a “Full Professor.” Stuffed full. But I’ve found that much of what learning I’ve acquired—and certainly the learning that’s been most important to me—has come after both events, and it has come informally through working with others.

I first thought of calling this little memoir *Journeyman*, not out of any universalist masculinism, but because it’s in part a story about learning on the job, and in part one of male privilege: I wouldn’t, I’m certain, have had the opportunities that have come my way had I been a woman, an Indigenous person, a person of colour, trans, or gender non-binary. But this is also, at its heart, a story about the ongoing learning of a craft, chronicling the various stages of my own formal and informal education. I haven’t attempted to tell the whole story or to recount every project I’ve been involved in. My selection principles in writing this have had to do with the activities I’ve been privileged to be part of from which I feel I’ve learned the most as an artist, scholar, and artist-scholar, and I’ve tried to share some of the things I’ve learned over the decades. Any other omissions are stories that are not mine to tell.

**PART I:**

**Formal Education**

I came late to theatre, theatre studies, and Canada as an object of study. Unlike many who work in these fields outside of Canada, I was never taken to the theatre by my parents and have no memory of having attended the theatre as a child. I was a post-war baby, born in 1950 the youngest of three sons of parents who had lived through a depression and a world war; they had no time for frivolities like theatre. I played hockey, took piano and trumpet lessons, and studied harmony, counterpoint, musical form, and music history at the Royal Conservatory in Toronto —all useful things for a future dramaturge, though I didn’t know this at the time. Once I got to high school in the mid-sixties, there were bus trips once a year on my birthday to the Stratford Festival. (I went to St. Michael’s College School, and my birthday, which happens to be on Michaelmas, was a school holiday with an organized educational excursion.) The only one of those Stratford shows I have any clear memory of—and there will have been four of them—was *1 Henry IV* in 1965, featuring an over-the-top performance by Tony van Bridge, I believe, as Falstaff. I was fifteen and wasn’t overly impressed by the performance, though the sheer eventness of live theatre stayed with me.

Meanwhile, in the classroom, although various school textbooks exposed me to the occasional poem by a Canadian—by the likes, for example, of the infamous Duncan Campbell Scott (we read his sentimental poems about a “waning race” of “Indians”—I still recall the “tragic savage” of his “Onondaga Madonna,” with her “pagan passion”—but learned nothing at the time of his role in residential schools’ attempts to kill the Indian in the child). I had no particular exposure, though, to Canadian art, writing, or, of course, theatre. I did buy my first record album in 1967, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, his first, and in the same year my brother bought me Al Purdy’s *Poems for All the Annettes* (the House of Anansi re-release). The former I played to death, and I later bought all of Cohen’s early books of poetry, a couple of novels, and, of course, his subsequent albums, all of them; the latter exposed me for the first time to printed poetry “in the [Canadian] vernacular,” and again, led to a follow-up interest later on. I was eventually to meet and host Purdy when he visited the Maritimes many years later, and I stayed briefly at his famous A-frame on Roblin Lake one summer where he showed me through his immensely impressive collection of signed books and first editions. Like many others, I collected autographed copies of much of his work. It was said at the time that the real rarity was a book by Purdy that *wasn’t* signed, and that was true, at least, of my collection. Well over fifty years after *Poems for All the Annettes*, when I retired from teaching, I donated my Purdy collection to playwright David Yee, who at the time was writing his play, *Among Men*, based on Purdy’s poem, “House Guest,” about Purdy and PEI “people’s poet” Milton Acorn talking, drinking, arguing, and building the famous A-frame near Ameliasburgh, Ontario.

My formal post-secondary education—after my application to the architecture program at University of Toronto had been rejected and I’d declined an offer to study engineering at Cornell in upper New York State under a hockey scholarship—was, like that of most people of my generation who eventually turned to Drama and later Theatre Studies, in a literature department. In my case this was the English department at University of Toronto’s Scarborough College. The curriculum there at that time included no Canadian work and little drama. After that, through pure inertia (the inability to change direction) I enrolled in the graduate studies program in English at the St. George (downtown) campus of U of T, where the sheer architectural Britishness of Trinity, Victoria, and University Colleges intimidated me, as did the brutalist fourteen stories of the Robarts Library, not-so-affectionately known as “Fort Book.”

My undergraduate years (1968-72) were largely undistinguished. While attending school full-time in Scarborough I was playing Junior hockey in Whitby and Oshawa, got married at eighteen in the summer between my first and second year, fathered a child a year later, and worked the midnight shift five nights a week at the then seedy Dundas and Yonge branch of Hertz Rent-a-Car in downtown Toronto, long before the Eaton’s Centre and the attendant glitz of Dundas (now Sankofa) Square existed. I surreptitiously let homeless people sleep overnight in rental cars with reclining seats (waking them before management arrived in the morning) while I did my course readings and taught myself to type in the front office. I crammed my full-time class schedule into three days a week in Scarborough. I studied neither theatre nor Canadian literature, and indeed learned that the highest form of writing was epic poetry—fiction being a late and debased development, and drama not literature at all (Shakespeare being, of course, a poet). Among my strongest and strangest memories is being told by one distinguished professor of Anglo Saxon that nothing good had been written in English—much less in Canada—since *Paradise Lost*. I was also taught by everyone, it seemed, that good art was never political. Tell that to Milton.

I did, among the usual, conservative U of T mix of period offerings in English and American lit, take a course or two in “drama” rather late in my undergraduate years, which, picking up on where I had left off in high school, largely meant Shakespeare (though I remember being puzzled by Beckett). And drama meant published dialogue, not theatre. The academy at the time was dominated by the formalist “new criticism” of I.A. Richards, the close reading of rhythm, rhyme, irony, and ambiguity (William Empson’s “Seven Types”), and it was ruled by Archibald MacLeish’s modernist dictum on self-referential creative autonomy: “a poem should not mean but be.” Historical factors were irrelevant, cultural context extraneous, and meaning immanent. All of this was very white, male, definitely not Canadian, and, of course, unsullied by the mouths of actors.

I do, however, remember attending an intimate reading by Margaret Atwood with a small group of English students and faculty not long after her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, was published in 1969, which sparked my incipient interest in Canadian writing and (eventually) my curiosity about feminism—and, indeed, about the politics of art more generally. I bought a first edition copy of *The Edible Woman* and for years afterwards I bought first editions of most of her subsequent work, including her poetry, which I’ve always preferred to her fiction. I also remember one lonely theatre production by, if I recall correctly, Theatre Passe Muraille, in those foundational days of the so-called alternative theatre movement in Canada. The piece involved, again if I remember correctly, a scene in which a naked woman was a tied to a chair, gagged, and brutally interrogated. The politics of the movement were nationalist; they didn’t have much to do with gender. But the real impact on me of those years, and of Theatre Passe Muraille in particular, was to come much later.

In my final year at Scarborough College—my final year as an undergraduate—I took a Renaissance prose and poetry course from Patricia Vicari, who in response to one of my essays wrote, “you have a gift for apt quotation”—which may prove to be my epitaph. My partner still maintains that my writing consists mainly of the stringing together of quotations. That same year I took a Shakespeare course from a very gentle and generous professor, John Margeson. When I continued into graduate studies in the Fall of 1972 I gravitated again to his Shakespeare offering, as well as to a course on Shakespeare’s text (the Folios and Quartos) with the great Clifford Leech, and one on Early Modern Drama—Jacobean comedy, to be more precise—with the wickedly witty R.B. Parker, who I later learned had also, under the name Brian Parker, written about Newfoundland playwright Michael Cook. I took other graduate courses as well, including a course on English satire with D.J. Dooley, for whose class I wrote a long, rambling, and admiring essay, “The Road to 1984,” about the complete works of George Orwell, exhibiting a then unconscious attraction to political writing. And I took the required course on Anglo Saxon, for which I submitted, as my final assignment written in proper alliterative half lines of Old English, a spoof critical edition of what I called *The* *Seowulf Fragment* by the Beowulf poet’s only forgotten brother, complete with textual apparatus, critical introduction, and notes describing the poem’s discovery at the bottom of a tenth-century monastic privy.

This was the U of T of Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye. I never took a course from either, but I did fall under the intellectual influence of the latter, though I didn’t, at the time, read any of his work on Can Lit. Most of my grad school essays, whatever the subject, cited *The Anatomy of Criticism*, *The Well-Tempered Critic*, or *A Natural Perspective* and discussed the argument of comedy or the “mythos” of one season or another. I was later to write a featured review of Frye’s *Words with Power* for the late, lamented magazine, *Books in Canada*, but the most significant residue of my dalliance with Frye was an eventual interest in structuralism, the basis of my later work on semiotic theory of various kinds, poststructuralism, and what I called “materialist semiotics.” I found my way to Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Lacan, that is, backwards through Frye, though I can only see and say this in retrospect.

But my strongest influence during my graduate work came from my final course, a small seminar on Shakespearean comedy in the Summer of 1973 with Alexander (Sandy) Leggatt. The class met for three hours, four mornings a week, then had lunch together at Hart House before retiring in the afternoon to watch the televised Watergate hearings. I don’t remember how we found time to do the reading for the course, or to write, but I do remember that course as the most formative of any I’d taken, not because of any particularly theoretical approach—though Sandy co-taught courses with Frye—but because of the generosity of spirit of the instructor, the conviviality of the room, and the rigour of the analysis. That course also introduced me in the first serious way to Shakespeare’s last plays and to Sandy as my PhD supervisor, and it got me thinking about possible dissertation projects.

My first idea, oddly, was to write a stage history of *The Winter’s Tale*—oddly because, although I loved the play, at the time I knew very little about stage history beyond the passages dedicated to it in the Arden and other critical editions of the individual Shakespeare plays. I had probably never heard the word historiography, and at that point had not seen a single production of *The Winter’s Tale*. Nevertheless, the idea to do so took me on my first travels to the land of Shakespeare in the mid-to-late 1970s. In London and Stratford-upon-Avon I saw legendary performers such as Tony Church, Judi Dench, Mia Farrow, Michael Gambon, John Gielgud, Alan Howard, Ben Kingsley, Ian McKellen, Helen Mirren, Eric Porter, Ian Richardson, Donald Sinden, and others, seeing mainly European classics and being exposed more thoroughly to British acting than was probably healthy for my incipient theatrical or nationalist sensibilities**.** I did most of my research at the Theatre Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon, where the archives of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) are housed.

On one trip I was armed with a letter of introduction from Ronald Bryden—former theatre critic for *The Observer* and then director of the then Drama Centre at U of T—to Stanley Wells—then director of the Shakespeare Centre and a distinguished Shakespearean scholar, biographer, and editor. I was deeply intimidated to meet what turned out to be a gracious, but disarmingly shy man. We didn’t know what to say to one another, but he offered to help me get tickets to the season’s shows at the RSC, one of which, of course, was *The Winter’s Tale* in 1976, featuring Ian McKellen’s neurotic Leontes, directed by John Barton with Trevor Nunn at the cavernous Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

But that wasn’t the production, or the theatre, that left the greatest impression, though Barton’s book and television series, *Playing Shakespeare*, was later to have significant influence on me as a director and as a scholar of Shakespeare in performance. These were the RSC’s glory days under Nunn and the early days of The Other Place, the recently converted rehearsal shed that, as an intimate studio theatre, was the brainchild of early feminist director and activist Buzz Goodbody. Archives aside—I’ve never enjoyed working in archives—I couldn’t have picked a better time to be in Stratford-upon-Avon. In viewing several outstanding shows at The Other Place, including Barry Kyle’s *Richard III* (with Ian Richardson), and especially Nunn’s now famous cabined, cribbed, confined *Macbeth* (with Ian McKellan and Judi Dench), my understanding of what theatre could do was transformed. With minimal sets, costumes, and props, and their focus on outstanding acting before small audiences positioned only a few feet from the performers, all of the shows I saw at The Other Place in those years—not all of them by Shakespeare (I remember a solid *Perkin Warbeck* and an excellent *Doll’s House*)—featured “poor theatre” at its richest. In later years I was never again so taken with the work of the RSC, with the partial exception of Michael Boyd’s athletic ensemble production of the first tetralogy at the Swan Theatre in 2000-2001, which I saw again later in a single marathon weekend in Ann Arbor, Michigan. But it was the earlier, Other Space productions that became for me a model of the kind of theatre experience I would focus on for most of my career as both scholar and practitioner.

Much later, in my 2004 book, *Shakespeare and Canada*, I wrote about my first “pilgrimage” to the imperial centre in a very different way, with a very different take on the formative influence of my travels. There I reflected retrospectively on my obligatory tour as a search for authenticity, authority, even my own cultural identity: a position from which, critically, to speak. How, I asked, could I dare to write about Shakespeare without having visited *the* Stratford-on-Avon, as opposed to the imitation one in Ontario (on another, imitation Avon River), without having seen the work of the Royal Shakespeare Company, or been to the birthplace of Shakespeare and of my own displaced culture? I wrote of feeling like a fraud, at best a colonial mimic of academic authority that was, I knew in my bones and from the architecture, curriculum, and professoriate of the University of Toronto, fundamentally British. I hadn’t recognized then that by “universal,” I meant “English” (and male, and straight), though my dawning awareness of this was prompted by my travels, on my purchased-in-Canada Brit-Rail pass, through train stations named after characters from Shakespeare’s history plays, and through the *real*, *authentic* towns, cities, streets, and rivers after which the colonial imitations of Southwestern Ontario were named. I visited Shakespeare’s birthplace and his grave, his wife’s famous cottage, his mother’s house, his “new place,” and all the other “Shakespeare properties” with their real Tudor architecture, unlike the familiar “Tudor style” of the homes and pubs in Ontario with their inauthentic central heating.

But I also found in both Stratford and London an understanding that didn’t really land until much later that there was a fundamental otherness at the heart of things English. Even those shows at The Other Place included, for example, a production of *Hamlet* by Buzz Goodbody, a lone feminist director among the RSC’s male bastion who was responsible for the founding of The Other Place and whose suicide for political reasons before the show opened resonated deeply. A suicide’s *Hamlet*! And playing the title role was Ben Kingsley (born Krishna Bhanji, in Yorkshire), whose actorly authority was based on something other than “pure” or “authentic” unracialized Englishness. (Years later the same would be true of David Oyelowo, who, as Henry VI in the Michael Boyd first tetralogy, was the first Black actor to play an English King at the RSC.) Meanwhile, in London, I did the tourist rounds, visiting streets, churches, buildings, bridges, tube stations, embankments, theatres, and old curiosity shops whose names I had known, it seemed, all my life, with an uncanny—Freud would say *unheimlich*—combination of familiarity and strangeness. But most of all I visited the Tower of London, which I thought of at the time, with a characteristic colonial cringe, as the very birthplace of my cultural identity, at least on my father’s side (my mother’s parents were Scottish). I did the tour, and it being November found myself alone in the tiny Chapel of St. John the Evangelist, with its thick walls and deep shadows at the heart of the ancient White Tower. I was then only slightly haunted by the fact that at this seat of essential Englishness I had discovered what for an anglo-Ontarion was the archetypal Other, for of course this central keep of White Tower had been constructed in 1066 by the French.

After I returned to Canada, somewhat stirred but not yet really shaken, I reconsidered the topic of my dissertation and settled on considering Shakespeare’s last plays through the lens of reader response theory, inspired by having read Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin*, an influential account of reading Milton’s *Paradise Lost* published in 1967 that I had encountered in my final year as an undergraduate. I adapted reader response theory, somewhat clumsily and ahistorically I now think, to try to account for the experience of audiences in the imagined theatre—I still had little experience of a real one. I called the thesis *Imaginative Engagement in the Last Plays of Shakespeare* and, because the name Richard Knowles was already taken by a senior Shakespearean editor, I called myself Richard Paul Knowles. I was never comfortable with that moniker but continued to publish under it for the next twenty-two years before I reverted to Ric with my first book. My thesis was my first foray into what became an ongoing and vexed interest in the experience of audiences, though I was warned by the discipline-bound department committee who approved my proposal against venturing into the non-literary area of audience psychology, except, if I must, in a brief appendix. This was the age of disciplinary silos, long before the heyday of fashionable (and fiscally responsible) interdisciplinarity.

I asked Sandy Leggatt to supervise my dissertation and became, I believe, his first advisee. We had lunch together once a week at the Innis College pub, where he would return my previous week’s chapter draft, annotated, I would hand in a new one, and we’d talk over lunch and a beer. Sandy was a great, supportive, human, and humane teacher, and I was privileged to learn from him. Decades later, for the occasion of his retirement, I would co-edit with Karen Bamford—a later Sandy supervisee—a collection of essays on *Shakespeare’s Comedies of Love* in his honour. The title echoed, in the plural of the time, the title of Sandy’s earlier book, *Shakespeare’s Comedy of Love,* the one that had made the most impact on me early on and led to my choice of dissertation topic and supervisor. But the main thing I learned from Sandy was and remains the importance, in a teacher, scholar, or mentor, of generosity of spirit.

My graduate student years also saw me teaching for the first time, not as a marker or teaching assistant, but plunged directly into the fray at Scarborough College with my own full section of a third-year undergraduate course in American Literature, a subject about which I knew nothing beyond having taken the very same course a very few years earlier when I was myself an undergraduate at the same campus. I struggled to stay one class ahead of the students, and overprepared by reading whatever criticism I could get my hands on, feeling that I had to have all the answers. The reading list consisted of the familiar classics—Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Dickinson (one woman, at least, but no writers of colour)—but who knows what I was teaching at the unconscious, structural level and the level of representation. I never asked who this course assumed was or was not American, or whose work was worth teaching, and it would be years before I started thinking about that sort of thing in any practical, applicable way. I suspect I was a terrible teacher, but I did learn a good deal from the experience, chiefly (eventually) to try to allow myself only to ask productive, provocative questions, and try to help the students come up with their own answers.

During my grad school years (1972-77) I began attending theatre in Toronto fairly regularly. I don’t really know why. I had a couple of subscriptions, one to Theatre Plus, at the (then) St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, where I saw Marion Andre’s productions of Joe Orton (*Loot*), Max Frisch (*The Physicists*), and others, mainly European, and one at Toronto Arts Productions under artistic director Leon Major, also at the St. Lawrence Centre, where I saw Major’s productions of Pinero’s *Trelawney of the Wells* and Brecht’s *Galileo*, which I didn’t really understand at the time. The only Canadian work I remember was George Ryga’s controversial (and not very stimulating) FLQ play based on the kidnapping of James Cross, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, directed by Martin Kinch in 1972, with costumes designed by Pat Flood, who many years later became a colleague of mine at the University of Guelph, designing several shows that I directed and providing illustrations for my 2015 book, *Fundamentals of Directing*.

Early in my grad school years I made the obligatory annual pilgrimage, for students of Shakespeare and others, to the Stratford Festival. But it was only in 1975 that I got hooked, with the arrival at Stratford of Robin Phillips as artistic director. Phillips replaced what he called the “Stratford shout” acting style and what had been a somewhat gothic design template (routinely featuring leafy gobbos mottling the rich wooden surface of the festival stage) with his uniquely nuanced combination of sleek, elegant design, the ingenious, fluid use of the festival stage, and, especially brilliant, fundamentally naturalistic acting. I’ll never forget his stunning, sexy, protofeminist *Measure for Measure* in 1976 with Martha Henry’s dazzling performance as Isabella. Or his *Richard III* in ’77 with a charmingly malignant Brian Bedford and a regal Maggie Smith as Queen Elizabeth. Or his still more regal Elizabethan *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in ‘76 with Jessica Tandy and the following year with Maggie Smith, both doubling as Titania, Hippolyta, and Queen Elizabeth I, whose dream the show was framed as. And there were Richard Monette and Nicholas Pennell alternating as Hamlet in 1976, and later Peter Ustinov’s Victorian *Lear* in 1980. And the list goes on. Phillips was later to become a guiding influence and mentor for me, but more of that anon.

Late in my grad school days I belatedly began to develop an interest in Canadian literature, initially by way of the journals of the early European “explorers,” fur traders, and searchers after the last, lost expedition of Sir John Franklin, himself in search of the mythical Northwest Passage to “the Orient.” My brother Ken and I began reading these journals because they charted the routes of canoe trips we were taking, initially in Ontario, in the James Bay area, and later in the arctic. We devoured volumes in the Canadian Reprint Series published by Mel Hurtig, and followed the routes, first, of the fur traders, then of the early white settlers to the west, and finally of Franklin and those who set out in search of him.

Eventually we followed Samuel Hearne’s route, as recorded in the Hurtig facsimile of his *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*, an edited and posthumously published journal of his travels from Lac de Gras down the Coppermine River to the village of Kugluktuk (then called Coppermine) at Coronation Gulf on the Arctic Ocean. The European, colonialist naming and claiming of the river, town, and gulf encode the extractivist motives behind an expedition that is now remembered mainly for Hearne’s questionable account of the massacre of a group of Copper Inuit by his Chipewyan and Dene guides at Bloody Falls near the mouth of the river on 17 July 1771. Hearne’s account is graphic and is haunted by his archetypally colonialist self-positioning as standing helplessly “neuter in the rear.” Apart from the plentiful caribou, moose, arctic hares, arctic foxes, and arctic terns, Ken and I were pretty much alone on the 845 km, rapid-and-canyon filled route from Lac de Gras just days after the ice thawed to allow our float-plane from Yellowknife to land, to the then deserted small falls that has since been designated a National Historic Site, and on to the village at the mouth of the river.

We were not alone, however, when we arrived there, in spite of many of the Inuit having decamped to hunt further north among the islands of the gulf: we were trailed everywhere by groups of young Inuit kids, and we practiced our own form of extractivism by purchasing sculptures from the doorsteps of carvers who were too elderly to undertake the summer hunt among the northern islands. We had flown to Lac de Gras on a small float plane that drifted as each gust of wind caught our Grumman aluminum canoe, strapped to its gunnels. We returned to Yellowknife on a larger commercial flight that skidded down the gravel runway, and then home, where among other things we found and read John Newlove’s laconic poem, “Samuel Hearne in Wintertime,” debunking romantic myths of northern “exploration” and ending with the image, lifted from Hearne’s journal, of a young girl at Bloody Falls impaled by a spear, twisting at Hearne’s feet “like an eel.”

That reading, however, was part of what soon after became for me a more systematic engagement with Canadian fiction and poetry, enabled in part, if I remember correctly, by a sale of paperbacks, three for the price of two, in the McClelland and Stewart New Canadian Library series edited by Malcolm Ross. I read everything from *A Bird in the House* to *Windflower*, all by white settlers, many of them busily *Roughing it in the Bush*, as the title of Susanna Moodie’s contribution to the series would have it in a book later critiqued by Michi Saagig writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and others for its representation of Indigenous people as “savages.” The closest I came at that time to “ethnicity”—the closest the series came—were Norwegian Canadian Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese*, German Canadian Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh,* the occasional Ukrainian Canadian volume, and Mordecai Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*; the closest to Indigeneity I got were Major John Richardson’s *Wacousta* and Rudy Wiebe’s *The Temptations of Big Bear*, both, of course, by white settlers. Needless to say, I never got past modernism, which many then considered to be un-Canadian.

*Theatre*

Sandy Leggatt also got me involved in theatre, perhaps his greatest gift. My entire theatrical experience up to that point consisted of playing a military character called Major Error in a student-written satire when I was an undergraduate, though I was never clear on exactly what was being satirized and don’t remember that the play was ever actually produced. But Sandy, who was himself a formidable amateur actor, suggested late in my work on my dissertation that if I wanted to be a Shakespearean—and I did, at the time—I should perhaps find out something about the stage. This was, then, a novel thought, for me as for many Shakespeareans. So I auditioned and got a bit part in Martin Hunter’s production of what I learned to call “the Scottish play” at the venerable Hart House Theatre. I played various extras and spear carriers, the Merciless MacDonwald, and Lennox—this last a role that was severely cut late in the process, almost certainly because of the quality of my acting. It was a miserable experience on all fronts, and I vowed never to do it again—until, that is, the day after the show closed, when Sandy called me up and asked if I wanted to be in a production of *The Duchess of Malfi* that was coming up at the Glen Morris (now Luella Massey) Studio Theatre, in which Sandy had the delightfully sordid role of The Cardinal.

The director was Leon Rubin, who at that time was a student at the then Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama, and who later worked as an assistant director at the Royal Shakespeare Company, writing a book about their epic, eight-and-a-half-hour production of *Nicholas Nickleby*. He was also later the artistic director at the Bristol Old Vic, the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, and the Watford Palace Theatre, has directed at several theatres in the UK and around the world and has written books on *Rehearsing Shakespeare* and *Performance in Bali*. I had lunch with him years later when he returned to Canada as a guest director at the Stratford Festival, but we didn’t really hit it off. The lead male role in *The Duchess,* Bosola, was played by David Parry, best known as a folk singer and father of Evalyn Parry, who I much later encountered as Artistic Director of Toronto’s Buddies in Bad Times Theatre from 2015-2020. *Duchess* was an entirely different and infinitely more positive experience than the Scottish play had been*.* I played another variety of minor roles, including one in which I had the unique experience of executing my own seven-year-old son Chris, who had been cast to play the Duchess’s pathetic child. But I was hooked.

All of this was in 1977, at the early stages of a long and ongoing decline in funding for the arts in Canada, including theatre, funding that had flourished in the previous, nationalist decade and produced the heyday of the so-called alternative theatre movement in Canada including, famously, the founding in Toronto of Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto Free Theatre (later merged with Canadian Stage), Factory Theatre Lab (later dropping “Lab” from its title), and Tarragon Theatre, as well as small to mid-sized professional theatres across the country specializing in Canadian work, some, but not much of whose work I had seen and about which I’d often had mixed feelings at the time. I’ve revisited those assessments since. It was also the year I completed my PhD and got my first academic job, which took me and my family, in our ancient little second-hand beige Volkswagen, my first car, to Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, on the edge of the Tantramar marshes near the border with Nova Scotia. I was armed with advice from an English professor at Scarborough College who supervised my teaching assistantship: “Establish a reputation as an eccentric,” he said. “Everyone will leave you alone.” I thought he was joking.

**PART II:**

**1977 to 1989**

**Mount Allison**

My first full-time teaching position began in Fall of 1977 at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, though at first it was contractually limited and renewed on a year-by-year basis. I’d written over 150 letters of application addressed to any advertised position and to any department in which I thought I’d like to work, whether they were advertising or not. Many of these applications were to Universities in Canada, but many others were in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, various African countries, and a couple in Europe. I still have a souvenir box full of rejection letters, including one signed by the great Nigerian scholar and Africanist Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, whom I finally met in Berlin thirty-five years later. Mount A wasn’t advertising, but I stopped in anyway on the way to a Nova Scotia vacation to visit family, and it turned out that a replacement position had opened up in the meantime.

It was a beautiful Friday afternoon in early summer, so the only physical presence in the place was an admin assistant who called a faculty member, who called the chair, who called a meeting of almost the full department to interview me that evening in one faculty member’s living room. The interview was a relaxed affair, over drinks, so relaxed that I soon found myself entering guilelessly into a disagreement with a senior early modern drama specialist about the merits of Shakespeare’s popular contemporaries, Beaumont and Fletcher. He didn’t feel there were any, and I disagreed, perhaps too strongly. I went back to my hotel certain that I’d thrown away any chance I might have had at the position. I later learned that another member of the department who had missed the interview had afterwards asked the chair, “what’s this guy like?”

“He got into a big fight with D---,” said the chair.

“Hire him!,” was the reply, and the rest is history—or at least my story.

The English department faculty at Mount A, an undergraduate, liberal arts institution, was in transition at the time from being dominated by British and American professors who by-and-large published little or nothing, to hiring more and younger Canadian faculty, more women, and more active researchers, and of course as a new hire I was “recruited” by both sides as a potential ally. Most of the professoriate in the department could be identified by alma mater by taking a quick look at our manners of dress: one had the rumpled jacket and thin tie of “a Cambridge man,” another sported a cardigan and smoked a pipe signaling his background at Yale, yet another was pure Chicago in his slick blue suits, and a fourth signaled her University of New Brunswick and well-heeled Fredericton roots through her never-ruffled hair and fully professional plaid woolen outfits. As for me, one day early in my first year I arrived at the Department, a bearded, long-haired child of the sixties at the University of Toronto, wearing my usual t-shirt and jeans, and was greeted by my Cambridge-educated colleague, his tone belying his spoken sentiment: “I love your working man’s attire.”

The department offices were in Hart Hall, a former women’s residence built in 1910. My office there was spacious and comfortable, but it wasn’t the highlight of my office experience at Mount A. The first truly exceptional space was in the year in which Hart Hall was being renovated and the department was relocated to Colville House, a white clapboard residence built in 1879 in the Carpenter Gothic style and the former home and studio of painter Alex Colville when he taught at Mount A in the 1950s and 60s. My office had been the Colvilles’ bedroom, and it looked out, I then believed, over the backyard featured in his painting, “Hound and Field.” My second stellar office was in the Centre for Canadian Studies on the second floor of “The Anchorage,” a large, ornate wooden home built in the Queen Ann style in 1892-93 that served as the Centre for Canadian Studies, of which I was for a time co- and then Acting Director. I was housed in a spacious room on the second floor, equipped, for the only time in my career, with a private bathroom that featured a majestic cast iron pedestal-style bathtub that was unfortunately filled with files most of the time. All of my offices featured a coffee maker, grinder, and fresh roasted beans that I ordered by mail from Dinah’s Cupboard in Toronto’s Yorkville, and this made me popular among the coffee-drinking faculty. I considered sawing my office door in half and opening up a side hustle to supplement what was in fact a pretty meagre income.

But my twelve years at Mount A., from 1977-1989, were life-changing for me on several fronts. During that time, I started teaching full-time, turned at least some of my attention to the local, started publishing, started seriously training and working in the theatre, and slowly began to develop a political sensibility in both my scholarly and creative work. In those years, too (and probably still), Sackville was a hive of artistic activity on the local level, and it was small enough that the artists had not carved up their respective disciplinary turfs into separate silos. Everyone with an interest in the arts attended, and attended to, everything—gallery openings, concerts, screenings, readings, and theatre—and I was among them.

I don’t know how I had the time. In my first four years, in addition to teaching a full load of brand new courses in everything from 17th-Century English to Contemporary Canadian literature, I served as a live-in don of two different men’s residences for two years each—Hunton House and Trueman House—in which hundreds of 17-18-year-old boys-to-men, away from home for the first time, partied from Wednesday evenings to early Sunday mornings, drinking like fish, smashing Moosehead, Alpine, and Tenpenny empties in hallways you didn’t dare walk down barefoot, and generally engaging in admirably inventive acts of vandalism that included annually chopping down and stealing a huge Christmas tree from someone’s, anyone’s, private yard—an act for which I had to apologize profusely on the students’ behalves, and negotiate recompense.

In the classroom, however, the students I taught were, for the most part, engaged, attentive, excited by the material, and unerringly respectful. And they did the reading in what would now be considered prodigious amounts. Classes were small, courses were full-year, and I had the freedom to populate my reading lists as I liked. But the department thought that my U of T doctorate meant I was well prepared to teach anything, so the course offerings foisted upon me included such things I knew nothing about as “Forms of Narrative” apart from fiction. I put together a reading list for that course that ranged from *The* *Odyssey* to *The Hobbit* and from *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. And I immersed myself in the local.

This was the first time I had lived anywhere outside of Toronto, and I was immediately made aware in the Maritimes that I was “from away”—from “upper Canada” specifically, a term I hadn’t previously heard used about the contemporary world. And I learned that I had a Toronto accent. For the first time in my life—except for being the trumpet player on the hockey team and the hockey player in the school band, and except for being a Catholic among Protestants when growing up—I was “other,” in however minor a way. The experience would be generative for me many years later. But in the meantime, I engaged with it, as had others before me and as was typical of the period, by becoming an ardent regionalist, a subset of the nationalism that at that time was the dominant lens through which Canadian literature and theatre were read. And oddly, most of the most dedicated regionalists on the Canadian scene seemed to be from upper Canada.

In my first semester at Mount A. I sat in on a fourth-year seminar on Maritime Literature taught by a colleague from Cape Breton, and I joined that class’s Fall field trip on a long-weekend literary tour of the Maritime provinces. I read as widely as I could in the field. I also signed up for an enlightened recruitment program run by the university in which I travelled all around the region giving classes on request for beleaguered high-school teachers who were mandated to teach Shakespeare whether they liked it or not. (Many of them didn’t.) I offered illustrated guest lectures on Shakespeare in performance, featuring production slides from the Stratford Festival and the RSC and floating possible staging options, focusing on whatever plays the classes were required by the curriculum to study. I didn’t have to do recruitment pitches; I was simply introduced as being from Mount A. In these ways I became fairly well acquainted early on with the region’s cities, towns, highways, urban and rural landscapes, its bed-and-breakfasts, its literatures, and some of its people and cultures, and this all laid the initial groundwork for becoming a kind of specialist, eventually and for a short period, on theatre in the Maritime provinces.

My first one-year appointment at Mount A was renewed. After a second year I was offered a third one-year term, but when, with a combination of arrogance and naivety, I declined, declaring that they had an open position and either were or were not happy with my work. I was, astonishingly I now see, offered a tenure track appointment as an Assistant Professor, which I accepted. Four years later, in 1983, I came up for tenure. I had published very little by that time, the status of my extensive overload work in the theatre was unclear to the promotions committee, and among my scant publications was only one essay in a major refereed publication. The article was given for additional assessment to D…, with whom I had butted heads at my original interview and who had himself published nothing but was said throughout his entire career to have been working on a never-completed monograph on “the problem of *Hamlet*.” (“It must be some problem,” said his partner at the time.) Nevertheless, I was unanimously granted tenure and promotion to the Associate level with a cv that would not now suffice to secure a part-time sessional appointment at any self-respecting university. I had no idea then how lucky I was, but after my stint as a residence don was finished I proceeded to buy a small frame house for what would now be a pittance, complete with a pond with resident Canada geese and a fully stocked chicken coop on a one-acre plot of land overlooking the fields sloping down to the tidal mud flats at the northern extremity of the Bay of Fundy. I still have the beautiful silver contact print of the mud flats by my colleague in Fine Arts, photographer Thaddeus Holownia, that was presented to me as a gift when I left the University.

Mount Allison, and its situation in the Maritimes, also presented me with other opportunities to deepen my relationship to Canadian Studies more generally, so much so that I eventually served terms as Associate and later Acting Director of Canadian Studies, working and becoming friends with poet and bibliographer Douglas Lochhead, who was Davidson Professor at the Centre for Canadian Studies, and hosting such dignitaries as the novelist Hugh MacLennan, who of course coined the phrase, “the two solitudes.” Over several years I was the University’s representative, and then chair, of the Atlantic Universities’ Reading Circuit, sponsored by the Canada Council for the Arts to bring Canadian writers to New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland for readings.

As chair I pretty much got to select the writers that I wanted to invite, and I had the chance to meet, host, and provide tours of the nearby historic and beautiful Tantramar Marshes to a wealth of major voices. I got to play host to such literary luminaries, mostly male, as Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje, P.K. Page, Al Purdy, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and many others whose work I also taught in my Canadian Literature classes, which I partly organized around those visits. Among playwrights were the likes of Michael Cook, Erika Ritter, and George Ryga. I also became friends with New Brunswick’s own David Adams Richards, of which more below. I learned a lot from these visits, some of it about life, some about Canada, some about writing. I remember driving to Moncton to meet the great Elizabeth Smart at the airport. The author of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, a diminutive but vibrant seventy years old, arrived at the gate in white canvas sneakers with only one small backpack slung over her shoulder to sustain her over a two-week stint on the Atlantic circuit. I was already in awe of her evocative, poetic prose and was further blown away by her energy and expansiveness. The following year when I was on sabbatical leave in Toronto I called her up and took her to the theatre on more than one occasion and attended a fête for her at theatre Passe Muraille organized by Michael Ondaatje and her biographer, Rosemary Sullivan.

And there was Al Purdy’s visit, shortly after Queen Elizabeth II had come to the Maritimes and visited Sackville for an afternoon. I told Al the story of the Queen’s surreptitious gin-and-tonic at the famous Marshlands Inn (where she went “for tea”), the whole of which had been booked for two nights for the sake of her short, one-hour stay. I suggested to Al that he write a poem about it. He said that the poem was mine to write, a challenge that issued in my only published poem—published in a special limited edition, hand-printed on grey, home-made rag paper and adorned with a golden crown by Thaddeus Holownia:

**When the Queen Came to Sackville**

When the Queen came

to Sackville every

one was excited no

one could believe it bands

played dancers

danced and when she went to

Marshland’s Inn

for gin

everyone said she was

radiant and when she left

they burned the brand

new throne

they bought to hold her

delicate

porcelain

cheeks

The poem was later reprinted in the university’s yearbook as a sardonic memorial of the Queen’s brief stopover.

The poet Patrick Lane arrived in Sackville not long after returning from a trip to China with a group of Canadian writers. I knew him as the author of crisp, startling poems made of up short lines and sharp images, but he read from a new collection of poetry he had written in and about China, poems that were much more fluid than I was used to from him, with longer, flowing lines and more expansive images. I asked him about this, and he explained that he hadn’t had a typewriter with him in China and had written the new poems in longhand. It was, for me, an early insight into the ways in which the material conditions of creative production directly shape the work—an insight that in turn shaped much of my future thinking about theatre, particularly in what much later became my best-known book, *Reading the Material Theatre* in 2004. But what I had been unconscious of in running the reading circuit, I’m now embarrassed to say, was my own privileging of white men, who overwhelmingly dominated. There were few women, no Indigenous writers, and as far as I can recall, only the Sri-Lankan/Ceylonese Michael Ondaatje and Rienzi Cruz representing immigrant or minoritized voices, the former being hardly an outsider even then.

In my last full year in Sackville, I also got to know perhaps the most prolific and successful of Canadian playwrights, George F. Walker, during a year he spent there in order to be close to his partner Susan Purdy’s family just down the trans-Canada highway in Amherst, Nova Scotia. I met George once a week at the campus pub where we talked theatre and politics over a beer. It was a good year for him financially, with the major successes at large theatres in the US as well as Canada of his Governor General’s award-winning play, *Nothing Sacred*, a loose adaptation of Turgenev’s novel *Fathers and Sons*. I was later to broker the gift of his papers, including hand-written manuscripts of over a dozen of his plays, to the theatre archives at the University of Guelph, which resulted in his getting tax breaks on income accruing as a result of one anomalously successful year in the life of a significant Canadian playwright with unprecedented international success. But Sackville was not a particularly comfortable place for him, an urban dweller if there ever was one, whose ear was uniquely tuned to class difference and inequality in Toronto’s east end. I remember him calling me one day from Halifax, excited. “Ric,” he almost shouted, “there are Black people here!” He and Susan returned to Toronto shortly afterwards, and I missed them.

*Theatre*

I also got heavily into theatre on campus at Mount A, largely through the generosity of Arthur Motyer, who was director of Drama and of the university’s tiny but vibrant and flexible Windsor Theatre, located in the student centre above the cafeteria. In the twelve years that I worked there, largely through the inspirational work of Motyer and Alex Fancy, Dean of Arts and director of French-language theatre, Mount Allison was a training ground for a host of students who would later become prominent in theatre in Canada and beyond: Martha Irving and Charlie Rhindress, staples of the theatre scene in the Maritimes for decades (I cast Charlie in his first crossdressed role, and cast Martha to play Kristen in *Miss Julie*); Mathew Jocelyn, who was to go on to co-found Théâtre de l'Autre Rive in Paris and serve as Artistic Director of Atelier du Rhin in Alsace before being appointed artistic director of Canadian Stage in Toronto, where he served from 2009 to 2018; Lise Ann Johnson, who distinguished herself as a major play development dramaturge for many years before being appointed as a director at the Canada Council for the Arts; Ross Manson, founding director of Toronto’s Volcano Theatre and a distinguished actor and director who has worked and won major awards across Canada and around the world; Alison Sealy (now Alison Sealy-Smith), a leading television, film, and stage actor at theatres ranging from Nightwood to the Stratford Festival, and the founding artistic director of Toronto’s Obsidian Theatre, Canada’s leading Black theatre company; and the late Ker Wells, a co-founder of Primus Theatre (Winnipeg) and Number Eleven Theatre (Toronto), who directed, taught, mentored, and inspired a generation of performers working primarily in movement-based theatre using the methods and philosophies of Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski as propagated by Ker’s mentor, Richard Fowler.

Arthur Motyer cast me early on in productions of Jules Feiffer’s *Little Murders* (Alfred), Brecht’s *A Man’s A Man* (M.C.), Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (Duke Frederick), and his own adaptation of Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (Pat Garrett). I didn’t distinguish myself in any of these roles, and in one notable performance of *Little Murders* I managed, by jumping from the middle of one scene to the middle of another, to cut a whole intervening scene that I wasn’t involved in, to the confusion of the audience and the considerable chagrin of my cast mates waiting offstage for their entries. Nevertheless, I persisted, going so far as to curate, dramaturge, and perform two solo shows: *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* and *The Loves of John Donne*. But the world wasn’t sorry when I gave up acting by 1983, having realized both my lack of potential—I was way too self-conscious—and my greater interest in directing and dramaturgy.

In my twelve years at Mount A I directed nineteen shows and acted in seven, all over and above a full teaching schedule. If I include professional gigs and one-acts, I worked on over thirty shows in that time period. As a director I began early on with John Heywood’s short Tudor farce, *Johan Johan*, and followed that with a series of medieval mysteries and moralities (I was teaching a full-year course on “[English] Drama to 1642” at the time). For my first full-length productions I chose, with absurd ambition, poor-theatre stagings of *Miss Julie* and *Macbeth*, productions which I now suspect were pretty painful to watch. But I was learning, partly from Arthur, partly from skilled designer and colleague Ian Gaskell, and partly from experience, and before long was tackling new work, some of it by students, when I also functioned as a dramaturge.

I also began developing an interest, deriving in the first instance from the medieval mystery and morality plays I directed, in extra-proscenium spatial arrangements and I attempted to experiment with audience engagement beyond passive spectatorship. The first serious exploration was a staging of the fifteenth-century morality play *Mankind* that I adapted and directed in the cavernous Hesler Hall, across from Windsor Theatre. With a portable bar at the back of the hall, the space was often used for dances and parties so it served as an appropriate site-specific place for the play’s scenes of revelry and riot. I erected a platform stage in the centre, dressed the cast in blue jeans and red t-shirts sporting the allegorical names of their characters—Mischief, New Guise, Nowadays, Nought, Mercy, and the eponymous if largely passive central character—and set them loose among the audience to cause, well, Mischief.

The surprising success of this experiment led me to work with a senior student, Ann Fizzard, to create a subversive little show that we later staged to coincide with the university’s convocation ceremonies. *Valedictory* presented itself as a valedictory address, the show’s poster and program used the colours and fonts used for the university’s official graduation ceremonies. The central speech attempted to rouse the audience to protest against specific and unequal university policies, and the show ended with actors, dressed in the yellow jackets of the actual campus police, abruptly breaking up the assembly and hustling the audience out of the theatre without the catharsis of applause or curtain call. (This performance took place in conjunction with the same convocation at which the University’s Fine Arts students staged their own intervention: as the faculty and graduands paraded into the massively columned Convocation Hall, the students were on the steps with a plaster neoclassical statue, an empty notebook, and a chisel; when the procession exited after convocation, the statue was reduced to rubble on the steps, but the notebook was full.)

In 1982-3, with Arthur Motyer on sabbatical leave, I was appointed Acting Director of Drama. In that year I returned to Hesler Hall, this time setting up scaffolding, platforms, and lighting rigs throughout the hall, all ingeniously designed by Ian Gaskell. Over the previous few years I had developed a friendship with novelist David Adams Richards, now a multiple winner of the Governor General’s Award, the Giller Prize, member of the Canadian Senate, and recipient of the Order of Canada. Dave was something of a film buff, his family having run a movie theatre in Newcastle, New Brunswick, and he had written a sprawling, large-cast play called *Water Carriers’ Bones and Earls’: The Life of François Villon* that was full of wildly ambitious filmic cuts and edits across multiple locations. He had submitted the script to Theatre New Brunswick and been told it was unstageable, so he showed it to me. I was excited by the very things that made the play impossible to mount on TNB’s traditional proscenium stage or to tour, as TNB productions traditionally did, to prosceniums throughout the province. The script presented lots of opportunities for student actors to hone their skills, and, of course, I was excited to work on the world premiere of a new play by a major writer that, although ostensibly set in fifteenth-century France, drew directly on the vernacular language, culture, and sensibility of Richards’ Newcastle home on the banks of the Miramichi River, not far up the coast from Sackville.

But the real excitement about *Water Carriers* was the staging. Ian Gaskell’s set used the full length, width, and height of Hesler Hall, mixing audience and stage space together at various levels and enabling patterns of movement throughout that allowed for stillness to exist on one platform in counterpoint to—sometimes simultaneously with—raucous movement throughout the space in ways that approached what would now be called immersive theatre. The show invoked smell and touch as well as the more common theatrical senses, at one point featuring the distinctive scent of actual freshly roasted beef wafting throughout the space. At another, actors circulated among the crowd offering hors d’oeuvres to the audience as guests at a reception. *Water Carriers* also featured my first extended experiment with cross casting: the title role of the philandering male and masculinist medieval poet and criminal was skillfully and athletically performed by a young Moynan (then Shelley) King, who later became a key curator, writer, editor, director, and performer in Toronto and Canada’s queer theatre scene as well as in film and television. At one point in the show her gang whooped uproariously while anarchically and anachronistically wheeling her about the space in a stolen grocery-store shopping cart.

