

## SAM STEDMAN

### FREE FALL: THE STATE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY AND EXPERIMENTAL PERFORMANCE: (A NETLESS NET)

What status does experimental and interdisciplinary performance currently have, and where might its future lie? Into what relationship(s) with various forms of institutionality has it settled, and what impact(s) might this have on its present and future development? Is its support by the Canada Council simply an entrenchment of its marginality? This paper is a meditation on these questions, using as a case study Toronto's Free Fall Festival, one of the most recent additions to an expanding network of experimental and institutional festival venues across Canada. Tracing the dangers and the necessities of institutionalization in a contemporary economic and cultural landscape, Stedman attempts not to answer the aforementioned questions, but to bring this vital and under-represented discourse into greater focus.

*Quel est le statut aujourd'hui de la performance expérimentale et interdisciplinaire? Quel avenir lui est réservé? Quel est son rapport avec diverses formes d'institutionnalisation, et quels effets cette situation peut-elle avoir sur son état actuel et futur? L'appui que lui accorde le Conseil des Arts du Canada ne fait-il que renforcer sa marginalité? Cet article est une réflexion sur toutes ces questions, à partir de l'exemple du Festival Free Fall de Toronto, l'un des plus récents ajouts à un réseau toujours en expansion de festivals expérimentaux et institutionnels au Canada. En soulignant les dangers et les besoins de l'institutionnalisation dans un paysage économique et culturel contemporain, Stedman cherche non pas à répondre à toutes ces questions, mais bien à mieux situer un discours essentiel et sous-représenté.*



Imagine war breaks out in your hometown. You flee with your family, friends, and neighbours to another country to escape danger. As soon as you cross the border, you become a refugee. If, on the other hand, you find refuge within your country, in a camp or temporary shelter, you are considered an internally displaced person, or IDP.

(O'Connell, *diaspora*)

The above quote—transcribed from a grant application submitted by Stephen O’Connell of the formerly Toronto-based performance collective bluemouth inc.<sup>1</sup>—was the seed of what has now become the biennial Free Fall Festival. The grant application was initially intended to garner funding for a “national symposium of new and experimental performance” (O’Connell), entitled *diaspora: symposium and festival of the living arts*, a joint effort of the Theatre Centre, bluemouth inc., and the 7a\*11d International Performance Art Festival. Participants in the proposed symposium/festival were to construct and inhabit a tent city in an undisclosed location in Toronto late in October 2002. In an interventionist effort to encourage engagement from both the media and the public—especially that of the surrounding community for whom the disturbance would be most visible—the event was structurally rooted in this overt political gesture of linking the socio-cultural displacement of the IDP with that of the experimental artist.

It is perhaps not surprising that *diaspora* did not receive funding, given the tenuous (at best) public support for tent cities and the like in Toronto, and given the resulting criticism that would likely ensue if it were discovered to be attached to a government-funded arts event. A new application was drawn up for a much pared down and more conventionally conceived performance festival called Free Fall, which did receive funding. The revised event took place in October 2002 at various venues on Queen Street between Dufferin and Spadina streets, from the artist ghetto of Parkdale to trendy Queen West. While the event retained its initial goals of bringing together a national selection of interdisciplinary and experimental artists, further developing a growing network for these artists to inhabit and utilize, and providing a forum for critical discourse, its ability “to foster a greater awareness” of experimental performance practices “amongst the general public” (O’Connell and Duclos, *Free Fall 02*) was greatly restricted, in comparison to *diaspora*, by the more conventionally institutional structure of the festival.

The likening of experimental artists and IDPs, while it could come under fire for demeaning the plight of actual political refugees, is both metaphorically accurate and evocative. Finding little support within mainstream culture,<sup>2</sup> experimental arts practices and their proponents in Toronto generally find themselves in a situation of entrenched displacement, even within the arts community itself. It is not that experimental artists are persecuted, *per se*, but rather are largely ignored, a far more insidiously damag-

ing cultural formation than overt persecution could ever pretend to.<sup>3</sup> It is not so much a forcible displacement that marginalizes the perception of experimental performance's artistic and cultural legitimacy, but an inherited marginalization that perhaps began with the "genrefication" of performance art in North America and the disappearance of unifying dominant ideologies to attack or subvert.