It was at this point—1983—that I decided that if I was going to take directing seriously I had to learn something about it, so I made plans to do so on my upcoming, first sabbatical leave. I had been following the early work of the then hot young director Richard Rose at Necessary Angel, the company that he founded in Toronto in 1978 after graduating from York University’s theatre program. Rose had become known at the time for his innovative use of space and audience relations in collectively created shows such as *Censored* and *Mein*, and, most notably, in John Krizanc’s *Tamara,* a critique of fascism in which the totalitarianism of theatrical perspectivism was purported to be deconstructed by having each audience member assemble their own play by following actors of their choice from room to room in Toronto’s historic Strachan House, where several scenes were enacted simultaneously throughout the building. It later had a high-profile nine-year run in Los Angeles featuring Hollywood stars such as Karen Black and Anjelica Huston, and a five-year run in New York featuring Sara Botsford. Because of my own interest in site-specific and environmental performance I wrote to Rose, who at that point had just co-founded the short-lived Autumn Angel Repertory Company—a conflation of his own Necessary Angel Theatre with Thom Sokoloski’s Theatre Autumn Leaf—and I was invited to work with him as an Assistant Director for the 1983-84 season.

I learned a lot from working with Richard—much of which I recorded in an article I subsequently published in *Canadian Theatre Review* (*CTR*) on “Richard Rose in Rehearsal”—but very little of what I learned was about space. His innovations in that area, I concluded, were largely the contribution of his then designer, Dorian Clark, and when left to his own devices, as in the Harbourfront production of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* on which I assisted, his work with space could occasionally be quite awkward. (I remember him agonizingly sitting on the floor backstage with a pained expression on his face throughout the run.) The show was planned to take place in a kind of perambulatory furniture showroom in a large hall in Queen’s Quay terminal overlooking Lake Ontario, but those plans were dropped, audience seating was installed, and the space was rearranged to resemble a conventional proscenium configuration. I did, however, learn a lot from Richard about the construction of a rehearsal process moving from open-ended exploration and the accumulation of information, through several series of focused, purposeful improvisations and exercises, to a sequence of increasingly constrictive choices and a stripping way of unnecessary detail. And I learned much from his productive understanding of audiences as active *investigators* rather than passive consumers.

I also learned about working with actors, and some of that I learned from the actors themselves. Richard and Thom had assembled what was intended to be a permanent repertory company of outstanding actors that included, for *Seagull*, Steward Arnott, Mark Christmann, Denis Forest, Elizabeth Hanna, Maggie Huculak, Tanja Jacobs, Kim Renders (later a colleague of mine at Guelph), and Bruce Vavrina. From them I learned what it means to work as an ensemble, to work *generously* as an actor, and to bring one’s full self to a rehearsal process that is fundamentally about discovery. And I learned from them to treat actors, always, with respect: what they do is brave and astonishing and should never be undervalued.

I was not alone in working with Richard, Thom, and the ensemble at Autumn Angel that year. Also working on *Seagul* was DD Kugler, who subsequently worked with Richard at Necessary Angel for eight years, served as Artistic Director of Edmonton’s Northern Light Theatre for five, and taught at Simon Fraser University for twenty. He quickly established a reputation as one of North America’s very best dramaturges and teacher/mentors, and even in his early days I learned basic lessons from him about dramaturgy, from working with translations through to the role of a production dramaturge in developing spatial and temporal structures and rhythms. Having seen him work with actors in space, I was not surprised that among his many later accomplishments was entering effectively into the realm of dance dramaturgy in its very earliest days, modelling and being among the first to write well about the practice. The Autumn Angel season was the beginning for me of a long professional friendship with kugler (as he calls himself), and my experience and conversations with him are a large part of the reason why I rarely accept dramaturgical gigs to work on scripts without continuing with them into rehearsal as production dramaturge.

In the Fall of 1984, I returned to Mount Allison from my leave both refreshed and inspired to direct more, and more challenging work. Chief among these projects, in which I challenged myself most and from which I learned most, were a stage adaptation of Kathy Acker’s post-punk, poststructuralist novel, *Blood and Guts in High School*, brought to my attention by Paula Parris (now Paula Parris Eisenstein), and adapted by me and Jennifer Hunt, who also performed its lead role; *Holy Ghosters*, by Nightwood, Ship’s Company, and Eastern Front Theatre co-founder and director Mary Vingoe, which I staged environmentally in and around an isolated barn on the Tantramar Marshes where much of the play’s action takes place; and only the second production anywhere of Judith Thompson’s *White Biting Dog*, which went on to win a Governor General’s award.

*Blood and Guts* was a hoot. Apart from directing a couple of short, experimental feminist plays by Margaret Hollingsworth, it was my first full-on experience of what would now be called postdramatic theatre, of non-linear dramaturgy, adaptation, and the extensive non-text-based structuring of a work in space and time, working on material that had little direct relationship to my own life experience. The characters were weird and inconsistent, the show, like the novel, was based on the principles of collage rather than linear cause-and-effect, and much of the meaning was communicated through spatial and temporal patterns and rhythms that, though sometimes jarring, had to have their own sometimes weird logic. It was the kind of thing that only the generosity of an Arthur Motyer and the freedom afforded by Windsor Theatre would have let me get away with at a university: when we entered rehearsal, we had little more than a novel and some vague ideas about relevance. When we emerged from an extended rehearsal period, we had a sometimes shocking, sometimes funny graphic novel of a theatrical experience. When the show was over I sent a copy of the performance score to Richard Rose, suggesting that it would be a perfect vehicle for Kim Renders. He wrote back that what we had—what I had sent him—was a director’s score rather than a script, and he couldn’t consider producing it. I later found it deposited in the Necessary Angel archives at the University of Guelph.

*Holy Ghosters* was another kind of experience entirely. Mary Vingoe’s play deals with historical events local to the Tantramar region: the 1755 expulsion of the Acadians, which haunts the play, and the repulsion of the invading rebels from the thirteen colonies in 1776. Both took place, at least in part, on the very marshland landscape, made arable by dykes built three centuries ago by the Acadian settlers, on which our venue, Frank Brooks’s barn, sat, the landscape largely unchanged since the 18th century. We installed a generator to power the lights and sound inside the off-the-grid barn, its own sound muffled by bales of hay, and bused audiences from the Mount Allison campus out to the old barnboard structure just off High Marsh Road. When the buses had departed and the audience had distributed itself on hay bales throughout the large space, silence descended, the lights dimmed, and through the open barn door the audience could see the moonlit actors, in 18th-century gear, approaching from a distance across the marsh. Inside, there were multiple dispersed playing spaces and multiple perches for audiences to watch as the action of the piece played itself out around them, one scene beginning in one part of the barn as another ended elsewhere. *Holy Ghosters* is an ensemble piece employing a feminist structure in which no single (male) character dominates and the fractured community itself plays the central role. All the characters are based on actual historical figures, and the play is modelled on Thomas Raddall’s historical novel, *His Majesty’s Yankees*. One of the twists in this production was that the audience each night included, among others, direct descendants of the Delesderniers and Estabrooks families represented in the play; one of its richest achievements was the momentary melding of that audience and those characters into a single community sharing a virtually unchanged landscape across a large gap of time. I later wrote an essay about the play in a collection honouring Douglas Lochhead, who attended the show and presented each member of the cast with his Governor-General’s-Award-nominated poetry collection, *High Marsh Road*. “There *is*,” he wrote,” a sense of history here and all across this marsh.”

The final play in this “returning-from-Toronto” anti-trilogy*, White Biting Dog*, was different yet again. I had seen the premiere production, directed by Bill Glassco at Tarragon Theatre, while I was on leave, and I was stunned. I was stunned by the sheer quality—the *thickness*—of the writing, by Thompson’s ear for class and micro-regional differences in language. I was stunned by the magnificent performances turned in by Jackie Burroughs, Clare Coulter, Steven Ouimette, Hardee T. Lineham, and Larry Reynolds. And I was stunned by the ways in which, as I later wrote in my first book, the play’s structure and symbolism functioned as productive perversions of oedipal and Aristotelian dramaturgy as well as Roman Catholic iconography. My own production, unlike those of *Blood and Guts in High School* or *Holy Ghosters*, confined itself to a generally realistic representation of a Rosedale home using a traditional proscenium-style audience-stage relationship, and I used everything I had learned from Richard Rose and others to ground the actors’ performances in fundamentally naturalist method acting.

In spite of the fact that the play’s action is precipitated by a white talking dog named Queenie, as I understood it, its putting pressure on, exposing, and perverting often veiled naturalistic assumptions about linear cause and effect relied on a firm grounding in naturalistic performances. The writing itself, after all, however loaded it was with consciously overstated symbolism, was firmly grounded in the accurate, if heightened, rhythms of the everyday speech of characters from Gravenhurst, Kirkland Lake, Oakville, and private-school Rosedale. And I was blessed with an outstanding cast, including the aforementioned Moynan (Shelley) King as Pony, and at its empty centre a charmingly vacuous Randy White (who later developed a career as a director off-Broadway in New York and at Regional Theatres across the US, and as founding director of Cardinal Stage Company in Bloomington, Indiana). This production began a longstanding creative, pedagogical, and scholarly relationship with Judith Thompson, who didn’t see the show, but heard a recording of it and, thankfully, approved. I later edited two books of essays about her work and hired her as a faculty member when I was Chair at Guelph.

*Scholarship*

My years at Mount Allison also, slowly, launched my career in scholarly publishing. I had submitted my revised PhD dissertation to University of Toronto Press, who had accepted it for publication provisionally on its receiving funding support from the Aid to Scholarly Publishing Program funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC). It didn’t. For the record, I’m happy now that it didn’t, and, even then, I didn’t try other publishers. But I spent some of my early years converting some of its chapters into articles and publishing them in the journals *English Studies in Canada,* *Shakespeare Studies*, and *The Upstart Crow*. And much of my scholarly time at Mount A. was spent, at least early on, on Shakespeare, as it continued to be for some years after, though most of that work shifted from literary criticism to analyses of Shakespeare in (usually Canadian) performance, and later to (usually Canadian) adaptations of Shakespeare. I went to my first meetings of scholarly associations in those years, initially the meetings of the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA).

Those were heady times for the SAA. It seemed that all the world’s leading literary scholars were attending, and introducing exciting new theoretical approaches: new historicism, cultural materialism, cultural and materialist feminism, and the new bibliography, all of which were explicitly political, destabilized universalist theories of immanent meanings, and the last of which upset certainties about foul papers, fair copies, and authoritative texts. I sat in seminar rooms with the likes of Alan Sinfield and Catherine Belsey and was in the room when the famous “division of the kingdoms” (the two different, both authoritative, texts of *King Lear*) was first proposed and debated by scholars and editors such as Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, Steven Urkowitz, and Paul Werstine.

But for me the excitement was in the emergence of the study of Shakespeare in performance as a serious scholarly undertaking rather than what W.B. Worthen at the time called “the last bastion of [19th-century] character criticism.” My first paper presentation at the SAA was on Robin Phillips’s 1977 production of *Richard III*, which was later published in the journal *Theatre History in Canada* (now *Theatre Research in Canada*, or *TRiC*), and after that I became a regular attendant and occasional convener of a recurring annual seminar at SAA on Shakespeare in performance. Members included Worthen along with Barbara Hodgdon, Ellen O’Brien, Carol Rutter, Skip Shand and others that treated performance as a discipline separate from, but equal to text rather than merely an interpretative activity realizing what was already “in the play.” In fact, it was then that I began to wonder if there even *was* such a thing as “a play,” as opposed to just a script, on the one hand, and performances, on the other. This fundamental insight has shaped my scholarship and creative work ever since and marked my turn from literary to theatre studies.

Also during this period, I began to dabble in writing about Canadian theatre, first with reviews of shows I was seeing mainly in Halifax and Fredericton, including John Neville’s seasons as artistic director of Neptune Theatre in Halifax, where I saw, among other things, his appalling performance as a white English gentleman playing Othello in blackface. I would drive from Sackville for an evening show and return afterwards, often on icy highways in the middle of the night. Once I woke up when my driver’s side wheels hit the shoulder on the wrong side of the Trans-Canada Highway coming from Halifax; on another occasion I did a 180º spin on the Trans-Canada on the way back from the Playhouse in Fredericton in winter. I’ve been more careful since.

Among the first scholarly meetings I attended on a Canadian theme was “Canadian Theatre: The Next Decade,” a conference in Saskatoon in 1981. I was very green, and when invited to chair a panel of luminaries with whom I was almost entirely unacquainted I stupidly (and humiliatingly) said that they needed no introduction and was called on it. But it was at that conference that I heard Alan Filewod present a paper on collective creation as not simply a practical or aesthetic decision, but a political choice to function organizationally *as* a collective. I still regret the shift in usage away from “collective creation” to “devising” because of the loss of this political resonance. Alan’s paper, which was later published in *Canadian Theatre Review* (*CTR*), introduced me to ways of thinking about theatrical process and the politics of form that were new for me at the time and would soon become central to my thinking. And of course Alan was eventually to become my colleague at the University of Guelph.

It was Alan Filewod, too, along with members of the Mulgrave Road Co-op, who convinced me to attend the conference/festivals of the Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance (CPTA) in the 1980s. CPTA was dedicated to the belief that theatre is a means, not an end in itself, and it was dedicated to social change. I missed the first, formational festival in Thunder Bay in 1981, entitled Bread and Circuses, but attended Bread and Roses in Edmonton in 1983 and Bread and Dreams in Winnipeg in 1985. Some of the work at these festivals was clunky, and some of it was inspired, but all of it was politically inflected and it had a significant influence on how I thought about what theatre could *do*, or what I later thought of as what it could *perform* in the world. Most importantly, perhaps, it was at Bread and Roses that I was introduced to the work of Brazilian director and theorist Augusto Boal.

I found Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly Forum Theatre, theoretically compelling, and as practiced by at least one of the visiting companies from South America, intellectually engaging. Forum Theatre consists of staging scenes in which the audience witnesses the oppression of one or more characters or class of characters by another, after which audience members—as “spect-actors”—are invited to step in and take over the role of the oppressed in an attempt to solve the presented injustice, while the other actors improvise ways of blocking the intervention. The scenes are moderated by a “joker” figure who facilitates procedures and discussion, and questions proposed solutions that are deemed to be “magic.” Boal calls these performances “rehearsals for the revolution.”

Forum theatre had clearly been sufficiently impactful in Brazil in the 1960s to have been cause for Boal’s torture and exile by that country’s military regime. By the 1980s in Canada, where oppression was more often the result of what Marxist theorist Louis Althusser called Ideological rather than Repressive State Apparatuses and where a single subject could often be both the victim and agent of oppression, the form was less clear-cut, and generally less effective. In the 1990s, when Boal’s work became popular in the US, the grounds were even more slippery and I felt that in practice Forum Theatre had become as much about wishful thinking and the purging of liberal guilt as Greek tragedy had been about the purging of pity and fear for Aristotle. Nevertheless, my introduction to Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly the concept of theatre as rehearsal for the revolution, was formative for my thinking, and reading Boal at the time led me to new, politicized understandings of both Aristotle and Brecht.

I attended my first meetings of the Association for Canadian Theatre History (now the Canadian Association for Theatre Research—CATR) at the then “Learned Societies” conference at the University of Guelph, long before I worked there. (I remember seeing a sign at the airport pick-up area in Toronto—“Learned baggage”—which I was tempted to go and stand beneath.) I arrived at the conference’s opening reception having published my one essay in the association’s journal, and its co-founder and co-editor, the great Ann Saddlemyer, came sailing across the room to welcome me warmly. CATR has since, in many ways, become my scholarly home, and I served for a time on its executive and as its Vice President.

Over my years at Mount A I alternated between publishing chapters and articles on Shakespeare and on Canadian Theatre, focusing increasingly in those years on Atlantic theatre. Among my first publications were a few essays on Robin Phillips’ productions of Shakespeare; an essay on Tom Gallant’s *Step/Dance* at Neptune Theatre (my first article to be reprinted); a sprawling piece using play theory drawn from Johan Huizinga, called “*Homo Ludens*: Canadian Theatre, Canadian Football, Shakespeare and the NHL;” and an essay in *CTR* on the directorial use of Stratford’s Festival Stage, for which I won my first (the inaugural) Richard Plant Essay Prize from CATR.

In 1986, as part of a symposium series at Mount A’s Centre for Canadian Studies, I organized and hosted a conference for the first time, the first Atlantic Theatre Conference, which brought together artists from all four provinces and scholars from across the country, including regionalists from Alberta such as Diane Bessai (who wrote a review of the conference for *CTR*), the editors of the national journals, representatives of the funding councils, and other interested observers. With the predictable exception of Halifax’s Neptune Theatre, it also included representatives of every professional theatre, English or French, within the Atlantic region. With very few supporting personnel, I wrote the grant applications, raised the funds for both artists and scholars, made the invitations, and organized the program, all of which proved to be good experience for years later when conference organization was made much simpler by email.

The conference itself included performances by The Co-opérative de théâtre l’escaôuette, Cathy Jones of CODCO, The Mulgrave Road Co-op, Tintamarre (Mount Allison’s French-language troupe led by Alex Fancy)***,*** Marshall Button ofTheatre New Brunswick and The Comedy Asylum, and Graham Whitehead of Mermaid Theatre. There were also readings by John Gray, Michael Cook, and Christopher Heide; a keynote address by John Gray (“Learning How to Fail”); andpapers by Terry Goldie, Michèle Lacombe, and Denyse Lynde on Atlantic Canadian drama; Edward Mullaly, Mark Blagrave, and Laurent Lavoie on theatre history in the region; Zénon Chiasson, Alan Filewod, Judith Weiss, and Rose Adams on theatre for social action; and panels on funding, education, and “The Next Decade.”

The conference led directly to my first two edited publications: an essay collection, *Theatre in Atlantic Canada* (1988), which published the revised proceedings of the conference, and an issue of *CTR* on “Atlantic Alternatives” (1986)—signaling both Atlantic theatre as an alternative to theatre in the rest of Canada, and alternatives within the region to the big “mainstream” theatres, Neptune, Theatre New Brunswick, and the Charlottetown Festival. It also led, eighteen years later, to my being invited to act as rapporteur for the *second* conference on Atlantic Canadian theatre, “Shifting Tides,” organized by Bruce Barton with Natalie Alvarez and Michael Devine, at the University of Toronto in 2004.

My scholarly output during this time was patchy, at best, but I was learning the ropes and trying to learn how to integrate my scholarship with my creative practice. I wouldn’t publish my first authored scholarly book for another decade.

**Robin Phillips**

The Atlantic Theatre Conference came after my return from sabbatical and my work with Richard Rose. I felt that my experience with Autumn Angel had been enormously valuable, but I had much more to learn about the process of directing for the theatre. I had had a long-standing interest in the work of Robin Phillips, and in fact my main scholarly project on my 1983-4 leave had been to work on a proposed book about his Shakespeare productions at Stratford from 1975 to 1981, a book that never happened. I had spent months in Stratford, first one whole summer sitting among the actors in the Green Room at the Festival Theatre poring over clipping files as the sounds of the shows played over the Green Room speakers. I also interviewed actors, designers, and others who had worked with Robin, including the likes of Nicholas Pennell, Domini Blyth, and William Hutt (on the porch of his stately home across the river from the Tom Patterson Theatre (then the Third Stage)).

Later, when the archives had relocated to an office building a few blocks away, I studied prompt books, costume bibles, and archival videos, the last of which are shot from a single still camera and are not usually very entertaining. The exception to this occurs when the viewer sees things not seen by audiences. Since they’re taped on infrared film to record blocking for use by understudies or for remounts, I could see such things as when, in Robin’s *Macbeth* in 1978, Maggie Smith could be seen crawling on hands and knees across the stage in a blackout as the actors set up for a coup de théatre when the lights came up for a lavish banquet scene after the murderers had struck out the lights on an empty stage.

Since I returned to Sackville, I had published some of my work on individual shows in academic journals, so when I wrote to Robin to ask if I could work with him in the upcoming 1986 season on his production of *Cymbeline*, I sent him my article on his 1977 *Richard III*. “It’s as if you’d been in rehearsals,” he wrote to me, inviting me to join the team in Stratford that summer. *Cymbeline* already had an assistant director—the great Martha Henry, who also wanted to learn about directing from someone she called “the master.” So, although I was there on a director-training grant, I played more of a dramaturgical than directorial role on the show, cutting the famously convoluted text for production while maintaining full pentameter lines, writing a brief program note, and sitting behind the desk with Martha and Robin, a facsimile edition of the First Folio in front of me along with all the best critical editions of the play and the massive “compact” edition of the 13-volume Oxford English Dictionary, complete with its signature rectangular magnifying glass for reading its notoriously small print.

I knew my role, and my place. On one occasion, Susan Wright, playing the wicked Queen, approached me for help in scanning a particularly knotty passage of the play’s notoriously difficult verse, which I thankfully managed to provide. Robin strolled out from behind the table and, passing in front of Martha and me, commented:

“I suppose academics are of *some* use after all.”

“I prefer not to think of myself as an academic.”

“Don’t worry, darling. If we thought of you as an academic, you wouldn’t *be* here.”

The production of *Cymbeline* was startling, remembered by many for Jupiter’s descent in the final act in a gigantic Lancaster bomber, complete with spinning propellors on either side of the stage balcony-as-cockpit and a pilot/god sporting an aviator helmet and goggles (Robin had set the show in 1938-40). *Deus ex machina* indeed. Others vividly remember Colm Feore’s exquisitely sleazy Iachimo delivering the beginnings of his voyeuristic speech in Imogen’s bedroom in the second act, prefaced by pornographically amplified deep breathing in a hoarse whisper from inside the trunk out of which he eventually slithered.

These were highly theatrical masterstrokes, brilliant in their way, but not the heart of the matter and not what I learned from the most. What I remember best are moments in rehearsal when, for example, Robin coaxed a magnificent performance from Martha Burns of Imogen’s notoriously impossible speech in Act IV when she awakens to find what she mistakenly believes to be the decapitated corpse of her lover. Drawing on a combination of personal (and private) anecdotal illustration, an activation of the speech’s imagery, and embodied understanding of how Shakespeare’s verse functions in the body and the imagination, Robin worked with Burns to create what seemed like a natural, organic reaction to an outlandish, melodramatic circumstance (“his Jovial face—/Murder in heaven? How? ‘Tis gone”).

I remember many other lessons learned during the *Cymbeline* rehearsals, from all involved. Little things, like Martha Henry’s simple coaching: “‘i’st,’” she said. “It rhymes with ‘wrist.’” I saw her, an actor with as much onstage presence as anyone in the world, capable of disappearing—at the Festival Theatre in Stratford, of all places, where she was a major star—as she circulated unrecognized in the lobby at intermission on preview days, eavesdropping to gauge audience reactions to the show and then whispering them to me by the water fountain. And I learned about actorly generosity from, for example, Joe Ziegler, playing the famously thankless role of Posthumus, selflessly supporting other cast members, turning in a nuanced and detailed performance and getting negative reviews while his friend Colm Feore, in the much flashier role of Iachimo, a gift for any actor, was praised to the skies and has gone on to become a staple at the Festival. And I had the privilege of witnessing the work in rehearsal of veterans like Nicholas Pennell, Eric Donkin, and the venerable Mervyn (Butch) Blake as they supported younger actors in minor roles, including the likes of Eric McCormack (later Will Truman in television’s *Will & Grace*).

But most of what I learned was from Robin. I ended up working with him on four shows and several workshops over two seasons, as well as on a couple of other projects. In the winter of 1986-7 Robin brought me from Sackville to work with him for ten days at his home outside Stratford, where his partner, Joe Mandel, who owned the famous Church Restaurant in town, cooked magnificent meals while I ghost wrote with Robin his commissioned report on the National Theatre School of Canada. Driving me back to Pearson airport on my return to New Brunswick, Robin suddenly asked, “is there a balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*?”

“Um,” I stammered. “I’m pretty sure there isn’t a balcony mentioned in the text. But…”.

It turns out, of course, that there isn’t, except in the play’s long history of production, so much so that it has become one of the most famous scenes never written. This was the beginning, for me, of thinking about my second season, for which Robin assembled an independent “Young Company” as residents of the Tom Patterson Theatre. Robin had designed a new, sleek stage of bleached white pine with an elongated thrust dividing most of the audience on the two sides—and no balcony. It was a stage that no-one but Robin could work with, and it was never used by anyone else. But he used it brilliantly. The Young Company did three shows in that season, *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and RC. Sherriff’s bleak World War I play, *Journey’s End*, plus a development workshop of Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, with Findley himself (Tiff) and his partner Bill Whitehead present in rehearsals. Tiff, of course, had been a young member of the first acting company at Stratford in 1953, and had over more recent years had two plays produced there. His novel *The Wars* had been made into a film by Robin in 1981 featuring Stratford stars Brent Carver, Martha Henry, and William Hutt, a film that has recently been re-released as I write. I was later, after Tiff’s death in 2002, to visit the flat he shared with Bill in Stratford and broker the donation of his theatre memorabilia to the theatre archives at Guelph.

That second season at Stratford was extraordinary for me. I was one of three assistants on the season, the others being Anna Hagen and Jack Wetherall. Anna was a B.C.-based stage and television actor who has gone on to win a Jessie Richardson outstanding career achievement award and a woman of the year award from ACTRA. Jack had been a member of the Festival company during Phillips’s directorship in the late 1970s, playing Konstantin to Maggie Smith’s Arkadina in Robin’s 1980 production of *The Seagull* and Orlando to Smith’s Rosalind in his 1977 *As You Like It*. Jack also performed in the New York production of John Krizanc’s *Tamara* under Richard Rose’s direction, but he’s perhaps best known as Uncle Vic in television’s *Queer as Folk*. I had no sooner arrived and checked into my temporary hotel room at 23 Albert Street than Jack, staying in the same hotel, knocked on my door to introduce himself and welcome me. We went for a drink.

This was the beginning of a sociable couple of months of rehearsal before the season opened, the tourists came to town, and the actors started jostling for positions in the next season. But it was the young company itself, supplemented by then journeyman actor Peter Donaldson, William Webster, and, again, Butch Blake, that was most extraordinary: Marion Adler, Susan Coyne, Kevin Gudhal, Nigel Hamer, Michael Hanrahan, Richard March, Weston McMillan, Melanie Miller, Nancy Palk, John Ormerod, Albert Schultz, and Derek Scott. A decade later the core of the company became the core founding members of Toronto’s Soulpepper Theatre, with its opening two productions, Schiller’s *Don Carlos* and Molière’s *The Misanthrope*, being directed by Robin in 1998. I learned a great deal just from hanging out with the company in bars and restaurants, and from participating in rehearsals. But again, most of what I learned was from Robin himself.

The first thing I learned was about casting, notably about challenging actors, especially young actors, by giving them roles that are beyond, but only slightly beyond, their current level of experience or ability, and resisting the temptations of type casting. Once casting was complete, Robin’s rehearsal hall was always focused on the work, and while he welcomed personal anecdotes and discussions of current events as they applied to and enriched the resonances of the work at hand, newspapers and other distractions were relegated to the green room—and there were, of course, no cell phones at the time. Robin wasn’t above taking the occasional rehearsal out into the world—I remember the street brawl between the Capulet and Montague youth (“do you bite your thumb at us, sir?”) being run on a hot afternoon along the pathways of Stratford’s riverside park system—but when we were in the rehearsal hall, he insisted that everyone in the room be fully focused on the actors, feeding them energy. (He once banned an observer from rehearsals—a major Canadian playwright—for falling asleep.) Once we were in the theatre proper and had moved beyond detailed scene work, he would sometimes equip himself with a drum, which he would beat to underscore the rhythms of a scene, and his assistants—myself, Jack, and Anna—would be distributed throughout the house, checking sight lines, audibility, and peripheral detail.

Robin was and remains best known for his work with actors, and this work was informed by a unique capacity, despite knowing the play he was working on inside-out and backwards, for genuinely not knowing in the moment what was coming next. I came to understand this work in relation to the Brechtian “not-but,” in which actors were encouraged to keep alive, not only the choices they and their characters made, but also those they rejected. Robin’s work similarly managed to keep the options open for audience members, presenting what characters do as a matter of historical choice rather than universalist inevitability: Robin’s audiences consistently witnessed characters making *conscious choices* in complex situations, and this was often what was most compelling about his work. This neo-Brechtian technique, of sorts, was perhaps unexpected in a director best known for producing outstanding naturalistic acting, even (or especially) when working with stylized scripts, but it is a large part of what kept his audiences engaged moment by moment. It’s also perhaps why Robin was always most successful with the comedies and especially problem plays than with Shakespearean tragedy, encrusted as it is with centuries of neo-Aristotelian theorizations about fate and tragic inevitabilities. The method was formational for me in working with actors, and it also made me second guess my earlier practice, on occasion, of rehearsing the final scenes of a play early in the rehearsal process, a method that allows everyone to know where they’re going but risks pre-determining all previous choices.

I continued to learn from Robin about working with actors and with language in ways that were endlessly productive, and applicable, as I later realized, far beyond Shakespeare and Stratford. He allowed no paraphrasing or generalization even as a temporary tool, insisting on the specificity of each line’s precise wording, rhythms, assonance, dissonances, syntax, meaning and resonances. I learned from him how to work closely with language and verse: the taste of the words in the mouth, long and short vowel and voiced and unvoiced consonant combinations, assonance and alliteration, rhythms and syntax in the mouth and body, the complex interplay among metrical units (feet), line units (pentameter), half lines, grammatical units (phrases, clauses, sentences), and breath units with their visceral impact on the emotions.

Examples that I witnessed are legion, ranging from the smallest nuance to discoveries of considerable significance. On the smaller end of the scale, when actor William Webster, playing Montague in *Romeo and Juliet* in 1987, spoke the line “Unless *good* counsel do the cause *remove*” stressing “good” and “remove,” Robin pointed out that the pentameter naturally places the stress on the first syllable of “counsel,” which in turn, together with the two short unstressed syllables of “do the,” sets up a strong emphasis on the alliterative “cause”: “unless good *couns*el do the *cause* remove,” a more resonant choice under the circumstances. A perhaps more significant moment, also involving Webster, this time as Friar Laurence (the doubling was one of the unusual aspects of the show), involved Robin pointing out the rhythms of the “long, long sentence full of little syllables” Shakespeare had given the Friar when comforting Romeo before he left for Mantua:

Get thee to thy love, as was decreed,

Ascend her chamber, hence and comfort her. [*breath*]

But look thou stay not till the watch be set,

For then thou canst not pass to Mantua

Where thou shalt live till we can find a time

To blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends

Beg pardon of the prince, and call thee back

With twenty hundred thousand times more joy

Than thou went’st forth in lamentation [*breath*].

The observation resulted in the actor’s beginning to rock Romeo in his arms, responding to the length of the sentence, the parallel structure of the phrasing, and the rhythms of lines such as “twenty hundred thousand times more joy,” which for all its hyperbole has the size of a lullaby and the delicacy of a comforting mother’s “there there there there *there*.” The delicacy of the Friar’s lines, and the effect of the rhythm in the passage are reinforced, too, by the fact that Shakespeare provides no pauses for the actor to breathe over the last three, arguably five lines of the seven-line sentence, increasing the tautness of the diaphragm and the urgency of the advice being administered.

But perhaps my favourite moment in the *R&J* rehearsals, and one of the most exhilarating in the production, occurred after Robin, working with Albert Schultz on Romeo’s famous speech in what in most productions would be the balcony scene, pointed out the conjunction of the speech’s physical imagery with its remarkable absence of natural pauses for breath provided over at least six-and-a-half of the speech’s seven lines:

O, speak again, bright angel, for thou art

As glorious to this night being o’er my head

As is a winged messenger of heaven

Unto the white-upturned wond’ring eyes

Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him

When he bestrides the lazy puffing clouds

And sails upon the bosom of the air [*breath*].

“Don’t try to conquer the speech,” Robin said. “If you deliver it as a single breath unit the gasp for breath at ‘air’ [the perfect word at that point] will bring the house down.” Schultz’s physical response to the image of mortals falling back, combined with the extension of breath and tightness of diaphragm, produced a remarkable extended arc in his kneeling body that was much more than merely an illustrative physicalization of the imagery, and the breathless gasp for air at the end of the speech was electrifying precisely because it was not “acted,” but the result of the actor’s genuine physical need to take in air.

Chief among the many other things I learned working with Robin were ways of thinking about design and blocking. Not all designers enjoyed working with Robin, who had his own very specific aesthetic that made many feel as though they were little more than technicians executing his conceptions rather than full collaborators on the look of the shows. But some of the world’s best designers enjoyed working with the knowledge and sensibility Robin brought, including the likes of Daphne Dare (sets and costumes), Susan Benson (sets and costumes), Michael Whitfield (lights), and Ann Curtis (costumes). I was privy to an early design meeting between Robin and Ann Curtis when I was staying at his house, and it was apparent that both knew more about historical fashion, fabrics, and costume construction than most, including the precise years and months at which even the smallest changes in fashion occurred. And I could see that they enjoyed one another’s skills and knowledges enormously.

But I learned two simple things from Robin. The first was to know what you’re talking about, to be informed about every aspect of theatrical production so that you know what is and is not possible, and whether or how it can be achieved within the budget you have. I remember, working on *Cymbeline*, a sound designer’s proposal for an echo effect that Robin wanted to achieve to suggest the inside of the cave that Guiderius and Arviragus inhabited in the wilderness, in spite of the scene’s being played on the open Festival stage. Robin found the proposed sound cue, achieved using the latest reverb technology, to be too regular, suggestive of a walled room rather than a rough-hewn cave, and requested, by model number, an older analogue device that was much more effective at producing the ragged result he was looking for. This was typical of his work in pretty much every department, including costumes, sets, and lights, where he was always fully informed and up to date about the technologies of theatrical production—something that would be virtually impossible now, of course, in these days of rampant technological innovation.

The second thing I learned was always to be available and present for sound and music auditions, demonstrations, and especially fittings, in order to make sure that the transition from design to construction is seamless and to make sure that the actors get what they need to support their performances. And what they need includes costume items such as shoes, socks, and underwear that may not be visible to audiences but that deeply inform the performances. (Robin radically altered the feel of his rigid 1976 production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with Jessica Tandy when he restaged it in 1977 with Maggie Smith, by changing the underwear to a soft cotton fabric. In 1980, his *King Lear*, with Peter Ustinov, produced its stiff, stifled sexuality by having all of the actors, men and women, wear corsets and dozens of tight Victorian buttons down the fronts of their costumes. He said he wanted it to feel as though, if a button popped open, steam would emerge.) Too often in the theatre fittings are scheduled to coincide with rehearsals and directors are unable to be present, and this is almost always a mistake: fittings are about much more than making sure that things fit. I attended many of them with Robin and found his attention to costume detail, actorly comfort, and the ways in which the feel of a costume can feed actors’ imaginations deeply instructive.

Perhaps the area in which I learned most from Robin, however, was blocking. Robin always claimed that he didn’t know how to teach directing, but among other things he taught me an enormous amount about the meaningful, sometimes magical movement of actors in space, and I later tried to pass on what I learned to two decades of directing students at the University of Guelph, as well as to participants in masterclasses that I ran for a few years at Factory Theatre. When it came to blocking, Robin was a cross between a magician and a cinematographer. Both work through the control of focus; that is, the control of what the audience looks at, what they see, and what they don’t see. In the former capacity, Robin could make actors seem suddenly to appear as if from nowhere, as in his 1979 Production of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, when death, in the form of the character Marcade, materialized standing stock-still and dressed all in black downstage centre on the Festival stage, interrupting the frivolity of the proceedings of the rest of the cast, all of them in full, joyous movement and garbed in pastels and prettiness. Where did he suddenly come from? On the extended thrust of his adapted Tom Patterson stage, Robin could also manage to make an actor exit at one end of the elongated stage and enter seemingly simultaneously at the other with a full change of costume and, often, role. Some of this had to do, of course, with the efficient use of backstage space and dressers, but most of it involved directing the audience’s gaze elsewhere, as a magician does, through movement or stillness, long enough to achieve the desired effect.

And he treated that gaze, and talked about it, as a cinematographer would. He talked about the fact that audiences in our times are trained to see and understand stage pictures as if they were framed through the lens of a camera, and he talked about blocking in terms borrowed from film. An actor moving across the stage could draw the audience’s eye like the pan of a camera and come to rest on another actor as the first one passed. The smallest movement on an otherwise still stage could have the effect of a zoom in on a single face or even eyelash, zooming out again when a hand moves, or further out with the movement of a foot, and yet further out with movement by actors on the other side of the stage. I learned from him the precise ways in which movement on an otherwise still stage can draw the eye, as can stillness on an otherwise busy one. I learned how to manage the relationship between foreground and background in ways that resemble a camera’s depth of focus. And I learned how to create meaningful stage pictures that seemed to emerge naturally from the actors’ motivated movements in the space.

I was unable to return for the Young Company’s second season at the Patterson, when they were joined by William Hutt in an extraordinary performance as King Lear. But I did keep in touch, writing program notes for that season and for a later production by Robin of *The Elephant Man* at Canadian Stage, and in 1999 he recruited me to serve for two years on the board—along with the likes of actor Brent Carver and novelist Mordecai Richler—of what he called “The Ontario Patchworks Project,” an ambitious arts initiative that, as I recall, never got off the ground. I returned to Mount Allison from my two seasons at Stratford invigorated and inspired to create.

**Mulgrave Road**

The last thing I took part in before leaving Stratford were the creation workshops for *Not Wanted on the Voyage.* Our mandate was to create a new, devised stage work based on Timothy Findley’s novel about Noah’s Ark. We were allowed to cut as much of the text as we liked, but were prohibited from writing anything new, so much of the creation was based on improvised ensemble movement, marking a significant difference in approach to the text-based work that we had otherwise been doing with Robin. For me it was an enlightening shift to a different kind of dramaturgy. Although the project never came to fruition, I found the process exciting in itself—especially the stunning physical work of Nancy Palk as Tiff’s Mrs. Noyes—and I’ve continued to work in this way on physical theatre ever since, especially with Majdi Bou-Matar at MT Space, with the Blue Bird Theatre Collective, with Ahmad Meree and Jewels Krauss, and with Soheil Parsa’s Modern Times. The work with Robin and the Young Company already resonated with what I’d been learning about collective creation (now called “devised” theatre) as it had developed at places like Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille, Saskatoon’s 25th Street House Theatre, and, in the small town of Guysborough, Nova Scotia (population 512), the Mulgrave Road Co-op (now Mulgrave Road Theatre).

I had by this time been a member of Mulgrave Road for the better part of a decade, a relationship that started when I wrote a rave review of their production of *Tighten the Traces/Haul in the Reins* and *The Boat,* created and performed by Robbie O’Neill, the company’s co-founder (with Gay Hauser, Michael Fahey, and Wendell Smith). I had attended the company’s meetings, been involved in several of their creations, and had taken students from Sackville to Guysborough to see the shows, meet the company, and sleep on the floor of the rehearsal hall or enjoy the hospitality of Gay Hauser and designer and visual artist Stephen Osler’s large house in town. I sustained a relationship with the then Co-op’s successive artistic directors including Chris Heide, Alanna MacDonald, and Jenny Munday, its General Manager Ed McKenna and his partner, playwright and actor Cindy Cowan, and of course with Gay, Steven, and others throughout my time at Mount A.

I benefited greatly from my association with Mulgrave Road. I extended my training by attending professional workshops they offered, most notably one in voice with Stratford’s Annie Skinner, and especially the “baby clown” workshop with the legendary Richard Pochinko, at the end of which I “gave birth” to my own clown, whom I still visit every now and then, drawing upon Pochinko’s personalized archetypes of the joey (dominator), the auguste (victim), and the ringmaster (who balances the two). And I learned about the complexity this relationship allowed in one workshop in which I found my auguste managing, by virtue of his self-effacement, to masterfully out-manipulate his joey scene partner: knocking at a door, my clown was sufficiently retiring that he was unable to enter when instructed to do so, forcing the other actor to abandon what he was doing to come to the door.

I also learned more from my colleagues at Mulgrave Road about the politicization of theatre, from a regionalist perspective, of course, but also, by way of playwrights Cindy Cowan, Wanda Graham, and Mary Vingoe, from a feminist one. It was Cindy who first introduced me to Sue-Ellen Case’s landmark book, *Feminism and Theatre*. As editor of the *Atlantic Alternatives* issue of *CTR*, I published Cindy’s cultural feminist play, *A Woman and the Sea*, which she had produced at Mulgrave Road and also submitted to Urjo Kareda at Tarragon Theatre, receiving in response one of his famous letters indicating that this was *exactly* the kind of play he was *not interested in*. Alan Filewod eventually republished the play in his *CTR Anthology*, and I published a number of my own essays on the work of the company between 1985 and 1995, including, in 1986, an early history, and in 1995 an examination of their feminist work.

Mostly I learned from my work at and on Mulgrave Road about the making of collective creations. In its early years the company operated as a co-op modelled on the co-operative movement in agriculture and fishing founded in 1928 just down the road in Antigonish, N.S. by Moses Coady, the subject of an early production, *The Coady Co-op Show*. Most of their shows in the early years were collective creations, beginning with *The Mulgrave Road Show* in 1976-77. When I returned from Stratford after the 1987 season, I had the idea of working on a trio of collective creations with Mulgrave Road about the Irving, McCain, and Sobey families, called *The Owners of the Maritimes Trilogy*. Among other work in the theatre, I began to develop the first piece in the trilogy, *K.C. Superstar*, after patriarch K.C. Irving, as a university production with my students at Mount A, which would then be recast, revised, and remounted as a full professional production at Mulgrave Road and would tour. The show was a mashup, a kind of musical/physical theatre/game show/clown show/multi-media collage, based on extensive research and interviews undertaken by myself and the student cast. I tried to combine what I had learned from Robin about orchestrating improvised movement with what I knew of the Passe Muraille method of creating character from the outside in, as it were, getting inside of the body of characters physically in order to discover their emotional state, and with the radically presentational style of the early Mulgrave Road collectives.

The cast included Charlie Rhindress, later co-founder of Live Bait Theatre (Sackville), and Krista Wells, later of Ship’s Company (Parrsboro, N.S.). Part satire, part documentary theatre, it was, in essence, a tongue-in-cheek exposé of the extensive but very secretive interlinked Irving gas, oil, forestry, transportation, construction, and media empire run by K.C. Irving and his three sons, James, Arthur, and John, out of Saint John, New Brunswick (where the Irvings controlled the discourse by owning virtually all media outlets not only in the city but in the province). The conglomerate had and continues to have powerful tentacles globally, from Newfoundland to California and overseas, including Bermuda as a corporate tax haven. The show was the subject of a feature article in the national news magazine, *Maclean’s*, after which I was told by a sympathetic staffer of one Irving newspaper in Moncton, New Brunswick that I would never work in the province again.

Two of the Irving sons saw the show at Mount A, shifting uncomfortably in their seats within the tiny confines of Mount Allison’s Windsor Theatre. When the Mulgrave Road version toured to a large, turn-of-the-century theatre in Saint John, the Irvings’ corporate headquarters, I watched from the balcony as the show split the house. On audience right, in stony silence, sat the Irvings and their senior management; on the other side of the aisle sat a crowd consisting, like the city itself (and much of the province), almost exclusively of Irving employees, regularly erupting in laughter and applause. It was a lesson I’ve never forgotten, contradicting traditional theatrical wisdom that the great virtue of the theatre is its ability to constitute its audience as a single community. For an artform whose efficacy consists in serving as a live forum for the negotiation of cultural values there’s much virtue in a divided house.

The Saint John showing concluded a tour of the Maritime provinces, and immediately after the strike we left for Maine, where the Irvings owned—and presumably still do—an obscenely high percentage of land in a largely forested state dotted with Irving gas stations. Artistic Director Chris Heide and I were delayed at the border at midnight as suspiciously artsy folk blaring early Eric Clapton on the car stereo, until I confessed that I was a University Professor and we were allowed to proceed. Throughout Maine we encountered enthusiastic crowds, and American reviewers, refreshingly for us as Canadians, commented ruefully on the foreign ownership of their natural resources.

What did I learn from the *KC Superstar* experience (apart from the obvious fact that I was not a songwriter)? First, I learned something about coproduction between a university theatre program and a small professional company, including the appropriate sharing of resources. In support and as part of this learning, I had applied for a small research-creation grant through the University to research the use of video in live theatre. This allowed me to purchase—this was 1988—a rather cumbersome video camera which we used to record interviews and to experiment in the show with mixing live and pre-recorded video segments. One of the most effective uses of the camera was to record, during an audience warmup at the top of the show, each night’s audience laughing and applauding along with a red-nosed host/clown character named Casey, and later to play these recordings back at moments that were far from funny or joyful. Audience members saw themselves seeming to cheer the Irvings in the way that many in the Maritimes were manipulated into supporting them as supposed job creators rather than clever union-busters, tax evaders, and the recipients of large government subsidies on top of already huge, but hidden, profits: the Irving empire was not publicly traded. I learned, then, for better and for worse, something about the manipulation of audiences. I also learned to use video and projections—the show also used slides and an old Kodak Carousel projector—in ways that were not simply illustrative or decorative, and that didn’t need to be confined to what have become the overly familiar large upstage screens deployed as backdrops to the live onstage action.

Perhaps more importantly, I learned from *KC Superstar* how to go about putting a show together from scratch, dramaturgically, how to gather and employ inspirational resources, how to work with actors to improvise, assemble, sequence, and edit scenes using post-it notes and patchwork. This experience came in very handy in subsequent work at Mulgrave Road and later at Buddies in Bad Times, MT Space, Modern Times, and elsewhere, as well as in writing the appendix on “Devising” for my book on *The Fundamentals of Directing*. *KC Superstar* was not a great show by anyone’s measure, but it was a timely one within the politics of the region, it engaged actively with the local community, culture, and political situation, it toured successfully throughout the Atlantic region and into the US, and it taught me a great deal. Unfortunately, I left the Maritimes before my proposed trilogy about the region’s wealthiest families could be completed. It was intended to include *McCain and Able* (about the often-quarrelling sibling owners of McCain’s food empire) and *Sobey It* (about the Sobeys supermarket chain). I hoped that one day someone else would pick up the thread, but so far no-one has.

I was commissioned to write my final show with Mulgrave Road not long before I left the region in 1989, though the show was not realized until 1991. *From Fogarty’s Cove* was a tribute to Canadian singer-songwriter Stan Rogers using his own music, from the part of the world that had most inspired him. Rogers was precisely my age and was a rising star in the North American folk scene when he died at thirty-three in a fire on the tarmac in Cincinnati returning from the Kerrville folk festival in Texas. The show’s working title, *From the Family*, riffed on the title of one of his early albums, *For the Family*. I was invited to take it on because I was related to Rogers through marriage, and therefore had access to his parents and his Maritime family, specifically his Aunt Betty and Uncle Lee, from Canso, Nova Scotia, the last of whom had made Stan his first guitar. Canso, a small (now former) fishing village on the northeastern extremity of mainland Nova Scotia, just down the highway from the Guysborough home of Mulgrave Road, had been the subject of much of Rogers’ most powerful music.

For me, *From Fogarty’s* Cove, now incorporating the title of another of Stan’s albums, was a drawn-out and sometimes frustrating experience, though not without its moments of joy, including time spent at the glorious beach and kitchen parties of Guysborough County featuring, respectively, skinny dipping and fiddle playing. It was my first full-length play, and my biggest takeaway from it was that I was not a playwright, especially not a writer of musicals, and especially not a writer of musicals about real people to whom one is related, however distantly. Nevertheless, directed by Terry Tweed (part of the early Theatre Passe Muraille family) with musical direction by John Alcorn, the show toured the Maritimes and Newfoundland to standing ovations, largely due to the fact that it ended with Stan’s song, “The Mary Ellen Carter,” with its rousing chorus of “Rise Again” lifting folks to their feet. The show went on to represent Canada at the Dublin Theatre Festival during that city’s stint as European City of Culture in 1991. It was, I believe, a godawful play but a great concert, and as such its suitable legacy was the founding, in the wake of its performances in Canso, of the Stan Rogers Folk Festival (“Stanfest”) there, bringing much-needed revenue to the town.

**PART III:**

**1989 to 2016**

**University of Guelph**

Near the end of my time at Mount Allison I visited the University of Guelph, Ontario, to work in the theatre archives at the McLaughlin Library on campus—I can’t remember now what it was that I was working on. While I was there, Leonard Conolly, who was making the transition from Chair of the Drama Department into senior administration at the time, invited me for lunch at the Faculty Club (now the University Club) to try to recruit me to apply for the position of Chair of Drama (now Theatre Studies). He bought me a draft pint of Wellington County Ale, brewed in town, and said “this is the best reason for coming to Guelph.” That was almost true, though I later found that Wellington’s cask ale, Arkell, was even better. But there were many other reasons for considering the position, particularly for someone with a creative and scholarly interest in Canadian theatre.

In addition to the library’s housing of the archives—the leading Canadian theatre collection in the country, now known as the L.W. Conolly Theatre Archives—the department was then the institutional home of *CTR*, it had an outstanding faculty, a program that effectively combined practical courses in acting, directing, design, voice, movement and technical theatre with academic ones in theatre history, criticism and theory, and the first and only graduate program specializing in Canadian Theatre. It was then, I believed at the time (and still do), the best theatre program in the country, and it was housed in a College whose Dean, David Murray, was actively trying to integrate theory with practice in the arts departments—hiring Chairs in English, (Connie Rooke), Fine Arts (Ron Shuebrook) and Drama over the course of two years who represented both the creative and academic sides of their disciplines, and the integration of the two. It seemed ideal for me.

At a conference that Spring I met with Guelph faculty members Alan Filewod and Ann Wilson, who regaled me with stories about Guelph, filled me in on the various curricular reforms they felt were needed and departmental policies they wanted to have addressed, and strongly encouraged me to apply for the job. I bought a jacket and tie—my first since I was fifteen years old—and interviewed for the position. I’d spent twelve years in Sackville focusing on the local and living in an active multi-arts community. My memories of my interview in Guelph, however, include my asking, repeatedly: “what’s going on in Guelph?”

“It’s only an hour and a half from Stratford.”

“Yeah, but what’s going on in Guelph?

“It’s just an hour and a half from the Shaw Festival.”

“That’s great, but what’s going on in Guelph.”

“The Toronto scene is only an hour and half down the road.” And so on.

I met with the selection committee, the faculty, and the Dean, and I met with theatre students at the Bull Ring (a circular brick building, a former cattle ring, built in 1901, that had been converted to a bar and dance club, but had once been the site of an early performance of Theatre Passe Muraille’s iconic *The Farm Show*).

As part of my interview, I remember a meeting with the faculty in Massey Hall, a brick and brownstone structure built in 1901-1903 in a wild mix of styles as the library of the Ontario Agricultural College, converted in 1968 to house the English and later Drama Departments. At the meeting Alan Filewod lamented the lack of knowledge among students arriving in the program—and perhaps even graduating—without having so much as heard the names of key figures like influential Russian experimental director Vsevelod Meyerhold. At this point I confessed some of the great many things that I had never heard of, knew nothing about, or hadn’t read. This prompted Alan’s admission that he’d never read *Don Quixote*, after which everyone got along famously.

I was offered the job. Back in Sackville, I called Douglas Lochhead, who was born in Guelph, but who, more importantly, I regarded as a mentor. He gave me the obvious advice: Mount Allison was a great place to start one’s career, and (in his case) a great place to finish it, but it had no graduate program, no real prospect for professional advancement comparable to what Guelph had to offer, and far fewer opportunities to see or work in the theatre than were available in Southern Ontario. And of course he was right. I had loved the Maritimes as a region—its arts, culture, geography, and people—and I had particularly loved the richness of the Tantramar marshes. But there was no single place in the region where I wanted to spend the rest of my professional life, particularly in the theatre. And Mount Allison was going through one of the first of successive rounds of savage budget cuts and contentious labour disruptions. So back in Guelph I met with the Dean, naively suggested that they pay me what they thought I was worth rather than engaging in a rigorous process of negotiation, and I accepted the position of Chair of Drama. We transported what the movers told me, even then, was my five tons of books to Guelph in the summer of 1989 and I plunged into six years of administrative work as Chair of Drama.

**Administration**

I’m not at all sure how well prepared I was for the job. At Mount A I had served brief terms as acting director of Drama and of Canadian Studies and had some experience on committees and in the university’s Senate, but my degrees and experience were in English Departments—Mount Allision had no Drama or Theatre department as such—and Mount A was a smaller and much less bureaucratic institution than Guelph. The former operated on a liberal arts model that was friendly to arts and humanities (its Fine Arts Department was famous); the latter was dominated by Aggies and Vets (Ontario Agricultural College and Ontario Veterinary College students and faculty). And I have never been very good at constructing budgets or reading spread sheets. Nevertheless, I made a striking first impression at a welcoming reception for new faculty when, in conversation with the Dean, I leaned back into a just-completed oil painting at the Faculty Club, damaging the painting and adding a large blob of pink to the back of the new navy-blue blazer that I’d bought for my interview. I suppose I learned from that experience, too, if only that, when push comes to shove (and it generally does), oil paint isn’t very forgiving.

There was much to do as Chair of a complex, if small department, beyond learning the institutional ropes, dealing with budgets and personnel, sitting on Dean’s Council and various program and other committees that come with the territory. When I arrived, apart from the two designers on faculty and one staff member who taught technical theatre at the introductory level, over one third of our offerings, including almost all of our so-called “practical courses”—in design, directing, acting, voice, and movement—were taught by sessional instructors. This was a conscious decision for relatively flush times, but it was a fraught one. It allowed us to hire outstanding instructors such as George Luscombe, Adrian Pecknold, Catherine Marrion, Stephen Bush, Fiona Griffiths, and others. It was wise insofar as it did not remove the best of professionals from the profession, allowing them to support themselves by working part time at the university while maintaining their creative careers, as well as allowing them to teach what they were actually *doing*—which used to be a first principle of university-level instruction.

It was problematic, however, insofar as it was exploitative, providing low levels of pay and very little job security, while also raising the problem that the folks teaching half of our curriculum, while welcome to attend department and committee meetings, weren’t paid to do so. In effect, they had little real say in curricular development or department policy, leaving a key half of our curriculum underrepresented in decision-making. It also meant that one third of our instructors had little real understanding of how the courses they taught related to the rest of the program. This proved crucial over the years when it came to much-needed curricular review, and it proved to be more and more problematic as budgets were slashed and part-time, sessional positions were low-hanging fruit for those in more senior administrative positions looking for cuts. It also meant, for me as chair, that a great deal of time was spent every semester searching out and hiring course instructors, including travelling to Toronto and elsewhere to interview applicants.

I became convinced, and still believe, that the hiring and employment practices at universities in Canada as elsewhere are deeply problematic. Universities were founded on the principle, as I understand it, that “higher learning” is fundamentally different from training, the former having to do with research, critical thinking, and the production of new knowledge, the latter with the passing on, reproductively, of skills. It’s a deeply held, if frequently violated principle that faculty at a university teach what they’re simultaneously involved in as researchers (including creative activity, considered to be research-driven). Full-time tenured and tenure-stream faculty have for these reasons traditionally been hired on the understanding that a “normal” workload is weighted and assessed for teaching (usually 40%), research and/or creative activity (40%) and service to the university, community, and scholarly or professional organizations (20%). Tenure was originally intended, as I understand it, to protect academic freedom: once you’re tenured you can’t be fired for what you think, research, or publish, within reason and excluding hate speech. It was not designed to protect incompetence, lack of productivity, or disseminating hatred or misinformation. By the time I was hired as chair this situation had devolved and has done so further every year since, and an increasing percentage of the teaching at universities across North America has been done by untenured, underpaid instructors teaching overfull course loads who have no time, and are not being paid, to do research, engage in creative activity, or contribute through service to the development of their respective disciplines or the running of their academic programs. And they are eminently disposable. These so-called sessional, or part-time instructors (in the US they’re called adjuncts), of course, have no time or opportunity to actively engage in the kinds of activity that would advance their own careers, or in many cases even to keep up with disciplinary developments in the fields they’re teaching in, severely limiting their chances of ever getting tenure-stream appointments and limiting their expertise as teachers.

It became clear to me that, for the sake of fairness and the quality of both teaching and research, tenure should be dissolved and replaced by academic unions (fully capable of protecting academic freedom) to which *all* instructors belong equally, being paid, whether full- or part-time, faculty or graduate students, equitable and proportionate amounts to support their research and service as well as their teaching. This remains an unlikely-to-be-realized dream, and it’s more unlikely every year. This particular horse, I’m afraid, has left the barn.

In any case, curricular review at Guelph at the time that I was hired was much needed, for two main reasons. The department suffered from the familiar divide in theatre programs: the “academic” and “practical” halves of the department were distrustful of, even hostile to one another, and this was a problem that I felt I had been explicitly recruited to address. The curriculum was also dominated by a traditional and Euro-America-centric focus on the western canon, by a pedagogical approach based on one-way knowledge transmission rather than on methodology, theory, or critical thinking, and by the study of universal and unchanging meaning understood to be immanent in historical, dramatic, and theatrical “texts,” almost always by western men, that were understood to be stable over time. There were, moreover, no courses in theory, an omission that it was clear to me would be a barrier to our students if they intended to apply for graduate programs that at the time were overwhelmingly theory driven. And theory is, in any case, perhaps the best avenue for the teaching of much needed critical, analytical thinking and problematizing the unquestioned assumptions that have long plagued theatre training. So I undertook to lead a massive curricular review, an undertaking that had both positive and negative results.

On the positive side, we developed a curriculum in which both “sides” of the department were blended together at both the curricular and individual course levels, one that interrogated and historicized both “practical” and academic methods. We integrated non-western work throughout the curriculum rather than marginalizing it to “special topics” courses, though we also offered those, and we declared a special focus, “where appropriate,” on Canadian theatre. I published about our proceedings “towards a materialist pedagogy” in several essays in *Theatre History*/*Research in Canada*, where they received broad attention, both positive and negative, in those days of the theory wars. We were praised for our progressiveness, and I, on one occasion, was attacked for autocratically imposing democracy on the department. The downside of our curricular changes—and I very much regret this now—was that we eliminated specialized courses in voice and movement, intending them to be incorporated into the acting stream in ways that never really did or could happen. Those courses had been important parts of their learning for some of our most successful graduates, such as Kelly Thornton, who later became Artistic Director of Nightwood Theatre from 2001-2019, and later still of the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre; and Paul de Jong, who later became head of voice and coordinator of the theatre program at Humber College, head of voice coaching at the Stratford Festival, and voice teacher at Toronto Metropolitan (formerly Ryerson) University.

But I also learned from these and curricular developments elsewhere that there’s no point in designing an ideal curriculum if you don’t have the faculty to teach it. We did well, by and large, but would have been wiser had we spent more time fitting the curriculum to the actual skills and interests of the individual faculty members who shape their own course offerings, however they are designed or intended, in ways that they are best able to teach them. This is particularly true when many of a program’s courses, as ours were, are taught by part-time, sessional instructors who may not understand the curricular context or philosophy into which their individual courses fit, and probably won’t have the time or energy either to find out or to develop their own skills in such a way as to make them serve that larger purpose.

I also learned this kind of thing from, and in equal measure applied it to, department and program reviews that I was invited to do in the years that I was chair and beyond, by Brock (twice), York (all three campuses, twice), Toronto, Ottawa, Bishops, Acadia, Windsor, Dalhousie, St. Thomas, the University of California at Santa Cruz, and Edna Manley College in Kingston, Jamaica. I tried to bring the same experience to bear later when for six years from 2005 to 2011 I was a member and for three years committee chair at the Ontario Council for Graduate Studies (OCGS), the multi-disciplinary body, since dissolved, that reviewed and approved all graduate programs in all disciplines—including social sciences, sciences, Engineering, and other things—in universities across the province. The OCGS was often resented as intrusive by the departments it evaluated, but in my experience, it was a brilliant and effective initiative of Ontario universities to remain independent of government intervention, and I was sorry to see it end. It wasn’t, as they say, “broke.” But I learned much from experience as a program reviewer about theatre education, training, and curricular construction, and I learned from my work at OCGS an extraordinary amount about graduate programming generally as well as about the politics and practices of evaluation.

My being Chair at Guelph brought with it other duties and opportunities outside of the University. Not long after I arrived in Guelph I was invited to serve as Managing Editor of *Theatre Research in Canada*/*Recherches théâtrales au Canada (TRiC*) which I did from 1989-1994, learning the ropes about how journals are run in ways that would serve me well later as an editor. I served in the same capacity for *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales* from 1989-1998. In this last role I supervised the merging of *Essays in Theatre* with *Canadian Drama/L’art dramatique Canadien*. *Essays in Theatre* was an excellent journal edited by my colleagues Harry Lane and Ann Wilson with, like the Guelph department at the time, a special interest in Canadian theatre. It published some outstanding work by scholars in Canada, the US, the UK, and beyond and it was a great loss years later when it eventually folded. One of the major lessons I learned, primarily from the editorial practice of Harry Lane, was the value for a scholarly journal of matching a book with the right person to review it—the reviewer whose opinion readers would most like to have on the book’s topic. Too many journals assign book reviews to graduate students or junior scholars as entry points to scholarly publishing, knowing full well that a mere book review gains them little advantage with hiring or promotion committees, and in the case of negative reviews of work by senior scholars potentially endangers their future prospects.

A major responsibility outside of Guelph was serving on and eventually chairing the Council of Chairs of Ontario University and College Theatre Programs (with the unpronounceable acronym COUCTP) from 1991-1997. This was fundamentally an advocacy group bringing together the chairs and heads of widely disparate departments, from large conservatory programs such as the one at the University of Windsor, through varying types of College program, to largely academic ones housed in English departments. We addressed many subjects, shared stories, and served as a support group for one another, eventually even founding a lecture series named after one of our members, Anthony Hammond of McMaster University, who had passed away from cancer. But our major accomplishment, in my view, was to draw up a document that could be used by anyone on how practical work in professional and non-professional (including university) settings should be treated by tenure and promotion committees.

We made it clear that acting in, directing, or designing a professional production for which one was hired was the equivalent of a scholarly article published in a refereed journal. The same work on a non-professional production was understood to be the equivalent of a non-refereed publication unless it was vetted by a qualified and approved outside referee, who could determine its equivalency to professional work. Work on university productions, we mandated, could count as *both* teaching and creative activity for the purposes of promotion and tenure since directing a show for course credit, for example, involved much more work than did teaching a traditional classroom-based course, and also involved research/creative activity. The document we produced was used for many years across the province and helped to support many a faculty member whose institution did not fully understand or appropriately reward creative work in the theatre *as research*.

I also served, in 1989, as “external editor” for Playwrights Canada Press (PCP), the publishing imprint of the Playwrights Union of Canada (PUC, originally Playwrights Guild of Canada, or PGC, a name it returned to in 2002, never having been actually registered as a labour union). At the time there was some concern that PCP was perceived as being only interested in publishing work by PUC members, which was never the case, so to address the misperception they brought in outside editors to make the final selection of plays for publication each year. I was honoured to be selected for the job, and remain proud to have chosen, for example, Daniel McIvor’s *See Bob Run* and *Wild Abandon*, suggesting that they be published together. This was the first publication by someone who became one of Canada’s major playwrights—and I later directed the two plays together in a senior student production featuring the multi-talented actor, playwright, and designer Michael Spence, who later became multiple award-winning Associate Artistic Director of Toronto’s Theatre Gargantua. I also selected the hit, *The Anger in Ernest and Ernestine*, by Leah Cherniak, Robert Morgan, and Martha Ross, which I believe was the first clown show published by the press.

The experience as external editor was the beginning of a long relationship with the press, leading, first, to my taking out membership in PUC, and later to my being invited by the press’s editor, Angela Rebeiro, to serve as President of the Board of Directors of PCP and supervise the establishment of the press as an independent entity. I travelled to Vancouver in Spring 2000, as both President of the Board of PCP and a member of PUC, to address the annual meeting of the latter and hopefully get its approval for PCP to incorporate as a distinct, for-profit business, with PUC as its sole shareholder. It was a contentious proposition, with many members of PUC understandably resistant to the loss of what had become, especially under the leadership of Rebeiro, its most publicly visible operation. I faced many questions, some of them hostile, but tried my best to maintain my composure, and approval was eventually granted. I went out that evening with playwrights Vern Thiessen and Aaron Bushkowsky to celebrate by sampling great British Columbia wines selected by Bushkowsky, who was an expert. We talked, over wine, for hours, and were met with Vern’s insistent prompts:

“*Hamlet* or *Lear*?”

“Judith Thompson or George F. Walker?”

“Why?”

And so on, for some time. We had to respond immediately and then defend our choices. It strikes me now that Vern’s career as a celebrated playwright whose work has been performed at major venues around the world means his name would not be out of place in this company. “Vern Thiessen or Djanet Sears?”

I had never thought I would be, at least in name, President and CEO of a for-profit company, but I served in that capacity for two years at PCP and remained on the board for another eight under the leadership, as Executive Director, of Rebeiro and later of Annie Gibson. I had the pleasure of working with its treasurer, the playwright, accountant, and co-founder (with John Hirsch) of the (now Royal) Manitoba Theatre Centre, the first of Canada’s big regional theatres. Tom Hendry was a small, wry, wickedly witty but unerringly generous character then in his late 70s, a trained accountant, a legend in the Canadian theatre world who had served as the first literary manager at the Stratford Festival and had also co-founded the Playwrights Co-op (later PUC and Playwrights Guild), Toronto Free Theatre (later merged with Canadian Stage), and the Playwrights Lab at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Tom regaled every meeting of the board with stories from his life that were never mean-spirited, never centered himself, were always funny, and were sometimes even relevant to the discussion at hand. I also had the pleasure there of meeting and working with dozens of different playwrights from across the country, notably including three powerful women: the indomitable Colleen Murphy, the brilliant but soft-spoken Mieko Ouchi, and especially Yvette Nolan, who became a good friend, and of whom more below.

In addition to working on the board of PCP, I also launched two book series with the press as general editor. The first, “Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,” was designed to provide a history of criticism on various major topics in the field, organizing selections of essays chronologically, and ending, usually, with one or two newly commissioned essays to bring the volumes into the present. The stated goal of the series was “to make the best critical and scholarly work in the field readily available to teachers, students, and scholars of Canadian drama and theatre,” and the volumes were organized by playwright, region, genre, theme, or cultural community. We published three volumes per year for seven years, beginning in 2004 with Rob Appleford’s collection of essays on *Aboriginal Drama and Theatre*. I was a very hands-on general editor, selecting all the topics and assigning them to volume editors, serving as a consultant to them when needed, ensuring a uniform citation style for the series, proofreading every volume, and, of course, enforcing deadlines.

I remember one year staying up half the night on a holiday in Rome in the days leading up to the new year proofreading and correcting two volumes that were overdue at the press. I remember disagreements with volume editors, mostly about missed deadlines, citation style, or missing, incomplete, or inaccurate citations, but occasionally also about the inclusion of pieces that I didn’t think were up to snuff. But I also remember the pleasure of resurrecting lost or forgotten essays, of selecting topics for each volume and the right editors to take them on. I’m proud to say that every volume was published on time, ready to launch at each Spring’s meeting of the ACTR/CATR. After twenty-one volumes I discontinued the series and replaced it with a new one, “New Essays on Canadian Theatre,” consisting entirely of newly commissioned essays and designed to fill what I perceived to be gaps in the critical record, often taking new approaches, often from minoritized and under-represented communities. Most volumes, by design and for teaching purposes, coincided with a companion anthology of plays, and most of them either won the Patrick B. O’Neill award for editing or included chapters that won the Richard Plant essay prize, or both. I oversaw the first six volumes in the series, one per year from 2011 to 2016, before passing it on to Roberta Barker of Dalhousie University as general editor who has kept it going with considerable panache, publishing on topics that exceed my expertise. Editing these two series was a labour of love, and, needless to say, I learned more about Canadian theatre, Canadian theatre scholarship, and my colleagues’ work across the country than I have in any other capacity in my career. It’s a tribute to Angela Rebeiro, Annie Gibson, and Playwrights Canada Press that they have supported, and continue to support this kind of crucial work in the field. And they, along with their outstanding and scrupulous managing editor, Blake Sproule, have consistently been a great pleasure to work with.

I served for six years as Chair at Guelph between 1989 and 1995, including one term in which I was Acting Dean of the College of Arts. It was the proverbial best and worst of times.

Among the best was the chance to oversee the renovation of Massey Hall, adding a second large rehearsal room upstairs at the back of the building along with extra office space, and perhaps most significantly turning the downstairs rehearsal hall into a functioning theatrical space, with a backstage crossover, a modified thrust stage, and a tech booth. Also among the best was the opportunity, however rare, to hire outstanding people. In only my second year at Guelph I had been invited to support the Second International Women Playwrights Conference at Glendon College in Toronto. This was before Judith Thompson joined the faculty at Guelph, so we had no full-time faculty member to teach playwriting. So I supported the conference by hiring British playwright Sarah Daniels—prolific author of such plays as *Masterpieces*, *Neaptide*, *The Gut Girls*, and enough others to fill two fat collections published by Methuen Drama—to teach a six-week summer course, and paid her way to both Guelph and the conference. When she arrived in Guelph, she asked me to go with her to the campus bookstore, where she chose a specific empty notebook as the only required purchase for students in the course. She counted the number of pages in the book—I think it was 80—and promised me that everyone in the course, including herself, would, by the end of the first week, fill the notebook with a full-length play and then spend the remaining five weeks revising it. Students were allowed to cross out material, but not to tear any pages out of the book—and she would know, because she had counted them. The course was among the most successful we’d ever offered.

In Spring 1990 I worked on the public workshop and world premiere of Judith Thompson’s play, *Lion in the Streets*, presented by Tarragon Theatre at the now defunct DuMaurier World Stage Festival at Harbourfront in Toronto. Rehearsals were held in the intimate extra space at Tarragon, with an extraordinary group of actors: Andrew Gillies, Ann Holloway, Maggie Huculak, Stephen Ouimette, Jane Spidell, and the remarkable Tracy Wright, who passed away far too young of pancreatic cancer in 2010. I became friendly with Tracy—I liked her a lot—who taught me much about the process of acting as a discipline of *letting go*. She could be wild, but always controlled.

Judith, on the other hand, taught me about her own unique processes of writing and revision. Rehearsals were replete with jaw-dropping discoveries among the company, but every now and then, often to the surprise or even consternation of all of us, Judith, who was also the show’s director, would ask stage manager Nancy Dryden (a former student of mine from Mount Allison days) to clear the room and dim the lights. While actors and others drank coffee and ran lines in the Tarragon lobby, Judith would walk around in the darkened rehearsal room “getting into the blood,” as she said, of her characters. By the time each short break was over, she would present to the assembled company, with astonishing rapidity, new, remarkable, and quite unexpected moments, speeches, or whole scenes, often replacing things we all thought were brilliant, but that she felt were expendable. I later published some of the material she had cut from this and her other plays in a special issue of *CTR* on her work, under the title, quoting her, of “‘Great Lines are a Dime a Dozen’: Judith Thompson’s Greatest Cuts.”

*Lion in the Streets* confirmed Judith’s position as one of the outstanding contemporary playwrights, not only in Canada, but in the world. A winner of two Governor General’s Awards, and subsequently many other major national and international honours, Judith had plays under production throughout the English-speaking world. While we were in rehearsals for *Lion*, in a rare fit of institutional enlightenment, the University of Guelph determined that it needed to address the problem of gender imbalance among its faculty and undertook to do so by advertising tenure-track positions for outstanding women in any field. I was working with a double Governor-Generals-Award-winning playwright at an international festival, one who could fill the playwriting gap in our curriculum and could also teach script writing for film and television, with which she had considerable experience, and, as an actor trained at National Theatre school, could also teach in and lead our acting program. I took the opportunity to ask Judith if I could put her name forward. We were awarded the position, and Judith has been a colleague ever since, bringing her extensive experience and great compassion to the program and enriching our students’ experience no end.

Also among the best experiences as Chair was having the chance to hire and get to know the great director George Luscombe, who taught acting for us for several years, and after whom we named our “mainstage” black box theatre. George had been the founding artistic director of Toronto Workshop Productions in 1958, a foundational theatre that was alternative in both the political and aesthetic senses long before the so-call “alternative theatre movement” in the late sixties and early seventies, producing classics such as *Chicago ’70*, *Ten Lost Years*, and *The Mac Paps*. George refused to drive on Highway 401, the major, but frenetic route between Toronto, where he lived, and Guelph, so he drove north from Toronto to the regional Highway 7, adding hours to his commute each teaching day. He also refused to attend student productions, claiming, probably accurately, that undergraduate students with only a couple of courses under their belts weren’t ready—couldn’t be ready in the time they had—to appear before the public and potentially undo the benefits of the learning that they’d done.

George put his acting students through a rigorous program that combined the physical theatre of Joan Littlewood (with whom he had worked for five years in London, England, in the 1950s) with the psychological theatre of Stanislavsky and the “efforts” of dance theorist Rudolf Laban. I regret that I never took one of his courses, but I did learn much from him and from his specific bringing together of those influences in his actor training. Every Spring he would come to my office to report on his students’ progress over the course of the previous year, and every Spring he would tell me that he was going to write a book on his method over the coming summer. Although I regretted not having taken one of his courses, I did learn in conversation with him about his method, and I have through most of my work with actors combined physical theatre techniques with a focus on actorly intentions that draws upon Laban, and detailed attention to “given circumstances” as articulated by Stanislavski.

One Fall, at the beginning of the school year, George arrived in my office to report that he hadn’t written his book yet. Someone had told him that before writing a book—any book—it was a good idea to read Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. “Ric,” he reported, beaming, “it’s a *great book*!” George had become so excited by Tolstoy’s masterpiece that he spent the entire summer reading more of Tolstoy, followed by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Turgenev, Pushkin—all the great Russian novelists of the 19th century—and he never got a start on his own book, which it was left for Stephen Bush to write after George’s death.

My favourite memory of George, however, was his delivery of the Convocation address one year when he was awarded an honorary doctorate at Guelph. Taking the stage, by then in a wheelchair, he opened his address: ‘“In the beginning was the word?’” he asked. “Bullshit!” He went on, in a rousing, characteristically combative speech, to excoriate logocentrism in all its forms as it applied to any understanding of how theatre does or should work. Among the worst of times during my tenure was witnessing the health of this giant figure in Canadian theatre decline to the point that he had to retire from teaching in 1995. Along with my colleagues at Guelph I visited him for the last time at his home not long before his death from heart failure in 1999.

Service as Chair of the department’s tenure and promotion committee, and occasionally as a member of the College Committee, was never the best of times. Faculty are quite capable of behaving badly when assessing other faculty members’ work, and ranking contributions to teaching, scholarship, and especially service is more than a bit of a mug’s game. Such rankings are inevitably comparative but given the range of activities within a theatre program, never mind across a college, the comparisons are apples to oranges. What I did learn from the experience, however, was how to read teaching evaluations. I learned that the best teachers are rarely the ones who receive the best (or worst) numerical scores; indeed, extremely high scores are often a sign that someone cares more about getting good evaluations than they do about good teaching. Extremely low scores speak for themselves.

I also learned to evaluate the evaluatees, depending on who was being evaluated. A diminutive young woman of colour at the front of a class is never given the degree of deference, for example, given to an older white male, and an older woman—of colour or of pallor—has always to work hard to maintain respect. The verbal parts of student evaluations are more complex than the numerical, and ultimately more useful, though if a student’s response is more or less illiterate there is reason to argue that it should be discarded in its entirety. Perhaps most interestingly, I learned from years of experience on these committees how to tell whether a teacher most wants to be liked or respected, most wants to be found funny, or nice, or smart, or learned, because those words show up regularly in their evaluations and say more about self-image than about competence. Teaching evaluations are necessary, sometimes a necessary evil, but they need to be carefully crafted. Questions about whether the material on a course was well selected, for example, are probably not with the students’ range of expertise and should be taken with a grain of salt; questions about fairness and evaluation are inevitably influenced by how well each student has done on the course and how many classes they attended; questions about organization and clarity are probably the fairest and yield the most accurate results.

Among the very worst of times in my term as Chair was the experience of serving a semester as Acting Dean, learning things about my colleagues in the College that I’d rather not have known and refereeing intra- and interdepartmental quarrels. But I learned things too, as an administrator. I remember one colleague who regularly came to my office with a worried look on his face, sat down, clasped his hands tightly together, and said, “Ric, we’ve got a problem.” The first few times this happened I listened carefully and tried to come up with a solution. But I quickly learned differently. I learned that, with him as with many people, if I listened closely, looked sympathetic, said “hmmm” a lot, and waited, he would soon present his own solution and leave my office fully satisfied. Sometimes, I learned, leaping into action is not the most effective practice.

But perhaps my worst experience as acting Dean was a more salutary if less happy one. As Dean I had to serve on the university’s senior management team, “V-PAC” (the Vice President’s Advisory Committee), which indeed behaved like a pack, seemed to regard faculty and students alike as the enemy, and required an oath of silence from its members about what was said and done in committee. This created an extraordinarily unhealthy and counterproductive environment in which senior administrators had only one another to talk honestly with, and in which trust between Deans and the faculty they were supposed to represent was inevitably fractured by a lack of transparency. One V-PAC meeting addressed a student protest with which, alone in the room, I found myself in total sympathy. My voice was silenced. Although I had felt relatively competent as an administrator in spite of my struggles with accounting, the VPAC experience taught me that, for the sake of my own mental health, I had no desire to participate any further in senior administration, particularly in times of budget slashing. Besides, I had my own work to do.

In 1996, in the middle of my second term as Chair, as part of a university-wide restructuring program purportedly intended to save money (of course it never did), the Drama Department was offered the opportunity to vote on whether it wished to be combined into a single administrative unit with the English Department or with Fine Arts and Music. English was felt to be the more progressive and more research-intensive option at the time, and so the School of Literatures and Performance Studies in English (SLAPSIE) was born. The restructuring was somewhat contentious, as might be expected, and it may have worked out better if we had called ourselves HUGSIE. In any case the name was later changed to SETS (School of English and Theatre Studies), and things settled somewhat over time.

I took the opportunity to step down early as chair in the middle of my second four-year term, “graciously” leaving the Directorship of the newly formed School to Gerry Manning, who had been Chair of English. I was not a fan of the restructuring, I disliked the shift in title from Chair to Director and all that that implied, and I had no wish to administer a larger unit or, as I’ve said, to move up the administrative ladder. I had my own creative and scholarly goals to pursue, many of which—including writing books—had been put on hold while I was Chair. I moved out of the chair’s office on the main floor of Massey Hall and into the fourth outstanding office of my career, on the second floor, one with high ceilings to accommodate my exponentially increasing volume of books, and four large windows on two walls to provide light and cross-ventilation. Apart from periodic infestations of mice and, on one notable occasion to the consternation of a visiting student, a bat perched beside her on a bookshelf, it was ideal—once screens had been installed on the windows. I inhabited that office happily until my retirement.

**Teaching**

I taught throughout my time as Chair, with one course release per year from a six, later five-course load, and returned to full-time teaching in 1996. At the time I left Mount Allison, the university was just beginning to consider offering single-semester courses, and only at the fourth-year level. At Guelph, all courses were single-semester, and class sizes were mostly larger than I’d been used to. This took some adjustment. I still feel that full-year courses with relatively small classes offer the best environment for teaching and learning, particularly in theatre, but I’m aware that, for various practical and financial reasons, that horse, too, left the barn a long time ago. In any case, throughout my over a quarter of a century at Guelph I taught courses from the introductory to the graduate level and undertook undergraduate and graduate level supervisions.

*Undergraduate*

I had the pleasure of teaching a wide range of courses at Guelph, in everything from directing, dramaturgy, script analysis, dramatic literature, theatre history, applied criticism, and theory, to intercultural and Indigenous performance. I believe that it’s healthy to avoid offering the same courses year after year, frequently to redesign those courses that you do repeat, and always to respond to the climate in the room and the needs of each specific group of students. I remember some of my own classes as a student at the University of Toronto in which instructors read lectures, staring resolutely downwards at notes that were observably brittle and yellowing with age. One memorable instructor managed to avoid eye contact with anyone in the room for a full semester. These classes, needless to say, were not particularly inspiring.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of my favourite courses at Guelph, in spite of large class sizes and heavy demands on the instructor’s time, and in spite of having to overcome what many students thought they knew from high school, was the required Introduction to Theatre course at the first-year level. The “texts” for the course, as I taught it, were as many as nine shows that the class—a couple of yellow school busloads full—attended over a single semester, mainly a couple of hours away in Toronto, usually, by policy, on Tuesday evenings when the theatres needed a boost in numbers. In addition to the department’s own productions, I tried to include as much variety as possible in terms of size and type of show, and because it was introducing *theatre* (rather than drama) to first-year students, many of whom had either seen no theatre or had only seen shows at Stratford or the large commercial theatres in Toronto, I started with shows without words.

After a first class presenting the course outline and the organization of the field trips, we started with a trip on a (then) two-dollar Tuesday in September to a baseball game at the SkyDome (later the Rogers Centre) in Toronto. The next day, the first full class, began with a question: “why did we do that?” Apart from the odd student who thought it had been about bonding, most of the answers were insightful, addressing the bifurcated space between “performers” and audience, and even touching on the issues around which the course as I designed it centered: ritual and representation. In what sense, for example, did an all-male team of largely Puerto-Rican players, all male, represent “us” when “we” won? And I showed images that revealed the remarkable similarity between the floor plan of the stadium and that of the Theatre of Dionysus in fifth-century Greece, with the observation that it was the Jumbotron, not home plate, that drew the eye, standing as it did where the skene (the structure behind the playing area) was in Athens. Some students even introduced into the conversation the presumed origins of theatre in ritual and sporting events. One year, when playwright Colleen Murphy was writer in residence at Guelph, she came into the class as a guest speaker and deftly articulated the ways in which playwriting was like baseball, the action initiated by an opening “pitch,” with subsequent events determined by a sequence of reactions and responses to that initiating action.

We next went to a performance of dance, then opera, before approaching the spoken word, making clear that theatre was not simply, as many had learned in high school, the “realization” of dramatic texts, usually Shakespeare’s. And we took the students, most of them for the first time, to small theatres performing experimental, political, queer, “foreign,” intercultural, or new Canadian work. Sometimes, early on and when we could afford it (this didn’t last), we even went to the Shaw or Stratford Festivals. Along the way the course introduced all the disciplines of theatre—the disciplines taught in our program—from acting, directing, design and technical theatre to theatre history, criticism, and theory as active practices.

Teaching theory at the undergraduate level was, for a time, controversial, and may still be. I was an advocate, not of teaching universal theoretical templates, or even histories of theory, but of teaching students to theorize That is, I tried to teach students to ask what it means to do what you’re doing the way you’re doing it—to question the universal applicability of *any* method, any practice, any mode of analysis, and uncover its often unspoken ideological, cultural, or other codings that might otherwise be overlooked or taken for granted. What does it mean, for example, to teach that theatre is about conflict, that acting involves playing objectives, and that design necessarily involves perspectival depth? What does it mean to organize a curriculum, or a textbook, around national canons? Around predetermined genres? What does it mean to position the action of a play behind a proscenium arch and an invisible “fourth wall”?

In this sense, I taught theory in all of my classes, but I also taught a third-year course that introduced major theoretical developments in the field, and occasionally offered fourth-year seminars in specific theoretical approaches, mainly materialist, semiotic, or both. In one such course, on materialist semiotics, I had an intriguing student, Thomas Morgan Jones. Thom did not have a brilliant academic record at the time. Like many theatre students, he was doing too many things, soaking up any opportunity he could to work in the theatre, learning by doing. But he had the one prerequisite for learning: omnivorous intellectual curiosity. After he graduated with middling grades, he applied to the then Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama at U of T to do his MA degree and asked me to write in support of his application. I was later told that he was admitted to the program largely on the strength of my letter, but of course he performed brilliantly there and since, pairing up creatively with actor and playwright Anusree Roy to form Theatre Jones/Roy, and later making his name as an actor, director, playwright, and eventually artistic director first of Theatre New Brunswick, then Prairie Theatre Exchange, and now as Executive Director of the National Theatre School’s English Section. His success has been entirely based on his eagerness to learn, having taken every opportunity to train in places ranging from the Charlottetown and Stratford Festivals to Ann Bogart’s SITI company in New York, but also having learned to theorize his practice rather than simply and uncritically to deploy “universally applicable” techniques. He was open to and acquired a range of techniques adaptable to a range of different situations.

Another of my favourite offerings was a third-year course in “Fundamentals of Directing.” When I first offered the course I couldn’t find a text for it that was remotely satisfactory. Most were British or American, most were preachy and hierarchical, likening the director to a ship’s captain or military general, and none was written to prepare students for the realities and material conditions that they would encounter in Canada. But they had nice glossy pictures and were very expensive. I designed my own course around an anthology of scenes. Each student chose a short scene that they worked on throughout the semester, going through the process of directing them from the pre-rehearsal design of an appropriate process through each stage of that process to opening night. The students did script analyses, cast one another in their shows, engaged with the class in design meetings, rehearsed, did scene work, blocked their scenes, and discussed what they had done. Over the years I refined the process, and ultimately published a book based on it that has the same title as the course itself. The Foreword to the book is written by Nina Lee Aquino, who after graduating from Guelph and the MA program at University of Toronto, became a multiple award-winning director, the founding artistic director of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre, Artistic Director of Cahoots Theatre Company, Factory Theatre, and now the National Arts Centre’s English Theatre. “Fundies,” as we called the third-year, entry-level course, had been her first foray into directing. I had hardly noticed her through most of the semester, sitting quietly in corners, saying little, and never putting herself forward. But for her final assignment, the in-class presentation of a scene from the second act of Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls*, she blew everybody away, presenting a beautifully paced, evocatively staged, and highly polished piece of work. I have stayed in touch with and worked with her over many years now, but more of that below.

My courses shifted over my time at Guelph, none more than my Canadian drama offerings. At Guelph as elsewhere the teaching of Canadian drama was shaped overwhelmingly at the time by the publication in 1984-85 of the first three national anthologies of Canadian plays: *Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre*, edited by Richard Perkyns; *Modern Canadian Drama*, edited Richard Plant; and most enduringly *Modern Canadian Plays*, edited by Jerry Wasserman, which expanded to two volumes and has gone through five editions. In fulfilling a commission from Robert Lecker to contribute an essay on theatre to an edited volume on *Canadian Canons*, I had critiqued these anthologies (and the very idea of a solidifying national canon) as exclusionary, at that time specifically excluding feminist, working-class, regionalist, Indigenous, “ethnic,” and experimental or movement-based work while overwhelmingly privileging white, male plays in the dominant naturalist tradition.

In teaching courses in the field, then, I realized I had to do something else, something that resisted teleological stories of an always “developing” national theatrical maturity and paid serious (rather than token) attention to what I called “voices (off).” I had, moreover, to avoid the liberal model of generous inclusion that welcomed limited difference through a lethal assimilationist embrace. I tried various things, the most successful of which, I believe, was to ground my third-year Canadian Drama course in Indigenous plays (which of course immediately problematized the designation “Canadian”). Each unit of the course paired one play by an Indigenous playwright or collective with another play from a different cultural community—Black, Asian, Latinx, queer, disability, or dominant-culture—with which it shared some structural, thematic, or other features. I didn’t attempt to compare any of the plays to any explicit or implied dramaturgical “norm” from which they might be seen to deviate, deliberately or otherwise. I also offered courses at the fourth year and graduate levels on Indigenous theatre (in the absence of an Indigenous presence on faculty), and on intercultural performance, defining “culture” broadly. And, always, I relied on guests, particularly Indigenous theatre makers—Tara Beagan, Jill Carter, Monique Mojica, Daniel David Moses, and Yvette Nolan were regulars in those classes—to provide students with perspectives that as a white settler Canadian remain unavailable to me.

*Graduate*

One of the great pleasures of moving from Mount Allison to Guelph was the chance to teach and supervise at the Graduate level. The first year of the MA program at Guelph was my first year teaching there, and it was in that program, even more than at the senior undergraduate level, that my teaching and scholarship were most deeply intertwined and mutually supportive. I taught Shakespeare when I was working on Shakespeare, materialist or semiotic theory when that was my scholarly focus, Indigenous theatre or intercultural performance when I was researching them. This, and supervising graduate students with similar interests, is the great joy of teaching in a graduate program.

My first supervisee, in my first year, was Jennifer Preston, whose thesis was, I believe, the first one anywhere on the work of Cree superstar Tomson Highway, the artistic director at that time of Native Earth Performing Arts and the author of the wildly successful *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. It was my first real exposure to Indigenous theatre from a scholarly perspective, and I learned a great deal from the experience, particularly about Indigenous humour, which Jennifer found hilarious. After her graduation Jennifer went on to serve for a time as Native Earth’s administrator and she published the first history of Native Earth’s Weesageechak Begins to Dance play development festival in the New-York-based *TDR (The Drama Review*). My second supervision, in the second year of the program, was Jen Harvie working on Judith Thompson’s plays. Jen went from her MA in Guelph to do a PhD on a Commonwealth Scholarship at the University of Glasgow and has since had a major career at Queen Mary University of London in the UK, where she has been head of Drama. She has published groundbreaking work on theatre and performance, including *Staging the UK*, *Theatre & The City*, and especially *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*, which is widely considered essential reading within and beyond the field. She also co-edited the “Theatre &” series, which has had a global impact, particularly on teaching.

Jen was the first of several graduate students and former graduate students with whom I’ve co-authored chapters and articles. We co-wrote a chapter on iconic Canadian theatre critic Herbert Whittaker, and our “Dialogic Monologue: A Dialogue”—written and delivered *as* a dialogue—won the Richard Plant Essay prize in 1994. The origin story for the essay was a comment made at a conference by Michael Sidnell, astutely observing that monologue in the theatre was, in Soviet-era Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, more dialogic than was dialogue. I ran into another scholar after Michael’s talk who dismissed the originality of the observation, saying that Bahktin himself had said this, which I didn’t think was true. This led to Jen and I systematically reading Bahktin’s complete works and finding no evidence that he had made this observation, at least not directly. The research, however, was hugely instructive, as were my discussions about it with Jen, and it led to our delivering our dialogue on the subject as a conference paper, which we subsequently published in *TRiC.*

I taught a wide range of courses at the graduate level over the years, on Shakespeare, Canadian theatre, theory, Indigenous theatre, and intercultural performance, almost always in consort with research that I was undertaking. And through that teaching I learned a great deal from some extraordinarily talented students, some of them senior artists who had come back to school in mid-career. I always felt uncomfortable accepting practicing professional artists into the program and taking them out of their practice, if only temporarily, and I often asked those who contacted me to inquire about the grad program why they were interested and what they wanted from it. An MA alone is not a terminal degree and is unlikely to lead to a teaching career or to enhance anyone’s income or profile significantly.