Josette Féral has traced the trajectory of performance art from the 1970s through to the early 1990s, arguing that

[the] changes undergone by performance art are linked to an era in which there are no more strong political, economic, or aesthetic ideologies, nor any mutual artistic projects. The disappearance of these comprehensive ideologies, as well as the fading away of large systems of meaning, has been offset by the emergence of individualism and nationalism which affirm the difference among subjects, groups, and countries. (157)

As a result of these cultural changes, 1990s (and, one could certainly argue, contemporary) performance art shifted away somewhat from strictly formal preoccupations and toward the artist's renewed concern with "message and signification." With this shift came the loss (or fulfillment) of performance art's unifying function to "contest the aesthetic order of the time," leading to the disappearance of performance art "as a form" with a more or less clear ideological function and to its evolution into a rather expansive genre (Féral 148-9).<sup>4</sup>

The Free Fall Festival is a pro-active response to the generalized displacement of experimental and interdisciplinary work and an attempt to exploit the potential benefits of becoming an institutionalized genre. In effect, it adds a new node onto a burgeoning national infrastructure of experimental and/or interdisciplinary festival venues that already includes Mois Multi (Quebec City), Vasistas (Montreal), and the High Performance Rodeo (Calgary). Between 2002 and 2004, connections between the organizers of Free Fall and the organizers of these other events solidified, with an agreement being reached to work in tandem "to promote the development and dissemination of interdisciplinary performance in Canada by sharing cost and collaborating on programming" (O'Connell and Duclos, *Free Fall 04*).<sup>5</sup> As such, the 2004 Free Fall Festival took place in April to allow for the possibility of cross-country touring via this growing network of festival venues for innovative experimental and interdisciplinary work that, due to its

lack of mainstream popularity and concomitant lack of mass demand, would not otherwise have had such a ready-made opportunity for national exposure.<sup>6</sup>

A total of seven companies/artists took advantage of the exposure that Free Fall 04 offered, including productions from British Columbia (Radix Theatre), Ontario (Turbo Bonz, Oomph Group, and Glenn Christie), Quebec (Martin Bélanger and Marcelle Hudon), and Newfoundland (Lori Clarke). While some shows utilized an environmental format—like the Oomph Group's site-specific installation/performance, where wine and cake were served, and Radix Theatre's drive-in spectacle, where the car-bound spectators were arranged in a circle around the performance and a short-range radio transmitter broadcast the audio portion of the performance directly to the car stereos—others employed a more conventional spatial relationship between audience and performance. Some of these more conventional spatial arrangements still constructed a variety of unconventional audience and performance relationships: Martin Bélanger's variously alienating and sympathetic uses of theory and autobiography, both fascinatingly mediated by his use of physicality and direct address; Marcelle Hudon's combination of puppetry, live video, music, and the manipulation of shadows; Lori Clark's two modes of address that began with a video installation and ended with an image-based performance utilizing the projection of images onto a live performer. This brief outline only scratches the surface of the various kinds of work and interactions that the festival offered its patrons.

Free Fall is the youngest of the above-mentioned festivals, and it remains to be seen if it will expand to the scope of the High Performance Rodeo (the latter ran for three weeks in 2007, in contrast to the 11 days of Free Fall in 2006). Surely such growth would be desirable in a variety of ways, likely indicating stronger institutional support and audience base for the work—a support seemingly unanimously desired by the artists who create it. But it is a fine line between changing the perception of experimental work's accessibility and changing the nature of the work to ensure mainstream accessibility. If interdisciplinary and experimental work is to fulfill its goal of a productive increase in support and popularity for its radicalism while avoiding assimilation into the mainstream in such a way that its radicalism disappears, Free Fall, and the work that it produces, must engage in a dangerous dance with institutionality. Of course, some artists working in this area may welcome assimilation into the mainstream, but of those with

whom I've been acquainted, many are deeply committed to forms of experimentation, however generalized or fragmented, that would suffer (or perish) if contained wholly within strict mainstream parameters of accessibility and consumability.