The best answer I received to this was from Guillermo Verdecchia, who was also one of the students from whom I’ve learned the most. “I want time to think,” he said—the best reason to undertake graduate studies. Guillermo was already a Governor General’s Award-winning playwright, an actor, director, and former Artistic Director of Cahoots Theatre when he came to Guelph, and he was and remains perhaps the most theoretically and politically sophisticated artist I’ve known. I supervised his MA thesis at Guelph on the plays of Carmen Aguirre, and then sat on the supervisory committee for his PhD dissertation at U of T. He abandoned the latter when it was very nearly completed: he had no need for a PhD, and he’d had, I suspect, enough time by then to think before returning full-time to his artistic practice. But the scholarly world would have benefited from his dissertation and other contributions, and I regret his decision. He continues, however, to be a major figure in Canadian theatre as, among other things, a resident artist at Toronto’s Soulpepper Theatre.

There have been many others—David Van Belle, Brydon MacDonald, Caroline Gillis, d’bi young anitafrika, Majdi Bou-Matar (of whom more below). Actor and director Gil Garret was a particularly intriguing case. His thesis, which I supervised, was in two parts. The first was a written performance studies analysis of his own trip by canoe down the Maitland River in Huron, Perth, and Wellington Counties in Ontario. (Another student, Kimber Sider, had similarly written her thesis about her solo ride by horseback across Canada, but not under my supervision.) The second part of Gil’s thesis project involved both an installation and a performance, the former in the theatre of the Blyth Festival, where he later became artistic director, the latter on the shores of the Maitland River near Blyth. His supervisory committee, consisting of me and designers Pat Flood and Jerrard Smith, drove the 120 kilometers from Guelph one wintry day to the riverbank where we stood downstream of where Gil had situated himself while he floated dye and various biodegradable objects past us between the icy riverbanks, reminding us of the work of British sculptor and artist of nature, Andy Goldsworthy. Gil was smart and delightful to work with; he contributed directly to my growing interest in and understanding of performance studies—or at least to performance as something other than just actors speaking someone else’s words to one another on a stage.

There was another intriguing anomaly among my supervisees, at least in terms of how her career evolved. Julie Byczinski entered the Master’s program in theatre after having completed a BA in Canadian Studies at Guelph. I supervised her thesis on non-dominant languages in the theatre, part of which, an essay on *not* translating in the theatre, was published in a *CTR* issue that I co-edited with Hélène Beauchamp on *Theatre and Translation*. The essay was later reprinted in the Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre series and has been frequently cited ever since. Julie went on, however, neither into a PhD program nor into practical work in the theatre. She became a major arts fundraiser for the Royal Shakespeare Company in the UK, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in the US, before returning to Guelph as Director of Advancement at the Ontario Veterinary College. Arts degrees really *can* prepare you for practically anything.

In 1996, in addition to my appointment at Guelph, I became an adjunct member of faculty at the then Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama, and a few years later a full member of Graduate Faculty at U of T, so that I could do supervisions there. None of these was more memorable than working, not at the Drama Centre but at OISE (Ontario Institute on Studies in Education), with the great teacher and scholar Roger Simon to co-supervise the equally great actor, director, and playwright Honor Ford Smith. Roger was a Professor of Social Justice Education whose work on critical pedagogy and on cultural memory I had been heavily influenced by in my own scholarship and teaching. Honor was co-founder and artistic director of Sistren, a women’s theatre and social action collective in Kingston, Jamaica, and a member of the Groundwork Theatre Company, also in Kingston. Meeting regularly with both of them as Honor completed her dissertation, *Performing Nation: The Pedagogy and Politics of Postcolonial Jamaican Performance*, was a great joy and huge learning experience for me, not only about Jamaican performance or even critical pedagogy or cultural memory, but about the ethics of scholarship, and the collaborative relationship between teacher and student and between scholars and what used to be called their “objects of study.” For Roger, and for Honor, the first question to be asked, in any scholarly, pedagogical, or artistic relationship, was “who benefits?”

My appointment at U of T also led to a strange and enriching, if not entirely successful experiment in collaboration across programs. The curriculum at the Drama Centre included a course on Performance Analysis, but no one, at that time, to teach it. Our program at Guelph at that time had no PhD component, which came later, and no such course. I felt that our students would benefit both from the course itself and from being in a class with PhD students to raise the level of the discourse. So one semester, and only for one semester, I loaded a rented van with MA students from Guelph once a week and drove to Toronto for a three-hour class with students from the Drama Centre in the afternoon and a performance at a theatre in Toronto in the evenings. The weekly performances served as the texts for the following week’s class, each week accompanied by different readings taking different theoretical approaches to the analysis of performance. The mix of academic cultures and levels was indeed enriching, and the drive to and from Toronto, however exhausting, involved lively ongoing discussions that the U of T students missed out on. The drive also, on occasion, was a bit harrowing. Highway 401 between the two cities can be notoriously dangerous in the winter in the dark, at least when the heavy truck traffic tosses rain or snow in great cracks onto the windshield. On one occasion, within the city, I managed to clip someone’s side-view mirror. I was not paid for the extra time or teaching load—more than half the class was from U of T—and the experiment was never repeated.

Supervisions and regular classes are not the only components of graduate teaching. There are also various kinds of professionalization workshops, classes, seminars, and mentorships. I was introduced to one of the best of these at Northwestern University, where I was invited on a number of occasions to give talks on my own work and on such things as collaborative scholarship. On one of these occasions I learned from a Canadian scholar at Northwestern, Tracy Davis, about teaching one of the most useful skills in the profession: asking questions. Tracy offered her students a course on how to ask productive, generative questions in a wide variety of professional contexts. This began with how to formulate large research questions that could drive a thesis or book project (not only what do you want to know, but why do *you* want to know *this*, *here*, and now; or, “why does it matter to me?” This question is crucial to sustaining interest in a research project over the *longue durée*). A good generative research question, of course, leads logically to “where do I go to find the answers; or, how do I construct my archive?”, as well as to “what *kind* of question is this and *how* do I go about answering it; or, what is my theoretical approach?”

But Tracy also helped with smaller questions: how do you formulate short, clear, on-topic, and genuine questions following a conference presentation? (Make them short, clear, on-topic, and genuine!). How do you approach reading a scholarly article or book with questions that help you in your own research? How, in your teaching, do you ask a class generative questions (questions that open up discussion rather than closing it down, avoiding questions that have single correct answers)? How, as a thesis examiner, do you ask questions that invite candidates to expand upon rather than reiterate their arguments, giving them the chance to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge? Tracy’s example also led me to think about the formulation of questions that I could use in my theatrical practice as a dramaturge working on new play development and as a director planning a rehearsal process or working with actors. These questions often and most generatively involve such formulations as “what is it that we want to know?” or, alternatively, “what if…?”.

One of the opportunities presented by teaching at the graduate level is the chance to serve as external examiner for fascinating projects by smart PhD students around the world. I’ve been lucky to have served in that capacity over twenty times since 1990, at Universities across Canada as well as in the US, UK, Ireland, and Australia, on subjects ranging from Shakespeare through neoliberalism and contemporary performance to international theatre festivals and the *kun-borrk/manyardi* song tradition and its role in western Arnhem Land society in what’s now known as Australia. I was external examiner on a dissertation by an American, Karen Fricker, at Trinity College, Dublin, writing about Québecois director Robert Lepage under the supervision of Irish scholar Brian Singleton. Karen had been a reviewer in Ireland and the UK prior to completing her doctorate, and she eventually moved to Brock University in Ontario from where she has served as theatre critic for the *Toronto Star*. Years later her dissertation, turned into a book, won the 2022 Ann Saddlemyer Award from CATR for outstanding book.

Other notable students for whom I’ve served as external examiner have included Elyssa Livergant and Sarah Thomasson, both at Queen Mary University in London, England. Years earlier I had co-written a show with Elyssa for the Rhubarb Festival at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto; a couple of years after Sarah’s defense and after she had landed a job at Victoria University in Wellington in Aotearoa/New Zealand, I invited her to contribute an essay to *The Cambridge Companion to International Theatre Festivals*. All of these defenses, along with others in Edmonton, Fredericton, Toronto, and Vancouver were in-person events, but this, unfortunately, is increasingly rare. The embodied presence of external examiners provides opportunities to make public presentations and have productive conversations with colleagues outside of the exams proper, and it’s a great loss that budget slashing, conference calls, zoom, and Teams have reduced contact between candidates and their examiners to brief virtual windows. This has also reduced the ability of examiners to form mentorship bonds and to write in support of job applications by candidates they haven’t even met in person.

I only supervised one PhD to completion at Guelph, and it was singularly appropriate that that dissertation was on dramaturgy. It was a great pleasure to work with Jessica Riley. She first arrived in my office quite hesitant, appearing, at least, to be lacking in confidence. She had completed an MA degree at York University where she worked with my friend, Shakespearean scholar and theatrical text coach G.B. (Skip) Shand. She enrolled in my graduate course on intercultural performance and contributed, among a great many other things, an astute analysis of the work of French semiotician Patrice Pavis on “theatre at the crossroads of culture.” She usefully honed in on the problematics of Pavis’s “reception-adapters” in his famous hourglass model of intercultural transmission between source and target cultures in an analysis that I have drawn on in my own work ever since.

Jess also collaborated with me on an essay about Aluna Theatre’s signature theatre piece, *Nohayquiensepa*, directed and designed by the remarkable Trevor Schwellnus, perhaps the most effective use of projection in the theatre, and also one of the most powerfully political show I’ve seen. Jess took the lead on what eventually became the best chapter in my 2017 book, *Performing the Intercultural City*. She had grown in assurance over the years into that increasingly rare thing among scholars, a highly skilled archival researcher with a sound, theorized understanding of how and in whose interests archives are constructed and the capacity to use her archival work in the service of serious analysis that is both rigorous and generous. Her work in the L.W. Conolly collection at Guelph, the National Archives in Ottawa, and elsewhere, and her conversion of that work into cogent arguments for her dissertation about the dramaturgical practice of Urjo Kareda and its impact on Canadian Theatre, was a joy. Out of that project she has since edited and published Kareda’s selected correspondence with dozens of Canadian playwrights, is converting her dissertation into a book, and has found tenured employment at the University of Winnipeg, the home department of another of Canada’s great dramaturges, Per Brask. And over the course of her PhD I was able to collaborate with her as co-author twice.

I’ve been lucky throughout my career to have the opportunity to design my own courses, to teach and supervise in areas identical with, or very close to, the areas in which I was carrying out my own research or artistic practice. And I’ve consistently had the chance to learn from my best students—especially graduate students—in ways that have directly influenced my theatrical practice and, of course, the development of my scholarship, to which I’ll turn next.

**Scholarship**

I was promoted to Full Professor—pronounced “full”—in 1992, in the middle of my tenure as chair of the department. I was fifteen years out from my PhD, and still hadn’t published my first authored book. I had over thirty articles and chapters to my name and had done some editing, but without my record as a practitioner would probably not have been promoted. I certainly wouldn’t these days. I had external letters of support for my promotion from two senior scholars and one artistic director. The artistic director praised my courage in doing professional theatre when I “didn’t have to,” and one of the scholars recommended promotion because I hadn’t caught “the French disease.” This meant, of course, that he didn’t know that I had in the previous several years become interested in—and had published on—cultural theory.

In fact, my interest in theory, in an unfocused way, extended back to my graduate student days and my dalliances with reader (and audience) response theory and with the structuralism of Northrop Frye. I had also been inspired by Linda Hutcheon and others to publish on “Canadian Historiographic Metadrama,” and by Johan Huizinga to publish an essay based on play theory when I was at Mount Allison. But my outing as an aspiring theorist coincided with two key things: my arrival in Guelph, and my acquisition of a computer. The former brought me into much closer contact with colleagues working in Canadian theatre and working theoretically. The latter replaced writing longhand, cutting (with scissors) and taping (rather than pasting), and revising as I typed final versions of work that tended to take a narrative form, because that’s what I had learned to do when writing cursively. Working on a computer, for me, introduced a kind of estrangement that lends itself to theorizing, even, initially, to asking what it *means* to write in that way.

My early serious engagement with what became a major theoretical approach for me came through the work of Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, particularly their co-edited volume, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1994) and Sinfield’s *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992). My publications on pedagogy in the 1990s were directly influenced by Sinfield’s delightfully titled essay, “Give an Account of Shakespeare and Education, Showing Why You Think They Are Effective and What You Have Appreciated About Them. Support Your Comments with Precise References.” But much of my work in the 1990s explored the politics, or what I called (following Fredric Jameson) “the political unconscious,” of either dramatic form and structure, or of the material conditions through which meaning is produced.

The former is perhaps best represented by two essays I wrote that were foundational for me: “The Dramaturgy of the Perverse,” published in *Theatre Research International* in1992 about versions and productive perversions of dramatic form; and “The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning: Contemporary Canadian Dramaturgies. Part I: The Dramaturgical Inheritance,” published in *Australasian Drama Studies* in 1996. These and other essays from the period, including my collaborations with Jen Harvie on Bahktin, with another distinguished graduate student, Ted Little, on the community play in Canada, and an essay on women’s dramaturgy at Mulgrave Road, finally appeared, in varying degrees of revision, in my first authored book and my first publication as Ric, rather than Richard Paul, Knowles. This was *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning: Contemporary Canadian Dramaturgies*, in 1999. I was 49 years old.

*The Theatre of Form* was, however, more than a collection of previously published work. Its examination of form as the political unconscious of a dramatic work, whatever the work’s or playwright’s conscious intention, and the ways in which dramaturgical form and structure produce rather than merely reflect social formations, was organized in three parts around space- and time-based dramaturgies, its own structure being central to its argument. The first examined the dramaturgical inheritance—forms deriving from naturalism and from high modernist formalism, and their structural reliance on time and space respectively as strategies of containment. These were treated along with structures that purposefully “pervert” those forms. The second moved “beyond naturalism” to look at dramaturgies rooted in the temporal that involve tactics of multiplication, focusing on temporal, historical, and processual disruption. And the third moved “beyond modernism” to deal with dramaturgical strategies grounded in space-based disruptions of high modernist enclosures. As Leonard Cohen observed in a line I used as an epigraph, such disruptions—“cracks,”—are “how the light gets in.” An Epilogue explored experiments in structuring “space/time” that concluded the book by moving “toward a quantum dramaturgy,” and involved widespread reading in contemporary theoretical physics that occupied (and muddled) my mind for quite a while.

The post-publication history of *The Theatre of Form* was agonizing. The first glitch that I was aware of was the inevitable typo, in spite of multiple proof readings—the one that’s found, it seems, in almost every book the moment it arrives in its final form in the mail. But the way I found it in *The Theatre of Form* was particularly embarrassing. I was sitting in my office when a uniquely brilliant undergraduate student arrived at my door—Michael McKinnie, who has since developed a notable career as a teacher, scholar, and administrator at Queen Mary University of London, England and has published major interdisciplinary books and articles on theatre and economics. I had cited an undergraduate essay of his in my book and was delighted to show him a copy. Searching out the citation in the index, he laughed, and pointed out that not only was his name misspelled, but the typo had occurred in his *first* name, “Micheal.”

Typos, however, proved to be the least of my problems. Almost immediately upon publication, a strike at the warehouse that distributed the book led to a lengthy lock-down that severely restricted its circulation, and although it was favourably reviewed—and indeed received the Ann Saddlemyer book prize from CATR—it never did get the circulation I’d hoped, particularly for a trade paperback. Adding insult to injury, moreover, the book was subjected to a different kind of attention. The year after its publication by ECW Press, the press’s editor, Robert Lecker, wrote an article in *Studies in Canadian Literature* on scholarly publishing in which he used my book as his key case study. The article was entitled “Would You Publish This Book?” The question was rhetorical, and in spite of having received a publication grant from the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, my book was published at a financial loss for the press. It was the last scholarly book that they published, though in many ways I think it was one of my best.

The second major focus of my scholarship in the 1990s had to do with the related question of the material conditions through which meaning is produced in theatre. Foundational in this regard were two essays that I wrote on Toronto theatre, “Reading Material: Transfers, Remounts, and the Production of Meaning in Contemporary Toronto Drama and Theatre,” published in *Essays on Canadian Writing* in 1994, about how transfers and remounts in different spaces and times can alter the meaning of shows using the same cast, design, blocking, and all other creative choices; and “Towards a Materialist Performance Analysis: The Case of Tarragon Theatre,” published in *The Performance Text*, a collection edited by Domenico Pietropaolo in 1999. I engaged in similar materialist work on Ontario’s Stratford Festival, also in two essays, “Shakespeare, 1993 and the Discourses of the Stratford Festival, Ontario,” published in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, and “From Nationalist to Multinational: The Stratford Festival, Free Trade, and the Discourses of Intercultural Tourism,” published in *Theatre Journal* in 1995. I did related work on voice training in an essay on “Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology: Interrogating the Natural Voice,” published in *Shakespeare, Theory, Performance*, edited by James C. Bulman in 1996, about how dominant strands of voice training silently serve to transmit dominant culture values.

These three essays provoked a certain amount of hostility to my approach, as had some of my publications on materialist pedagogy. Some of that hostility emerged from researchers who were invested in an ideal of scholarly objectivity and resistant to the politicization of scholarship. But much of it also came from scholars and artists who understandably wished to see their work as the unmediated product of their intentions, and the meaning of their work as both immanent and immutable. The piece that stirred the most controversy—and the most readership at the time—was the essay on voice training. I examined, not the actual practices, but the contextualizing rhetoric of the published texts of six major books by the leading voice coaches and teachers Cicely Berry, Patsy Rodenburg, and Kristin Linklater, books that were and still are used extensively all over the English-speaking world to teach how to access what Linklater called “the natural voice.”

I argued, less bluntly and with more evidence than I do here, that each of these books, in different ways and to different degrees, is deeply ideologically coded, promoting a universalist and implicitly colonialist vision in which, if you look deeply enough into your primitive, essentially animal self you find “Shakespeare” as the universal model of humanity. The texts privilege, always, and sometimes absurdly, the “natural” over the supposedly decadent and “civilized,” and emotion over judgement, to the extent that “pure” vowels from the deep centre—howls of pain or pleasure—are validated while denigrating the corrupt and suspect articulations of consonants, which, in producing meaning, interrupt the true flow of emotion, as of breath. And in privileging Shakespeare over all else as the source and arbiter of universal culture—what we find when “we” look deeply inside ourselves (supposedly wherever “we” are in the world)—they are fundamentally ethnocentric. In the case of Kristin Linklater, indeed, they are also classist: she concludes her *Freeing the Natural Voice* with the argument that William Shakespeare’s plays could not have been written by the mere undereducated son of a rural glover, but must have been penned by the aristocratic Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, who presumably had more access to an understanding of universal humanity. In my experience it is not the dominant classes that best understand humanity.

Shortly after my essay appeared I was invited to present at a conference hosted by graduate students in theatre at Columbia University in Manhattan. The students were frustrated by what they felt was a lack of exposure to theory in their education and training, and since one of the voice teachers with whom I had engaged in my essay and for whose books I had reserved my most serious critique taught there, they felt it would be interesting to pit us against each other on a panel chaired by the notable feminist theatre studies scholar, Elin Diamond. The experience was harrowing, but instructive. Kristen Linklater was not accustomed to being questioned; rather, like many voice teachers and coaches, she was used to being treated as a kind of unquestionable “guru.”

To be fair, first, her professional position of voice “coach” has often been gendered female, undercompensated, and under-credited in the masculinist world of Shakespearean theatrical production. Voice coaching is seen as a service role, without the masculinist authority of a playwright or director, even though it is often the source of much of the nuance in a good performance. She also, rightly, saw herself as a liberator, especially for women, whose voices have, in theatre and the world, long been constrained and silenced. And, also to be fair, I participated, as part of the conference, in a workshop that she ran in which we were introduced to her method in practice, and I was confirmed in my understanding that, in common theatrical parlance, her technique “works”: in the studio it gets results, producing a new vocal depth, resonance, and flexibility in actors not previously so equipped. It was also, however, deeply and problematically ideologically coded, and in my view politically regressive, particularly in its print form.

My explorations of this materialist approach to performance analysis led me to propose and chair a seminar at the annual meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) on “Reading the Material Theatre,” minutes prior to which I was approached by senior theatre historian and theorist Tracy C. Davis in the hallway, who asked me if I wanted to collect the seminar papers into an edited volume for her Theatre and Performance Theory series with Cambridge University Press. I said no. Apart from one good paper on the proscenium arch, the seminar papers hadn’t really amounted to much. But I suggested to Tracy that I might be interested in contributing an authored book to the series, if she was interested. She was, and this led to my applying for and receiving my first grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC). I had first talked with Montreal-based theatre scholar and friend Hélène Beauchamp about doing a joint project on performance spaces across Canada, in which she would research those theatres and spaces operating in French, and I would look at the English-language venues. Indeed, I did an extended trip across the country, relying on the help and hospitality of members of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research—most notably Louise Forsyth in Saskatoon who put me up there in her own home, Moira Day in Edmonton who provided a long and detailed tour, and Malcolm Black and Jerry Wasserman in Vancouver—and visiting as many sites of rehearsal and performance as I could. As promising as this seemed at first, we ended up abandoning the project in that form as too unstable and unwieldy.

Nevertheless, my thinking around that research, my organization of the ASTR seminar, and some of those materialist late-1990s articles and chapters eventually led to the fulfillment of my promise to Tracy and the publication of my second book in 2004, in which, indeed, as in my first, several of my earlier essays appeared in varyingly degrees of modification and revision. *Reading the Material Theatre*, however, is less well known for those essays and others—on the Wooster Group, international festivals, Tarragon Theatre, and the English Shakespeare Company, which served as case studies—than for its introduction and first two chapters, which schematized and demonstrated the application of a theoretical approach moving “towards a materialist semiotics.”

I proposed a model in which meaning is produced in the theatre through the mutually constitutive poles of a triangle in which each pole—performance text (script, *mise en scène*, design, the work of actors, etc), conditions of production (training, rehearsal processes, working conditions, backstage conditions, moment of production, etc), and conditions of reception (publicity discourse, front of house, lobby and auditorium, location, prices, moment of reception, etc)—is constituted by multiple ideologically coded systems working relationally, in consort or in tension with one another. This *schema* was used as the methodological/theoretical starting point, not always in very sophisticated ways, for a myriad of PhD dissertations all over the world, never more so than at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where Tracy Davis teaches. It remains, for better or worse—it can sometimes be used as a very blunt instrument—what I’m best known for, especially outside of Canada.

In the same year as *Reading the Material Theatre* appeared, Marc Maufort, of the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, who had earlier brought me to Brussels for talks, commissioned and published my third book, *Shakespeare and Canada: Essays on Production, Translation, and Adaptation* in his “Dramaturgies” series with P.I.E. Peter Lang, Brussels, the board of which series he later invited me to join. *Shakespeare and Canada* gathers together previously published essays on Shakespeare at Stratford, in Montreal, and in adaptations, framed by a new introduction and conclusion, and positions the two terms of its title as both shifting and mutually constitutive, contrasting its articulation to the more common “Shakespeare *in* Canada,” the title of a collection edited by Diana Brydon and Irena Makaryk to which I had contributed an essay on three Canadian adaptations of *Othello*. My book’s framing argument is that productions of Shakespeare *in* Canada (including translations and adaptations) always inevitably involve producing, reproducing, or transforming both “Shakespeare” *and* “Canada” through acts of translation across cultures and centuries. The same argument was the underlying principle of my 2009 anthology of plays, *The Shakespeare’s Mine: Adapting Shakespeare in Anglophone Canada* published by PCP, where the Introduction concerns itself, not simply with adapting Shakespeare, but with adapting *to* Shakespeare—since he doesn’t seem to be going anywhere anytime soon.

*Scholarly Associations*

The role of scholarly associations in the development of scholarship is often under-recognized. For many it’s about making connections—networking—and for others it’s about the chance to become known by presenting witty and sophisticated papers to an admiring world of editors and prospective employers at annual conferences. For me it was and is, in part, about seeing and talking with people I like and admire but don’t (have to) live or work with, and in part about hearing the latest scholarship in its formative stages, before it’s been published and made available for reading in its final form—scholarship that helps to expand your awareness of approaches and methods as well as content beyond your own more focused research. As I’ve said, I’d joined my first scholarly associations, the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) and the (then) the Association for Canadian Theatre History (ACTH), and attended my first conferences, while I was still at Mount Allison. But it was after I came to Guelph that they began to play a more significant role in my social and scholarly life. The associations most central to my work included the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in the US (ATHE), the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), and what remained and remains my “home” association, now called the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR).

I was introduced to ATHE by my colleagues at Guelph, Ann Wilson and Harry Lane, at a time when that organization’s working groups on “Theory” and “Women and Theatre” seemed daily to be breaking new ground in the discipline. I remember being excited and deeply influenced hearing papers by the likes of Philip Auslander, Herbert Blau, Sue-Ellen Case, Elin Diamond, Jill Dolan, Peggy Phelan, Janelle Reinelt, Joseph Roach, and others, and what’s more having the opportunity to actually meet and talk with their authors, sometimes even presenting with them on panels, sometimes becoming conference friends. ATHE, however, was a huge and unwieldy organization that embraced all forms of theatre practice and studies, but, structured as it was around focus groups, it tended to be multi- rather than interdisciplinary. In spite of strategic plenaries it rarely managed to bring folks together across their differences. And perhaps because of its broad interest in theatrical practice (that was often not at a professional level and sometimes came across as self-indulgent), research and scholarship were often underrepresented on the organization’s executive and the value of its conferences, for me, declined over the years as I tired of hearing papers that should have been titled “Great Things I Have Done with my Students.”

ASTR, on the other hand, initially dominated by theatre historians and a kind of old-boy focus on dominant-culture traditions, became increasingly interesting to me over the years as its leadership evolved to feature women, LGBTQ2S+, and BIPOC people in key positions. Its conferences, too, were organized to feature plenary papers every morning, drawn from a large pool of anonymously vetted proposals, followed by more focused afternoon working groups. This meant that all attendees heard the same outstanding and often innovative papers daily, from both emerging and veteran scholars, and discussions in hotel bars and hallways bristled with brilliant examples drawn from work we had just heard. And the afternoon working groups served us all as venues for sharing and developing as yet not fully formed ideas or putting together edited collections.

I served both organizations in various capacities on program and conference committees, and simultaneously as Vice President (ATHE from 2006-08, ASTR from 2006-09), in which capacity at ATHE my purview was research and scholarship, including the oversight of the operations of its publications, *Theatre Topics* and *Theatre Journal*. At ASTR, in addition to consulting with and supporting the President, I was in charge of choosing conference themes and locations. One notable year, in consultation with the conference committee, I chose San Juan, Puerto Rico as a particularly attractive venue with an interesting colonial history. The committee was almost immediately overrun by questions from an overwhelmingly and remarkably provincial American membership about whether passports were needed to travel to Puerto Rico, what currency was in use there, and what safety concerns might need to be taken into account. Puerto Rico, apparently *not* needless to say, is an unincorporated territory—a colony—of the U.S. It astonished me how many well-educated U.S. citizens didn’t seem to be aware of that. Another year I chose Montreal, where the currency and the language *were* different, but the registration desk and book display would not accept Canadian cash, and very few people spoke French.

I was VP of ASTR during the productive and pro-active presidency of the great Tracy Davis who, in spite of being younger than me, has served throughout my career as a mentor. I learned much from her along the way about, among other things (especially graduate teaching and supervision), how to manage people and how to run a meeting. Tracy, in her inimitable way, would open each two-day mid-year meeting of ASTR’s executive with the announcement that there would be no bathroom breaks. We were encouraged to absent ourselves as needed, but the inevitable circumstance of ten-minute breaks lasting half an hour or more was avoided and the meetings were much more efficient and productive than they might otherwise have been.

I met and became friendly with many scholars whom I admire and like at both ATHE and ASTR—notably the likes of Leo Cabranes-Grant, Marla Carlson, Elin Diamond, Jill Dolan, Esther Kim Lee, Daphne Lei, Kim Marra, Nick Ridout, Ramon Rivera-Servera, Patricia Ybarra, Harvey Young, and many others. And I have been honoured to receive formal recognition for my work from both associations. But both ATHE and ASTR are based in the US, and while their purview is world theatre, neither has been notably interested in Canadian work. As in large part a Canadianist my primary loyalty has been to CATR, where I have too many friends to mention (you know who you are), where I presented my first plenary address, and where I have enjoyed and appreciated the association’s commitment to maintaining a mutually supportive rather than competitive atmosphere, particularly for emerging scholars.

The history of CATR, of course, has had its rocky moments, for me and for others. In its early days as ACTH (Association for Canadian Theatre History), its conferences were overwhelmingly dominated by theatre-historical papers reporting undertheorized empiricist research, often trying to establish “firsts” (first play performed in Canada, first Canadian play, first play by a woman, and so on), often dominated by names and dates, and often nationalist in tone. Occasionally these papers were somewhat tedious, and they often exceeded their time limits. I remember one senior presenter in Montreal droning on a good ten minutes beyond his 20-minute limit (it seemed longer still), avoiding eye contact with his session chair by staring resolutely down at the page in front of him, while his fellow panelists—younger and female—anxiously awaited their foreshortened turn at the podium. The next year, session chair Paula Sperdakos began by addressing her plenary panel: “these are the cow bells of my people,” she said, threatening to ring them continuously until anyone exceeding their limit ceased or deceased.

Not long after that, a proposal was made in 1991 to change the organization’s title from ACTH to ACTR, “Research” replacing “History” and welcoming different kinds of work and analysis. The proposal was controversial among some of the old guard of theatre historians and caused a temporary rift, but the motion passed, and its passing led eventually to what some of us remember as “the theory wars.” I recall giving a paper that was grounded in materialist feminist theory but was, I thought, very clear and straightforward, attempting to avoid being received, in the criticism of the day, as jargon. A senior colleague—an excellent researcher who had been with the association from the beginning and laid much of the historical groundwork for all of us—approached me after the session with a pained expression, clearly feeling excluded from the discourse, and said, “I can’t understand what you’re saying.” Sadly, he left the profession not long afterwards, I hope not for that reason.

In 2007 a second proposal, attempting to redress some of the more strident nationalism that was current at the Association’s founding in 1976 and opening the association up to scholars in Canada who work on other things, was also divisive. This resulted in another change to the organization’s name, this time from ACTR to its current CATR, indicating the geographical home of the association in Canada rather than the subject of the research its members undertook, while still maintaining a primary focus on research about performance taking place in the land now called Canada. I had sympathy for both sides of this debate. I’d had the experience at organizations based outside Canada of presenting at or attending sessions on Canadian topics where the panel was bigger than the audience, and I valued the Canadian association’s privileging of what I felt to be important work that wasn’t of much interest elsewhere. On the other hand, my Canadian nationalist days were behind me, too many Canadianist colleagues had seemed to be inappropriately and narrowly focused on “Cancon” at the cost of even contextualizing their work more broadly, much less more theoretically, and I wanted to welcome work that exceeded or crossed national boundaries as well as hearing the perspectives of scholars in Canada on work from elsewhere. Needless to say, the change was approved by the association, and it has led to an expanded membership, particularly among younger scholars who are less likely to identify exclusively as Canadianists. But there were, literally, some tears shed at the time by people who were and are my friends, and some resistance to fully welcoming folks working on non-Canadian topics lingers, particularly as the association reconsiders its book, essay, and editing prizes.

But the history of the association now known as CATR is for the most part that of a friendly, supportive, and necessary organization that has embraced my work and that of hundreds of others for fifty years now under the often-inspired leadership of its founders, Ann Saddlemyer and Richard Plant, and of subsequent presidents including Ches Skinner, Shelley Scott, Alan Filewod, Glen Nichols, Ann Nothof, Stephen Johnson, Marlis Schweitzer, Erin Hurley, Yana Meerzon, Robin Whittaker and others. Its many principles and traditions have included a notable openness to the work of graduate students and other junior scholars, to scholars from outside of Canada, and to work in such often-under-appreciated things as amateur theatre, applied theatre, theatre for young audiences, and pedagogy.

Early in its history scrupulous researchers such as Ed Mulally, Patrick O’Neill, Denis Salter, Mary Elizabeth Smith, Anton Wagner and others laid the historical groundwork, demonstrating that theatre in the land now called Canada long predates the heralded alternative theatre movement of the 1960s and 70s. Anton Wagner published a series of anthologies of “Canada’s Lost Plays,” while others, such as Sister Geraldine Anthony, Cynthia Zimmerman, and Robert Wallace provided a different kind of primary material, publishing interviews with living Canadian playwrights. Later such major figures as Susan Bennett, Alan Filewod, Sherill Grace, Rob Nunn, and (again) Robert Wallace brought major feminist, post-colonial, theoretical, and queer voices to the table. Later still the likes of Laura Levin, Marlis Schweitzer, Kim Solga, Roberta Barker, Jenn Stephenson and others broadened the association’s scope into the capacious realm of performance studies.

The Association was perhaps slow to begin building representation among its membership of marginalized communities, but this has improved in recent years with the participation of scholars such as Taiwo Afolabi and Giorelli Diokno on its committees, while Virginie Magnat, Jenn Cole, especially the indefatigable Jill Carter and others introduced Indigenous work and epistemology into the mix. Also less successful throughout its history have been its attempts to pay equal attention to French and English-language theatre, in spite of heroic efforts by Héléne Beauchamp, Len Doucette, Jean-Cléo Godin, Jean-Marc Larrue, Patrick Leroux, Nicole Nolette, and others.

Conferences were, of course, places where information was shared, but they were also welcoming sites for the consolidation of community and for the celebration—through awards, scholarships, and honorary memberships—of the achievements of theatre artists and those who have written about them. I delivered my first plenary paper at CATR’s meetings one year in Montreal, the first line of which elicited unexpected laughter for an observation that I didn’t realize was funny: that Guysborough County, Nova Scotia (I showed a slide of the rural Mulgrave Road) was an unlikely place to find professional theatre. I later sat on the board and various committees of the association on several occasions, rising once to the level of Vice President.

I remember gathering in a bar during our meetings in St. John’s, Newfoundland watching the results of a federal election and cheering with my colleagues as one of “us,” playwright Wendy Lill, was elected NDP Member of Parliament for Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. I remember the annual banquets in various hotels, restaurants, banquet halls, and museums across the country, banquets that were generally followed by a swarm of scholars heading off to a local bar—often organized and led in recent years by the gregarious Peter Kuling, now at Guelph—where post-prandial libations flowed freely. One of my favourites among these bars was in the Byward Market in Ottawa, where on one glorious occasion we sampled an outstanding selection of aged single malt whiskies while Peter and I talked about theatre, sports, and his upcoming issue of *CTR* on their intersection. For one now infamous banquet we were bused from our conference site to a beautiful Indigenous reserve located on a rolling prairie landscape just outside of Saskatoon, where we walked the grounds before dinner under an expansive prairie sky. Bellying up to the table, however, we learned that the reserve was alcohol free. The bus back to town, by a unanimous vote of the ridership, stopped and disgorged forty or fifty thirsty scholars who descended *en masse* upon the unsuspecting waitstaff of a roadside establishment. A Good Time was ultimately had by all.

*Editing*

An extraordinary amount of my scholarly time in the last half of my career has been dedicated to editing, a role that’s not dissimilar, in the academic world, to my other major role in the same period in the professional theatre: dramaturgy. Both involve working, not as primary investigator, creator, or theorist, but as a support person, peculiarly appropriate to working, as I have since my early fifties, with hitherto marginalized communities.I’ve already mentioned my first edited book, *Theatre in Atlantic Canada*, and my first journal issue, *Atlantic Alternatives*, both completed while I was at Mount Allison, and my serving as external editor for PUC publications in 1989. But it was later that my career as an editor began in earnest, and that career was without a doubt made possible by my relocation to Guelph, when I was immediately appointed Managing Editor of both *TRiC* and *Essays in Theatre*, the former published out of U of T, the latter out of Guelph. A few years later I served as a guest editor of a special issue of *CTR* on “Interrogating Theatrical Practice,” in 1996 I joined that publication’s editorial team as co-editor (with Alan Filewod, Harry Lane, and Ann Wilson), and in 2004 I took over as editor for another six years, publishing four issues each year.

Also in 1996, because of my adjunct appointment at U of T, I was invited to serve as editor of *Modern Drama,* a major and well-funded quarterly journal that had nevertheless fallen behind in its publication schedule and whose reputation had declined. I invited Joanne Tompkins and W.B. Worthen to work with me as co-editors to publish twenty-seven issues over the next six years, bringing it up to date both in its publication schedule and its scholarly approach. And in 2011 I was invited by then editor Penny Farfan to join her as co-editor of the prestigious quarterly *Theatre Journal*, taking over as editor in 2013 with Joanne Tompkins, again, as co-editor, perhaps the best in the field. Indeed, I had only agreed to let my name stand as editor after I had been assured by Joanne that she was interested in joining and succeeding me. She was, always, a great pleasure to work with and I learned a great deal from her patience, her attention to detail, and her supportive, one-on-one work with junior scholars. Editing can also be very much like good teaching. Meanwhile, I guest edited special issues of *TRiC*, and, as I’ve discussed earlier, founded two book series with Playwrights Canada Press as general editor, “Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre” and “New Essays on Canadian Theatre.” All in all I edited, guest edited, or coedited over fifty journal issues during my years at Guelph, along with seven collections of essays and five play anthologies.

Apart from teaching, there’s no better way to learn than by editing, and in particular co-editing. Not all of what I learned, of course, was welcome. As an editor, similar to my experience being a Dean, you learn things about your colleagues that you don’t want to know: their respect for deadlines, their sometimes creative relationship with citational accuracy, their sense of personal exceptionalism around word limits, their not infrequent reluctance to accepting editorial advice—even, sometimes, their control of tone, particularly, if not surprisingly, in emails. But these sometime annoyances are far outweighed by the positives, and for me most of these have had to do with the fact that editing is, above and beyond anything else, a process of collaboration—among authors, editors, anonymous referees, readers, and others. It’s a process of learning and sharing.

Editing is often framed as a thankless task, and to the extent that this is true, it’s largely because, on the one hand, little credit is given to it by the tenure and promotion committees of universities, where it’s often seen as a secondary role, and where collaboration in any form is undervalued. On the other hand, of course, it can be thankless from the point of view of the authors of submissions that have been rejected, however helpful, diplomatic, or well-intended the letters of rejection may have been. One of my distinguished predecessors as editor of *Theatre Journal* warned me that she’d felt the need, at conferences, to hide her name tag from angry authors who had felt themselves rebuffed. I never went that far, and in fact was surprised at how often recipients of letters of rejection I’d sent received them with considerable gratitude because of the advice I’d provided or passed along from readers. Indeed, most people who submit to scholarly journals welcome, and are eager to engage with, any feedback they can get. Scholars, for the most part, are almost pathetically grateful to have anyone read and take our work seriously, and we’re also, for the most part, willing to provide feedback to others, in a publishing economy that relies on the largely unacknowledged and unrecompensed kindness, or when that fails at least the generosity, of strangers (that is, anonymous readers).

At *CTR* the rewards for editing were many. All issues of *CTR* are special topic issues, and the editor gets to choose the topics, which results in both selfish pleasures and a chance to provide some leadership in the field. *CTR* also offers opportunities to learn from invited co-editors, and I had the pleasure during my tenure of working, among others, with my friends Skip Shand (on theatrical process and on tours, remounts, and co-productions), Harry Lane (on solo performance, and on the meaning of Canadianness in the journal’s title), and Hélène Beauchamp (on translation). I also got to co-edit issues with the likes of iconic Canadian playwright Djanet Sears on African Canadian playwrights, and with T.L Cowan on spoken word. I learned a great deal from each of these experiences, both about the topics of the issues and about my co-editors’ approaches to the collaborations: Skip and Harry’s meticulously detailed editing of text, Hélène’s understandings of cross-cultural as opposed to literal translation and of course her connections in and knowledge of theatre in Québec, Djanet’s generosity and community awareness, T.L.’s sense of the value of solidarity, and so on.

At *Modern Drama* and *Theatre Journal* I learned similar things from my co-editors, especially Joanne Tompkins, whose practice of editing-as-mentoring is legendary. And I learned the value, to graduate students, of working as editorial assistants on the journals, and the value to editors of the painstaking work of such assistants. Among my very best collaborative experiences with editorial assistants was working with the likes of Kim Solga (on *Modern Drama*) and Jessica Riley (on *Theatre Journal*). Such work—observing and participating in the editorial process, fact-checking, proofreading, and attending to detail—is the best training possible for graduate students when they come to submit their own work for publication. They quickly get to know how to prepare essays for submission, and how to expect and respond generatively to what happens next. And they learn, of course, that the process doesn’t complete itself overnight.

For the editor, working on journals has the added benefits of being exposed to the most up-to-date work in the field even before it’s published, of being able through special topics issues to contribute to shaping the field, and of enriching one’s own research through encounters with hitherto unfamiliar perspectives, contexts, and theoretical approaches. When I first took over as editor of *Modern Drama*, a journal which, benefiting from many years of the sale of reprinting rights, was wealthy, I determined to host a conference, “modern : drama (defining the field).” I invited scholars whom I and my co-editors felt were doing the most exciting work to address and interrogate the two terms of the journal’s title and the ways in which they spoke to one another. Neither “modern” nor “drama,” I felt, necessarily meant what they did when the journal was founded. The conference featured the likes of Sue-Ellen Case, Elin Diamond, Harry Elam Jr., Shannon Jackson, Loren Kruger, Stanton Garner Jr., David Savran, Michael Sidnell and others, and was perhaps the most exciting such event I’ve attended, paper after paper providing brilliant insights, but no opportunities for nodding off. (It was an intense couple of days.)

That conference not only set the direction of the journal for the six years of my editorship but resulted in two special issues and a book of conference proceedings published by University of Toronto Press with a stunning cover illustration by my colleague at Guelph, the distinguished photographer and performance artist Suzy Lake. And Elin Diamond’s contribution to the conference and the volume, “Modern Drama/Modernity’s Drama,” won the outstanding essay prize from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. At *Theatre Journal* I produced special issues on *Theatre and Material Culture*, *Interspecies Performance*, *Spectatorship*, and, crucially—it was the opportunity to do this issue that led to my accepting the role of editor in the first place—*TransIndigenous Performance*. Each of these topics was, I felt, crucial to the development of the field, and not incidentally (I treated interspecies performance as an extension of interculturalism) each was an area of focus for my own research, writing, and theatrical practice.

Indeed, throughout my editing career I used the opportunity to edit books and special journal issues that aligned with and supported my own research and teaching. My writing on and teaching about theatrical interculturalism were supported, for example, by my editing of special issues of *CTR, Theatre Journal*, and *Theatre Research in Canada* on theatrical interculturalism, as well as co-edited books in the Critical Perspective Series on the topic. My subsequent research on international theatre festivals began with editing a special double issue of *Theatre Research in Canada* on *Festivals* as well as *The Cambridge Companion to International Theatre Festivals*, and I drew directly on both when I wrote my 2022 book on *International Theatre Festivals and 21st-Century Interculturalism*. And my work on Indigenous theatre, of course, was inextricably connected with my editorial collaborations with Monique Mojica and Yvette Nolan, as well as with my collaborations with each of them as a dramaturge, of which more below. These projects involved extraordinarily complex and productive collaboration across significant social, cultural, gender, and other differences from which, as always, I learned and benefited enormously both in the moment and in all of my subsequent work. From Monique and Yvette, in particular, I learned the value of understanding existence as a complex of relationships, necessarily reciprocal, with the human and non-human world, of understanding all the world as my relations.

*Cultural Studies*

During this same period, I was a founding member, with Christine Bold (English) and Belinda Leach (Anthropology), of the Centre for Cultural Studies at Guelph, an interdisciplinary research centre that was very much aligned in its methods, approaches, and goals with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the UK, founded in 1964 by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. Hall’s essay, “Encoding/Decoding,” had been key to the formulation of my materialist semiotic triangle in my 2004 book *Reading the Material Theatre*. One of the achievements of the Centre at Guelph was to successfully nominate Hall for an honorary doctorate but, sadly, he was too ill by then to come and accept it.

As we understood it, Cultural Studies was an explicitly political interdisciplinary field that took as its focus the study of the everyday lives of ordinary people, including Black, Indigenous, and ethnic minority people, youth and youth subcultures, queer folk, and women. It brought “low” culture into the realm of serious scholarship and interrogated the ideological underpinnings of social and institutional practices and structures from a social justice perspective. It made no pretense to political neutrality and rejected the concept of scholarly “objectivity.” The work of the Centre at Guelph began with a speaker’s series and panels that attempted to suss out what aspects of the field were of interest to scholars at Guelph, and from that to form focused working groups. The speaker’s series was a major success, featuring such scholars as Sandra Richards (on slave castles in coastal Ghana), Roger Simon (on critical pedagogy and memory studies), Dorothy Smith (on institutional ethnography), and Rinaldo Walcott (on Black literary studies in Canada). We also hosted, as a visiting scholar, Maureen McNeil of the CCCS at Birmingham, whose work on the culture of science was groundbreaking. Her residency at Guelph announced to the university at large the breadth of our interests and a welcome to disciplines outside of the humanities and social sciences.