Contemporary experimental work no longer carries with it the fierce early twentieth-century urgency to annihilate dominant cultural and artistic norms, though the attempt is sometimes still made. That urgency can only come from a significant and somewhat unified cultural investment—positive or negative—in those norms on the part of the general public, which is not currently a feature of a deeply fragmented Western culture. I am quite sure (though I have no statistics to justify my claim—only my attendance at these often poorly attended events) that the vast majority of Torontonians have never actually witnessed an experimental performance. Though I am less sure on this point, it is my contention that this broad and sweeping genre is sufficiently ingrained within our cultural matrices that the general public thinks that it already knows what is *not* being offered by such work: that is, a conventional entertainment product with a more or less conventionally consumable narrative. Without necessarily knowing what experimental performance is, a verdict is thus passed down upon it. In the public eye, then, it becomes a genre by default, and a problematic genre indeed if it is defined by its lack of desirability. Or, equally damaging, it could be an imagined genre based not on actual exposure, but on an imagined exposure constructed by media sound bites or something once seen in a movie.

If I am even partly correct here, this observation begs a difficult question: upon what ground can contemporary performance in the avant-garde tradition combat this perception while provisionally maintaining the “newness” that defines it? What sorts of concessions to the dominant can or must be made in order to do so? In more specific and focussed terms, what are the implications of the formation and growth of a national network of experimental festival venues and what sort of effect could they have on the perception and development of experimental work, given that much of the work it is designed to support tends toward the challenging of institutionally derived and defined artistic norms and conventions?

With the disappearance of wealthy bohemian arts patrons and box office proceeds from an always already outraged audience lining up to throw rotten vegetable matter at the stage, and the (related?) demise of the romance of the radical “starving artist”

who revels in poverty and abjection, experimental artists have come to depend upon financial support from the government. The establishment of the Canada Council's first interdisciplinary sub-category in 1971, which by 1999 had evolved into the Inter-Arts Program,<sup>7</sup> mandated to support the creation, production, and dissemination of "performance art," "interdisciplinary work," and "new artistic practices" that do not specifically fit within the boundaries of other established generic categories, is a testament to this shift toward the institutionalization of a lineage of subversion that would once have been significantly uneasy about (or outright resistant to) such collusions with governmental support and sanction. Clearly, times have changed, both for artists and for those government bodies that dole out tax dollars to them. Where it once sought radicalism at all costs, many experimental artists now seek some modicum of mainstream legitimacy for their radicalism (if only to eke out a decent living), and the Free Fall Festival is one of the evolving manifestations of this search in Toronto: "Free Fall 04 was born of a desire to raise public awareness of new performance practices. The approach is to promote their visibility and highlight accessibility to the work amongst artists and audiences alike" (O'Connell and Duclos, *Free Fall 04*).<sup>8</sup>

Even if contemporary experimental performance has shifted away from its anarchic lineage, there is still a tension in this seeking to legitimate the *new*, for it is the anarchic force of the unknown that exposes the permeability of legitimacy's foundations. The new always threatens, however provisionally, to displace or replace the *old*, challenging the hegemonic rights of established traditions by showing them to be historical constructs subject to a variety of cultural processes that solidify said legitimacy. But are interdisciplinarity, performance art, and avant-garde experimentalism still new? If so, in what ways? In a broad sense, their lineage, in terms of performance, now stretches for almost 100 years (*if* we can consider Futurism to be a sort of originary manifestation)—a virtual eternity if we consider the speed at which culture has changed in comparison to the speed of change in prior centuries. While the work that falls under its banner has changed trajectories on numerous occasions, the new under examination is certainly old enough to have felt the impact of a generalized generic institutionalization. Yet it is still new in the sense that it lacks widespread appeal/accessibility/exposure and continues to disseminate atypical and sometimes radical means of holding the mirror up to nature for that reason.

I hesitate to describe Futurism as an "originary" movement

not only because it was a manifestation of already existing cultural trends, but also for fear of betraying the anarchic impulse that underpins it, one that rejects the linearity that maintains the integrity of origins. Perhaps, then, the possibility of adherence to an avant-garde lineage is as paradoxical as the Futurist movement itself, with its stultifying ideological manifestos demanding the death of stultifying ideologies. Surely, too, a more direct line could be drawn from the somewhat more explicitly politicized experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s and/or the development of feminist and queer performance—a body of work with a somewhat less anarchic and more politically productive ideological underpinning—to contemporary performance experimentation. Despite this reduction of anarchy and unabashed ludic play in contemporary work, experimentation of any sort is, by popular mainstream definition, “new,” and as such must endure its marginalization until such time as its mainstream popularity becomes sufficiently entrenched.

Free Fall is a step taken by the artistic community toward further developing this desired popularity *qua* legitimacy, but does it run the risk of entrenching its own marginalization? The Canada Council’s funding for interdisciplinary work more than doubled between 1997 and 2003, but it still accounts “for only 1% of total Canada Council [arts] funding since 1999” (*The Inter-Arts* 4). While the funding situation is improving—though there is still a long way to go before it begins to compete with its siblings, the next youngest and least funded being Media Arts which garners approximately 10% of the total Canada Council arts funding—the more difficult challenge of generating new audiences is not as optimistic, for public taste cannot be legislated in the way that public funding can. Free Fall 04 was attended primarily by experimental and interdisciplinary artists (and a small group of “already converted” enthusiasts), the very creators of the sort of work being promoted and disseminated. The value of their attendance is not at all in question if we accept as productive a long tradition of artists being inspired and influenced by their contemporaries. The lack, however, of a strong audience contingent from outside this community<sup>9</sup> illustrates the multivalent nature of the desired cultural legitimacy—neither government sponsorship (or, perhaps, 1% of total funding) nor generic institutionality are enough to propel interdisciplinarity and experimentation in performance into mainstream popularity, or even an escape from a general lack of mainstream attention.

Admittedly, had the festival garnered enough funding to take

out full-page ads in Toronto newspapers and been previewed on national television and radio stations, the audience demographic might have been more expansive. But this argument should not be considered to the exclusion of other related factors such as accessibility, audience expectation, and general legibility. Local<sup>10</sup> interdisciplinary and experimental performance in Toronto has tended to take place in venues that carry only a marginal cultural currency, thus reducing its accessibility. By adopting a festival structure—one that is familiar to a much larger demographic of those who make a point of attending performance—Free Fall is taking steps toward providing the work with a familiar and more accessible structure for local audiences. This type of conventional visibility, however, comes with its own pros and cons, perhaps the most significant drawback being that the festival must compete with all other conventional cultural events on a relatively level playing field, with only the existing legitimacy and perceived accessibility of the work to draw in audiences. In a time when even mainstream theatres are struggling to stay afloat, this levelling of the playing field may not be either beneficial or desirable. By contrast, *diaspora*'s interventionist IDP camp might have given it a structural advantage in terms of generating a different kind of visibility, one that could not only garner more attention from the media and the surrounding community (likely with mixed reactions in both cases), but could also issue a challenge, in line with its radical interdisciplinary lineage, toward conventional notions of performance.

The question here, which only time will answer, is whether a push toward structural and organizational conventionality will serve to increase the cultural legitimacy of the work in the public's perception, or if it will simply entrench its marginalization within the hallowed halls of institutionalization. In other words, is visibility necessarily a good thing, given that much of the work, the existence of which is being made visible, is geared toward the artful communication of the as yet invisible? Or, more simply, can the "new" garner cultural legitimacy while retaining its "newness"?