My own contribution to the speaker’s series emerged from an invitation from Ann Wilson to contribute to a special 1995 issue of *Modern Drama* on postcolonialism. I wrote a performance studies essay on hockey commentator Don Cherry’s intermission show, “Coach’s Corner” entitled “Post-, Grapes, Nuts and Flakes: Coach’s Corner as Postcolonial Performance.” Cherry, nicknamed “Grapes” (as in “sour grapes”), was a controversial figure known for his disdain for players from Quebec and Europe, who was often accused of racism and homophobia and of promoting violence in the sport. But he was popular with various nationalist nuts and flakes across the country. My talk was reported in various media outlets, and ultimately led to my debating Cherry on the Toronto radio station CFRB, a debate which I’m pretty sure I lost resoundingly. I made the mistake of likening Cherry, sitting virtually on the knees of his sidekick and interlocutor Ron MacLean and wearing outrageously loud suits, high-collared shirts, and colourful ties, to a ventriloquist’s dummy. This didn’t go over well. I learned much from this experience about how *not* to comport myself in the popular right-wing media—and perhaps not to agree to take part in events like that in the future.

The Centre eventually formed two main working groups, one on cultural memory and one on pedagogy, distilling the main interests of those who turned out for the talks. The work of the cultural memory group was at once arduous and extremely rewarding. Collaborative scholarship, especially across significant differences in gender, sexuality, race, and discipline among the collaborators, is always both things. And it takes time. The cultural memory working group wanted to develop a project that was locally based and focused on gender. It decided, early on, to ground its investigations in a local park dedicated on December 6th, 1993—the anniversary of the Montreal massacre of fourteen women at L’École polytechnique (Engineering) school because they were presumed to be feminist—to the memory of a local woman. Marianne Goulden had been a client, volunteer, and employee of Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis. She was murdered by her male partner in 1992. I was the performance studies person on two projects that emerged from this. The first, with Christine Bold, an historian of popular culture, and Belinda Leach, an anthropologist specializing in culture, class, and gender, attempted to theorize and activate feminist cultural countermemory, and it issued in publications in literary, anthropological, and other journals, notably including a special issue of *Signs* where we proudly shared space with the likes of Jill Bennett, Hélène Cixous, Susan Gubar, Marita Sturken, Diana Taylor, and others.

The second project was less theoretical and more directly community engaged. It involved five researchers: Christine and myself along with a then graduate student and activist, Lisa Schincariol, and two front-line workers, Sly Castaldi, the Executive Director of Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis, and Jodie McConnell, then a Human Rights and Equity Advisor at the University. We called ourselves The Cultural Memory Group, and we broadened our geographical reach from a small park in Guelph to the land now called Canada, travelling to dozens of feminist memorial sites across the country interviewing, photographing, and analyzing the efficacy of various designs and inscriptions. Our research took us to places and times ranging from downtown Vancouver’s Marker of Change, dedicated to the women killed in the Montreal massacre in 1989, to Bear River, Nova Scotia, where there are monuments dedicated to the memory of Annie Kempton, murdered “defending her honour” at the age of fifteen in 1896. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the preponderance of the memorials were to white women, but we did study one in The Pas dedicated to Helen Betty Osborne (Cree) who was abducted and murdered there by four white men in 1971; the Marker of Change included a feather design and an inscription in Chinook acknowledging murdered Indigenous women; the monument in Vancouver’s Crab Park registered that many of the women it memorializes from the nearby Downtown Eastside were “Native Aboriginal;” also in Vancouver there is a memorial stone dedicated to Tsay Keh Dene woman Wendy Poole; and there are monuments across the country that name racialized victims of femicide. When we published our book, *Remembering Women Murdered by Men: Memorials Across Canada*, we made a chapter available for Indigenous women to memorialize their murdered sisters in their own voices.

When it finally appeared in 2006 the book had taken nearly ten years to write.Five authors, one male-identified, four female, various sexualities, none from the same disciplinary background, but all white, collaborated across our differences and, remarkably, remained (and remain) friends. My contributions to the book have been considered by some to constitute performance studies, and while my foray into cultural memory studies could be considered a diversion from my work on theatre, it taught me a great deal—about gender, sexuality, male privilege, naming and not naming, feminism, community activism, collaboration, and care. But it taught me, perhaps most prominently, to seek out difference, including more and different types of difference than those involved in our collaboration, and specifically to seek out collaborations across difference in degrees of access and privilege. It also centrally taught me the value of working across the *discourses* of different disciplines and perspectives. It’s slow but healthy work when every sentence you utter might be greeted with “what do you mean by that?,” often forcing the realization that you don’t really know, and that sometimes your learned disciplinary languages speak (ideologically) *through* you rather than being employed *by* you as neutral tools.I learned from the experience of working with the Cultural Memory Group to seek out those moments, and to seek out as broad a range of collaborators, in scholarship and in the theatre, as possible.

Another important takeaway from the Cultural Memory Group’s work had to do with recognizing the problematics of ideological purity and valuing the fine art of compromise—both things that academics can be less than brilliant at, but that front-line workers deal with every day in order to get things done. *Remembering Woman* was published by a small feminist press. Its working title had been “Murdered by Men, Remembered by Women,” but the press, probably rightly, resisted that configuration, arguing that the prominence of “murdered by men” on bookstore shelves would inhibit sales, and therefore the impact of the book as an intervention. The problem, and its solution, ironically echoed a controversy we had discussed in the book over the use of the same phrase, “murdered by men,” in the inscription to Vancouver’s Marker of Change, a phrase that, ironically, had brought death threats to the organizers when the inscription was first proposed.

Both for us and for the creators of the Marker of Change, the problem was solved by changing the order of the wording, reducing the prominence of the phrase, but not removing it. Here and throughout our work we recognized how, and how well, the (mainly) women who had fought for, funded, and marshalled their memorial projects through bureaucracies across the country had promoted, negotiated, compromised where necessary, and successfully made violence against women visible in their communities, even if and when the resulting monuments might not have lived up to the highest expectations of academic scholarship and ideological purity. Unlike many progressive academics, these women had been able to use their skills to make (often literally) concrete interventions into the daily lives of people.

Both before and after publication our work attracted considerable interest at universities, women’s organizations, and elsewhere. We were invited, sometimes as a group, but often in pairs, to give talks and lead discussions, mostly around southern Ontario, where we spoke with interested groups about our work and theirs, often on the front lines, and where more than once our book inspired women to create their own memorial sites. On one notable occasion we spoke by invitation with Theatre and Performance Studies faculty and grad students at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois about our collaborative methodology working across the academic/community divide. The book was launched before significant crowds at The Bookshelf, a progressive independent bookstore in Guelph, and in a public event at (then) Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University), where the launch was chaired by prominent feminist author, activist, journalist, and former chair of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Canada, Judy Rebick. Highlighting the event were readings and performances by some of the Indigenous artists who featured in the book, including my longtime collaborator, Monique Mojica, of whom more below.

The second focus of the Centre for Cultural Studies was on pedagogy. The pedagogies working group consisted of a range of scholars, both graduate students and key faculty members such as Christine Bold, Donna Palmateer Pennee and, notably, Ajay Heble, an outstanding teacher, the founder of the Guelph Jazz Festival, and the leader of a succession of prestigious, well-funded, and highly respected international institutes on improvisation and social justice, centered in Guelph. The group’s work was to design graduate and undergraduate curricula in Cultural Studies based on critical (or “alternative”) pedagogy as it had developed out of the work of Paulo Freire by scholars such as Roger Simon, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and bell hooks. The group found that much of the extant critical pedagogies scholarship tended to operate at a somewhat generalized, philosophical level, so in trying to move beyond theoretical speculation, political positioning, and (let’s face it) virtue signaling, it turned much of its attention to the less glamorous practicalities and actualities of implementing interdisciplinary, cross-college cultural studies courses and curricula within the confines and constraints of actual classroom practices at an actual institutional setting—the University of Guelph—with the goal of gaining Senate approval for implementation. The fundamental operational principle of the group was that *theory must always be practiced and practice must always be theorized.* The work of the group began with the curricular plan for an MA program and the syllabus for a course on Collaborative Case Study Methodology.

The curriculum was never implemented, and the centre was eventually shut down by a politically hostile Dean before it could begin its second cycle from lecture series to working groups, research, publication, and curricular reform. But for me, the pedagogies working group had helped to hone my thinking about the cross-disciplinary teaching of theatre and performance studies as well as cultural studies. It issued in an essay published in *TRiC* in 1998 on “Alternative Pedagogies, Cultural Studies, and the Teaching of Drama and Theatre,” in which I formulated the principles and articulated a syllabus for a senior undergraduate course revolving around the site-specific planning, mounting, and reflecting upon a theatrical production as a full-year course in a Canadian university setting. But what I most directly and consistently carried forward into all of my scholarly and professional practice was the fundamental cultural studies principle I’ve articulated above: that, in the theatre, the classroom, and the study, *theory must always be practiced, and practice theorized*.

What I learned from my scholarly work in Shakespeare, Canadian theatre studies, and Cultural and Performance Studies in what I think of as the long 1990s—for me from 1989 to 2004—is how relatively easy it is to undertake ideological critique of work emerging from a dominant, imperial culture of which you don’t, politically, approve, but also how relatively unrewarding it is to be negative all the time. I was 54 years old in 2004 when both *Reading the Material Theatre* and *Shakespeare in Canada* were published, and the writing of *Remembering Women* was more or less complete. This was about ten years from the standard retirement date in Canada, and I made the conscious decision to spend the last decade of my employment at the University on material that I either liked or wanted to like; that is, on work by artists that I wished to support rather than criticize. It was here, too, that I quite consciously began to blur the division between scholarship and theatrical practice.

**Theatre & Interculturalism**

The main turn in my scholarly and creative work after 2004 was towards a new focus on minoritized communities and theatrical interculturalism. In 2004 I was invited by Sherril Grace and Jerry Wasserman to present a keynote address at a conference on theatre and (auto)biography, “Putting a Life On Stage,” at the Peter Wall Centre for Advanced Study at the University of British Columbia. I was intrigued and a little out of control, coining terms right and centre, but mostly left, and presenting what I thought was a sophisticated talk entitled “Autobiology, Documemory, and the Utopian Performative in Canadian Autobiographical Solo Performance.” (Susan Bennett, at the same conference, had the admirably more concise title, “3-D A/B.”) My paper ranged in reference from the French performance artist of plastic surgery, Orlan, to performance studies scholars such as Joseph Roach, Peggy Phelan, and especially Jill Dolan, dealing centrally with phenomenology and affect. For its case studies it focused largely on African Canadian artists Djanet Sears (*Afrika Solo*), Lorena Gale (*Je Me Souviens*), and George Seremba *(Come Good Rain*), along with Argentinian Canadian Guillermo Verdecchia (*Fronteras Americanas*). It took centrally into account the affect—the visceral impact on audiences—of witnessing the impact of the stories they were seeing on the bodies of their autobiographical subjects. After my forty-five minute presentation, which I thought had gone over pretty well, I was confronted from the audience by a dismissive public remark from prominent Canadian actor R.H. Thompson (the conference included artists as well as scholars), who said that there was nothing in my paper that any actor didn’t already know. I was kinda gobsmacked. Had he not followed the complexity of my argument? The nuance? But I was rescued by Paula Sperdakos, who had known R.H when he was still Bob. “Bob,” she said, “I have two words for you,” referencing a notoriously obstreperous Canadian classical actor: “William Hutt!” That, for the moment at least, silenced him.

But the paper, later published in the conference proceedings, had moved me further into the realm of working across difference, and it led directly to my being approached by Angela Rebeiro to edit and introduce a small collection of solo shows by African Canadian playwrights eventually published by PCP in 2011 as *Afrika (Solo*). It also contributed eventually to what turned out to be a hugely generative project for which I received a SSHRCC grant in 2010 on “Theatre, Meaning, and Cultural Difference.”

In the application I proposed to complete two books. The first, on theatre and semiotics, I had been invited to write by Palgrave Macmillan in the UK; the second was my major projected book eventually published as *Performing the Intercultural City*, though its working title had been *Performing Intercultural Toronto*. Canada, apparently, doesn’t sell well, particularly for US publishers, and this was for the University of Michigan Press. The book on semiotics I called *How Theatre Means*, in which I put semiotics into conversation with other theoretical approaches, notably affect theory, phenomenology, and cultural materialism. I was determined to return to, reread, and cite original theorists in every case rather than summaries or discussions of their work in teaching texts, though of course I took into account critiques and extensions of the theoretical approaches I discussed. But I wanted readers of the book, particularly students, to be able easily to return to the horses’ mouths, as it were, since I felt many “introductions to theory” get things wrong, oversimplify, or distort, reducing theoretical complexities to catch phrases. (And how often have any of us read only the introductions to major theoretical texts?)

This meant that I spent a great deal of time re-reading the likes of Saussure, Peirce, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and other white European men who I tried to put into conversation with feminist theorists, new historicists, cultural materialists, and, crucially, interculturalists. I divided the book in half in order to remain faithful to the *practice must always be theorized and theory practiced* maxim: part one was devoted to explicating the theories, part two to demonstrating how they might be useful to both scholars and practitioners, using Ibsen’s *A Doll House* and Monique Mojica’s *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* as case studies running throughout the book.Needless to say, the concentrated research for the book, and the need to think through theoretical genealogies, was extremely rewarding and instructive, but I felt when it appeared in 2014 that less than energetic promotion on the part of Palgrave meant that it never received the attention or readership I would have liked. *How Theatre Means* was also unique, for me, as the first book I had done without publishing independent chapters or sections of it elsewhere, beforehand or afterwards.

The second part of my project proved to be less straightforward. As I began research on theatre and interculturalism even before submitting my grant application, and on the social, cultural, and political context for discussing the topic in Canada, I quickly came to realize that I had a lot of preliminary work to do. Fortunately, I was presented with several opportunities to do this work on the long and circuitous journey towards the publication of *Performing the Intercultural City* in 2017. Some of these opportunities involved research and writing, many of them were editorial, and even more of them involved engagement and collaboration with the so-called “objects of my research” in the studio and the theatre.

I was invited in 2008 to present a paper on “Native Performance Culture Research” at a conference at the Sorbonne in Paris on “Situating Canadian Culture Globally,” which put me into conversation with scholars working outside of theatre studies and engaged me in what Daniel Coleman at that conference called “Epistemological Crosstalk” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and scholars. The paper was, indeed, published in a volume called *Crosstalk: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue*, edited by the conference organizers, Diana Brydon and Marta Dvořák. In 2009 I was invited by D.J. Hopkins, Kim Solga, and Shelley Orr to contribute an essay to their edited collection, *Performance and the City*, which led to my contextualizing Toronto’s intercultural theatre ecology within the framework of Canadian multicultural policy in an essay entitled “Multicultural Text, Intercultural Performance: Performing Intercultural Toronto.” In the same year I was invited by Ramón Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young to participate in what they called an “author’s retreat,” in which fifteen contributors—including the likes of E. Patrick Johnson, Paige McGinley, Eng-Beng Lim, and Patricia Ybarra—shared and discussed draft chapters for a book on *Performance in the Borderlands* of Turtle Island. The retreat was hugely generative for me (it was, among other things, where I first heard the term “transIndigenous,” from Performance Studies scholar Patrick Anderson), and the research for my own contribution, “Calling off the Border Patrol: Intercultural Dramaturgy in Toronto,” very helpfully included interviewing Canadian dramaturges who had worked extensively across cultural difference: Nina Lee Aquino, Marion de Vries, DD Kugler, Yvette Nolan, Brian Quirt, and Guillermo Verdecchia. Each of these papers contributed directly to what eventually became *Performing the Intercultural City*.

Also in 2009 I had the opportunity to undertake three related editorial projects: *“Ethnic,” Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*, which I co-edited with then graduate student Ingrid Mündel as part of the Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre series with PCP, gave me the chance to review previous scholarship on the evolving topic in Canada—the title of the book reflecting that evolution. Special issues of *CTR* and *TRiC* (a double issue) produced generative new thinking on interculturalism from current scholars that inevitably broadened my own horizons. And over the next couple of years I co-edited *Asian Canadian Theatre* with Nina Lee Aquino for PCP and a special issue of *Theatre Journal* with Penny Farfan on *Rethinking Intercultural Performance* globally. Finally, to bring me up to date on developments in Indigenous theatre I edited a special issue of *Theatre Journal* on *TransIndigenous Performance* in 2015, and co-edited *Performing Indigeneity* with Yvette Nolan for PCP in 2016. These were all tremendous opportunities that shaped my thinking and my work in very significant ways, and most of them involved the generative kinds of collaboration that I’ve talked about above. All of them, again, directly fed my research and thinking for *Performing the Intercultural City*.

But one of the earliest and most valuable opportunities that presented itself to me in this context was an invitation early on in my research to contribute a volume to the *Theatre &* series edited by Jen Harvie and Dan Rebellato for Palgrave Macmillan in the UK. The mandate of the series, “a long series of short books,” was to explore the intersections between theatre and “some aspect of the wider world” in a book written in accessible language that both surveyed and advanced the field and could be read at a single sitting. Jen contacted me early on and asked if I had a contribution I’d like to make to the series. I offered *Theatre & Interculture*, which she politely and rightly asked me to change to *Theatre & Interculturalism*. Writing this short book required contextualizing my larger project, this time not within Canadian multiculturalism but within what turned out to be a complex history of intercultural performance internationally involving white modernist artists, mostly men, appropriating and decontextualizing “othered” forms understood to be primitive, mainly “Eastern” or African, and using them to revitalize what was understood to be a decadent western theatre. It sometimes featured actors and other artists (usually musicians) from a variety of global cultures but almost always left creative leadership in the hands of charismatic westerners from Brecht, Brook, and Barba to Grotwoski, Mnouchkine, and Wilson.

I reviewed this material, identifying different parties as either universalists or materialists, but I also surveyed various critical and analytical movements (critical multiculturalism studies, critical race theory, whiteness studies, diaspora studies, critical cosmopolitanism) and various attempts to decolonize the stage (strategic reappropriations, diasporic transnationalism, transIndigeneity, and urban interculturalism). And I attempted to push beyond these western modernist artists, critics, and movements to identify and characterize an emerging “new interculturalism” that was developing, as it were, “from below.” I described

a new kind of rhizomatic (multiple, non-hierarchical, horizontal) intercultural performance-from-below that is emerging globally, that no longer retains a west and the rest binary, that is no longer dominated by charismatic white men or performed before audiences presumed to be monochromatic, that no longer involves the urban centres (in the west or elsewhere) raiding traditional performance forms seen to be preserved in more primitive or “authentic” rural settings, and that no longer focuses on the individual performances or projects of a single artist or group. The new interculturalism, as I see it, involves collaborations and solidarities across real and respected material differences within local, urban, national, transnational and global intercultural performance ecologies.

*Theatre & Interculturalism* has proven to be among my most frequently cited books, and it led to various invitations, most notably to a session at the Comparative Drama Conference in Baltimore in April 2014 where it was the topic of a “Critic’s Choice” panel, and to a gathering of global interculturalists at the National University of Ireland, Galway convened by Charlotte McIvor and Jason King in April 2015, entitled “Interculturalism and Performance Now.” In Galway I mingled with and learned from others working in the field globally, including Leo Cabranes-Grant, Alvin Eng Hui Lim, Julie Holledge, Joanne Tompkins, Emine Fişek, Yvette Hutchison, Brian Singleton, Daphne Lei, Justine Nasake, Natasha Remoundou, and Lizzie Stewart. Charlotte and Jason published the proceedings, and Charlotte and Daphne Lei later edited a Methuen Drama Handbook on *Interculturalism and Performance* that identifies the kind of work I had been pointing to, which they called “‘Other’ interculturalism(s),” as “Third Wave.” (The first wave consisted of the emergence and backlash from the 1970s to the late 1990s, and the second of consolidation in the early 2000s to 2010.)

But the work that most directly fed my research on “Theatre, Meaning, and Cultural Difference” was in the theatre. I chose Toronto as my case study partly because of the city’s claim in its promotional discourse, however accurate, to be at once the world’s most multicultural city *and*—after London and New York—the third most active theatre centre in the English-speaking world. But I chose it mainly because I had the opportunity to work there as a dramaturge with some remarkable artists engaged in working across cultural difference.

*Intercultural Practice*

I had little time in my first six years at Guelph, when I was department Chair and, for a time, Acting Dean, to work actively in the theatre or to write scholarly monographs. I did continue to make article-length contributions to scholarship, and I did direct student productions every year as part of my course load. And of course, the fact of the academic year and professional theatre season coinciding always limits anyone’s ability to work across the two. Judith Thompson often managed to have her shows at Tarragon theatre scheduled in December or April after the end of classes each semester, allowing her to remain active, and some artists within the academy participate in summer theatre or at Shaw or Stratford, but it’s a delicate balance trying to keep a scholarly *and* professional theatre career going simultaneously. I did massage my schedule in order to do some dramaturgy during those years at Tarragon Theatre (*Lion in the Streets*), theatre gargantua (*love not love*, *vision*, *the epoch project*, and *Exit Room*), and Canadian stage (*Mary Durham*), but was never able to attend all rehearsals. And I directed a production of Mayte Gomez’s *Death, Taxes and Writing* at the tiny Tik Tok Café in Toronto, as well as, with Elyssa Livergant, co-writing and directing *Back to Basics* at the Rhubarb Festival, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and various public fora where we took on the brutal and regressive educational policies of the Mike Harris government in Ontario.

But opportunities to work in the professional theatre were for the most part deferred until I stepped down as Chair. At Guelph, I had directed student productions of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness* early on, but mainly focused on Canadian work:two boutique shows by Tom Cone, *Cubistique* and *Beautiful Tigers*; Daniel McIvor’s first published plays, *See Bob Run* and *Wild Abandon*; and only the second productions of Beth Herst’s neo-restoration play, *A Woman’s Comedy* and Deborah Porter’s *Flowers*, a five-woman show about the famous Dionne quintuplets, among others. Later at Guelph, as my academic and practical work on intercultural theatre began to merge, however, I was to direct, in addition to some formally experimental Canadian plays, such work as Leanna Brodie’s *The Vic*, Lorena Gale’s *Angélique* (featuring well-known novelist and curator of the Festival of Literary Diversity, Jael Richardson (then Jael Ealy)), and Daniel David Moses’ *The Indian Medicine Shows* (featuring Mohawk and Anishinaabe actor Nick Nahwegahbow, who has subsequently worked at the National Arts Centre, the Stratford Festival and elsewhere). These last two were the first plays produced at Guelph by Black and Indigenous playwrights respectively.

Directing student work involves a challenging combination of creative activity and teaching. It was often extremely rewarding as the latter, and it taught me a great deal about acting and about pedagogy, in many ways serving, I believe, as some of the best teaching I did while also giving me the opportunity to delve deeply into the mechanics of some complex cross-cultural plays. But working in a university department means being limited to working with whatever students are enrolled in the program. In the arts and humanities Guelph is a notoriously white school to which, I’m told, parents send their kids because it’s “safe”—which often stands in for white. As a creative outlet, moreover, directing student work can be both rewarding and limiting. Its rewards come largely through the opportunity to work and experiment with design, movement, and non-traditional dramatic structures without the pressures of box office success or critical scrutiny. Its limits have to do with the fact that what can be done is sometimes constrained by the lack of skill and experience—especially experience across cultural difference—of student actors and collaborators, which can intervene as a shadow between conception and creation, idea and application. When does an attempt fail because it was a bad idea (a failure of the imagination), and when is it a failure in the execution? And just whose failure is it? But always, of course, we tried to follow the Beckettian maxim to subsequently “fail better.”

In the professional theatre the measures of success and failure are clearer, though the practice is at least as complex and constrained, and after I stepped down as Chair at Guelph I had more opportunities to challenge myself, though not often, by my own choice, as a director. I made the decision early, when I began to cultivate an interest in working across cultures as both a scholar and an artist, to step back from any creative leadership roles and to engage more fully, in both scholarship and theatrical practice, in service roles. Although I have always felt most comfortable directing—it’s the practice about which I feel most confident—the last thing BIPOC artists in Canada need is to have their work brokered through the creative leadership of white directors and producers and judged by critics from the dominant culture by standards that could be alien, oppressive, or extractive. So I began to work almost exclusively, in my theatrical practice, as a dramaturge, and in my academic work to engage in scholarship conceived as being in service to rather than in judgement of the artists and communities I was working with. Most chapters of *Performing the Intercultural City* were not simply informed by but emerged directly out of my collaborations with the artists who constitute Toronto’s intercultural performance ecology—ecologies being understood as places where any change in one element, in some large or small way, effects change in all the others.

My understanding of dramaturgical practice as service to a production, particularly when working across cultural difference, means three distinct things: the first is that it’s the dramaturge’s job to *listen*, actively, in what I learned from dramaturge Brian Quirt to call productive ignorance, not assuming any kind of expertise, or any a priori knowledge of the production’s subject matter or structure or the epistemologies and ontologies of its creators (though research into all of these things is necessary); the second is to articulate at every stage of the project what it is that I’m seeing and hearing as a culturally situated spectator, while asking whether that’s what’s intended; the third is, throughout the process, frequently to remind all concerned of what the original goals of the creators had been, trying to ensure that the taken-for-granteds of theatrical process in Canada—writing, refining, training, scheduling, funding, hiring, rehearsing, marketing, and so on—don’t, without anyone’s conscious consent, distort and deviate from the creators’ goals and intentions. I try not to work with scripts alone, where there are scripts, but to stay on board with a project throughout the rehearsal process, where a show’s temporal and spatial structures develop and acquire at least a much dramaturgical value as the text, if there is one.

This is a memoir about learning, and I’ve never learned so much in any aspect of my life as I have from working across cultural difference in the theatre with many BIPOC artists over the past couple of decades. Much of this work started, to different degrees and in different ways, with my attempts to treat, on the one hand, my scholarly work as a resource for my creative practice, and my creative practice as research for my scholarship. I have learned from many artists, including Karen Ancheta, d’bi young anitafrika, Tara Beagan, Jill Carter, Trevor Copp, Floyd Favel, Sarah Kitz, Camellia Koo, Ahmad Meree, Gloria Miguel, Andy Moro, Marilo Nuñez, Pam Patel, Béatriz Pizano, Trevor Schwellnus, Rhoma Spencer, Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, Diana Tso, Berni Stapleton, and David Yee. But I’ve learned the most from five people who have figured prominently in my late-career development as an artist and scholar: Monique Mojica, Yvette Nolan, Nina Lee Aquino, Soheil Parsa, and Majdi Bou-Matar. This memoir is dedicated, in part, to them.

*Monique Mojica*

I first met Monique Mojica in 1991 at the Second International Women’s Playwright’s Conference at Glendon College, York University. I attended the conference only to listen and learn, playing no formal role, keeping silent and, as best I could, unobtrusive. Nevertheless, at one session in which an Indigenous women’s collective from Mexico was participating with the help of a male translator—the one person available who had the language—the chair, after hearing the male voice of the translator for a while, said: “I see Ric Knowles is in the room. Perhaps he’d like to be the *next* *man* to speak.” Monique, sitting in the audience, was fuming at what she saw as a white feminist’s ignorant attack on the Indigenous male translator, offering his services to a group of Indigenous women who would not otherwise have had a voice. She approached me after the session to offer her regrets about what had happened, and to distance herself from it.

Many years later I ran into Angela Rebeiro, then publisher of Playwrights Canada Press, and we had coffee. Angela asked me what I was teaching and I told her about the seminar on Indigenous theatre I was offering at Guelph, pulling together a course pack of plays by Indigenous writers. “Can we publish it as an anthology?” she asked. “No,” I said. It wouldn’t, after all, be appropriate for the first national anthology of Indigenous plays in what’s now Canada to be edited by a white settler scholar. But I made a suggestion. Monique’s work had intrigued me, I had written several times about her iconic show, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, which continues to fascinate, and she’d been guest editor for the first issue of *CTR* on Indigenous theatre. I felt that she’d be the ideal choice to edit the anthology. When Angela approached her, Monique said that she was willing to take this on if I was willing to serve as co-editor, bringing my experience and the University’s resources to the project. She and I worked together over several years, meeting frequently in her flat on Davenport Road in Toronto, building trust, reading plays, floating choices, drafting introductions, and getting to know one another.

The first potential hurdle for a national anthology of Indigenous plays, of course—especially one to be published by a press with a national mandate—“Playwrights *Canada* Press”—was that many Indigenous people, including Monique, didn’t consider the artificial borders imposed upon Turtle Island by colonizers to legitimately constitute Canada, the U.S., and Mexico as separate nations, especially nations that claimed authority over the land’s original caretakers. Monique wanted to include plays in our collection that were created in the U.S., such as those by Spiderwoman Theater and William S. Yellowrobe Jr., plays she saw as foundational dramas for Indigenous theatre on Turtle Island, transcending those latter-day borders. I felt that the inclusion of such plays in the anthology would valuably problematize the nation-based categorization of university courses on “Canadian Drama” in which the collection might be used. So I was delegated to argue the case before the press’s Board of Directors. To my surprise, the board welcomed the idea, many members feeling that this would open the press up to a U.S. market. But the key board member for this discussion at the time, who was strongly supportive, was Daniel David Moses, Delaware, from Six Nations in Ontario. Dan was himself a foundational playwright whose iconic play, *Almighty Voice and His Wife*, was to be included in the book, though he was a notably selfless man and I don’t believe he knew at the time that his work was to be included.

Monique and I laboured mightily over the book’s title and introduction, settling finally on a title, *Staging Coyote’s Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English*, and on an introduction that problematized every word in that title, including “an,” “First Nations,” “Drama,” and “English.” The writing of the introduction was largely a process of Monique saying smart things while I asked questions and wrote down what she said. I had a larger hand in the introductions to each individual play, but the whole was, and was presented as being, collaboratively written, and we took care to negotiate pretty much every sentence and sentiment and every inclusion and exclusion, though Monique, of course, had veto power.

That first volume of *Staging Coyote’s Dream* was well received when it was published in 2003, as was a second, published five years later. Both volumes included plays by major artists and companies working in both Canada and the US. In between, I was invited by Monique to join the board of directors of Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, a company consisting of Monique, Jani Lauzon (Métis, though this has since been disputed), and Michelle St. John (Wampanoag). Turtle Gals was seen as a natural successor to New York’s famous Spiderwoman Theater, the earliest and longest-standing Indigenous women’s theatre company on Turtle Island and one of the first feminist ones. Spiderwoman also consisted of three strong Indigenous women: Monique’s mother, Gloria Miguel, and two aunts, the late Lisa Mayo, and its artistic director Muriel Miguel.

Serving on the board of Turtle Gals was a great learning experience for me. Board membership consisted largely of BIPOC women from various cultures and nations, including bookseller Anjula Gogia, later the 2022 winner of the Freedom to Read Award from the Writer’s Union of Canada. The board also included the extraordinary Cherokee scholar and writer Daniel Heath Justice, from whose writings and teachings I’ve benefited greatly. I served from the incorporation of the company in 2005 to its dissolution in 2008, though it had been founded in 1999 and first presented its masterpiece, *The Scrubbing Project*, in 2002, directed by Muriel Miguel. The play dealt with mixed race inter-generational trauma, particularly Jewish and Indigenous, which involves for Monique and Michelle who both also have Jewish ancestry, genocide on both sides of the family. Subsequent shows included *The Triple Truth*, commissioned by the CUPE National Convention and directed by Yvette Nolan in 2007, and *The Only Good Indian*, originally created by Mojica, Lauzon, and St. John, but directed in its final form by Yvette Nolan after Monique had left the company and was replaced by Cheri Maracle (Mohawk and Irish) and Falen Johnson (Mohawk and Tuscarora), both from the Six Nations reserve near Brantford, Ontario. *The Triple Truth* was an engaging show about Indigeneity and labour, *The Only Good Indian* an historical piece about Indigenous women in popular performance and film in the early 20th century.

Work on the board ranged from the usual fiduciary responsibilities and trying to help make the square peg of Indigenous performance/creation fit the round holes of funding bodies and professional protocols, to helping to organize fundraising events and soliciting items for the accompanying silent auctions. I was routinely tasked with asking my colleague at Guelph, celebrated Greek/Cherokee novelist, photographer, and scholar Thomas King, to autograph copies of his books for auction, increasing their value considerably.

In the meantime, Monique and I had co-presented a talk, “Creation Story Begins Again,” at the “Honouring Spiderwoman Theater/Honouring Native American Theater” conference at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where the Native American Women Playwrights Archive is housed. The talk included the seeds for both the Introduction to the second volume of *Staging Coyote’s Dream*, and, more importantly, for the collaborative work Monique and I were to do together in the theatre in subsequent years. Later published in the 2009 collection *Performing Worlds into Being: Native American Women’s Theater*, our presentation included a brief performance by Monique, perched on the edge of a table, of the creation story, “Sky Woman Falling,” which established the framework for *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way.* This was the first major production on which I worked with her as a dramaturge.

*Chocolate Woman* began at a personal and professional crisis point in Monique’s life, and with a determination on her part to move Indigenous theatre “beyond the victim narrative,” developing Indigenous dramaturgies that were not reliant on or imitative of western forms that are fundamentally colonialist. Work on the show, for me as a dramaturge and as researcher, began by learning about “story weaving” as practiced and theorized by Muriel Miguel and Spiderwoman Theater, about “Native Performance Culture Research” (NPCR) as expounded by Plains Cree director and playwright Floyd Favel in workshops with Monique, Muriel Miguel, Tuscarora/Taino musician and activist Pura Fé, and others, and about molas. I have written about these things, and about my work with Monique, extensively, but briefly: storyweaving derives from traditional modes of Indigenous storytelling based on a belief in relationality and the interconnectedness of all things. It involves weaving together fragments of story, song, film, dance, and movement into a complex, collage-like theatrical tapestry. NPCR attempts to build contemporary performances based on the structural and technical principles of specific (and Indigenous Nation-specific) cultural forms. And molas are the appliqué and reverse-appliqué textile panels hand stitched and emboidered by Guna women in several layers of fabric that are sewn together to form the fronts and backs of their blouses. Embedded in their formal properties are the fundamental principles of Guna cosmology, and those properties constituted the dramaturgical principles on which *Chocolate Woman* was built, drawn from the Guna part of Monique’s heritage on Guna Yala, an archipelago on the coast of Panama known by the colonizers as the San Blas Islands.

My work on *Chocolate Woman* began with research on each of these things—storyweaving, NPCR, and Molas—and included a weekend spent with Monique at the London, Ontario studio of her cousin, Guna visual artist Oswaldo de Léon Kantule (“Achu”), poring over his vast collection of molas as well as his own paintings, which share their structural principles with the molas, emphasizing duality, abstraction, multidimensionality, layering, geometry over iconicity, and patterning over symbolism. These became the dramaturgical principles around which *Chocolate Woman* was structured and its stories told. The creation story that Monique had performed as part of our talk at Miami University remained in place as the framing journey for the play: as Sky Women fell to land on turtle’s back in the framing story, the show’s semi-autobiographical central character, Dule Girl, guided by four matriarchal figures from Guna cosmology, travelled back to “land” on Guna Yala and to find herself. We created Dule Girl’s character and journey, and the characters of her guides (which were eventually performed by her mother Gloria), through a practice that begins with “embodied research”—Monique’s immersion in (in this case) Guna culture, including travelling there with Omushkego Cree designer Erika Iserhoff and embedding herself among the sea, the land, and its people.

The next stage is what she calls “deep improvisation.” This involves going into studio, “stuffed,” as Monique says, with the embodied knowledge that she has gained, and allowing it to explode from her body in the form of voice and movement. To witness this process is a privilege, at once astonishing and humbling. It’s akin to watching a person possessed. My role as witness was to “catch” the improvisation, typing furiously on my laptop to record, not only the words as dramatic text, but the essence of the movements and gestures of the characters inhabiting her, though they also became part of her embodied memory as we worked on refining and shaping what became, in essence, an early draft of the script and movement score.

The next phase of our work was to enter a series of creation workshops, working with Floyd Favel as director, bringing Achu on board as set designer and cultural consultant, Erika as costume designer, and eventually the then octogenarian Gloria, identified in her contract as both actor and elder. In the first workshop, Floyd asked Monique to annotate her first improvisation. She sat down with her notebook and what emerged from her embodied memory of the improvisation, rather than a traditional script, were pictographic representations scrolling down the page from left to right, then right to left, in alternating rows in the way, we later realized, that Guna pictographs do. Transferred and expanded using coloured marker pens onto large rolls of paper (rather than pages) these pictographs became the performance score for the developing work’s public presentations.

Guna pictographs are abstracted iconic records of action-based healing chants used in the council houses in Guna Yala, and even as the molas served as dramaturgical models for the show understood as a kind of *theatrical* mola, Monique’s performance score came to structure its movement as animated pictographs. The score evolved, with the crucial guidance of Brenda Farnell, an anthropologist at the University of Illinois who focuses on Indigenous dance, movement, language revitalization, and, crucially for us, the annotation of Indigenous movement and gesture. Monique and Brenda’s book, *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way: Mapping Embodied Indigenous Performance*, was published by the University of Michigan Press in 2023 with accounts of the show’s creation process, including an Introduction by Jill Carter (Anishinaabe) and a chapter that I contributed on the show’s dramaturgy.

The creation process for *Chocolate Woman* was foundational for me, providing a powerful model of devised creation in the theatre while also deepening my understanding of how to work with *and develop* dramaturgical forms and models that are not standard, in Canada or anywhere else, by responding to the needs of the story that is being told and to the epistemologies of the cultures from which it emerges. Working with the essential dualities of Guna culture and the structuring principles of molas led us to construct a four-part dramaturgy based on balance and contrast that eschewed the wisdom of tripartite western forms based on conflict and objectives, rising actions, turning points, and denouements, all of which can be seen as masculinist and extractive. The lessons learned from doing this have helped enormously elsewhere when working to find dramaturgies and dramaturgical processes that are not externally imposed but are integral to the work that’s being done and the cultures of the people doing it.

I also learned a great deal along the way about the ideological power of language, and about translation, both central to any dramaturgical practice, but especially to one like mine that was increasingly focusing on intercultural dramaturgies. Language, of course, is central to any culture: it shapes the way people think. In concentrating on Guna culture while working primarily in English, we were aware that there would be gaps and slippages, misunderstandings and misrepresentations. As the workshops proceeded, however, Floyd Favel left the team and was replaced as director by Guna actor and theatre artist José Colman, who joined us from Panama. Guna musician Marden Paniza also joined at this time as composer. Both spoke only Spanish and Dule Gaya (the language of the Guna people). This meant that we were working in the rehearsal hall with three languages, English, Spanish, and Dule Gaya, plus a smattering of Anishnaabemowin, and no-one in the room was fluent in more than two of them.

English and Spanish, of course, are languages of the colonizers, employing, for example, grammatical structures that consist of subjects doing things to objects, and thereby objectifying the world. Dule Gaya, I was learning, works more relationally, and deals more in present participles. We made the conscious decision to engage in a process of translation, shifting all of the text that we were creating in English first into Spanish, then into Dule Gaya, and then reversing the process and ending up with a script in an English that was inflected with the rhythms, constructions, and tenses of Dule Gaya, as well as many actual untranslated words and phrases punctuating the play. I’ve tried to carry the sensibility that inspired this process, if not the full process, forward into all my dramaturgical practice, and not just when I’m working with surtitles or other forms of translation or signing. I find that this helps, at least to some extent, to avoid the pitfalls of making unconscious assumptions about worldviews and relationships, particularly between people or between people and other living things. As I suggested earlier, sometimes our languages speak us, rather than the other way around.

My learning process continued when in 2008-9 I served on the jury of the short-lived “research-creation” grant program of SSHRCC (the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada). Having thereby learned the ropes, and conscious that the type of Indigenous work that Monique was doing was chronically underfunded, I applied, as principal investigator (I was the only member of the team who was eligible), and in 2011 got a large grant, entitled “Indigenous Knowledge, Contemporary Performance.” This was designed to support the completion of work on *Chocolate Woman* and its premiere in Toronto in 2011, the development of a new show, *Sideshow Freaks and Circus Indians* over the next several years,and a third research project by Erika Iserhoff and Candace Brunette, both Omushkego Cree, grounded in Cree textile arts. It was an extraordinary team, including Monique, Brenda, Erika, and Candace, as well as multiple award-winning Choctaw novelist and playwright LeAnne Howe from Oklahoma, Anishinaabe scholar and artist Jill Carter, and Plains Cree director, choreographer, dancer, and well-known film actor Michael Greyeyes.

Rather than molas or pictographs, *Side Show Freaks* was based, dramaturgically, on the ancient Indigenous mounds and earthworks that, at once invisible and hypervisible, populate turtle island from Brazil to northern Manitoba. In building a play about the Indigenous performers who populated side shows as “freaks” and objects of the ethnographic gaze of audiences in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries—also both hypervisible and invisible (on voyeuristic display on special occasions but overlooked in quotidian life) —we were, in effect, building a theatrical version of the mounds. Our process dramaturgically followed the principles of the mounds’ construction: layering, “ribboning,” thinking durationally, building ceremony, and maintaining processual openness. The four formal principles that we identified as the basic dramaturgical structure of the show itself were duration, alignment, convergence, and integration.

*Sideshow Freaks* went through several stages of development from 2010-2014, with Monique and LeAnne as writer/performers, and involving a who’s who of Indigenous directors, designers, composers, and dramaturgical associates along the way, ranging from directors Michael Greyeyes, Jill Carter, and Jorge Luis Morjón (Cuban-Trinidadian American), through associate dramaturge Chadwick Allen (an award-winning scholar of Chickasaw ancestry and an expert on mounds), to designers Marcus Amerman (Choctaw) and Dustin Mather (Chickasaw), and composer Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate (Chickasaw).

There were many memorable moments throughout the years spent developing the show, not all of them good. One event, which began very promisingly but went downhill, occurred in Banff, Alberta in the summer of 2012. In 2010 I had been invited onto the organizing committee of the first Humanities taskforce of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), a Canadian-based global research organization founded in 1982 and generously supported by a mixture of private foundation and public funds. CIFAR brings together teams of top researchers from around the world to address targeted, important, and complex questions. The institute is primarily science-driven, but the project I was invited to join, entitled, “Belonging Differently,” was its first Humanities initiative.

The problematic name (differently from whom?) was my first clue of potential problems to come. I joined the initially small task force, put together by philosopher Robert Gibbs of the Jackman Institute at the University of Toronto and Jonathan Arac of the English Department, University of Pittsburg, which eventually invited scholars from all Humanities disciplines, many of them outstanding figures from all over the world, such as cultural theorists Lauren Berlant (*Cruel Optimism*), George Lipsitz (*The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*), anthropologist Gassan Hage (*White Nation*), and Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows (*Indigenous Legal Traditions in Canada*). It was a great privilege to work with and get to know these outstanding scholars and deeply principled people. Some others, however, were less open, more discipline-bound, and less of a joy to work with. When the full group convened in Banff, Bob Gibbs asked me to organize a presentation by the “Indigenous Knowledge, Contemporary Performance” team, including Monique, LeAnne, Michael, Jill, Brenda, and myself.

The first sign that things might go south was the fact that the meetings were held at the colonial Banff Springs Hotel, which was inauspiciously built on the sacred Indigenous land of the Blackfoot Confederacy. The second was the total failure (or refusal) of many in the group to understand, when a presentation by John Borrows on Indigenous legal traditions used a hand drum, that the drum was not simply accompanying the presentation decoratively but itself held Indigenous law. When the “Indigenous Knowledge” team made our lecture/demonstration/performance, which included sections on embodied research, deep improvisation, Indigenous annotation methods, and Native Performance Culture Research, it was greeted with considerable disrespect by many scholars for whom Indigenous knowledge could not, by their definitions, constitute scholarship, for whom embodied knowledge and practice—they actually refused to get on their feet and participate—could not be understood to constitute learning, and for whom the land onto which Monique led them to ground our session held no meaning.

My Indigenous colleagues left Banff having been humiliated by a small number of smug academics, and I was left to apologized for having naively exposed them to such treatment. The Banff meeting marked the end of the “Belonging Differently” project at CIFAR and of a glorious opportunity for intercultural, interdisciplinary exchange.

For the most part, however, the experience of the Indigenous Knowledge, Contemporary Performance project was exhilarating. Some of the best moments involved travel to the mounds themselves to engage in embodied research *in situ*. Most memorable for me were the quarter mile long Great Serpent Mound in Peebles, Ohio, with its precise solar astrological alignments, and the seven-story high Great Bird Mound at Poverty Point, Louisiana, created in three short months as a performance of the creation story of the red-tailed hawk. Monique and LeAnne visited, listened to, and communed with countless mounds across Turtle Island, but most of the ones I explored with them were in Ontario. I remember the nightmarish aura surrounding the violated Watersnake Mound in Toronto’s High Park, desecrated by MBX bikes, the well-trimmed grassy earthworks surrounded by the suburban houses of “Indian Mound Crescent” in Scarborough, the ancient Southwold earthworks national historic site of the Attiwandaron people in Southwestern Ontario, and especially the glorious Serpent Mounds in Serpent Mound Park overlooking Rice Lake near Peterborough.