The latter question brings us to the tertiary title of this paper, the "netless net": an institutionalized support network for the production and dissemination of work that attempts a provisional or partial escape from imprisonment within the confines of mainstream convention. This is a kind of institutionality that carries the seed of its own destruction, exposing the foundational permeability and potential subversion of every institution from within its own walls.<sup>11</sup> Yet we must not, in a flush of optimism, underesti-



mate the totalizing power of institutions to dissimulate and thereby neutralize this ever-present subversive potential. This power is set in high relief if I am correct in my suspicion that Free Fall was funded while *diaspora* was denied funding because of the issues surrounding the sponsorship of a tent city. Politically, what is at stake is public backing, but artistically it is a question of an acceptable definition of the boundaries of performance and the degree to which art should infiltrate everyday life. The IDP camp was intended as a protest-like blend of performance and reality, a rather well established tactic of both modern and postmodern artistic practices—though each tradition approaches the collision with both convergent and divergent strategies and goals—not to mention a long line of political theatre and social activism. The effect of its denied funding, even if I am mistaken about the reasons behind it, is the maintenance of a safe distance between reality and illusion, thereby propagating (or denying the possible subversion of) an ultra-conservative and eminently sanitary notion of the nature and definition of performance (i.e. that which takes place in a context removed from reality and does not unpredictably spill out into the community).

Surely, this is the danger of such institutionalization, which, consciously or otherwise, always seems to keep that which falls within its domain from systemic change that might restrict its ability to exert its power in the way in which it is accustomed. To admit that the division between reality and representation is not a universal absolute but rather a complex cultural construction would be to risk social, cultural, and political vertigo (in the sense of the distribution and exertion of power), threatening the perceived structural integrity of every belief, law, and value that authorizes the general distribution and exertion of power, which in turn constructs society within the parameters defined by this distribution.<sup>12</sup> Put another way, “this ‘thing’ (the real?) that precipitates theatre, that which is not theatre, may turn out, we fear, to be theatre too, ‘with all its indeterminacies of illusion and resistances to illusion, including the illusion of resistance’” (Diamond 32; quoting Blau 94). Not only a frightening prospect for the powers that be, this possibility equally threatens the efficacy of the distribution and exertion of power by those that oppose the status quo, further entrenching this cultural anxiety in both the mainstream and the counter-mainstream(s).

A similar situation can also be observed on a more abstract terrain. The following is quoted directly from instructions to potential funding applicants to the Inter-Arts Program:

Consult the information sheet for the discipline closest to your project and compare it with the information on the Inter-Arts Program. Note the objectives of each program and the definitions of artistic practices supported by the program. Evaluate whether your project is an *extension* of an existing artistic discipline or is *outside* the realm of that artistic discipline. If your project *is* eligible within an existing program of the Canada Council (except for performance art, which is also eligible within certain programs in the Visual Arts Section), then it is *not* eligible within the Inter-Arts Program. Keep in mind that interdisciplinary work projects necessarily *integrate* distinct art forms (not just juxtapose them) and *transform* them into a new form different from an existing disciplinary practice. (*A Guide*)

The necessity of a dual-stranded positive and negative definition of the “new” work it is mandated to support illustrates the complex negotiation of this institutionalization. Applicants must create work that is distinct from recognized disciplines by utilizing and integrating two or more of these existing disciplines, thus creating a “new” form. The final sentence of the above-quoted guide, which reads “new artistic practice projects are by definition “new” to the Canada Council and question the boundaries of art” (*A Guide*), expertly negotiates the somewhat restrictive nature of the preceding instructions concerning interdisciplinarity by making reference to a defined category called “New Artistic Practices” which is “an open category for artistic practices that are non-discipline based and respond to concerns (formal, aesthetic, technical, etc.) other than those traditionally governing the production of artworks. [...] the category is open to projects that do not necessarily result in a recognizable art product in the traditional sense” (*Review*).

Still, there is a problem in these definitions (though I believe the Inter-Arts Office deserves high praise for the conception of its guidelines) of “discipline based” and “non-discipline based” work, each of which assumes the unquestioned integrity of the other. Adherence to these definitions is bound to have significant ramifications, if only because it constructs a sort of order that is not necessarily consistent with the work it is designed to support, and in many ways it remains to be seen how this struggle will be resolved in practice and what impacts it may have on both the infrastructure of production and the nature of the work itself. The radicalism of much of the avant-garde performance tradition has

rested on the attempt to challenge this very disciplinary integrity, and interdisciplinarity, built on the problematization of the exclusionary distinctions between disciplines, is no exception.

Nor can we ignore the more pragmatic problem of funding as a necessary part of the development of new work and new forms. Where artists could once depend upon their “home” discipline to provide funding for innovative fusions of various disciplines, with the Inter-Arts Office now entrenched in the spectrum of funding bodies, the official policy mandates that all such work must now be funded through them. Imagine a theatre company that has been experimenting with interdisciplinarity for years and has finally reached the point where the work is defined by its disciplinary fusion, rather than a more elementary juxtaposition. All of the operating grants received over the years from the Theatre Section of the Canada Council for the Arts are irrelevant; the work now falls under the banner of the Inter-Arts Office, with its reduced capacity for funding. The creation of such a funding ghetto could certainly impede the development of new and innovative work.

There are systemic dangers in the alliance that interdisciplinarity and experimental work can, and in some cases already has, made with institutionality. Yet to remain forever on the outskirts, just off the institutional radar, will likely not enhance the possibility of attaining a general cultural legitimacy within, and concomitant impact upon, contemporary culture. A brief look at one of the thrusts of the work of Michel de Certeau can assist in elucidating the potential efficacies of a “netless net”:

[Symbols (i.e. the named)] make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points on itineraries which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by. [...] Linking acts and footsteps, opening meanings and directions, these words [or, more to our point, institutions] operate in the name of an emptying-out and wearing-away of their primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. (104-05)

Institutionalization (i.e. the fixing of symbols that accounts for “genrefication”), from this perspective, is nothing more than the

carving out of a space of *usage*, an imaginary space necessarily liberated from the totalizing restrictions of its own parameters. It is thus up to the *user*, in this case the Free Fall Festival as a representative body of experimental work, to strategize its *usage* of the institutional affiliation to its best advantage (and, further down the line, for those companies producing under the banner of this festival to strategize carefully their *usage* of the institution that is Free Fall).

Conceptually, Free Fall has, in several ways, attempted to do just that. It has *used* (no negative connotation intended, in fact quite the opposite) the Inter-Arts Office to create a festival subtitled (in 2004) “performance without a net,” which constitutes precisely de Certeau’s “poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning[s]” carried by these specifically defined disciplines and their “integration” (or their transcendence into an equally defined space of “non-disciplinary practice”). While the grant applications refer to these disciplines, all fall under the label of performance, a theoretically inclusive term that defies the strict definition of disciplines and opens a space of play and quasi-institutionalized hybridity. Functionally, it allows for an event that can bring together various works and practices while inviting the anarchy of “newness” without generic restriction. It bears the marks of an institution that has the potential to resist the institutionalization of that which it seeks to promote and foster. Free Fall’s usage of the Canada Council for the Arts may constitute an extraordinarily useful series of checks and balances, keeping the government’s policies and definitions from restricting the nature of new work.

Of course, this optimism must be mitigated by the knowledge that there are still challenges, problems and dangers that only continued vigilant strategization can attempt to overcome. Both the lack of broad socially situated audiences and the potential for politico-artistic restrictions (such as the IDP camp) continue to loom on the horizon. It is the former that is of greatest concern, for an increased general demand for experimental work would solve many of its current problems, though surely bringing a new set of challenges to the fore. But with a burgeoning infrastructure of national scope taking shape and gaining momentum, and work specifically conceived to strike a chord within the cultural climate, the avant-garde tradition in Canada may yet find the legitimacy its practitioners so passionately seek while provisionally maintaining the radicalism of its lineage. ❁