The park was temporarily closed when we were doing our research, but we gained permission through Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg writer, scholar, and musician Leanne Betasemosake Simpson and highly respected elder, the late Gidiga Migizi (Doug Williams), who accompanied us on a private visit to the site. There Michael, Jill, LeAnne, Brenda, Monique and I laid tobacco and walked respectfully among the six two-thousand year-old burial mounds. Monique lay on her belly communing with the mounds, an experience that she relived later in a deep improvisation in studio in which she gave thanks to the ancestors for “leaving this place for us.” And we found and sang a song given to us by the mounds themselves.

Many of the most memorable moments of the *Sideshow Freaks* research, of course, also took place in studio. On one occasion, in the rehearsal space of Cahoots Theatre Company off Queen Street East in Toronto, Michael led Monique and LeAnne in a simple but stunningly effective exercise in duration, as they were each asked to lie on the ground next to a chair and take a full twenty minutes to move, continuously and purposefully, if achingly slowly, into a seating position on the chair, “making the body endure,” as Michael said, “the interminable time function: what happens to the body in mound time as it moves.” For me, as witness, the exercise was totally absorbing and compelling in the way that durational art can be, each tiny move, each miniscule shift of the body, speaking multitudes.

Among the most profound experiences I had, however, was working one-on-one with Monique in the Upper Massey rehearsal hall at the University of Guelph, witnessing and “catching” the creation of Izzy, the Invisible Woman, a Rappahannock potter, rootworker, and midwife who had escaped from the (actual, historical) Hiawatha Asylum for Insane Indians in Canton, South Dakota. Lizzie also participated, along with Panther Woman (played by LeAnne), in the St Louis World’s Fair of 1904. The character seemed to emerge fully formed from Monique’s body in what felt like a birthing, delivering in almost final form a powerful monologue about herself and her past, and then responding in the first person to my questions with neither hesitation nor any sense of fabrication.

Izzy became a central character in the developing show, one that was taken further in 2015, when I accompanied Monique as her dramaturge to The National Arts Centre (NAC) in Ottawa to work on *Declaration*, a project curated, framed, and directed by Article 11 Theatre’s Tara Beagan (Ntlaka’pamux and Irish) and Andy Moro (Euro-Cree) as part of “Ontario Scene” there before the company relocated to Alberta. *Declaration* has brought diverse Indigenous creators and artists together on various occasions in Toronto, Kitchener, Edmonton, and Edinburgh, as well as Ottawa, to create new collaborative work daily in front of audiences who were invited to witness the work as it was put together throughout each day as well as in formal presentations each evening. At the NAC I had the privilege of working alongside Monique, Santee Smith of Kaha:wi Dance Theatre ([Kahnyen’kehàka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohawk_people)), the musical duo Digging Roots (Raven Kanatakta and ShoShona Kish, Anishinaabe), Penny Couchie of Aanmitaagzi in North Bay, Ontario (Anishinaabe), Michelle Latimer (Métis heritage that has since been contested), and Jesse Wente (Anishinaabe), as well as Tara and Andy. Digging Roots orchestrated and accompanied each improvisation as well as contributing their own work, Andy and Michelle provided complex live and prerecorded videography on every available surface (the hexagonal space provided many), Jesse brought information and gravitas to the proceedings, and Santee danced beautifully and lovingly with almost anything that came her way, including, one afternoon, a china teacup and saucer that formed a part of Izzy’s assemblage. And the “show,” created fresh each day, was entirely different every night.

*Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* was never brought to fruition on the monumental scale at which it was originally imagined. My grant had covered research costs, and we presented the show as work in progress on several occasions, but funding for the full production was harder to come by and we were never able, as we had planned, to present the show in a circus tent in front of an actual mound. As an extension of Native Performance Culture Research, however, the process issued in multiple papers and publications by Monique, Brenda, LeAnne, Jill, Chad Allen, and myself, and it led more or less directly to the development of what is now being called “land-based dramaturgy” as practiced by Indigenous artists—almost all women—such as Monique, dramaturge Lindsay Lachance (Algonquin Anishinaabe), playwright Kim Sendklip Harvey (Syilx, Tsilhqot’in, Ktunaxa, and Dakelh Nations), operatic composer and libretto writer Spy Denommé Welsh (Algonquin Anishinaabe), playwright and performer Yolanda Bonnell (Anishinaabe/South Asian), and others. As a theatre piece the show was finally presented by Monique in a reduced form as *Izzie M: The Alchemy of Enfreakment*, in July 2018 and March 2024 under the direction of Carlos Rivera, when it exploredthe tension between the sacred and the profane and the ways in which things that are sacred in Indigenous societies became, in a colonial context, profaned for entertainment and profit.

*Yvette Nolan*

I first met multiple award-winning Algonquin/Irish playwright, director, dramaturge and artistic director Yvette Nolan at Playwrights Canada Press, where we shared roles, from either side of the eventual divide—Yvette as President of PUC, me as Chair of the Board of PCP—in the establishment of the press as an independent, for-profit entity, with PUC as sole shareholder. Yvette was also, and remained from 2003 to 2010, Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts, where together with Donna-Michelle St. Bernard as General Manager, she oversaw the acquisition of Native Earth’s first dedicated performance space, Aki Studio, at the Daniels Spectrum building in Toronto’s Regent Park.

I came to have huge respect for Yvette’s integrity, diplomacy, and wisdom, and we became good friends over the years, sharing our enthusiasms for theatre, good writing, camping, and red wine. I only worked with her on one occasion in the theatre, as dramaturge on the 2015 Factory Theatre production of her dystopian masterpiece, *The Unplugging*, directed by Nina Lee Aquino, but she also invited me to “dramaturge” her important book, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* (my only real contribution was to tell her she had to have a research question), and we co-edited *Performing Indigeneity*, the first collection of essays on Indigenous theatre written exclusively by Indigenous authors. One notable editorial meeting for that book took place on a Montana mountainside where we were camping with our partners. Yvette has played a very prominent role in my learning process, not only about Indigeneity and Indigenous performance, but about often fraught and difficult collaboration across urban Indigenous cultures (given the legacies of colonialism), about theatre administration in what is now Canada (given patronizing strictures around board governance and funding), and about the complexities, anxieties, and necessities of negotiating within and across communities of difference, including, especially, trans-Indigenous ones.

Yvette also taught me a lot about mentoring. She has served over the years as a supporter, mentor, and Indigenous guardian angel, if there is such a thing, to dozens of emerging artists, many but by no means all of them Indigenous, most of them women or non-binary folk, and many of them queer or two-spirit. Her combination of toughness and unstinting support is exemplary. Yvette is, I believe, the only person I’ve quoted, cited, acknowledged, or discussed in every one of my authored books. Among many other things, she introduced me to the Indigenous concept of “wise practices” as opposed to the familiar “best practices.” The former are “locally appropriate actions, tools, principles, or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable conditions,” according to Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux (Anishinaabe) and Brian Calliou (Cree). Unlike the more familiar “best practices,” they’re contextual and non-standardized, and the term provides a nuanced, flexible, but applicable measure of locally determined efficacy. I’ve used this concept in my writing and thinking ever since Yvette drew my attention to it at a campsite near Sudbury. I’ve used it most recently in the conclusion to *International Theatre Festivals and 21st-Century Interculturalism*, which asks what it would mean to trace the history of festivals, not to the competitive Feast of Dionysus in fifth-century Athens, but to Indigenous ceremonial practices of exchange from all around the world that pre-date the Greek model.

But perhaps the most enduring thing I’ve learned from Yvette is something she said to me in an interview about Native Earth Performing Arts’ Indigenous adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. *Death of a Chief* involved artists from many different nations, traditions, and practices all over the northern part of Turtle Island working in rehearsal to negotiate among their different protocols. The show opened with a procession in what was to have formed a circle, but cast members from different First Nations would proceed clockwise, others counterclockwise, so they compromised by moving both ways, in a figure eight. “If we can work it out in this play,” she said, “then maybe we can work it out in our lives too.” This has become a kind of mantra for me whenever I’m working in the theatre, neatly summing up what all theatre, but especially intercultural theatre, can and should perform: helping us work things out in our lives and in the wider world. It grounds my faith, not in treaties, intergovernmental negotiations, or truth and reconciliation commissions as sites for negotiation and conciliation, but in theatre.

*Nina Lee Aquino*

One of the first things I did when I started researching intercultural performance, in theory and in practice, was to contact my former student, Nina Lee Aquino, then the artistic director of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre, to ask if I could sit in on rehearsals for their upcoming show, *Singkil*, the first play by Filipinx Canadian playwright Catherine Hernandez (now a celebrated novelist), and for the collective creation, *People Power*, by the also Filipinx Canadian Carlos Bulosan Theatre. Both were directed in 2007 by a heavily pregnant Nina. She in fact gave birth to her daughter Eponine after her water broke while she was setting cues for *Singkil*, refusing to tell anyone until the tech was complete. In the end I was given dramaturgy credit for both shows, and I’ve been working with Nina off and on ever since, sometimes formally, sometimes informally, always happily. I’ve worked with her at fu-GEN, Cahoots, Factory, and now the National Arts Centre (NAC) as she’s moved from one artistic directorship to another. We even had a collaboration on David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* about to go into rehearsal at Soulpepper in Toronto when the show was postponed indefinitely by the onset of COVID-19. It may happen yet.

Both *Singkil* and *People Power* were significant learning experiences for me, initially, at least, about the complexities of Filipinx and Filipinx Canadian culture, but more enduringly, perhaps, about production dramaturgy. *Singkil* was a story centering on the singkil dance, a traditional dance of the Maranao people involving a solo female dancer equipped with a fan and elaborate headgear (a sarimanok) stepping gracefully among long bamboo poles that the rest of the company clacked together dangerously around her feet. Rehearsals included the playwright teaching the company, and especially actor Karen Ancheta, the artform that her mother brought with her from the Philippines. While the structure of the play, essentially an immigrant family drama, was not entirely unfamiliar to western audiences, its dramaturgy was nevertheless heavily influenced by the culturally specific shapes and (especially) rhythms of the dance. *People Power*, on the other hand, was a show devised by the CBT collective (Leon Aureus, Rose Cortez, Nicco Lorenzo Garcia, Christine Mangosing, and Nadine Villasin) dramatizing the non-violent EDSA revolution in the Philippines that overthrew the government of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. It was, in short, a collectively created play about a collective political movement that inspired others all around the world. In order to facilitate its realization Nina hired Clare Preuss, as movement designer, to create a shared movement vocabulary for the company that became a key part of the show’s dramaturgy. I had worked with movement in the theatre before, but the concept of movement design was new and exciting to me at the time. As someone interested in sculpting bodies in space, I learned from Clare a method for building ensemble through movement, but also how to build a gestural vocabulary based on thematic key words that was useful for punctuating a show at heightened moments.

Thanks to Nina, my work on *People Power* led directly to my being hired by the CBT collective to work as dramaturge on their subsequent creation, *In the Shadow of Elephants*, about the history of Philippine resistance to the three major colonizers of the country, the Spanish, Japanese, and Americans. I worked with director Karen Ancheta and the company over several years with embodied Filipinx cultural forms, as experts in music, dance, puppetry, and textile arts were brought in to teach them culturally specific musical and performance techniques and practices in the mornings that inevitably informed their improvisations in the afternoons as they developed the show. Its dramaturgy was consciously shaped by the structuring principles of forms and materials indigenous to the Philippines and predating colonizing influences. The show was also shaped, one notable day when the company scrambled through the woods near Karen’s home in Hamilton, Ontario, perhaps absurdly trying to replicate the conditions faced by resistance fighters in the hot and humid jungles of the Philippines.

Nina understands the role of the dramaturge to extend well beyond working with playwrights on text into the realm of helping the director to mold the crucial shapes, rhythms, and movements of bodies in space, to the extent that even on shows I’m not working on she’ll typically call me in to a dress rehearsal or preview performance for feedback before opening. Some of my favourite work with her, in addition to Yvette Nolan’s *The Unplugging*, has included the development and production, in a vigorously inventive traverse staging at Native Earth Performing Arts’s Aki Studio, of Flerida Peña’s queer Filipinx fantasy, *Sister Mary’s A Dyke?!*, and of Kawa Ada’s stunningly written intergenerational play, *The Wanderers*, which, as far as I know, was the first professionally produced Afghan Canadian play, evocatively designed by Camellia Koo for its premiere at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Nina was also responsible for pairing me up with Diana Tso for the development of her play, *Red Snow*, about the 1937 Rape of Nanjing by the Japanese, which, when it was ultimately produced by the Latinx Aluna Theatre and the Red Snow Collective, provided me the wonderful opportunity to work with Aluna’s artistic director, Béatriz Pizano as director, with whom I’ve sustained a relationship. The show, creation workshops for which included immersion in the again culturally specific techniques, practices, and costumes of kunqu (Chinese) opera to inform its dramaturgy, eventually toured to an international festival in Shanghai, but as dramaturge I was not, alas, invited along.

And finally (for this stage of my memoir), Nina hired me to work with Jovanni Sy, her predecessor as Artistic director at Cahoots, on his brilliant exposé of food and colonization, *A Taste of Empire*, on which I had the distinct pleasure of collaborating with Jovanni as playwright and performer and Guillermo Verdecchia as director when it premiered at the upscale demonstration kitchen of Toronto’s St. Lawrence Market while the police were busy, just down the street, illegally kettling protesters at the 2010 G20 summit. The show involved the preparation and explanation of what goes into the making of the Philippine’s national dish, rellenong bangus (stuffed milkfish), and it concluded with its being left to the audience, knowing what they then knew about the history and contemporary politics of the production of its ingredients, deciding whether or not to eat the dish that they had seen being prepared throughout. The dramaturgy of the show necessarily followed a structure determined by the preparation of the dish, its rhythms informed by those of chopping, cutting, stuffing, frying, and baking. *A Taste of Empire* was nominated for Dora Awards for both Outstanding New Play and Outstanding Production and has since been translated into Mandarin and Tagalog for subsequent productions across the country. I learned a lot from working on this show, particularly about site-specific work (the kitchen itself was one of the stars of the show) and about naïve or unreliable narrators (Jovanni played a lowly sous-chef who had little idea of the implications of much of what he had to say).

Nina has, then, served as a kind of mentor to me both through direct collaboration and through her practice of hiring me to work with other artists whose work she thinks I’ll find interesting. But it’s in rehearsal with her that I’ve learned the most. In all of her work, Nina is an imaginative director with an exquisite ear for the rhythms of a show and a fine sense of the ways in which design—sound, sets, lights and costumes—can work dynamically to shape a production from the outset, including development workshops, which for her always include designers “jamming” together. But Nina began in theatre as a child actor in musicals, and one of the most important things I’ve learned from her, dramaturgically, is how to shape a production as though it were a piece of music, paying close attention to repetitions, cadences, discords, and their resolutions. Although she doesn’t generally do so, I’ve begun, drawing on my early education in musical form, counterpoint, and harmony, to use musical vocabulary in shaping a show, building on what I’ve learned from her to talk about crescendos and diminuendos, syncopation, dissonance, and assonance, and sometimes explicitly to construct scenes in 3/4, 4/4, or 6/8 time, or in the rhythms of particular dance forms.

I’ve also learned from Nina to avoid blackouts whenever they don’t have a specific purpose, as they do, for example, in much of the work of George F. Walker, for whom they serve as punctuation. In most instances, however, a blackout, especially if it involves stagehands moving sets and furnishings around while audience members chat among themselves, tend to interrupt the flow of a show. She prefers to create brilliant transitional moments that are not only entertaining and significant in themselves, but contribute to the pace, rhythms, and meaning of the production as a whole.

Nina is a unique combination of collaborator and leader, and one of her great skills as a director is to assemble an outstanding creative team and let them do their work, which she then tweaks, asking questions and making generative suggestions and refinements that regularly serve to integrate and complement the various moving parts. Her commitment to developing new work, moreover, and to supporting young artists of colour, have perfectly aligned with my own interests over the past fifteen years. Indeed, Nina hired me over several years to teach Master classes in directing for the “Foremen” at Factory Theatre, emerging directors-of-colour who would go on to fill a serious gap in the worlds of intercultural and culturally specific theatre. I was lucky enough to participate in a small way through this program to the developing careers of such artists as Cole (now Carmen) Alvis, Jasmine Chen, Ryan Hinds, Aaron Jan, Miquelon Rodriguez, Rouvan Silogix, Mimanshu Sitlani, Athena Kaitlin Trinh, and others.

I owe a great deal to Nina, who has progressed over the years from calling me, with exaggerated respect, “Professor Knowles,” to referring to me now as “old man,” with perhaps a different level of irony. But her most characteristic feature, her unbending determination—not to say single-mindedness—was signalled early on when, as an undergraduate, she was determined to direct Betty Quan’s trilingual play (in English, Cantonese, and American Sign Language), *Mother Tongue*, as her senior directing project at the University of Guelph, in spite of the play’s characters all being Asian Canadian and Nina herself being the only Asian Canadian in the theatre program. Some members of the department put up barriers but, characteristically, she was undeterred, scouring the campus for Asian actors of all stripes (one of whom had to know or learn American Sign Language, another Cantonese), coaching people from widely dispersed programs, teaching them how to act, and finally pulling off perhaps the best student-directed production the campus had seen.

When she went on to do her MA at the then Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama at the University of Toronto, she could uncover almost no published or archival material on Asian Canadian theatre, so she characteristically created her own archive, tracking down and interviewing her predecessors in the field. When she graduated, she created her own company, co-founding fu-GEN with Leon Aureus, Richard Lee, and David Yee, inviting me to co-organize GENesis, the first conference on Asian Canadian theatre, editing the first national, two-volume anthology of Asian Canadian plays, and co-editing *Asian Canadian Theatre*, the first collection of essays on the subject. It’s not, perhaps, surprising that she has continued to exhibit this type of determination and advocacy throughout her career, has opened doors for dozens of actors, directors, and designers of colour, and has contributed centrally to changing the face, quite literally, of theatre in Canada. Her influence on me, and my work with her, have continued into my retirement from teaching, of which more below.

*Soheil Parsa*

In February 2007 I was invited by then U of T graduate students Barry Freeman and Robin Whittaker to deliver a keynote address at a conference they organized in conjunction with a show, *The Sheep and the Whale*, at Theatre Passe Muraille. The conference was called “The Shipping of Souls and the Reception of Cultures,” and the show was only the second I’d seen directed by Soheil Parsa and produced by Modern Times Stage Company. The first, *bloom*, in 2006, had been a powerful, inventive, and sometimes inscrutable adaptation of T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* by Guillermo Verdecchia. It left me wanting more and wanting to meet its director. The Shipping of Souls conference gave me the chance to do so. Soheil was then, and remains, a soft-spoken, gentle man with a fierce dramatic sensibility, and his typically intercultural production of *The Sheep and the Whale*, like all his work. was neither colourblind nor monochromatic, but purposefully cast with actors from different cultures, backgrounds, and (uniquely) accents. It was a powerful confrontation of the global causes and horrific consequences of refugee and immigration policies and practices that have led inevitably to the treacherous smuggling of bodies across the Mediterranean from north Africa into Europe.

I admired Soheil’s work, which required of audiences more active witnessing than passive spectatorship, told him so, and he responded with his usual courtesy. The meeting gave me the courage later to ask if, as part of my research, I could sit in on rehearsals for his production of *Hallaj*, which he co-wrote with Modern Times associate director Peter Farbridge about the life and martyrdom of the 9th-10th-century Sufi mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj, in 2009. But you don’t just sit in on a rehearsal process led by Soheil. My thoughts were actively solicited from the outset, and as I had been for *Singkil* and *People Power*, I ended up being given dramaturgical credit for my contributions and being invited back as dramaturge on subsequent work. This was the beginning of a long and ongoing relationship with Soheil and Modern Times, among the most rewarding of my career.

Like all of Soheil’s productions, which are heavily influenced by the purities, clarities, and epic proportions of the Persian/Iranian passion play, the *ta’ziyeh-khani*,as well as by the dramaturgies of European modernism and the cultures and languages of his diverse casts*, Hallaj* was a stylish, stylized show featuring a stripped-down set, dramatic shafts of angled light, ritualistic individual and group movement, and a tight control of focus. It allowed me my first chance to work closely with Soheil, whose detailed work with actors on the clarity of their intentions and the specificity of their delivery is legendary. He routinely takes actors aside during a rehearsal process for discussions from which they emerge with strikingly clarified intentions. *Hallaj* was also my first chance to work with my former student, Thomas Morgan Jones, who orchestrated the culturally diverse company’s choral movements. Again, it was exciting for me to have the opportunity to work dramaturgically with movement in the theatre rather than simply with text, to work productively across cultural difference, and to work within a context of mutual trust with artists who knew what they were doing. I later hired Thom to work with me as movement designer on a student production of Erin Shields’s *If We Were Birds* at Guelph, and to take over in tech week as director when I had to check into hospital for surgery. The students loved working with him, as I did, and I learned a good deal from him about the sculpting of bodies in space and the creation of an ensemble through shared movement vocabularies crafted out of their own improvised movement impulses.

I worked with Soheil again on the remount of a revised *Hallaj*, on a production of a new translation by Soheil and Peter Farbridge of *The Death of the King* in 2015-2016, and as co-organizer, with Natalie Alvarez, of the Modern Times initial “PostMarginal” event, a combination of workshops, panels, and papers addressing the generative use of cross-cultural and interlinguistic practices in the theatre, an account of which Natalie and I published in *Theatre Research in Canada*. But my most extended, exciting, if ultimately unrealized work with the company has been on a devised project that went through several iterations and titles, but never came to full fruition. Soheil and Peter had only previously worked on one devised piece, *Forgiveness*, in 2014, a collaboration by Modern Times with Laboratoriet and Don\*Gnu theatres in Denmark and with Toronto’s Dancemakers. The movement-based piece was aesthetically delightful, notably for dancer Andrea Nann’s mesmerizing movement work, but Soheil and Peter were not satisfied with the creation process. They invited me as a dramaturge with some experience in devised work to help out with a new project, initially called *Believers*, that was intended to explore ideologically driven violence: why, in so many parts of the world and throughout history, it asked, are people willing to die and kill for their beliefs?

We began in the Fall of 2016 with meetings among the three of us, identifying key resources—poems (Eliot, Yeats, Hopkins, Ginsberg, Leonard Cohen, Langston Hughes), images from the internet (often involving aspiration, ladders, and human pyramids), bits from plays (Brecht, Beckett, Amiri Baraka, Ionesco, Shakespeare, Weiss), film clips (*The Great Dictator*), music (martial, symphonic, or heraldic from different cultures), philosophical texts (Nietzche, Camus, Aung Sab Suu Kyi), religious texts (the Bible, the Quran, and Jewish, Muslim, and Christian prophecies), inspirational speeches (Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King, Tecumseh, Hitler, Malcolm X, Benazir Bhutto, Sojourner Truth, Fidel Castro, Emmeline Pankhurst, Lenin, Bolivar), and ladders. All sorts of images of ladders, which somehow inhabited our imaginations and became key set pieces once we had assembled a company and entered the workshop phase of our explorations on what we eventually came to call *Thirst*. And what a company! The performers, in addition to Peter, were: Arsinée Khanjian, the Armenian Canadian actor, activist, and star of Atom Egoyan’s films; Carla Melo, Brazilian Canadian actor, director, and theatre creator; Béatriz Pizano, Colombian Canadian actor, director, and artistic director of Toronto’s Aluna Theatre; and the skilled and charismatic musician, actor, and performing artist Ahmed Salah Moneka, then a recent political refugee from Iraq. These five extraordinary performers were joined in rehearsals and improvisations in the Aluna studios by multiple award-winning sound designer Thomas Ryder Payne, video designer and artistic producer of Aluna, Trevor Schwellnus, Soheil, of course, as director, and myself as dramaturge. And by ladders, three tall ones.

The improvisations, involving everyone, were lengthy, complex, sometimes funny, and often spectacular, with no offerings rejected but always run with and taken to new levels—often, using the ladders, quite literally. Favourite moments, for me, included Arsinée’s recreation of her journey up Mount Ararat to bury her mother, ending, not in the masculinist achievement of the summit, but in the unanticipated arrival at a fertile valley—rock, but also water and birdsong. Her personal ceremony, however, was caught on camera, the private memory stolen, violated, and disseminated without permission or respect. Her recreation of the event was also a reclamation.

Another favourite was Ahmed’s enactment of what we called “standup bombing.” Standing with his back to the director’s table, facing the other performers as onstage audience, he performed a standup comedy routine about the bombing of a city, laughter emerging grotesquely amidst exploding bombs and broken bodies. Ahmed’s lithe and expressive back shared focus with Béa’s stoic, arms-crossed resistance to the otherwise infectious laughter of the others and to Thomas Ryder Payne’s insistent bursts of canned laughter and canned explosives. This was a standup routine that bombed, in every sense of the word, and eventually modulated into aggressive interrogation. After each improv Soheil and I reported what we saw, there was a discussion, and often the improv was repeated with more specific instructions, Soheil asking Thomas and Trevor for specific framing effects, pushing the action forward and refining it, and often asking the actors not simply to create images but to enact specific intentions in doing so.

Soheil doesn’t talk in rehearsals about objectives, the basis of much method-based acting, in which the actors attempt to subjugate and objectify the rest of the world in pursuit of their own goals, but he does talk about *intentions*: why (rather than how) each line, each action, is spoken or performed. He’ll sometimes, as I witnessed in rehearsals for *The Death of the King* in 2015, forbid actors to walk and talk at the same time, which produces a particular kind of focused stylization in which energy accumulates in the still body of the actor, and their lines become charged with potential energy that would be dissipated with excessively naturalistic movements. And he does this most often on sets that, like the plain disks of the *ta’ziyeh* that the designs for *The Death of the King* or his *Waiting for Godot* directly evoked, remain uncluttered by furniture or scenic ornamentation.

*Majdi Bou-Matar*

In Fall of 2005 my life changed dramatically and for the better when a young, charismatic Lebanese man, a recent immigrant, arrived unannounced at my office at the University of Guelph and asked me how he could get admitted to our graduate program in Theatre Studies. Majdi Bou-Matar had applied, twice, for admission to the MA program, and in spite of a successful record as a theatre artist in the Middle East and North Africa and two undergraduate degrees from Lebanon—including one from the top-ranked American University of Beirut—he had been refused admission by the Office of Graduate Studies without his application ever having been forwarded to the theatre program. But he had done his homework, knew of my interest in intercultural performance, and assumed that I might have influence and be willing to help. As it happened, I was teaching a graduate course on intercultural performance in the upcoming semester. I invited Majdi to audit the course, completing all the assignments, after which I could, with evidence, argue that he was qualified for admission to the program. He joined a stellar class that included the likes of Guillermo Verdecchia, playwright Tony Berto, and theatre scholar Jess Riley. He excelled in the assignments and eventually contributed significantly to many aspects of the graduate program. In the end, I supervised his MA thesis on “Working with Different Communities to Build a Community of Difference: The Challenge of Canadian Intercultural Theatre.” He graduated in 2008.

But that’s not what Majdi became known for. In 2004, not long after his arrival in Canada as an immigrant, he had founded, in the unlikely location of Kitchener, Ontario, a cutting-edge physical theatre company, the MT Space, the name standing for Multicultural Theatre Space for culturally diverse artists, but also evoking Peter Brook’s famous book and concept, *The Empty Space*. The company’s mantra, echoing the title of Majdi’s thesis, remains “bringing different communities together to build a community of difference.” I encountered Majdi’s early productions—*Seasons of Immigration to the West* (2006), *Exit Strategy/Pinteresque* (2007), and the first version of what was to become his signature show, *The Last 15 Seconds* (2008)—only as a spectator and supporter of the company, though I later served as remount director for *The Last 15 Seconds* when Majdi took over its central role during over a decade and a half of touring. I was astonished to find, in a city that, in spite of a culturally diverse population, had been home only to run-of-the-mill, largely populist western theatre, a company that was now doing aesthetically challenging, politically charged, movement-based intercultural work that was at once of the highest standard, thrillingly innovative, and deeply grounded in its community.

The combination of uncompromisingly experimental art with unrivalled community involvement was equaled only, in my experience, by the Guelph Jazz Festival, a festival dedicated to improvised music that was founded in 1996 by my colleague at Guelph, Ajay Heble. I served on the board of the festival from 2008 to 2011, becoming board president for one brief shining moment in 2011 and learning something about what it takes to run such an organization. Majdi had taken a course from Ajay as part of his Master’s program at Guelph, and their outlooks on art and social justice still connect them in my mind as exemplary, each proving that art that’s both progressive and challenging is also at once desirable, possible, and responsive to community.

My admiration for Majdi’s work eventually led me to get involved, initially as a supporter, later a collaborator. I first worked with him as dramaturge on one of the company’s most successful shows, *Body 13* (which began as *The Change Room*) in 2010, receiving its full premiere production in Kitchener in 2012 and its Toronto run, to rave reviews, at Theatre Passe Muraille in 2013 before touring briefly within Canada. The creation process for *Body 13* was typical of all of Majdi’s devised work at MT Space. It began with the assembly of a talented, intercultural group of artists—Badih Abou-Chakrah (a major theatre, film, and television star in Lebanon), Jessalyn Broadfoot, Brad Cook, Trevor Copp, Nada Homsi (a theatre star in Syria), Pam Patel, and Tawiah M’Carthy, plus Gary Kirkham as writer and myself as dramaturge. It was crucial that all involved shared a commitment to the exploration of a specific theme, in this case the realities of love and sex across differences in culture, generation, gender, sexuality, and social position. Prior to entering rehearsals, everyone involved engaged as thickly, personally, and physically as possible in research on the topic and their own relationship to it, and they come together early and often in conversations about its urgency and impact.

*Body 13* rehearsals started each day, as do all of MT Space rehearsals, with an hour-long warmup period in which the actors are paid to do whatever they individually need to do to begin work relaxed and focused. This is followed every day by a brief “check-in,” in which everyone in the room reports on what’s happening in the world and in their own lives that’s relevant to the show we’re working on, This is an intriguing time when it involves, as do all MT Space shows, a genuinely intercultural, sometimes international cast, all in touch with different news outlets and family members within Canada and elsewhere in the world. Then the group gets on its feet and begins walking in the space. This starts with a familiar relaxation exercise in which Majdi talks through the process of releasing tension from the body, but it turns gradually into something more complex, as the company is asked to listen to the rhythms of their walking, to balance the space, and to begin to work as an ensemble. The rules of the game are made clear: don’t break the exercise by asking questions, don’t leave the exercise unless you’re injured, don’t just stand there and do nothing, and don’t plan what you’re going to do in advance.

But the game itself is difficult. It requires concentration and a certain type of actorly generosity. It begins with attending to the moving body’s balanced distribution of weight, and with discovering one’s own way of walking. This is followed by attentive listening to the room, its pace, and its collective rhythm, after which the company is asked to activate its sight, seeing with the whole body what is going on around it, balancing the space as the movement in the room changes, collectively slowing down, speeding up—and stopping, grounded, as one. The final step in the walking exercise is to look, simply and directly, into someone else’s eyes, not playing a character, not acting, but looking to know: who is this person? At this point relationships begin to form organically: what do you want from your look, how do you react to the look of the other? How is that relationship negotiated? And stories begin to be “harvested,” as Majdi would say, from the bodies in the room, rather than being externally imposed. And power begins to be negotiated. Words, if they do so at all, emerge only from the actors’ evolving embodied relationships.

Some parts of this process were not entirely new to me, except for the ways in which differently enculturated bodies allow for stories to be built from the negotiation of intercultural differences, and from explicit attention to ancestral bodies. Majdi talked about something he learned from master Tunisian director Fadhel Jaïbi of the Théâtre National Tunisien: that the body is physically attached to its place and culture of origin by an elastic, the pull of which Majdi asked his actors to feel viscerally. The elasticity varies in surprising ways, waxes and wanes at surprising moments, but it is always there, drawing us back again as we struggle against it. Indeed, the elastic *is* the body, and the baggage we all bring with us, and it ensures that the rehearsal hall’s intercultural negotiations occur in embodied and often surprising ways.

I learned an enormous amount from the detailed, repeated application of this method about how to begin to create devised physical theatre grounded in difference. But I also learned about the grounding of theatre in community. I had, in almost all my previous work, bought in to the idea that the rehearsal hall is a sacred space, that what happens there, as it does in Vegas, stays there. I’d come to believe that its doors should remain closed or the creative energy built up in the room would dissipate. Majdi, on the other hand, hated closed doors with what amounted to a passion. He believed they were impolite. He left the door to his office open, welcoming newcomers, immigrants, refugees, artists of colour, and anyone else to just drop in, and this often led to his offering them work. And he believed that any show he did was a product of the community it and he were part and product of. Rehearsals, from day one, were always open to anyone who wanted to attend, and attend they did, giving feedback and commentary that was not only welcome but responded to and acted upon. This was time-consuming, but it fed the work, and equally importantly gave community members a stake in that work. It was explicitly anti-exclusionary and anti-elitist, and this may have been Majdi’s greatest gift.

I continued to work (and argue, and attend theatre, and share, and imagine) with Majdi at MT Space and elsewhere through to and beyond my retirement, of which more below. And I continued to learn from him a combination of rigour, generosity, passion, and political commitment that was as productively unsettling as it was unstinting.

**A Year in Berlin**

Monique, Yvette, Nina, Soheil, and Majdi weren’t the only artists I learned from over these years, but they were the ones from whom I learned the most, and they were the most significant as the sites where my creative and scholarly work overlapped and fed one another: I was writing about (and teaching) what I was doing; I was practicing what I was theorizing. What also fed both my scholarly and creative work, if very differently, was an opportunity that presented itself for my final sabbatical year at Guelph. In the Fall of 2012, I was hiking with my partner on Ontario’s 900+ km Bruce Trail, which we had planned, and still plan, and will forever plan, to complete. Our sabbaticals—the final sabbaticals in our careers—were coming up, and for the first time they coincided. We were discussing what we might try to do, where we might best spend our research leaves that would at once feed both of our research projects and give us a significant change of pace and place. And for family reasons we wanted to be within hailing distance of Scotland for the occasional weekend. We talked about who we knew that we could approach, somewhere, for some kind of invitation or residency.

We returned from our hike, and within the week I had received, out of nowhere (we hadn’t yet gotten round to contacting anyone), an email from the distinguished German scholar, Erika Fischer-Lichte, inviting me to come to Berlin for a year as a Fellow of her International Research Centre, “Interweaving Performance Cultures” (IPC) at the Freie Universität there. I later heard that the Shakespeare scholar Dennis Kennedy, whom I knew from my early days, had given Erika a copy of my little 2010 book, *Theatre & Interculturalism*, and she was dismayed to find that I had not mentioned the Centre. She invited me, I suspect, as a way of making sure that I never made that mistake again. I accepted a very generous offer to join a distinguished international group of scholars working on what was precisely my area of research, my partner accepted an invitation to serve as a visiting scholar in American Studies at the J.F.K Centre at the same University, and by September 2013 we were off to Berlin, initially for eleven months.

My formal duties at the Centre were minimal: I had to attend a seminar once a week, serve as seminar presenter once, and contribute an essay to an edited collection. In exchange for this, I received expenses, a generous monthly stipend, funding for research travel, library privileges, technical and research support from a team of outstanding graduate students at the Centre, and a fully equipped office that I shared with the prolific and seemingly polymath scholar of international performance cultures, Stephen Barber. And I was able to attend many special presentations, workshops, and other events involving artists and scholars who came to the Centre as guests. But the real pleasures of my work at the Centre, and most of the learning that I did, came from Erika herself and from the other Fellows from every inhabited continent except South America, some of whom were artists, some scholars, some both, and all of them prominent or, in the case of junior Fellows, soon-to-be-prominent in the field.

Chief among those primarily identifying as artists were the leading Indian classical dancer and choreographer Navtej Singh Johar, and the extraordinary Lebanese actor, director, playwright, and visual artist Rabih Mroué, whose astonishing anti-representational and powerfully political work I saw several times in Berlin and elsewhere through my association with the Centre, and with whom I had a connection through my friend and collaborator Majdi Bou-Matar. The outstanding scholars and artist-scholars I got to know and learn from were legion, but in addition to Erika herself, perhaps most prominently included Indian scholar, director, and dramaturg Rustom Bharucha, American choreographer and groundbreaking dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster, iconoclastic artist, curator, editor, scholar, and artistic director in Wales of the Centre for Performance Research, Richard Gough, Nigerian literary critic and cultural theorist Biodun Jeyifo, Iranian scholar and dramaturge Proshot Kalami, American dance historian Susan Manning, and American-born interculturalist Phillip Zarrilli. It was, intellectually, a very heady year.

Much of what I learned from these and other colleagues at the Centre had to do with contextualizing my own work on Canadian theatre, Indigenous theatre on Turtle Island, and specifically intercultural theatre and performance in Toronto, within a global historical and contemporary scene. I learned a great deal about performance forms internationally that artists in the land now called Canada have drawn upon, about international training programs that denaturalize western models, and about modes of analysis that opened my eyes to different ways of seeing, understanding, and analyzing performance from, or drawing from, different global traditions and epistemologies. And I learned, directly in workshops and indirectly through various seminar presentations, about different performance disciplines both traditional and contemporary. I heard papers on such things as the nomadic aesthetics of applied theatre in Kyrgyzstan (Ananda Breed), the dramaturgy of turbulence (Paul Carter), food in performance (Richard Gough), Daoist breathing practices (Lynettte Hunter), the cultural performances of the Baul-Phokirs of Bengal (Proshot Kalami), Ōta Shōgo’s *Elements* (Peter Lichtenfels), the aging body in dance (Nanako Nakajima), political street theatre in Greece (Hypatia Verloumis), George Tabori and the culture of memory (Yoshiteru Yamashita), and many other provocative topics. And I participated in lively discussions after each of them.

My own project and paper, about “Indigenous Knowledge, Contemporary Performance,” was, however, somewhat problematic, revealing considerable intercultural slippage. I spoke about things that are complex and differently understood on Turtle Island than they are in Germany, where the concept of indigeneity has a turbulent history and Indigenous performance is most often viewed through a problematic anthropological lens. Largely because of the legacy of Karl May, his Winnetou novels, and the films that were made from them, moreover, there is in Germany an odd and unhealthy fascination with the often fetishized First Peoples of Turtle Island, who are routinely impersonated at festivals and elsewhere by white German hobbyists calling themselves “Indianers.” Nevertheless, my seminar was productive, and generated useful feedback that I was able to incorporate into a central chapter of my book, *Performing the Intercultural City* in 2017 and into other work.

After eleven months in Berlin, I could no longer take anything for granted—about how a particular gesture, shape, colour, rhythm, intonation, or storyline might be read, and where, and about how anything might (or might not) be considered to have “universal” meaning—an issue about which I’d already been pretty skeptical. I’d learned, in that time, from intense debates among extraordinary thinkers, about what the “intercultural” might (or might not) mean, about the very process of what the Centre called “interweaving,” about power and who might be understood to be *doing* the interweaving that was so earnestly and idealistically sought after, and about performative negotiation across real and valorized difference. I remained, as I’d already been, skeptical, but I emerged from the experience much better informed.

Travel, they say, broadens the mind (“til you can’t get your head out of doors,” according to Elvis Costello). Eleven months based in Berlin provided us with the opportunity to travel within Germany from Rügen in the north to Munich and a good portion of Bavaria in the south, including nearby Potsdam as well as Cologne, Dresden, Heidelberg, and Mannheim. We also visited Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Poland, and the Czech Republic, and unlikely as it may seem we flew halfway around the world to Aotearoa/New Zealand, where I was invited to deliver a keynote address, stopping in Singapore for a couple of days’ break.

These trips were, of course, enriching in ways that went beyond my education in the world’s theatre and performance forms. In Europe, especially in Germany and Poland, visiting innumerable memorial sites and museums as well as the Warsaw ghetto, memorials to the Warsaw uprising, and especially, excruciatingly, touring Auschwitz and Birkenau, left ineradicable scars. We learned a great deal about Ashkenazi culture and history, both rich and horrific. In Aotearoa, where I was selected to offer formal greetings from the international guests at the *marae* (meeting house) where the first day of the conference was held, we learned about the Māori and their somewhat more successful struggles against genocide than their counterparts on Turtle Island and Australia. My address was part of a formal pōwhiri (ceremony of welcome), and I was guided through my role by Māori elder and theatre director Rangamoana Taylor from whom I came to understand protocols and ceremonies of welcome. Those understandings deeply informed my later writing about Te Rēhia Theatre’s production of *SolOthello* in my book on *International Theatre Festivals and 21st Century Interculturalism* and in a publication from the IPC, as well as my understanding of trans-Indigeneity and cultural exchange more generally. The pōwhiri also included, astonishingly to me, an address by the pākehā (New Zealander of European heritage) mayor of Wellington, who addressed the assembly in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language). Where, on Turtle Island, would a settler mayor address the opening ceremonies of a theatre conference at all, much less in the language of the Indigenous caretakers of the land?

But more educational than the travel from which I learned so much, in addition to just *being* in a city with such a complex and ever-present history and such an active cultural and artistic life, was attendance at the theatre up to five times a week during my residency in Berlin, and even at that missing shows I would like to have seen. I learned more about my own work in the theatre in that year, perhaps, than in any other time in which I was not myself practicing. The German system is very different from the Canadian one, or any other I’ve had direct experience of. The system is dominated by the state theatres, which consist of well-funded repertory companies at the federal or municipal levels in which actors are paid year-round as members of the company, and shows are kept in repertory as long as they remain viable. Prices are kept low, a legacy of the subsidization of the arts in the GDR (German Democratic Republic—or “East Germany”) prior to unification. This means, in effect, that these companies are able to hire outstanding artists in secure positions, disregarding merely popular appeal but promoting an active culture of engaged audiences from all social classes, for whom theatre exists as a primary public forum for the live negotiation of cultural values. People in Berlin gather in bars after shows for lively, often heated conversations about theatre and the productions they’ve just witnessed. It also means—crucial to my own learning experience—that these theatres are able to hire (and appropriately pay) outstanding dramaturges, who tend to play a central role second only to that of director, particularly in the conceptualization, contextualization, and staging of productions and reimaginings of the classics.

I saw extensive work at the five state theatres—the Schaubühne, Volksbühne, Maxim Gorki, Deutches Theater, and Berliner Ensemble (where among other things I saw the original Brecht staging of *Mother Courage* and a terrific concert by German punk icon Nina Hagen)—by directors such as Thomas Ostermeier, Frank Castorf, Christoph Marthaler, Katie Mitchell, Shermin Langhoff, and Robert Wilson. There were many highlights for me—too many to mention—but any selection would include Ostermeier’s long-running, self-aware *Hamlet*, with the remarkable Lars Eidinger in the title role at the Schaubühne. Among the standard questions asked of what is perhaps Shakespeare’s most questioning play is the degree to which its title character is, in fact, mad in jest or in earnest. This was the only production I’ve seen in which the prince was unequivocally out of his wits, and it was a revelation. Ostermeier’s work, and that of his actors, on this and many other productions I witnessed in my year in Berlin—*A Doll House*, *Tartuffe*, *Hedda Gabler*, *An Enemy of the People*, among others—taught me a great deal about choice in the theatre: whether you are a director, designer, actor, or dramaturg, make strong choices, and once you make a choice, commit to it fully and without compromising. The results will surprise even you.

Another extraordinary show that I attended more than once was Katie Mitchell’s *Fraulein Julie* (*Miss Julie*), also at the Schaubühne. Mitchell reworked Strindberg’s play in two fundamental ways: first, she used her groundbreaking “live cinema” technique, the audience watching a live performance of a play while simultaneously watching the film, the making of which plays itself out onstage before our eyes, including body doubles, camera dollies, the use of a sound effects foley table (as in 1930s radio), voice overs created in a sealed booth, and filmic framed sets. Much of the onstage action is undertaken by stagehands and camera operators. In *Faulein Julie* this technique, together with supplemental text from Danish writer Inger Christensen, allowed the audience to see and hear the action through the lens, as it were, of the secondary character, Kristin, rather than those of the two main protagonists in the Strindberg, affording Mitchell the opportunity to focus, again as it were, critically and centrally on issues of gender, class, power, and representation. I had years earlier learned from Robin Phillips about how to incorporate the vocabulary and perspectives of film in the theatre; watching Mitchell literalize the filmic lens while at the same time providing critical distance was a revelation to me.

A third director whose work I saw in Berlin influenced me viscerally was Frank Castorf, then artistic director at the Volksbühne. His adaptations of Dostoevsky and others were remarkable for their total disregard of any appeal to populism, for their refusal to condescend to audiences (or, some would say, even to take them into account), for their rejection of consumerist materialism, for their duration—often many slow hours with little plot progression—and for their experimentation with video. They took advantage of the famous workshop facilities and personnel of the Volksbühne to build vast, self-contained, revolving sets with no missing fourth wall, within which actors, whom the audience could see live only when they were entering, exiting, and circulating outside of the structures, performing the bulk of the action within interior spaces that were visible only on live video projections and occasionally through a small window or door. The shows were magnificently, unapologetically self-indulgent, but for those with (almost infinite) patience, they were also socially committed, intellectually stimulating, and tremendously rewarding in ways that are rarely available in our current decades of immediate gratification. They taught me, as a spectator, patience, which proverbially has its own rewards.