## NOTES

- 1 Company members are now split, some residing in Toronto and some in New York.
- 2 The profusion of contemporary cultural criticism that addresses the notion of 'the mainstream' and its constitution and processes rightly removes the possibility of uncritical and naïve usage of this term. Without specifically addressing many of these concerns, I use this term throughout to describe a web of intertwined matrices of power that determine the general context of the following cultural factors: expectation (and concomitant generic legibility of praxis), desire (and concomitant popularity of praxis), and praxis (and, circularly, the concomitant construction of expectation and desire).
- 3 At least the Futurists, when hoards of already-outraged people showed up to throw their rotten fruits and vegetables, had an audience, and one that met their goals of the annihilation of cultural passivity.
- 4 The thrust of Féral's discussion is certainly complemented by the Canada Council's broad generic definition of performance art—one that emphasizes not aesthetic contestation, but rather its accumulated tradition and history—as “a multi-dimensional artistic practice that involves the live presence of the artist in a temporal dimension, often in a critical and process-oriented context. Performance art is an artistic practice that has a recognizable tradition, history and community. Examples include body art, action art, site-specific performative installations, conceptual and improvisatory performances and one-person stand-up performances” (*Review*).
- 5 This sort of national collaboration between bluemouth inc., Vancouver's Radix Theatre, and Les Productions Nathalie Derome from Montreal also resulted in the creation of a web-based initiative called Popstart, which emerged from the connection made between these companies at the inaugural Free Fall Festival. Its purpose is to be the hub of “a pan-Canadian interdisciplinary artist's network, in order to share ideas, approaches and information regarding our work” (*Popstart*). The website was officially launched during Free Fall 2004.
- 6 It should be noted that two of these four festivals are located in Quebec, which is a distinct clue in the project of deciphering the cultural status of experimental and interdisciplinary work across provincial borders, and suggests a possible explanation for Quebec being the only province other than Ontario (or, more accurately, 'Torontario') to be represented at the festival by multiple productions.
- 7 “The Canada Council created its first interdisciplinary sub-category in 1971. In the former Arts Award Service, the first 'Multidisciplinary and Performance Art' program for individual artists was established in 1977, initially to serve video and performance based installations. In 1983, the Media Arts Section at the Canada Council was created as a natural outgrowth of the Visual Arts Section. [...] In the 1990s, the

name of the program was changed to the 'Interdisciplinary Work and Performance Art Program' (IWPAP) and the program continued to evolve. [...] As a result of [...] restructuring, the IWPAP was transferred to the Media Arts section in 1997. In 1998, Circulation and Presentation components were added, and in 1999 the recommendation was made to reconstitute the IWPAP as an independent secretariat" (*Review*). For more information on the present state of the Inter-Arts office, see *The Inter-Arts*.

- 8 While phrases like "promote their visibility" and "highlight accessibility" may sound like conventional lingo necessary in order to secure a grant, and this may in fact be true to a certain extent, it is equally true that the artists and organizers involved in 2004 spent a great deal of time discussing the seemingly insurmountable problem of a relatively insular and very small audience base. My personal interactions, too, with various members of the experimental theatre community in Toronto supports the veracity of the genuine desire for greater audience support.
- 9 It is, I think, of interest to note that attendance was generally better at the locally originated productions than at those produced by companies based outside Toronto, pointing to the probable conclusion that the majority of non-artists (and perhaps even the artists themselves) who attend experimental performances do so because they already know of a particular company's work, or, on a more pessimistic but pragmatic note, attend primarily because they have a personal relationship with the artists themselves.
- 10 I use the term "local" here because, on occasion, interdisciplinary and experimental work from other countries is brought to established venues within the city, but it has the allure of a "foreignness" (which alters expectations and, I suspect, forgives a certain degree of illegibility) that is sponsored by the trusted and high-profile name of the venue (I am thinking here specifically of the Harbourfront Centre for the Arts), attendance having little to do with the (inter)discipline.
- 11 This notion of subverting the dominant from within the dominant has now become a virtual truism within postmodern discourse. However, from a Derridean standpoint, which proposes a dual-stranded subversive strategy, it must be complemented by a parallel subversion launched from a position wholly outside the dominant, otherwise the critique can only serve to reinscribe the dominant, reaffirming its systemic power. For a fuller discussion, see Derrida. The "netlessness" of the institutionalized "net" that is Free Fall constitutes the anarchic trace of this outside movement that, paradoxically, can only be quasi-actualized in and through institutionality. Still, the structure of the festival is only one aspect of the larger picture, and the work produced under its conflicted banner must enact the same movement if the subversive potential of the festival is to be actualized.
- 12 The incessant attacks undergone (and self-prophesized) by Jean

Baudrillard's argument concerning the fundamental interpenetration of reality and illusion that renders each impossible and his definition of reality as "that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction" (146), illustrates the force of this cultural anxiety. For further discussion, see Baudrillard.

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