Finally, and perhaps similarly, there was Robert Wilson. I have never much liked Wilson’s work, except for his epic masterpiece, *Einstein on the Beach*, which I had seen, not in Berlin, but a few years earlier in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I find the bulk of what he does to be at once arrogant, elitist, and abusive towards his actors, not to mention his audiences. But I attended an average of almost one show by him per month in my eleven months in Berlin, trying unsuccessfully to understand its appeal and his reputation, without ever, in the end, changing my overall opinion. But I did come to understand from him the value of durational art and the ways in which it could change one’s sense of time and one’s attention to the minutest variational detail. His frequent clown aesthetic I found cloying, his use of music—including compositions by collaborators such as Tom Waits—was sometimes thrilling, but his ability to force attention through durational aesthetics to the tiniest of details was, if not always compelling, at least instructive.

But for someone working on intercultural performance, almost all of this work at the state theatres was clearly, disturbingly, and, however much I learned from it, unrelentingly white, male, and culturally homogenous. The exception to this rule among the state theatres was the work and programing—and resident company—at the Maxim Gorki Theater early in the artistic directorship of Shermin Langhoff. Langhoff is a Turkish-born Berliner who, before taking over the helm of the Gorki in 2012, just before I arrived in town, had made a name for herself as a multicultural curator at the HAU (the three performance venues of the Hebbel Am Ufer international performance centre) and then as the artistic director of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße where she became known for her productions of what she called “postmigrant theatre”—theatre in which immigrant and racialized characters and performers are not limited to their ethnic roles as “others.” The Ballhaus Naunynstraße is not one of the state subsidized spaces in Berlin, where without major subsidy theatres struggle mightily, do not have permanent repertory companies, and often resort to crowd-pleasing fare. But this was certainly not the case for Langhoff, whose work was aesthetically and politically charged and challenging, and when she assumed directorship of the Gorki, she, along with dramaturge Jens Hillje, transformed what had been the most conservative of the state theatres to the only major space in the city producing new, almost always political work by and about its racialized and immigrant communities in ways that confronted an often complacent German mainstream where revivals and revisionings of classics were the rule.

There were other pleasures from which to learn in Berlin. Independent and often perambulatory or site-specific work by the likes of Rimini Protokol took me to parts of Berlin I may not otherwise have encountered and explored sensitive sites and stories from the city’s past and present in always provocative ways. The interdisciplinary collective Gob Squad, too, staged raucous political theatre-of-the-real, performance art, and video installations at sometimes unexpected venues beyond the state theatres. And the three venues of the HAU, where I was a frequent visitor, hosted touring theatre and dance productions, festivals, and installations that were diverse and always, also, challenging. It was at the HAU that I attended my first disability arts festival, NO LIMITS, in the Fall of 2013, which introduced me to new ways of thinking about the intercultural that included the cultures of disability, and new ways of thinking about movement, in particular in wheelchair and disability dance works using unfamiliar physical vocabularies that forced their audiences to see differently.

The benefits of being a Fellow at the IPC extended beyond Berlin itself, including theatre, scholarship, and cultural tourism. It happened that our time in Berlin coincided, in May-June 2014, with the thirteenth edition of the international festival, Theater der Welt, which takes place every three years in a different German city. In 2014 the festival was held in Mannheim, and the IPC invited all of its resident Fellows to attend, providing travel, accommodations, and tickets to the shows. There was the usual exceptional mix of international shows designed for the global destination festival circuit, including work by Eisa Jocson (*Macho Dancee*), Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker (*Vortex Temporum*), Manuela Infante (*Zoo*), Guillermo Calderón (*Escuela/Schulung*), Toshiki Okada (*Super Premium Soft Double Vanilla Rich*), and Dmitry Krymov (*Tararabumbia*). But Theater der Welt in 2014 also featured the city of Mannheim itself, as well as some events that involved Fellows at the Centre: a launch of Rustom Bharucha’s new book, *Terror and Performance*, and both a show (*Riding on a Cloud*) and an installation (*Double Shooting*) by Rabih Mroué. Among the highlights featuring the city was “Hotel Shabby Shabby,” consisting of twenty-two free-standing pop-up “hotel rooms” in unexpected locations around town designed by architecture students from around the world using found or recyclable materials and limited to a strict €250 construction budget. I, along with my partner, was the only Fellow from the IPC to spend a night in Hotel Shabby Shabby. Our room was an off-angled crate-wood and burlap structure on the grounds of a much more conventional hotel that served us breakfast and allowed us to use its showers. The interior of our room was lined with burlap, including sacks and slits from which various grasses, wildflowers, and other vegetation invaded the small space, only wide enough for one double mattress and high enough to kneel beneath a plexiglass ceiling that was open to the stars. We slept surprisingly well, in spite of plant allergies and the only slightly muffled sounds of the surrounding city.

From Mannheim we all departed directly for another festival and conference, this time across the Strait of Gibraltar in Tangiers and Tetouan, Morocco. This was Performing Tangiers, organized by the IPC and the International Centre for Performance Studies in Tangier (ICPS) and hosted by prominent IPC Fellow Khalid Amine, IPCS, and Abdelmalek Essaâi University in Tetouan. Performing Tangiers was the beginning of my interest in the theatre and theatre scholarship of the Arab world, and together with Theater der Welt in Mannheim also rekindled my interest in international theatre festivals, which I had written about in one chapter of *Reading the Material Theatre* and would write about again.

The conference-cum-festival was designed to bridge the divide between East and West by means of theatre. The performances I saw were intimate affairs attended mainly by conference goers. At the conference the papers, alternating between Arab and Euro-American presenters in English, French, German, and Arabic—including my own presentation on Indigenous performance on Turtle Island—were subject to live, simultaneous translation in Arabic, French, and English, but were radically, epistemologically different from one another, and different also in mode and tone of delivery. The papers in Arabic felt, to me, to be largely combative and often concerned the degree of “Arabness” in the work under discussion, often decrying Western influences. Those in English rarely had anything to do with the Arab world. In this sense, the event seemed less likely to bridge the gap between West and East than to place the two theatrical ecologies, perhaps strategically, in close proximity to one another in a crossroads city between Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, providing those interested with the opportunity for comparative analysis.

While we were in Tangiers, Stephen Barber organized a pilgrimage to the small city of Larache, an hour and a half down the Atlantic coast where a vanload of international theatre scholars—including Rustom Barucha, Peter Eckersall, Richard Gough, Navtej Singh Johar, Kate O’Reilly, Patrice Pavis, Maria Shevstova, Phillip Zarilli, myself and my partner—visited the unassuming cemetery overlooking the sea where a modest white stone marks playwright Jean Genet’s last resting place. The simple inscription reads:

Jean Genet

19 Dec 1910

13-14 Avril 86

After paying homage at the grave, we visited the hotel where Genet had lived in Larache, sipped mint tea on a patio, and returned up the coast as a huge and magnificent sun set over the Atlantic to our left.

Berlin was, needless to say, am extraordinary eleven months. In August of 2014 we returned to Guelph refreshed, and I contemplated a retirement from teaching in a couple of years that might free up my term time and allow me, on the one hand, to undertake what would probably be my last major scholarly project, and more importantly, to apply the lessons I had been learning to a more active theatrical practice. The teaching season, alas, coincides with both the theatre season and the schedules of many global theatre festivals; I wanted, for the first time in my professional life, to have the freedom to accept whatever opportunities arose.

**PART IV**

**2016-2025**

I officially retired on October 1st, 2016, but I continued to work; in fact, I only retired from teaching, committee work, and getting paid. My connection with students, who seemed every year to get younger, had declined in terms of shared or taken-for-granted cultural reference points, and I felt increasingly alienated by the growing corporatization of universities and an increasing focus on instrumentalist training for a job market that, in my field at least, has never really existed. This type of training isn’t pretty, or conducive to education in critical thinking, research, or creative activity of any kind. And I had never really seen myself as a trainer. But I continued to write in the early years of my retirement, including the COVID years, and I’d long looked forward to being able to do more dramaturgical work in the theatre than teaching schedules had previously allowed.

I was made University Professor Emeritus at Guelph, the equivalent of a honorary doctorate, an honour that brought with it the invitation to deliver a convocation address in which I passed on what I had learned from both the studio and the study, not about “tolerating” difference (which positions some folks as the generous tolerators, and others, abjectly, as the to-be-tolerated), but about privileging it over sameness, valuing uniqueness over supposed universality. In the Fall of 2017, my partner and I went, after a three-some year gap, for our final month in Berlin, staying in the same building as we had previously, attending seminars, and delivering seminar papers, while once again enjoying the extraordinary Berlin theatre and arts scene. I also attended almost everything at Shermin Langhoff’s widely multicultural and interdisciplinary Berliner Herbstsalon, a festival that in that year had the promising theme, “De-Integrate Yourselves,” and focused on social justice issues emerging from migration, immigration, and cultural difference. For two weeks in November 2017, it took over the Maxim Gorki Theater, the Palais am Festungsgraben, the Kronprinzenpalais and other sites on the historic Mitte street, Unter den Linden. This included Syrian artist Manaf Halbouni’s monumental “Monument,” installed in front of the iconic Brandenberg Gate and consisting of three upended buses that had been used for migration. The festival was described in its brochure as “a two-week-long public rehearsal for the rebellion against attributions, generalizations, and simplifications around the construction of identities, unities, purities, and societal integration, incorporation, and homogenization.” It featured over a hundred interdisciplinary works by racialized artists from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, France, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Mexico, the Netherlands, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Spain, Syria, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as artists identified only as Roma. It became for me a model, in its directness of purpose, of the kind of festival that I wanted to focus on for my major research project in my retirement: there was no universalist discourse of unlocated “excellence” here, no exoticization of difference, no UK, and no USA.

In June 2018 I returned to Berlin one last time, for the Centre’s closing conference and celebration. The conference incorporated receptions, performances that included another by Rabih Mouré, and keynote addresses by Kenyan scholar Ngũgĩ Wwa’Thiong’o and Argentinian cultural theorist Walter Mignolo. I had a conversation with the latter about—surprisingly to me—Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg artist and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson of Alderville First Nation in what’s now Ontario. Her 2011 book, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, and her writing about Indigenous resurgence, had had a profound influence on both of us, and she went on to become a major creative force as well as a foundational theorist of Indigenous resurgence in ways that resonate with Mignolo’s theorization of what he calls “decoloniality.” There were also panels involving many years’ fellows, including myself, talking about the central concerns of the IPC and what it had achieved. After my talk, which had touched on things ethnographic, I was approached by Tracy Davis to ask if I was interested in participating in a negotiation and rapprochement that she was organizing between performance studies scholars and anthropologists, to be held in a compound on a slice of beach at the edge of a jungle in Penang National Park, Malaysia in August 2018. I was.

The compound itself—the Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies at the Universiti Sains Malaysia —was a somewhat spartan affair reachable either on foot on a narrow path through the jungle, or by a small boat that we hired from a rugged jetty in George Town to take us and our blessedly minimal luggage around the coast of Penang to the beach, where we rolled up our pant legs, lifted our shoes and our luggage, and stepped out onto the sand. We were distributed to our cabins, where there were signs warning us not to open the windows because the monkeys would enter, wreaking havoc, after which we assembled in the main building’s dining room for the first of five days of simple but excellent Malaysian meals. The meetings themselves, entitled “New Dialogues Between Anthropology and Performance Studies”—were mostly held in a commodious (and air conditioned!) conference room on the second floor, but on one occasion we relocated to the beach underneath a tree occupied by a Silver Leaf Langur monkey and her stunningly bright yellow infant.

The assembled scholars cut across world cultures, professional ranks, genders, and ages, and included our host, Lye Tuck-Po, an environmental anthropologist at Universiti Sains, along with organizers Tracy Davis, Theatre and Performance Studies, Northwestern University in the US and Jonas Tinius, then a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The remaining scholars included Katerina Teaiwa, a Pacific scholar, artist, and activist of [Banaban](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banabans), [I-Kiribati](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I-Kiribati), and [African American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans) heritage at Australian National University; Damani Partridge, Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies at the University of Michigan; New Zealand-born pakeha theatre scholar Christopher Balme, at the Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Germany; cultural anthropologist Karin Barber, Professor Emerita at the University of Birmingham in the UK; Jazmin Llana, Professor of Literature at De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines; Julius Bautista, of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University, Japan; Performance Studies scholar Paul Rae, of the University of Melbourne, Australia; Yeo Seng Guan, an urban anthropologist at Monash University, Malaysia; ethnographer, filmmaker, and artist Jesse Shipley, at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, USA; senior anthropologist and musicologist Georgina Born, Fellow at Mansfield College, Oxford University; and Khadija Carroll, Professor of global art history at the University of Birmingham. We were also joined by Graduate students Kuah Li Feng, Sara Loh, Elena Weber, and Beh May Ting who served the meetings as rapporteurs and later served me as informal tour guides in George Town.

Our daily routine began with watching the monkeys looping over branches and fences to descend in droves upon the compound as we ate our breakfast. This was followed by swims in the ocean, morning walks and “yoga for scholars” on the pier, and it included “walking seminars” (informal interactions) and communal meals. But the formal work was rigorous, beginning at 9:00 each morning with position statements and ending with evening discussions from 7:30-9:00 p.m. Much of the discussion, as we shared readings, presented position papers, circulated bibliographies, and deconstructed stereotypes of one another’s disciplines, circled around different understandings and resonances across our practices of two key but endlessly slippery terms: “performance,” and “ethnography.” For me, the consultation was instructive, my work between my 2010 and 2017 books, *Theatre & Interculturalism* and *Performing the Intercultural City* being in large part auto-ethnographic. The opportunity to discuss methodologies with global experts occupying different cultural and scholarly positions was endlessly stimulating and instructive, and I learned to consider ethnography as, not just a tool, but, more foundationally and less mechanically, a way of thinking.

At the end of our five days together I returned—again by boat—around the coast of Penang to George Town, the UNESCO heritage zone that is itself a crucible, or contact zone, for intercultural encounter. It’s marked as a former British colony by a prominent Queen Victoria Memorial at “Victoria Green,” and by the presence of St. George’s Church, the oldest purpose-built Anglican church in southeast Asia. But these have a somewhat dormant, heritage feel in a city that more prominently and vibrantly is home to a mixed population of Malay (mostly Muslim), ethnic Chinese (mostly Buddhist), ethnic Indian (mostly Hindu) and non-Malay Indigenous people, all of whose architecture and iconography, mosques, temples, and languages rub shoulders with one another, though English remains the shared public language. It was my good fortune that the George Town International Theatre Festival was in full swing when I arrived, and the Hungry Ghost Festival (entertaining and feeding the wandering spirits of the dead) was just beginning. The front row of every performance was reserved for the ghosts. I stuck around attending both festivals, which considerably enriched what was to be my last major scholarly project, on international theatre festivals, which I’ll talk about next.

**Festivals**

Not long before my retirement, I had applied for and was awarded a SSHRC grant to fund a proposed four-year research project that I called “International Theatre Festivals and the 21st-Century Traffic in Cultures.” I’d been working for fifteen years in the theatre and the study on interculturalism and performance, and international festivals seemed logical sites for the negotiation and exchange of cultural values. So why did I feel, impressionistically—mainly from visiting large destination festivals in Edinburgh, Toronto, and Montreal, and studying such festivals elsewhere—that while successfully trafficking in fetishized cultures in the way dealers traffic in drugs, international festivals were not so successful in promoting intercultural communication and exchange? This project has taken me since then to festivals both large and small on every inhabited continent, in places ranging from North Africa to South America and from Turtle Island to Aotearoa and Australia, sometimes travelling alone, at other times as part of delegations both official and unofficial or accompanied by friends. On a couple of occasions I even took shows I was working on to the nearby IMPACT and CAMINOS Festivals in Kitchener and Toronto, Ontario. I learned that not all festivals are the same, and that some types of festival serve the cause of interculturalism much better than others.

Memorable trips have included taking part in a delegation of Canadian presenters led by Béatriz Pizano and Trevor Schwellnus of Aluna Theatre to Bogotá, Colombia to attend the Festival Iberoamericana and especially FESTA (Festival de Teatro Alternativo de Bogotá). Taken together the two festivals provided a clear and representative contrast between the world’s large destination festivals designed to attract tourists, and small political, issue-based gatherings primarily addressing a local audience. On other occasions I attended CARIFESTA in Port of Spain, Trinidad with a delegation of Caribbean Canadian artists led by Trinidadian Canadian Rhoma Spencer; the Santiago a Mil International Theatre Festival in Chile with CAPACOA (Canadian Arts Presenting Association); and the industry series at the Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires (FIBA) in Argentina as a representative of the MT Space. In Santiago and Buenos Aies I had the pleasure of hanging out with the likes of producer extraordinaire Sue Balint, playwright Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, artistic director of Vancouver’s Boco del Lupo Sherry Yoon, Métis playwright Matt MacKenzie, producer Sherrie Johnson, and many others. I also attended the Journées Théâtrales de Carthage as part of MT Space’s show, *The Last 15 Seconds*, on which I served as remount director, and the Arab Theatre festival in Tunis with my friends and collaborators Nada Homsi and Majdi Bou-Matar, who was my translator, research assistant, cultural consultant, and social coordinator there. Majdi introduced me, among many other key figures in the Arab theatre world, to Cyrinne Ganoun, Artistic Director of El Hamra Theatre in that city and daughter of the late Tunisian director and Majdi’s teacher, Ezzedine Ganoun.

Closer to home, I found exemplary small-scale festivals like Aluna Theatre’s RUTAS, in Toronto, MT Space’s IMPACT, in Kitchener, and notably Kaha:wi Dance Theatre’s transIndigenous and interdisciplinary Living Ritual Festival at Toronto’s Harbourfront in 2017 organized by Kaha:wi’s artistic director, Tekaronhiáhkhwa Santee Smith, Kahnyen’kehàka (Mohawk), from nearby Six Nations of the Grand River.

Living Ritual was a revelation. It opened outdoors by the waters of Lake Ontario with an Onkwehon:we (Mohawk) Edge of the Woods ceremony of welcome—a living ritual—organized by the Mohawk hosts but inclusive of greetings from Indigenous visitors from Australia, Aotearoa, and elsewhere on Turtle Island, who performed at the festival and took part in a series of intensive and shared workshops, keynote provocations, and participatory panels, all of which were welcoming of everyone, but designed to serve the Indigenous participants. The festival was small in scale and lasted only a few days, but it allowed all participants to stay for the duration, take part in all activities, attend all the shows, and talk to one another at some length. And it was not about competition, but exchange. It was at Living Ritual that I began to ask the question that largely framed my subsequent research on festivals:

What would it mean to see theatre and performance festivals, not as having begun within the competitive framework of ancient Greece but among the relational frameworks of Indigenous communities globally [and of the proto-festivals that pre-date fifth-century Athens]? What would it mean to understand festivals as conferring cultural capital through the dispersion rather than accumulation of worldly goods [as at a potlatch]? To consider festivals as sites of the exchange rather than the commodification of cultures? To consider them as being grounded in the land and in Indigenous knowledge systems rather than in deterritorializing and decontextualizing programming practices?

I’ve learned a great deal about each of the festivals I’ve attended, of course, and about what organizational features of each best advanced cultural exchange among artists, between artists and audiences, and among audiences, and this led to my compiling a kind of taxonomy of types of festival and a practical list of “wise practices” for festival organizers and curators interested in more than tourist promotion. Some of these practices have to do with temporal and geographical containment; some with decentering curation and leadership; some with programming that allows artists who have something to say to one another to meet, talk, and see one another’s work; some with cultural contextualization; some with the scheduling of panels, workshops, and conferences; and some with accessibility—through physical amenities (such as ramps, elevators, and wheelchair seating), through translation (including signing and audio description), and through pricing.

Of course, not all festivals have the same objectives. The Arab Theatre Festival, for example, which occurs in a different city in the Arab world every year, serves not as a showcase for international exposure and touring, but as a hothouse for the solidification of a unified Arab identity across Arab cultures that share little beyond a written language. It hosts a sometimes-contentious conference at which issues of influence, representation, and form are hotly debated. Similarly, CARIFESTA occurs in a different Caribbean country each year, hosts a major conference, and is explicitly intended to constitute the Caribbean, and to some extent the Caribbean diaspora, as a single nation. Festivals in the Francophone or Lusophone worlds serve as sites for the negotiation of postcolonial relations among nations that share a colonizer’s language. Elsewhere, festivals such as London’s LiFT, Germany’s Teater der Welt, and many North American and European curated live-art festivals are directly engaged with the politics and geographies, inclusions and exclusions, of their host cities, while many of the major destination festivals promise to “bring the world” to their host cities while also showcasing those cities to the world, branding them as “Festival Cities.”

In conjunction with attending the festivals over these years I’ve written reviews for *CTR* and *Theatre Journal* of festivals ranging from the CoMotion disability arts festival in Toronto to the George Town International Theatre Festival in Malaysia, the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe, The Arab Theatre Festival, and Santiago a Mil. Reviewing has given me access to the media departments of the various festivals, including their promotional and contextualizing materials, tickets (often very good ones), interview opportunities with artistic directors and artists, access to special events and industry series, and production photos of the shows. All of this constituted key research for my project. Another important part of that research consisted of editing a special issue of *TRiC* on Festivals, as well as *The Cambridge Companion to International Theatre Festivals*. From this editorial work I learned about such unusual things as the remarkable Wee Festival for the very young in Toronto; the trilateral BeSeTo (Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo) Festival, held in a different host nation in each iteration, which attempts to redress historical differences and hostilities in Northeast Asia; and the Kampala International Theatre Festival in Uganda, which was designed, among other things, to forge solidarities and alliances among East African nations. And I learned from scholars working in different disciplines from different locations about the sociology, geographies, and economics of organizing, hosting, funding, marketing, researching, and documenting festivals.

I was in Aotearoa/New Zealand in March 2020 at the tail end of an extended research trip to Festivals in Australia and Aotearoa when Canadians were called back home by the global COVID pandemic. In spite of having intended to do more research before attempting a monograph on festivals, I realized that it might be a long time before festivals and their archives reopened, so drawing on the research I’d already done I sat down at my computer and fairly quickly wrote what was to be the first major outcome of my research, *International Theatre Festivals and 21st-Century Interculturalism*, which finally appeared in January 2022. I was disappointed that the press wouldn’t let me use “traffic in cultures” in my title, presumably disliking its (intended) resonances with traffic in drugs and human subjects, but I was surprised and delighted when I was offered the opportunity to appear in Tracy Davis’s series, Theatre and Performance Theory, at Cambridge University Press—the same series in which my *Reading the Material Theatre* had been published eighteen years earlier. The larger research project, however, continued post-pandemic.

**Theatre**

*Pre-COVID*

My primary reason for retiring from teaching had been to do more work in the theatre, but of course by 2020 theatres were closing, apart from online performances, which I haven’t had any interest in contributing to, and in which, in any case, I have no expertise. I did work between my official retirement date and the onset of COVID restrictions on a number of shows that I’m proud of, and from which I’ve learned a lot. Among these were working as dramaturge with playwright and director Marilo Nuñez on her autobiographically based play, *El Returno/I Return* at the Theatre Centre in Toronto as part of Why Not Theatre’s, Riser Project in 2016-17. I also took part in ongoing workshops with Soheil Parsa and Modern Times on *The Believers/Thirst* in 2017-18, including a week in studio in Montreal in which I somewhat dauntingly sat in as director with Peter and Soheil as performers and improvisors. And I was director and dramaturge for a production of the experimental *What is Water?,* a one-woman movement- and text-based piece at the Theatre Centre in 2019 by Turkish playwright and performer Gülce Oral.

But chief among my theatrical activities in that time was a developing professional and personal relationship with Majdi Bou-Matar, with whom I worked at MT Space as dramaturge and co-creator of their devised pieces, *The Occupy Project* in 2017 and its successor, the remarkable *Amal* when it opened in 2018 at the RUTAS Festival in Toronto, was remounted at IMPACT in 2019, and toured briefly before the onset of COVID. *The Occupy Project* was a fraught one in many ways that taught me a lot about the difficulties involved in the necessary and complex negotiations between Indigeneity and immigration. But *Amal*, which grew out of it, was a delight to work on. With Majdi’s usual brilliant guidance and using a similar method as for *Body 13* in 2010-12, scenes seemed to emerge from the nowhere of simple improvisational exercises, were then repeated, edited, and refined, each of them named and posted on a wall of the rehearsal hall to be eventually revisited, sequenced, discarded, combined, or elaborated upon until, as if by dramaturgical magic, we had a play. If something crucial was missing in the sequencing, we returned to creation mode and integrated the necessary new bits or revisited and revised the scenes we had.

All of this, of course, is both a great joy and hard work that places dramaturgy at its centre, but it was a wonderful, very much hands-on learning experience for me about the challenges and joys of collective creation and devising under the guidance of an ingenious and skillful director, and it gave me the chance to contribute moments and scenes as an active co-creator. The subject matter, moreover, was timely and important, telling the story of Syrian family divided in their political affiliations, some of whom flee the country and, after a fraught and for some fatal crossing of the Mediterranean, arrive in Canada sponsored as refugees by a Cree man with a guitar. Grounded in the representation of an intergenerational line of strong women, the show asked, “what does it mean to occupy? To resist? To survive?” The company, which featured Ahmad Meree, himself a recent Syrian refugee, was stellar, involving, in addition to Meree, an experienced and culturally diverse team of actor/creators: Trevor Copp, Nick Cumming, Nada Homsi, Jewels Krauss (later replaced on tour by Bó Bárdos), Gülce Oral, Pam Patel, and Cree actor-musician Nigel Irwin. The show opened in Kitchener, was performed at the RUTAS Festival in Toronto in 2018 and the IMPACT Festival in 2019 and toured to festivals in Montreal and the Middle East, though its further touring, along with a stint as part of Factory Theatre’s subsequent season, were cut off by the pandemic.

I also served as dramaturge in the Fall of 2019 when Majdi directed and the two of us radically adapted, with the permission of the playwright and translator, John Van Burek’s translation of Québécois playwright Stéphane Brulotte’s *Besbouss: Autopsy of a Revolt* for Pleiades Theatre at Toronto’s Streetcar Crowsnest. *Besbouss* was originally conceived and first performed in its original French as a solo show about the fictional autopsy of the fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation kick-started the Arab Spring movement in December of 2010. Majdi brilliantly added Bouazizi himself as a mainly silent, movement-based character, we made changes in the translation and the scene sequencing, and in collaboration with designer Teresa Przybylski Majdi located the action on an antiseptic, angular set, the silver-grey walls of which were ultimately smeared with ashes, the detritus of Bouazizi’s death-by-fire. This was all the inspirational stroke of Majdi, a theatrical genius whose work was often underrecognized because he operated outside of the major metropolitan centres and the theatrical mainstream. *Besbouss*, along with the Toronto performances of *Last 15 Seconds*, *Body 13*, and *Amal*, gave him wider recognition in the city, Canada’s theatrical metropole. Majdi’s work on *Besbouss* and elsewhere also reinforced the lessons I had learned in Germany: when you make a choice, make it a strong one, and commit to it fully.

*Qana*, also in 2019, also performed in Toronto, was a very different kind of experience. The show was initially conceived as one third of an experimental trilogy of short solo shows by women about the Middle East, each employing a different performance discipline (voice, dance, and theatre). *Qana* began with three of us in a small studio in Kitchener: Majdi, myself, and the remarkable performer and vocalist, Bó Bárdos, a mezzo-soprano with a specialization in new and experimental music and a performer with MT Space experience. All we knew, to begin with, was that we wanted to do a solo piece involving movement and voice but no text, inspired by two events separated by two thousand years of history that took place in the town of Qana in southern Lebanon. The town, on the one hand, was the setting of the biblical wedding feast at “Cana,” where Christ performed the miracle of turning water into wine. “Qana,” on the other hand—the same town—was also the site in 1996 of a United Nations compound that was bombed by the Israeli military, killing 106 civilians, mostly women and children, and injuring 116 more who had taken shelter there.

Majdi began by asking Bó to sing something. Anything—though her choice of starting material, of course, will have been influenced by her knowledge of what the show was to be about. As we worked, we listened to various materials, including improvised experimental music brought into the studio live by guest artists. And we orchestrated movement, excised lyrics, distorted or eliminated familiar musical and narrative expectations, and began to create a kind of ritual performance in which Bó moved through a ceremony from cleansing, with water, to celebration during which the water was transformed into wine, and finally to mourning, when the transubstantiated wine became blood. Bó worked with a large, cast-iron tub from which she drew the water, wine, and blood and into which she dipped and stepped. Late in the process we invited Fides Kruker, the extraordinary vocal teacher, singer, and developer of what she calls “emotionally integrated voice,” to join us for a few sessions as vocal coach, refining and tweaking the vocalizations. We also brought in the accomplished scenographer Trevor Schwellnus, of Aluna Theatre, to design and create video for the show drawing upon images of the Israeli attack on Qana. His video creations were digitally keyed to the modulations of Bó’s voice, which was eerily engaging and ultimately devastating as the bombs fell and the audience watched the blood anoint Bó’s unadorned body. The show, which premiered as part of Aluna’s CAMINOS Festival, was less than half an hour long, but its impact was epic, and the experience of working on it with four exceptional artists at the top of their game was, for me, exhilarating.

*Pandemic Be Damned*

Just prior to the imposition of COVID restrictions and the shutting down of most theatres, I was scheduled to work on a number of shows that were postponed or cancelled. I had, of course, retired from teaching in part to allow myself to take on more work in the theatre, and as for many theatre workers—though without their actual financial need—I felt desperate, if more than a little selfish, given what was going on in the world. But desperate times call for desperate measures, and when I was approached with a proposal by Trevor Copp to return to directing, I was cautiously intrigued. Trevor was (and remains) artistic director of Hamilton’s Tottering Biped Theatre.

I had worked with Trevor previously on three shows at MT Space and had provided him with some directorial feedback on his solo mime show, *Searching for Marceau*. I had also worked online with him and Johnny Trinh as a development dramaturge early in the pandemic on their gastro-play *Soup*, which was given a livestreamed dramatic reading as part of the Vancouver Outsider Arts Festival in 2020. I knew Trevor as an actor and a talented mime who was bored or irritated with some of the rules and expectations that plague traditional mime, which seemed to rely on the self-satisfaction of both performer(s) and audiences at nothing more than successful mimesis and was restrictively rule-bound. I shared this view. So when he presented me with a script that integrated mime and dense, anachronistic text in a solo show with two characters and a story that mattered, I began to work with him on his play dramaturgically, and to think with him about how we could rehearse and eventually present it, pandemic be damned.

*Bulfinch’s Mythology*, the piece that resulted from our collaboration and continues to tour, is a solo show based on the very few historical facts that are known about Thomas Bulfinch: that he was the 19th-century translator, popularizer, and bowdlerizer of works of classical mythology, mostly Ovid and Virgil; that he was a rampant and outspoken homophobe; and that he had a young male friend about whom he wrote another, adoring book and beside whom he was eventually buried. In Trevor’s play, exploring internalized homophobia, the relationship between the two men unfolds through letters and text while the translations of the myths are enacted through evocative movement.

The original script needed some work—work that is nevertheless best done in the studio rather than the study—and the mime sequences could only be created and refined in studio. During COVID, of course, there were no studios. It turns out that my home in Guelph has a back deck that’s raised eighteen inches above the rest of the yard, has no railing, and is the size and shape, more or less, of a small stage. So we worked there, out of doors, quite happily (and well-ventilated) for the most part. But the show opens, after an extended mime sequence featuring Theseus and the Minotaur, with Bulfinch delivering a graphic and booming homophobic rant about the evils of 19th-century Boston’s steaming homosexual underworld. The neighbours called the police. (I told this story to friends who said we were lucky: their neighbours would have cheered.) In any case, from that point on I circulated, and posted on the fence outside our yard, a notice to the neighbours explaining what was going on, asking for their patience, and promising not to rehearse in the early morning or late evening. Our back deck has henceforth been known (at least by Trevor and me) as “The Bulfinch Stage.”

We presented a workshop version of *Bulfinch* in the atmospheric chapel of an early 20th-century church in Hamilton in September 2021 with the audience masked, COVID-tested, and socially distanced. We reversed the chapel’s layout and used its large, arched wooden door as a shared upstage entry and exit for the audience and the performer, its stained-glass windows for their rich glow. Designer Joe Pagnan lit the show with shafts of light casting deep, angular shadows, sound designer Zach Parsons provided eerie underscorings and reverberating punctuation, and the ornate wooden door upstage mysteriously opened on its own initiative and cast appropriately haunting, angled light across the space. When we mounted a revised full production at the Hamilton Fringe in 2022, however, the show shifted in feel from the sacred to the profane. Our venue was now a somewhat insalubrious music venue and former strip club, so we shifted to cabaret-style staging, made use of the venue’s cash bar, and engaged the audience directly as inhabitants of the Boston molly house that features prominently in the show’s narrative. It changed the feel of the show dramatically and provided a lesson both in adaptation to given circumstances and in just how much context can shape a show and impact its meaning. *Bulfinch* has since been performed in university and festival settings where its resonances have shifted and no doubt will shift again.

Just prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, I’d managed to bring two of my preferred collaborators and friends together to work on a project that was dear to my friend Majdi’s heart, and that eventually also made use of the Bulfinch stage: an adaptation of *The Bell*, by Lebanese playwright Rafic Ali Ahmad, originally translated into English by Majdi with Kitchener colleague Paddy Gillard-Bentley. The play takes place in southern Lebanon during the 1982-2000 Israeli occupation. It consists of a monologue by a goatherd who brings to life a whole village, including his own herd of goats, that is caught in the middle of the conflict between the Israeli occupiers and the Palestinian resistance. The English version had previously been given a workshop production in Kitchener, directed by Anne-Marie Donovan and Nada Homsi, with Majdi playing the solo role of the goatherd, Abu Isa. The script’s goats in that version had been changed to sheep, and were evocatively performed by “Les Moutons,” part of Toronto’s Corpus Dance Project led by dancer/choreographer Sylvie Bouchard. That version was charming, and audiences loved it, but Majdi was not entirely satisfied. The dancers-as-sheep were terminally cute, but the show, stripped of some of its political import, was in danger of being read by a Canadian audience as dealing with a village of also cute but comically ineffectual Lebanese people incapable of taking care of themselves or their sheep. Sitting in a hotel room in Tunis in January 2018, while Majdi smoked a surreptitious cigarette beside an open window, he, Nada, and I discussed revisiting the show. Majdi obtained permission from the playwright to work with me on an adaptation, and I suggested approaching Nina Lee Aquino to direct the new version.

In December of 2019 and January 2020, the three of us worked on the show in the rehearsal hall of Factory Theatre, where Nina was artistic director. It was an exhilarating experience. We reverted to the script’s original goats, but rather than dancers we giddily decided to use a portion of the exploration grant we had received from the Ontario Arts Council to buy twelve stuffed goats—one small kid, ten mid-sized nannies, and one large, very expensive buck, whom the script names Ghadanfar. We modestly called ourselves the GOAT collective. Nina had the brilliant idea of staging the piece on what could be imagined as a map of southern Lebanon, with the audience arranged around it. With permission, we undertook a radical dramaturgical restructuring of the script and rewriting of some of the language, and Majdi deftly deployed the stuffed goats almost as puppets to represent villagers, resistance fighters, and, well, goats (“look at that udder!”). It was an exhilarating experience, and I learned interesting variations on timing, address, and the different dramaturgical rhythms that followed from the decision to use, manipulate, and address non-human actors (the goats). Rehearsals and development, however, were cut short, for the time being, by the pandemic.

In the meantime, Ahmad Meree, one of the actors in *Amal* and a Syrian refugee who had been brought to Canada in 2016 co-sponsored by Majdi, had been writing *I Don’t Know*, his first play written in English. He had authored two earlier plays, *Adrenaline* and *Suitcase*, both of which had been directed and ushered into production by Majdi. After each had premiered in Kitchener and *Adrenaline* had toured, the two short plays were performed together in Toronto, in Arabic with English surtitles, as part of Theatre Passe Muraille’s 2020 season. (It was one of the oddest, if also most instructive theatrical assignments I’ve undertaken when Majdi invited me to do scene work with Ahmad and fellow actor Nada Abusaleh in Arabic—which I don’t speak—during rehearsals for *Suitcase.* The script had not at that point been translated into English for surtitles, so I worked with the actors on the clarity of their intentions, not understanding a word of the spoken text.) *I Don’t Know* was written with Majdi in mind, not as director, but as one of the actors in the two-hander, the other being the playwright himself. Ahmad hired me during the pandemic to work with him as dramaturge on the show, which was scheduled to premiere outdoors at the IMPACT Festival in September 2021 under the direction of Majdi’s protegee and successor at MT Space and IMPACT, Pam Patel.

*I Don’t Know* was an uproariously funny show about suicidal ideation, one that invoked existentialist philosophy and the theatre of the absurd to represent the refugee experience in Canada, drawing directly on Ahmad’s own life in Kitchener. As directed by Pam, it also drew from physical comedy and clown traditions, employing outsized pencils and lollipops, a large black war-time gas mask to protect against COVID, bananas-as-guns, and on one occasion a banana peel as a condom. All this was outside of my regular dramaturgical wheelhouse, but I found myself enjoying the manipulation of audience expectations that are possible through comic timing, and particularly in this show, comic suspense. It was also educational to work on a show staged outdoors (because of COVID), on an extended thrust amounting to an almost fashion-show-style runway that mingled intimacy with distance, on which upstage action could play almost contrapuntally against what was happening more intimately down the runway.

And we revived *The Bell*, also at IMPACT 21, also and appropriately outdoors, this time in a grassy yard behind the colonial Schneider Haus Museum in Kitchener where the stuffed goats grazed happily on a floorplan/map of Lebanon that was marked out by large boulders (borrowed from the Stratford Festival) while audience members watched from two sides. Nina, who was also considering programming *The Bell* for the NAC, hired her usual excellent technical team, including Michelle Ramsay doing miracles with a very limited group of lighting instruments, and Michelle Bensimon getting creative with music and the sounds of grazing goats. Working with the MT Space team and with the help of Richard Lee, I served as producer for the only time in my career. It’s not a role I relish, and I learned that I didn’t want to do it again.

The process however, was no longer the joy that it had been in the Factory rehearsal hall. During the pandemic Majdi had suffered seriously from mental health problems, and he struggled in both *I Don’t Know* and *The Bell* with his own confidence as an actor. Indeed, we spent much of the summer of 2021 leading up to the September openings meeting in my backyard a few times a week to rehearse one-on-one. I don’t know how the neighbours felt this time about hearing a large Arab man with a booming voice telling stories to goats and singing, on one occasion, a militaristic anthem in Arabic celebrating Arab unity. But, forewarned this time by my regular circulars, they didn’t complain, and some even expressed their regret when we moved on to the performance site in Kitchener.

In the end, Majdi’s performance was well received, even garnering an outstanding actor nomination from Arts Awards Waterloo Region. But he was far from satisfied, and his mental health problems deepened. He continued to perform in and tour internationally with his signature show, *The Last 15 Seconds*,in 2022, but to the shock and indeed debilitating despair of many, myself included—we had become close friends as well as collaborators—he died by suicide after a tour to Germany in June of that year. He was posthumously awarded a lifetime achievement award from Arts Awards Waterloo Region, a festival in Casablanca and a performance of *The Last 15 Seconds* in his beloved Beirut have since been dedicated to his memory, and MT Space has raised money for a bursary in his name to support an emerging immigrant artist each year. I felt the loss of Majdi deeply, continue to do so, and I’m reminded of him daily by places, scenes, echoes of conversations, everything to do with MT Space, and the dozen stuffed goats that peer out at me from various corners and cupboards in our house, the only place where we’ve been able to store them in the event of a remount in his memory. He was perhaps my closest collaborator and best theatrical interlocutor, and I miss him.

*Post-Pandemic: Old Dog/New Tricks*

I filled in some of my time during the pandemic while the theatres were closed writing scholarly articles and submitting them to journals which I’d long admired but in which I’d never previously published. The first was an essay on “The Postmigrant Theatre of David Yee,” surveying the career of the Governor-General’s award-winning playwright and Nina’s closest playwriting collaborator, which was published in *The Journal of Canadian Studies*. The second, published in *Canadian Literature* from whose editorial board I had stepped down after serving there for fifteen years, was on “The Refugee Theatre of Ahmad Meree.” A third, in a journal to which I had been a frequent contributor, was a long essay in *TRiC* about the IMPACT Festival and its fraught 2019 iteration as a case study of the difficulties facing international festivals attempting to serve as genuine sites for intercultural encounter, in spite of the many barriers in the way of such endeavours.

Since COVID restrictions began lifting in 2022, however, and theatres reopened, my work schedule in the theatre began to fill in again, and more opportunities for ongoing learning and experimentation have opened up, many of them with old colleagues and friends, but many also moving in new directions that have proven to be both challenging and instructive. Some of this work has involved revisiting projects started by Majdi: a proposed revival and expansion of *Qana* and the trilogy of which it was to be part is being considered as I write, involving a coproducing team of Tottering Biped, MT Space, and El Hamra Theatre in Tunisia. Reviving *The Bell* with another actor has also been a possibility, though how we can this without Majdi remains difficult to contemplate and is, of course, emotionally fraught. MT Space has also attempted to hire a director from the Arab world to continue the work we had begun with Majdi in May and June of 2022—not long before his passing—on *Offspring of Terror*, a devised work about grandmothers, most of them from the west, trying to find the children of women who had travelled to the Middle East to become ISIS brides. In a short window when he seemed to be recovering from his illness Majid had directed a few very generative rehearsals with Bó Bárdos, Nada Homsi, and Pam Patel as performers and myself as dramaturge.

But one of the best experiences I’ve had working in the theatre since COVID was renewing my relationship with Soheil Parsa, working with him as production dramaturge on a revival of the Daniel MacIvor/Daniel Brooks collaboration, *Monster*, in the Fall of 2023 at Factory Theatre. Apart from *Hallaj*, I’d not worked with Soheil on a contemporary Canadian play before but was a huge admirer of his staging of Leanna Brodie’s translation of David Paquet’s *Wildfire* at Factory in 2022, where every directorial choice seemed a revelation, the performances were crafted with precision, sound and light functioned more as creative partners than merely atmospheric support, and the pacing and spacing were perfect.

Soheil typically begins each rehearsal process doing table work. His purpose isn’t to explain away a script’s problems and complexities so much as to identify options and alternatives at every moment, ensuring that nothing is taken for granted, every possibility is explored, and everyone in the room is deeply engaged with all aspects of the script. For *Monster* this process, which also included working with the playwright to update the script, not only consumed the first two of our five weeks in rehearsal but was revisited frequently thereafter as the staging presented more possibilities. The show involved the solo performer, the extraordinarily talented Karl Ang, staying in a single spot downstage centre for the duration, with the exception of one brief moment when he went backstage to retrieve the show’s only prop, a flute glass of champagne. Downing its contents, Ang hurled the flute into the wings to the sound of shattering glass provided by multiple-award-winning sound designer Thomas Ryder Payne. The presence during most rehearsals, including table work, of two of Canada’s most outstanding designers—Thomas and set and lighting designer Trevor Schwellnus—was an extra bonus for the show, both of them providing, with the help of stage manager Meaghan Speakman’s precise calling of literally hundreds of cues throughout the show’s 80 minutes, evocative visual and aural depth and richness that inhabited Ang’s masterful creation of no less than sixteen distinct and differently voiced and embodied characters. And each character, courtesy of Trevor, was provided with its own distinctive lighting cue even when only speaking a single word or line.

*Monster* was the first solo show Soheil had directed, and both his and my first show using a mic, which opened up new possibilities for both intimacy and intimidation, while allowing Thomas to integrate voice into the show’s soundscape, enhanced with echo and other effects. Soheil’s collaborative and analytically grounded process meant that everyone in the room contributed, increasing the dark and difficult but also very funny show’s impact exponentially. I learn much from Soheil every time I work with him, or even see show’s that he has directed, partly because of his own dedication to continuing to grow his craft.

But most of my post-Covid work, in different ways and to different degrees, has involved me, as a dramaturg and/or director, learning new tricks. I had already started off in some new directions since my retirement, working before the pandemic on music, voice, and movement on the wordless *Qana* with Majdi, Bó, Trevor Schwellnus, and Fides Kruker; and during the pandemic with Trevor Copp on mime in *Bulfinch’s Mythology*, where we proceeded generatively to break most of the discipline’s most rigid rules. With Majdi and Nina we had worked on something approaching puppetry as a key supporting element of *The Bell*, and with Ahmad and Pam Patel we used elements of farce in the production of *I Don’t Know* (the title of which frequently provoked puzzled looks when I answered the question “what are you working on?”).

There was also a brief flirtation with film. I’ve always liked film as a viewer and have enjoyed working with videography within the context of live theatre for years. But until recently I’ve had no real interest in working in any but live performance and had no experience beyond brief consultations with Trevor Copp and Dan Abramovici on Abramovici’s short film *Spaceman*, based on Trevor’s mime work. But when Jewels Krauss and Nigel Irwin, two collaborators on the MT Space production of *Amal*, separately approached me about giving them feedback on draft screenplays they had written I hesitantly consented, hoping, again, to learn something. Working with a screenplay alone is difficult. Film is primarily a visual medium, spoken text can take a secondary or even tertiary role, and writers for film, particularly those like Jewels and Nigel who were new to the genre, tend to overwrite.

Meaning in film is most often conveyed visually and is produced as much through camera angles, zooms and pans, depth of focus, and through post-production editing and montage as through anything that is readily apparent in even the most prescriptive of scripts. Working as a dramaturge on filmscripts, then, involves paying attention, not only to plot (or storyline), character, and dialogue but also to the possibilities for meaningful juxtapositions and visual resonances that are at best implicit and may or may not be realized in shooting. Working on the screenplay for Nigel’s *Medicine Man*, about a plastic shaman who is also a “pretendian,” placed me in the relatively familiar turf of negotiating across cultural difference, and also in the more familiar areas of character and plotting. But it was fascinating to work with Jewels on scripting voice-overs for *Impact*, an autobiographical, quasi surrealist film the visuals for which had already been shot, but not yet edited. It was a little like working on a jig-saw puzzle that may have extra pieces—footage that may or may not be used. I haven’t ventured any further into the realm of film (or television), but the kind of pushing at the edges of my dramaturgical experience that these various projects initiated has continued and intensified more recently, and much of my most interesting and challenging work has been with 7 Spices, Tottering Biped, the Blue Bird Theatre Collective, and the NAC (National Arts Centre).

*7 Spices*

I have worked with Ahmad Meree several times over the years at MT Space, Theatre Mada, and now his own company, 7 Spices, and I’ve maintained a relationship with him since *I Don’t Know* at IMPACT ‘21, working as a dramaturgical mentor on his translation of Syrian playwright Sa’dallah Wannous’s *The King is the King* for Pleiades Theatre in Toronto in the Fall of 2022 and on a remount of his earlier play, *Adrenaline* at the National Arts Centre in 2023. And we’ve begun a creation process working with Jewels Krauss and Syrian Canadian director Radwan Taleb, on a devised project entitled *Secret Agent*, a highly stylized movement-based piece about the complexities of an intercultural relationship. These projects, too, have mostly involved familiar dramaturgical work and processes, though I’ve learned a great deal from Ahmad about the dramatization of the lived refugee experience in Canada, and in particular about the requisite, quotidian performance of “refugeeness” within Canada.

That performance and its constraints are central to a new show, *Uncivilized*, initially staged as a work in progress at the 2023 IMPACT Festival with me and Ahmad sharing the directorial responsibilities and myself working as dramaturge. *Uncivilized* has been a departure for Meree from his earlier work in that it’s deeply reliant on an onstage camera manipulated by Meree himself in a myriad of ways—onstage, offstage, upstage, downstage, stage left, and stage right, close-up and longer shot, to explore the representation and public performance and perception of a refugee, Mohammed, undergoing while commenting upon his process of gaining citizenship in a country, Canada, that in spite of its boasts of official multiculturalism, is largely limited in its understanding of cultural difference. I hadn’t worked with a live camera onstage since my early 1980s experiment in *K.C. Superstar* at Mulgrave Road; the new flexibility provided by a smaller camera and digital technology has been intriguing and has allowed for the exploration of complex issues of representation from stereotyping to fetishization.

The first versions of the show have somewhat controversially used whiteface to depict the “ideal” refugee—one of European heritage—against which all others are measured and found wanting. The performance of identity has been a focus of my work off and on over my career, particularly during the 20 years I’ve been specializing in intercultural performance. But *Uncivilized* has exposed me to the necessarily complex and conscious performance required of the refugee, in this case from Syria, in a country, Canada, that anticipates undiluted gratitude while perhaps unconsciously also requiring a degree of both complicity and hypocrisy from the refugee subject. The multiperspectival manipulation of an onstage camera and the offstage, seemingly anodine voice of what may or may not be a Canadian immigration agent constitute the perfect vehicle for the play’s subject matter. *Uncivilized*’s dramaturgy, drawing from a confrontational brand of stand-up, eschews both character and story as they’re traditionally understood, but relies heavily on theatrical and extra-theatrical role-playing. The audience witnesses a conscious performance of shifting subjectivity. Since its presentation at IMPACT 23 *Uncivilized* has been workshopped at Theatre Passe Muraille in December 2024, bringing on board Modern Times’ Pakistani Tanzanian Canadian artistic director Rouvan Silogix as director, for a planned coproduction among Passe Muraille, Modern Times, and 7 Spices at Passe Muraille in September 2025.

*Tottering Biped* *Revisited*

I’ve never really liked mime. But the experience of working with Trevor Copp on the mime sequences that were intercut with text in *Bulfinch’s Mythology* convinced me that better use could be put to Trevor’s remarkably articulate physicality, earned through his training at L’École Internationale de Mimodrame de Paris Marcel Marceau, than asking audiences to recognize that a figure in white-face and a silly costume is trapped inside a bottle. So when Trevor approached me about being involved as director and dramaturge in a devised work, tentatively called *The Solitudes Project*, I welcomed the chance to work with him again. Trevor, who is also an accomplished ballroom dancer, was interested in working with the remarkable contemporary dancer and choreographer Andrea Nann and wanted to incorporate sound and video into the interdisciplinary project. Andrea agreed enthusiastically, Trevor approached his long-time collaborator Zach Parsons to serve as sound designer and composer, and I invited designer and videographer Trevor Schwellnus, with whom I had worked at Modern Times, Aluna, and Factory to join the team. Andrea hasn’t been able to join us yet, nor has Pam Patel, whom we invited to come on board as co-director and co-dramaturge. The rest of us, however, began a first phase of the project in November 2023 in a small upstairs studio in an old downtown building in Hamilton to explore isolation, solitude, loneliness, and independence through the journeys of a silent figure—eventually to be played by both Trevor and Andrea—suffering from early-onset Alzheimer’s, who has commandeered a boat and is sailing alone and aimlessly on the ocean. The intention is that all of the disciplines involved would contribute equally to the developing show, though so far movement has been driving the action and creation, triggering sound and video to establish an environment—at times *literally* immersive (the character goes underwater)—in which to explore the attractions, joys, difficulties and dangers of isolation within the most social of creative media, the theatre. And centering around a character who has no one to talk to, the work might also free viewers as well as artists from the logocentric tyranny of text.

We have only so far managed two weeks of creation concluding with a workshop presentation before an invited audience; meanwhile, we’re awaiting ongoing funding. The workshop started with the evolution of a set consisting of a fully articulated sailboat that did not and will not have any actual material existence. While Trevor Copp explored the physical character of the one-person craft through mime, climbing abord, circulating below deck, casting off, and careening out of the harbour, Trevor Schwellnus, an accomplished sailor, provided crucial information on the boat’s structure and operation, in effect designing a set that wasn’t and never would be there. Zach, meanwhile, created a soundscape and composed music, some of which seemed to emerge eerily from the mast, which Trevor C. played with cupped hands as though it were a theremin. We created sequences on the boat, in the water, and in the air above the boat when Trevor C. mimed climbing the mast and rigging the sails. Trevor S. created a rich video surround by filming the other Trevor’s hands as he mimed images of fish, birds, flying fish and other creatures of the environment that were then manipulated into strange and unusual shapes and silhouettes among waves, clouds and seascapes that included impressive storms and uneasy doldrums.

My job, as director and dramaturge, was of course to help shape all this into a coherent if wordless story, to explore the central themes of solitude and its variants as the central character descended more deeply from the isolation that is independence—our “hero” had wandered off from the confines of an old folks’ home—into the quintessential loneliness that is dementia. I was charged with integrating the central creative disciplines at play while also—in an ongoing project Trevor Copp and I share—attempting to strip mime of some of its representational excesses (fussy detail, elaborate demonstration) and introduce increased interiority and actorly intention. Mime as an artform has traditionally relied almost exclusively upon technique—on *how* an action is performed; we have become more interested in the more theatrical question of *why*.

But Trevor isn’t just a mime. Among other things, as the complex faux archaic text of *Bulfinch’s Mythology* demonstrated, he’s also an inventive writer, and occasionally he sends me some of his work in progress—not only dramatic—inviting comments and suggestions. One of these works to arrive in my inbox was an experimental short story entitled “Split Infinity,” in which the revolving structure of the story, which had neither beginning nor end and sat on the page in two columns intersecting one another in the middle, employed aspects of what was at the heart of its form: quantum mechanics. The circulating narrative revolved around two characters who never meet, scientists in Argentina and China respectively, at opposing points on the earth’s surface, encountering and impacting one another through a microscope, at which point their narratives intersect and cross. They literally cross the page. But writing the story wasn’t enough for Trevor, who now wants to work with me as director and his partner, a transgender Chinese Canadian scientist, to stage it as a durational performance with actors, dancers, and participating audience members, with the added twist that we will be exploring analogies between quantum mechanics and the experience of trans people. This constitutes another return for me: I hadn’t explored the intersectionality of quantum mechanics since I wrote “Toward a Quantum Dramaturgy,” the last chapter of my first book in 1999, at which point the trans experience hadn’t remotely entered my imaginary. We are currently in discussions with experimental performance companies about collaboration in creation of the show using one Asian and one Latinx actor, and one Asian and one Latinx dancer. And we’re in the process of applying for funding.

Meanwhile, on another front and in a return to our experiments with mime, Trevor and I are working with mezzo soprano Bó Bárdos on a project currently entitled *Sometimes it Snows in April*. In mid-April 2024 Trevor had invited me to attend a performance anthology of his short mime pieces called *Ineffable*, which I hadn’t enjoyed very much. Some of the pieces resembled very traditional types of mime, in which the point seems only to be to recognize what’s being represented, and they involved quite a lot of busy detail and overt demonstrations of emotion (a grin, a grimace, a sad face, shock). A few of them, however, grounded mostly in an exploration of loss and grief, were more subtle and seemed to emerge from a more grounded emotional place. In October of 2024 Trevor invited me to work with him on these for an upcoming gig he had in December. He wanted to use these three mime pieces as the starting point for a short mime and song show with a “European” feel to it about grief and loss. Having worked with Bó on *Qana,* I knew how evocative her experimental vocal technique could be, and I knew something of her experience of grief, so I suggested that we work with her, placing the two of them on a stage with only a single streetlamp and a park bench as a set.

We proceeded to break down the mime sequences to their fundamentals, stripping them of what I felt were their unnecessary detail and much of their narrative, and interweaving them. The strands of story that were left were held together by kind of mimed, physical chorus registering the stages of a relationship, and all of this was run parallel to Bó, dressed in a trenchcoat and carrying an umbrella, improvising fragments of wordless song and vocalization. Attempting to blend the mezzo and the mime through the techniques of theatre, I asked Bó and Trevor to think of themselves, not as a singer and a mime, but as actors using their training in the techniques of music and mime to play intentions. *Have* the emotion, I urged in a familiar directorial message, but *play* the intention. In four foreshortened rehearsals we put together an unassuming little half-hour show about a stag hunter and his prey, a young man and his lover, an old man and his dog, and a woman, a park bench, a lamppost, and an umbrella.

The result was something Trevor kept referring to as a durational piece, and I suppose if a 40-minute show can be described as durational, it was. We set a deliberately slow pace in these harried times and lingered over moments such as eating a lunch on a park bench. I encouraged both Bó and Trevor to sit inside of each moment and allow the audience to experience it fully, rather than feeling the need to move steadily toward some narrative closure. *Sometimes it Snows* received its first workshop presentations on December 13th and 14th at the Hamilton Conservatory using a thrust configuration, and the audience seemed to receive it with surprisingly rapt attention. I have been as proud of this little show as of anything I’ve worked on, and plans are underway for its future life, including, potentially, combining it with a first act, tentatively entitled “Seven Sad Songs,” driven by Bó’s remarkable vocal work.

*Blue Bird Theatre Collective*

Although working with Trevor and Tottering Biped has involved, sometimes incidentally, sometimes directly, various kinds of difference, mainly in sexuality, my work with the Blue Bird Theatre Collective has returned me to what has been my main focus for the past twenty years: intercultural performance, or, consciously and explicitly working across cultural difference. I first worked with Bluebird’s founders, Ghanaian-born Tawiah M'Carthy and Canadian-born Brad Cook on *Body 13* at MT Space under Majdi’s direction in 2011, and we have periodically talked since about working together again. Tawiah and Brad founded their company in 2013 collaboratively to create new work that was movement- and text-based and they had a significant hit with their show, *Maanomaa, My Brother* at Canadian Stage in 2023 under the direction of Philip Aikin. Both have active theatre careers outside of Blue Bird, so their creation process is an extended one consisting of several phases over, in the case of *Maanomaa*, several years.

Tawiah and Brad approached me in June of 2024 about participating in a new project they were planning with the sought-after Zambian-born actor, director, and playwright Natasha Mumba (with whom I was already working on another project at NAC, of which more below). The plan was to create a two-hander tentatively entitled *A Portrait*, to be directed by Tawiah and performed by Brad and Natasha, about a white male painter who has been commissioned by a major theatre company to do a portrait of a Black actress playing a famous person from history. In a zoom call in June 2024, they invited me to drop in on the process periodically as it was developing and offer feedback. I was interested in the project and the people, but, truthfully if perhaps arrogantly, I responded that I only accepted work in which I could participate fully, from conception to opening night of the show’s final version. This was not, I explained, about money, but about the way I preferred to work, having the privilege, as someone with a pension, to accept work only with people I respect and enjoy working with, on projects that I value, and as a full participant. They agreed, and in early July the four of us entered into a week of table work, research sharing, and discussion to narrow down the parameters of the project.

In the first couple of days we considered the central issues we were interested in (most of them concerning representation), who the historical character the actor would be portrayed as, and what play she was performing in, narrowing it down fairly quickly to a decision between Mary, Queen of Scots, and Joan of Arc. We settled on Joan, in part out of an interest in speculations that she may have been Black. We spent most of the rest of the week researching Joan’s life, reading plays about her by the likes of Brecht, Anouilh, Shaw, Shakespeare and others, analyzing the hundreds of portraits that have been painted of her over the centuries (most of them ahistorically giving her fair skin and, often, flaming red hair), theorizing about portraiture and representation, and coming to decisions about the given circumstances behind our own show: dates, times, places, ages, backgrounds, material conditions, and other crucial contextual information we needed to know before the actors could, in our second week, get on their feet. Which they did, generating relationships, movement vocabularies, and negotiating terms. One of the most interesting improvisations involved each character laying down the “rules” of their engagement. Much of this involved purely physical improvisations, with text emerging only occasionally, though we did come up with a draft of a “first meeting” scene that was both tense and funny and introduced some key issues.

So far so good. We spent more time around the table than I’m used to when doing devised work, but then there was more research to share than usual, and there was perhaps more distance between the actors and the characters they were playing than is common. Otherwise the process was familiar up to that point. When the next step—the next week’s work—was delayed by funding and scheduling until October, however, we pivoted (as we all learned to say during the pandemic): Brad and Natasha independently wrote scenes based on the work we had done, to which Tawiah and I responded with edits, analyses, thoughts, suggestions and speculations. All three of these artists are folks I’m intrigued to be working with over the long haul. The explorations continue….

*NAC*

One of the most exciting new institutional connections for me came about through a familiar source. In 2021-22 I had helped Nina Lee Aquino with her application and interview preparations for the job of Artistic Director of English Theatre at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Not that she had needed help: as the founding artistic director of fu-GEN and former AD of both Cahoots and Factory Theatres, she was arguably the most qualified candidate, successful or otherwise, ever to have applied for the position at the NAC, which she eventually accepted. She assumed her duties in August 2022.The application process was itself a learning experience, involving addressing things like the role of a national theatre in a postnational world, the role of internationalism at the NAC and its connections to Canada’s diasporic communities, and the relationship between a national theatre and its local community. And the process was rigged with traps. One question, concerning how an artistic director would deal with the emergence of marketing that didn’t correspond to the artistic vision of a show was one of them. The response, of course, was that regular communication from the outset would never let that situation emerge. Any aspiring AD who fell into the trap was clearly not fit for the job.

Shortly after accepting the position at NAC, Nina was in touch with me about several ways in which she felt I might be useful. One was to join her newly established “dramaturge’s circle.” This was a group, operating individually, of dramaturges from across the country—Brian Quirt, Vicki Stroich, Bob White and others—who were each given up to ten submissions of work for proposed production by the NAC. Nina had always had a primary interest in developing new work, and this had never historically been a practice at NAC’s English Theatre, whose stages rarely saw new plays. Reading and reacting to submissions had also never been a practice of the company, and over the decades virtually disappeared as a practice at any theatre in Canada where, strapped for time and money, even acknowledging the receipt of unsolicited scripts or proposals is rare. I got a package of ten submissions in my first year and found all of them worthy of a response, a few of them worth at least following up on, and one or two that Nina thought she might be able to move forward with.

Nina also hired me to work over two years as dramaturge on the development of an exciting new play, the first by the aforementioned Zambian-born playwright Natasha Mumba, that was scheduled for production in the 2025-26 season at the NAC. Set in both Toronto and Zambia, *Copperbelt* is an atypical African Canadian play, in that it deals with a wealthy Zambian family in an ethically complex struggle caught between a Canadian mining company and the Zambian government. The script opens with a note to potential directors” “This African play is not spiritual or ethereal. It is clinical and political.”

It’s long been my practice, when invited to work with a playwright I don’t know, to meet with them over coffee and *not* talk about the script, but to find out about their interests and practices, and to give us both a chance to decide whether we’re compatible. I had seen Natasha perform, first in *School Girls; or, The African Mean Girls* in March 2019, and then, live-cast during the pandemic, in *Act of Faith* in November 2020, both directed by Nina. I’d admired her work, but I hadn’t met her. So we got together in a café on Bloor Street West in Toronto in December 2023 and—well, we ended up very quickly talking about her play, and I’ve been working with her ever since.

Initially this involved three months of regular meetings over the script in coffee shops all over Toronto. Natasha is inexperienced as a playwright but has a great ear for dialogue and for the rhythm of a scene, and a keen sense of story construction. She’s smart. She’s also a strong personality committed to the complex representation of African characters far beyond the stereotypical poles of poverty and greed, starving children and warlords. She’s gifted, as well, with an equally strong work ethic, and is willing both to see and correct what isn’t working in her script while fighting for what she wants. Through most of the first few months of our working together, *Copperbelt* didn’t have an ending, but we found one just before entering what for me was a luxurious two-week workshop with an exceptional cast culminating in a public presentation at Canadian Stage’s Festival of New Theatre in early April 2024. The reading was greeted by cheers from a largely Black, broadly diasporic audience.

The workshop was followed by more one-on-one work in the Fall, thickening each character’s story as Natasha, an actor herself, made sure all of the actors had interesting journeys. Then, on New Years Day of 2025, Natasha, Nina, Tawiah (as actor and movement coach), and I travelled to Zambia—my first time in sub-Saharan Africa—to visit sites relevant to the play’s action (including a side trip from Lusaka to the mining town of Kitwe), to do a week-long workshop, to cast Zambian actors for the scenes taking place there, and to work on translations and dialect for lines and scenes that would not, in Zambia, take place entirely in English. Natasha had contacted over forty Zambian actors, and prior to our trip Nina had seen their audition tapes and narrowed that down to the seven who, supplemented by Tawiah, would constitute the workshop cast. The flight was long—Toronto to Newark, Newark to Johannesburg (16 hours), overnight in Jo-Burg, and a final couple of hours to Lusaka—and together with the seven-hour time change this meant it took a while to focus on the work. But Nina and I arrived in Lusaka on Friday and met with the translators and organizational team on Saturday, took Sunday off (to go on a min- photo-safari), and dug in with a full cast on Monday for a week-long workshop.

The workshop began as most do, with a reading of the script in which the actors were asked, contrary to much practice in sub-Saharan Africa, to read the text as written, without improvisations, followed by a question period in which everyone in the room was invited to respond in specific ways to the script while Natasha and I took notes. The actors were excited to be representing complex, non-stereotypical African characters in a compelling story that they felt was, in that problematic word, “authentic.” The next and subsequent read-throughs and scene work encouraged actors to engage in improvisations based on the text, particularly where they felt their characters might use Bemba rather than, or in addition to, English as written. While English is the official language of Zambia (the country had been part of the British colony of Rhodesia before gaining its independence in 1964), the country is home to seventy-two languages, with Bemba, spoken by 35% of the population, being the most dominant, particularly in the Copperbelt and the Northern Province.

The translation work was intriguing. I worked with Natasha and two translators from Lusaka: Austin Kaluba, an experienced literary translator, and Chiluba Nsofu, an actor fully fluent in both languages. They recorded the actors’ improvisations, and then the four of us worked together to find versions that worked, using both languages, and that were true to the ways in which the languages mixed in Zambia. Part of my responsibility, along with paying attention to the rhythms of the dialogue and flows of the scenes, was to ensure that the versions we arrived at would work for non-Bemba-speaking Canadian audiences.

The complexities of this work emerged in one revealing moment. In a key two-handed scene between Bemba-speaking characters late in the play, Nina and I were interested in having the scene play out entirely in Bemba, supported by English surtitles, as a way of honouring the language. Natasha, however, was torn. She recognized the theatricality of the idea, and appreciated the attempt to honour the language, but she also recognized the fact that no-one in Zambia would speak in entirely unadulterated Bemba: the culture, represented authentically (again that word), was now hybrid, and even native Bemba speakers would routinely mix English with Bemba in their everyday exchanges. We settled on a 60%-40%, Bemba to English. With surtitles.

One of the purposes of the trip was to cast some Zambian actors in major roles in the show, inviting them to come to Canada for the premiere and to eventually tour with the show. The cast we were working with was mixed. Some came from a theatre background (which in Zambia can sometimes mean what would in Canada be called community-based theatre), others had only film experience., some had both. Some of the actors impressed at first blush, others took a while to adjust but Nina, working on acting and text, and Tawiah, working with movement, offered intensive training over the course of the week, to which all of the company responded with both gratitude—they had had little opportunity to gain western-style theatre training (however problematic than might be)—and with marked and enthusiastic improvement.

In the end we selected two actors, Kapembwe Wanjela and Kondwani Eliot Zulu,for full in-person auditions, acting with Natasha. Both of them were impressive, and the NAC is preparing packages of coats, hats, and mitts to welcome them to Ottawa in December for rehearsal for a January premiere, which will be followed by a run at Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto. The final day of the workshop consisted of a reading in a local gallery before a crowd of invited friends, Zambian artists from various disciplines, and the Canadian High Commissioner to Zambia. The excitement in the room was palpable, in spite of microphones having been added at the last minute because of torrential rains pelting the roof of the gallery (it was the rainy season), and we left with high hopes that the production might eventually tour to Zambia.

Working at the NAC has taken me, not only into a new country with new people, but has also involved working in new genres. As I’ve said, I’ve never really like mime, but I’ve enjoyed working that dislike out with Trevor at Tottering Biped. I’ve never really liked radio drama either. It most often seems to me to try too hard, the actors performing overly theatrically, overly melodically, and the sound design either exaggeratedly atmospheric or too literal, naturalistic, or illustrative. And it rarely seems to take advantage of the unique capacity of the genre to get inside listener’s heads in a way that evokes rather than illustrates or explains, treating the absence of a visual dimension as a barrier rather than an opportunity to free the listener from the overwhelming dominance of visual representation and to free performers from the objectifications of to-be-looked-at-ness. My suspicion of the form is why, Nina said, she invited me to dramaturge the “Irresistible Neighborhoods” radio drama project at the NAC in 2023-24, an invitation that seems to have turned into a long-term commitment.

Nina devised the first “Irresistible Neighbourhoods: Ottawa 2044” in order, in part, to address a long-standing critique in Ottawa that the NAC, in addressing its national mandate, had never paid sufficient attention to the local. She was also anxious to continue her career-long commitment to the development of new work and new playwrights. “Ottawa 2044” was initially designed to address both of these things, while also undertaking to address what is perhaps the most pressing issue of our times: climate change. The English Theatre’s producer at the NAC, Judi Pearl, now also in charge of Environmental Projects there, had proposed to Nina that the experiment with radio serve as a primary case study for a Climate Art research project she is involved in with the Metcalf Foundation in association with Mass Culture, a collaborative support organization working on climate change.

In Spring, 2023 Emerging playwrights were asked to apply for NAC support to write and have produced 20-minute radio dramas set in their own Ottawa neighborhoods twenty years hence, and I was charged with working with the successful applicants for the better part of the year as dramaturge and production dramaturge. It’s a fascinating challenge to help emerging writers to imagine a future version of their neighborhoods through sound and voice alone, particularly neighborhoods that have experienced both climate change and—part of the mandate—actions taken to address it. But it necessarily involves, as I routinely argue all writing and rehearsal processes should, thinking about the creative process as posing and attempting to address questions (rather than presenting answers), engaging in “what if?” speculation through the invention of imagined situations, and following through on what their outcomes might be. In this case, moreover, it did so without the representational fixities that sight can (pre)determine, at once a restriction and an opportunity. How do you evoke a future local through sound? How do you imagine different behaviours, lives, and ways of thinking that will have allowed the planet and its neighbourhoods to survive for another twenty years with life that actually isn’t and can’t be “as we know it”?

The emerging playwrights who answered these challenges and were accepted into the project—Sanita Fejzić, Lily Polowin, and the team of Seth Thompson and Kel MacDonald—responded in very different ways, about three different neighborhoods, Vanier, Val-Tétreau in Gatineau, and Centretown, respectively. Sanita’s was a sci-fi, post-apocalyptic fantasy about differently hybrid peoples, part human, and part plant or part technology, Lily’s an almost sentimental play about water and cross-cultural, cross generational collaboration, and Seth and Kel’s an urban journey through a vertical post-industrial maze whose denizens include a raccoon, a crow, and a character called Old Weird Ron.

The team, minus directors, first met in Ottawa in September ’23 for an orientation session facilitated by Vicki Stroich as “climate dramaturge.” In addition to information on the “culture gap” in the climate crisis and the ways in which the Climate Art Project intended to support the engagement of artists in imagining a better future, we were led, as a group, on a tour of the three neighborhoods by the playwrights themselves, learning that Vanier was built on a dump of toxic waste, that the water in the Ottawa River running past Gatineau was unfit to drink or swim in, and that the aging built environment of Centretown was nevertheless home to a variety of non-human lifeforms. For the next eight months the playwrights, Vicki, and myself met regularly over zoom to discuss drafts of the works-in-progress, Vicki taking on prime responsibility for the imagined worlds of the plays, me for character and story, but really both of us working miraculously well together to support the nascent writers on overlapping fronts. With the exception of Vicki, we all met again, this time with Ottawa-based directors Kate Smith, Kristina Watt, and Emily Pearlman, sound designer Nick de Gaetano, and stage manager Jackie McCormick in Ottawa in May of 2024 to rehearse and, in remarkably short order, record the plays in the NAC’s Hexagon studio for a June 2024 release on the NAC website and “wherever you get your podcasts.”

In addition to having the chance to experiment with a new (for me) form, I’ve learned from this project how to think differently in all of my work: about the specificities and resonances of place, about imagining the evocative use of sound in the process of writing, and about how to represent different ways of thinking and being and the processes of change. I’ve also benefited from working with Vicki around ways to help playwrights imagine coherent worlds. It is the first time I’ve had the opportunity to work alongside another dramaturge, and Vicki is an experienced and sensitive dramaturgical voice from whom I’ve learned a good deal about gentleness and generosity of spirit, as well as about other dramaturgical insights and techniques, and about climate change and the arts. Finally, I learned from my first time working in a recording studio how to go about blending and balancing voice and sound to create worlds in the minds of audiences, giving them just enough to allow them to imagine their own worlds into being without overwhelming them with unnecessary details. And even as the wordless projects I’ve been involved in with Majdi and Bó and with Tottering Bipedgave us a chance to free viewers from the logocentric tyranny of text, the radio dramas of *Irresistible Neighbourhoods* have provided the opportunity to free performers from the objectifying gaze and audiences from the tyranny of the scopic regime of the proscenium and other stages.

The plays were well received. But even before they were recorded, Nina and Judi were approached by another branch of the NAC, the orchestra (NACO), to collaborate with them on Irresistible Neighborhoods, Part 2 (IR2), with a foreshortened timeline and a somewhat different mandate, though the focus on climate change remained. The overall project title was determined to be “Walking on Water.” This time, two senior playwrights from beyond Ottawa were to be commissioned to work with two composers to create radio plays that were to be performed and recorded before a live audience at NACO’s annual SPHERE festival (“exploring nature’s influence on art and humanity”) in September 2024, before being released as radio plays in November. We had six months.

The commissioned playwright-composer teams were assembled quickly. Siminovitch Prize nominee Berni Stapleton with composer Duane Andrews would represent a barren but richly evocative seaside Newfoundland neighborhood outside St. John’s, and Siminovitch laureate David Yee with composer Chris Thornborrow the Trinity Bellwoods neighborhood of Toronto. Both teams, including directors Sarah Kitz (artistic director of the Great Canadian Theatre Company) and Nina respectively, and foley designer John Gzowski, met in Ottawa for orientation in March, once again facilitated by Vicki Stroich. Unfortunately there were no neighborhood tours this time ’round, but the tight time frame served to concentrate the mind, and before we left Ottawa we had ideas for both shows, and more importantly a commitment to playwright-composer collaborations that didn’t prioritize text. Both composers had worked in film and television writing music for scenes that had already been shot. Both were excited by the prospect of being co-creators from the outset, and indeed there were many occasions when the music came first and the playwrights wrote scenes in response to musical ideas and compositions.

The teams worked independently of one another and mostly over zoom for the first three months, and because Vicki was unavailable I was the only one working on both shows until John Gzowski joined us in Ottawa in June. My contact with David and Chris over those months as they developed an eco-horror play, *Cicadas*, was limited to some feedback on musical proposals about instrumentation and tone and on a couple of drafts of scenes, and to a few meetings. There was more frequent, weekly consultation over zoom among Berni, Duane, Sarah and I about *The Woman of One Thousand Years*, which spanned three time periods connecting the centuries over the airwaves through a radio station on Newfoundland’s east coast. The in-person early rehearsals in June were glorious but coincided with the difficult birth of Chris’s son in Toronto, Chris joining us from the hospital by zoom when he could, answering questions, offering rewrites and refinements, all while anxiously attending to his partner’s complicated labour. The musicians, contracted by NACO, who were accustomed to being hired to work on finished projects with limited practice time, were thrilled to be taking part in an extended rehearsal/creation period, and I was excited to be working with them as a dramaturge, seeing and helping to facilitate the creative collaboration among actors, musicians, writers, composers, and foley.

Working with David, Chris, and Nina was an entirely pleasant and productive experience, if a largely familiar one. I’d known David and, of course, Nina, for a very long time, we share a wry sense of humour and an obsession with detail, and I share with David a nerdy interest in the complexities, contradictions, and nuances of English grammar. Chris had worked with David before, and he fit right in to the mix and brought with him a rich understanding of the rhythms of speech and musical punctuation, together with admirable and generous flexibility and openness. The novelty, this time, was working in the horror genre while avoiding cliché and retaining a perverse sort of climate optimism.

Working with Sarah, Berni, and Dwayne was a very different experience. I hadn’t previously known any of them, though I had admired Berni’s work. But the dynamics were very different in this group and were dominated by two strong women who were both born collaborators. And the setting and subject—rural Newfoundland—I had only previously experienced as a tourist, though there are cultural similarities between Newfoundland and the Maritimes. But Bernie’s imaginative leaps every week were stunning, Duane’s good cheer and inventiveness both infectious, and Sarah, as director, brought a steady and dramaturgically secure hand to the proceedings, along with a studied capacity for close reading and close listening. For the first time working as a dramaturge I often found myself pushing Berni for *less* subtlety, trusting audiences less than the playwright did to pick up on details, nuances, and, especially, connections across the play’s three time periods: one hundred years ago to the day, the present, and far into an imagined future.

The only significant similarity between the two shows was their self-reflexive use of radio, *Cicadas* relying for its narration on the device of podcasting, and *A Woman of One Thousand Years* using a venerable Newfoundland amateur radio show as a mode of communication across the play’s distant time periods.

Both shows were recorded, twice, before live audiences over a weekend in September 2024 as part of the NAC’s SPHERE festival, and released as radio plays in November. Audiences reveled in watching, not simply the shows, but the making of the shows through communication among actors, musicians, and foley, as the extraordinary Newfoundland actor Deirdre Gillard-Rowlings (“Didi”) doubled characters through the manipulation of her voice either digitally or by the simple device of speaking into a cup; as musicians took their cues, not from time signatures in the score but from lines in the script or physical cues from the actors; as percussionist Nathan Petipas dipped cymbals in water or “played” them with cello strings; and as John Gzowski created an extraordinary soundscape from ordinary things—from bags of flour to boards and boxes—right before our eyes. For its live audiences, each of the pieces in “Walking on Water” was in large part a show about making a show.

The “Irresistible Neighborhoods” project continues. The third, as yet unnamed installment, which will include as one of its three parts a full-length live stage version of Yee’s *Cicadas* in Spring 2026, perhaps enhanced by Augmented Reality, is currently a multi-platform endeavour that will involve my learning how to work as a dramaturge on VR and AR applications, possibly gaming, and who knows what new ways of imagining a climate future for national neighborhoods. At the NAC and elsewhere, the opportunities for learning continue.

**CONTEXTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Life is short. And the craft, as Chaucer said, is long to learn. I’m still learning. But learning the craft is also not an individual endeavour, nor is it dissociated from the society in which it takes place. Which means that the story I’ve been telling, my story, isn’t mine alone, and while it *is* that of a particularly socially positioned and privileged white male baby boomer who has had opportunities that haven’t been available to everyone, it’s also in many ways representative of sixty years of theatre and theatre studies in the land that’s now called Canada, and it’s been shaped by social and political forces at the local, national, and international levels.

My earliest education took place in a 1950s and early ‘60s Toronto that was very different from what it is now. Known as “Toronto the Good” it was, in my lived experience if not in its actual demographics, as white as the driven snow (which I remember as being deeper than it is now), as conservative as the Presbyterian church basement that my mother presided over as an elder, and as boring, culturally, as it could get away with. Bars closed early, stores were all closed on Sundays when you couldn’t order alcohol in a restaurant without a side order of food, the food itself was tasteless, and all the vegetables were overcooked. My primary and secondary school classmates were exclusively white, though being Roman Catholic they included a significant number of Irish and Italian students who by then had officially *become* white. (This, of course, didn’t excuse them from being called nasty racial epithets by their schoolmates and treated by their teachers as inferior.) At home, I was taught two things by my mother: “it’s not polite to *notice* things”—especially difference; and “we didn’t send you to school to have *ideas* put into your head!”

My only other experience of any sort of cultural difference was having to walk north every day to go to St. John’s Catholic school on my own while all my friends in the neighborhood, all non-Catholic, walked south together to the public, or what I learned to call Protestant school, Williamson Road. In high school I took public transit halfway across the city carrying my trumpet, hockey equipment, and an armload of books to get to St. Michael’s College School, while my friends walked the short distance to nearby Malvern Collegiate. My classmates from grades seven to twelve were all boys, and being in a family of three brothers, I had very little to do with girls or women during puberty, apart from my mother and the nuns, some of them vicious, who taught me in primary school. Finally, while I had some very vague awareness of the civil rights movement from television—I remember watching the news and my Scottish grandmother, puzzled, saying “I suppose they *are* people too!”—I had pretty much no direct experience with Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Asians, Black folks, or other people of colour. And I had no idea that Indigenous people existed outside of tv westerns.

In the awareness of the general public, as far as theatre was concerned, and in spite of small operations like the Crest Theatre, there was only Stratford, a national theatre dedicated to the work of a foreign playwright, and the Royal Alex, a roadhouse for high-culture touring shows or musicals from the West End or Broadway. We were taught in school to respectfully admire, if not actually like, “the best,” and the best was clearly British, even if it couldn’t, regrettably, always be Shakespeare. It was never local. This was the period of the so-called colonial cringe, in which English Canadians for the most part considered ourselves, rather than the Indigenous peoples who were invisible to us, to be the colonized, if we thought about it at all.

That world began to change in the later 1960s, though the changes took some time to filter down throughout society, and certainly to me. I clearly remember attending Expo 67 in Montreal in the year of Canada’s centennial celebrations, first with high-school friends (one Irish, two Italian, one of whom had access to a car), and again later in the summer with my parents. Expo and the centennial celebrations themselves could eventually be understood to have kicked off a period of Canadian nationalism that reached its peak in the 1970s. In the theatre it manifested itself in the Gaspé manifesto in 1971 calling for 50% Canadian content in all subsidized Canadian theatres, and in the founding, in the early to mid-’70s, of small nationalist so-called “alternative” theatres, first in Toronto and then across the country—alternative not because of any commitment to aesthetic experimentation or any explicit political program, but because they produced Canadian plays. One of them, still operating in Ottawa, was self-consciously called the Great Canadian Theatre Company. But most of them aspired to swim, in Denis Johnston’s metaphor, “up the mainstream” rather than aspiring to any ongoing or politically alternative status. In theatre studies it was reflected in the founding of *Canadian Theatre Review* in 1974 and of the Association for Canadian Theatre History in 1976, both ushering in a nationalist period that was to last into the 1990s.

Expo ‘67 also, however, as a world’s fair organized by national pavilions, helped to reduce, if only slightly, a hitherto deep-seated English-Canadian provincialism and opened up some awareness of a wider world, not only outside Canada, but also of a vibrant and different language and culture in a Quebec that many were visiting for the first time. (For me, this understanding was somewhat deepened when I did a summer exchange program in grade twelve with a Québécois family and had a Québécoise girlfriend. But when I returned to high school in Ontario after the summer, proud of my language acquisition, my anglophone French teacher humiliated me in front of the class by mocking my debased Québécois, as opposed to his “pure” Parisian accent.)

This was a time of some small, dawning public awareness of the absence of a Canadian cultural identity. In 1972 CBC radio host Peter Gzowski held a contest to complete, after the fashion of “as American as apple pie,” the phrase “as Canadian as…”. The contest was won by seventeen-year-old Heather Scott, who offered “as Canadian as possible under the circumstances.” And the heady search for a Canadian identity was on. The period was marked by self-deprecating jokes about Canada and yoghurt:

“What’s the difference between Canada and yogurt?”

“Yoghurt has a culture.”

Or even,

“There’s no difference—they both have an imported culture.”

As for me, I was too busy starting graduate studies, working full time on the midnight shift at Hertz Rent a Car, and trying to help raise a child who was born in 1970, to take much of this very seriously. And I’ve never really liked yoghurt anyway.

But all this was changing quickly, and not only because in the wake of Expo Canadian content policies (and sometimes even money) were being put in place to support CanLit, the Canadian film, television, and music industries, Canadian pride, and even Canadian theatre. We sewed Canadian flags to our backpacks when we travelled and insisted (perhaps protesting too much) that we weren’t like Americans. The 1960s were prosperous years, and beginning in 1962 a policy was introduced, formalized in the Immigration act of 1967, that liberalized Canadian immigration policies, eschewing for the first time discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, or culture. Never mind that this was done to bolster a stretched labour market with cheap, easily policed bodies, the new policy had the effect of opening the country’s borders to non-European immigrants, which gradually transformed street life in Toronto, and more gradually in the rest of Canada, introducing new languages, looks, and services, most notably food.

By the time the first generation of these immigrant families’ children were growing up the policy change also began to transform the arts scene, including theatre. This, too, was partly the result of other policy changes that came about, in part, because of the response of immigrant communities to the report of the 1963 Bilingualism and Bicultural Commission, in which the English and French were designated as “charter groups,” and everyone else was othered. All of this led eventually, of course, to the adoption of official multiculturalism over a series of white papers and policies culminating in its official passage into law in 1988. This policy, designed to “manage” rather than promote difference, nevertheless and crucially opened the door for equity initiatives “from below.” And, finally, after years of limited and patronizing funding from the multiculturalism directorate for non-professional “ethnic heritage” activities, arts funding, as a result of strong lobbying by minoritized artists, became available for Canadians of colour as well as those of pallor.

All of this meant, for me, that when I left for Sackville in 1977, Toronto was still a provincial village, and when I returned to Guelph, just outside Toronto, in 1989, the big city down the road was a different place, boasting its multicultural “identity,” flaunting its opportunities for “ethnic” dining, calling itself “world class,” and featuring some new theatre companies. I had, of course, tried to keep in touch over my twelve years away. I’d been to the city on sabbatical in 1983-84 and went to the theatre a couple of times a week, haunting the alternative scene. I’d been there to visit my mother every year, and I’d always attended what theatre I could. One year I even brought a group of students from my fourth-year Canadian theatre class at Mount A (they slept in my mother’s basement), attending shows ranging from one at the tiny back space at Passe Muraille (featuring Ian Wallace and Jackie Burroughs—both names to conjure with, both now lost to us), in which a giant penis raided the aisle and devoured one of my students, to a spacey show at the now defunct McLaughlin Planetarium on University Avenue featuring Paul Gross and laser lights spangling the night sky.

Nevertheless, while I was away becoming a Canadian nationalist and Maritime regionalist—and the Maritimes as I knew them outside of Halifax’s north end were still overwhelmingly white—a second wave of alternative theatres had appeared in Toronto in the late ’70s and early ’80s targeting alternative audiences, including, in 1979, both Buddies in Bad Times, a queer company, and Nightwood, a feminist one (though neither began with identity mandates). Nightwood was later, from 1989 to 2008, to adopt a mandate promoting the work of women of colour. In 1986, however, the founding of Cahoots Theatre Projects, and especially its 1990 conference, “Write About Now,” billed as “The First Canadian Conference of Visible Minority Playwrights,” ushered in a couple of decades or so in which new culturally specific and intercultural theatre companies were founded in Toronto that I was at first largely unaware of. The Indigenous Native Earth Performing Arts, founded in 1982 and based in the Native Canadian Centre on Spadina Road, rocketed to prominence in 1986 and 1989 with its productions of Tomson Highway’s *Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, and in 1989 Soheil Parsa and Peter Farbridge founded the intercultural Modern Times Stage Company with which I was to become involved years later. Many more companies followed in the 1990s and 2000s, some of them short-lived, some enduring, but together constituting an intercultural performance ecology that I eventually began to participate in and write about, and that isn’t going away any time soon.

While I was getting my bearings as chair of the university department proudly hosting the first graduate program in Canadian theatre, that theatre and Canadian society more generally were moving gradually out of a phase of post-colonial nationalism to join a postnational, globalized, and sometimes even transnational world. And as the economic heyday of the 1960s receded further and further into a rear-view mirror tinted by nostalgia or condescension, funding for the arts, universities, and social programs dried up, neoliberal governments everywhere reframed artists as (independent) entrepreneurs, and both universities and arts organizations, including theatres, became increasingly corporatized. Universities, in Canada as elsewhere, strapped for cash and pressured to be (financially) accountable, increasingly focused on training rather than education and on so-called STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine), cutting back on arts programs and especially on expensive and trouble-making ones like theatre.

Ironically, many of the ideals I thought I had fought for, such as interdisciplinarity, became catchwords, not for artists or academics, but for administrators. Why hire faculty in two or more departments defined by discipline when a single interdisciplinary program could cover the same ground with less expense (and fewer faculty with less expertise)? Within those shrunken theatre departments that remained intact, meanwhile, the divide that I had resisted all my career between theory and practice, seemed magically to be dissolving, albeit, again, with less expertise among instructors on both sides: what new faculty that were hired were expected, not to specialize, but to teach theatre history, criticism and theory from all over the world in all periods, while also directing departmental productions and teaching acting, not always well and often with no prior training. Courses and programs specializing in what was called dramaturgy emerged with little clear sense of what the word might mean beyond sounding sophisticatedly obscure, and these courses and programs were often taught by generalists with little or no training or experience *as* dramaturges.

As I write and work in and on intercultural performance in this country, and with the terrifying re-emergence of Donald Trump as president south of the border, there is much talk about the rise of the extreme right in the US, Canada, and globally. I suspect and hope that this movement is the (hopefully last-ditch) reaction of white supremacists to threats to their hitherto taken-for-granted privilege and dominance. These threats have arisen, as the white supremacists perceive it, from many directions: increased immigration, formal and informal movements such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, Me Too, the Occupy Movement, Idle No More, and various resistant transnationalisms, Indigenous resurgence, feminist, queer, two-spirit, and trans rights movements. All of these are under attack from the right as “woke,” but all of them also make room for hope in a future that is more equitable and assumes a less hierarchical, less extractive, and less acquisitive national and global culture.

The individual journey that these pages trace, then, is embedded in and reflective of a larger social pattern, as most personal journeys are. Like Canada, I’ve moved gradually away from a kind of settler colonial deference to British and American authority and values (Shakespeare et al), including willful ignorance of Canada’s own genocidal policies and practices (we take great pride in the underground railroad, but are largely ignorant of Canada’s history of slavery, and until recently have been in denial about its abusive residential school system and other crimes against its first peoples). Like Canada, I have moved through a postcolonial nationalist period to a dawning awareness of the country’s own productive internal cultural differences and a hopefully resistant new engagement with a transnational—as opposed to international or globalized—world.

But within this shifting context, I, like Canada, still have a long way to go, and the learning journey continues. I hope I’m not as naïve as I was when I started out, and I hope that Canada, too, has gained something in sophistication and grace as it begins to acknowledge its less than exemplary histories and often oppressive present practices—many Indigenous reserves still have no clean drinking water as I write. I hope that I’m less focused on personal ambition than I was as a young academic, and more capable of working both within and against the kinds of hegemonic social pressures, in Canada and globally, that reward that kind of ambition. I do think I’m seeing those systemic and culturally reproductive pressures a little more clearly than I used to, and I think this is true of a broader public. It’s certainly true of the much younger artists and scholars I now encounter and admire. I know I’m less conservative than I was all those decades ago when I was working in an English department, exclusively as a scholar, and almost exclusively on Shakespeare, and I’m continuing to learn to be more appreciative of difference. But as Bob Dylan said, I was so much older then. I’m younger than that now.