

Introduction: Pushing the Limits

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Whenever I review an article submission to *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches théâtrales au Canada*, one of the first questions I ask is: Does this article push the limits of theatre and performance studies in an exciting, provocative, or challenging way? Does it open up a fresh approach to existing material, shed light on an overlooked subject, excavate new primary sources, employ innovative methodologies, or introduce a novel theoretical approach? In short, does the article do something *different* for the discipline and does this difference matter? I am pleased to say that all six of the articles gathered in this issue of *TRIC/RTAC* push the limits of theatre and performance studies scholarship in diverse and engaging ways. This pushing continues in the excellent Forum section edited by Adriana Disman, which explores four of the performance art pieces she curated as part of the LINK & PIN series in 2013-14.

Jennifer Wise and Lauren Jerke open the issue with “Liz Gorrie and the Kaleidoscope Alternative,” a rich investigation of the work of artistic director Liz Gorrie (1942-2011), who founded the Kaleidoscope Theatre Company, a Theatre for Young Audiences in 1973. Through extensive archival research and interviews with those who knew and worked with Gorrie, Wise and Jerke make a strong case for situating Victoria-based Kaleidoscope within the broader narrative of Canada’s alternative theatre movement. “Kaleidoscope was as politically and aesthetically radical in its objectives and practices as such better-known seventies companies such as Tarragon, Tamahnous, Passe Muraille, and Toronto Free Theatre,” they write (8). Challenging assumptions about the geographic origins of the alternative theatre movement, as well as tendencies to relegate theatre for young audiences to the sidelines of theatre history, Wise and Jerke push persuasively at the limits of Canadian historiography.

Brian Batchelor examines a different kind of pushing in “‘This Beer Festival Has a Theatre Problem!’: The Evolution and Rebranding of the Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival.” Here Batchelor looks at how corporate interests and branding imperatives have transformed the popular Edmonton Fringe over the past three decades. In particular, he considers how the expansion of the Fringe to include “two beer tents, a wine and Internet café, a KidsFringe recreation area, numerous outdoor stages, busker acts, and food and artisan vendors,” not to mention “an eco-conscious carnival consisting of classic rides and arcade games” has affected its place within Edmonton’s “arts ecology and urban imaginaries” (34). Drawing on a wealth of newspaper clippings as well as reflections on his own experiences working as a bar manager at the festival, Batchelor identifies the social and artistic effects of this branding by reading the Fringe’s development alongside its efforts to “[brand] itself as theatrically and spatially *different*” (35).

Natalie Doonan also takes up the politics of eating and drinking at performance events in “Techniques of Making Public: The Sensorium Through Eating and Walking.” In Doonan’s case, however, the two Sensorium performances at the centre of her study push at the limits

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of defining the relationship between humans and non-humans through participatory acts. As the founder of Sensorium, a “participatory art platform in Montreal” (52), Doonan aims to rethink the way publics come into being and to present audiences with opportunities to explore the urban environments through unexpected encounters. To demonstrate Sensorium’s political potential, she analyzes *Midsummer End Foraging Tour* and *Hunter, Gatherer, Purveyor*, both of which “use food as a medium to [. . .] undo binaries of public/private, self/other, domestic/wild, depressed/revitalized” (54). Throughout the article, Doonan foregrounds the role of the curator-dramaturg in participatory public art projects, outlining an innovative model for collaborative performance creation.

Like Doonan, Naila Keleta-Mae stresses the relationship between the personal and the political. In “An Autoethnographic Reading of Djanet Sears’s *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*,” she interweaves her own experiences of Christianity, motherhood, and blackness with a close reading of Djanet Sears’s powerful play, *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*, emphasizing “the explicit ways the scholar’s topic of inquiry intersects with her/his/their personal lived experience” (77). Keleta-Mae’s embrace of autoethnographic methodologies rejects more conventional modes of play analysis, which relegate the author to the background, in order to “push against the underrepresentation of Black cultural production in Canadian scholarship, as evidenced by the paucity of scholarly publications and conference programs on the topic” (76). Her work offers a dynamic testament to the need to question accepted norms in academic scholarship, with respect to both structure and content.

Helene Vosters also uses juxtaposition to stirring political effect in “Diamanda Galás and Amanda Todd: Performing Trauma’s Sticky Connections.” Reading performance artist Diamanda Galás’s piece *Defixiones* alongside Amanda Todd’s *My Story*, she challenges tendencies to contain trauma historically, geographically, and institutionally, insisting that such containment efforts dislocate trauma “from the larger affective economies through which it is produced and through which it circulates” (92). With great sensitivity, Vosters employs psychoanalytic theory, performance studies, memory studies, and queer and feminist studies to illustrate how the “power of *Defixiones* and *My Story* extends beyond their efficacy as performance events to their role as epistemological vehicles for the ongoing, and transnational, transmission of social memory related to traumas produced through violence” (92). The result is a poetically potent demonstration of performance’s potential to transmit knowledge of trauma across boundaries of time and space.

Núria Casado Gual pushes in a different direction in “Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age in Joanna McClelland Glass’s Drama,” demonstrating the value of “age studies” to theatre scholarship. As Casado Gual notes, although scholars of early modern drama (especially Shakespeare) have contributed to a “thriving ‘theatrical gerontology,’” the work of contemporary dramatists, especially those from North America, has been largely overlooked (102). Casado Gual addresses this gap through a detailed analysis of the treatment of age in the plays of Joanna McClelland Glass, arguing that through the combination of narratives of “notions of progress and decline in the depiction of her aged characters” (109), Glass promotes an ambivalent view of aging that can be interpreted as realistic and dignified.

Curator/editor Adriana Disman pushes the limits of Canadian theatre and performance

scholarship in thrilling ways in the Forum section “LINK & PIN,” which features scholarly reflections by Kelsy Vivash, Niomi Ann Cherny, T. Nikki Cesare Schotzko, and Disman herself on four of the performance art pieces produced through LINK & PIN’s 2013-14 residency at hub 14, a co-op studio in Toronto. This is the first time to my knowledge that *TRIC/RTAC* has profiled the work of performance artists in its Forum section and I am delighted to welcome such work to our pages. The Forum section concludes with a charming piece by Steven Bush (distinct from the LINK & PIN articles), which recounts his memories of working with George Luscombe, a theatre artist who knew a thing or two about pushing limits.

Finally, a bit of housekeeping. As you may have noticed, our masthead reflects a shift in the membership of our editorial board. Many thanks to the following outgoing editorial board members for their years of service to the journal: George Belliveau, Kym Bird, Reid Gilbert, Andre Loiselle, Roger Parent, Gregory J. Reid, Jonathan Rittenhouse, and Denis Salter. Speaking not just for myself but also for other members of the editorial team, past and present, we are extremely grateful for your commitment to *TRIC/RTAC*. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome several new members to our editorial board: Sarah Bay-Cheng, Tracy C. Davis, Michael Greyeyes, Jen Harvie, Patrick Leroux, Michael McKinnie, Joanne Tompkins, Kailin Wright, and Harvey Young. Collectively, these new board members bring years of experience as scholars, editors, teachers, and administrators, and I look forward to working with them in the years to come.

Happy Spring everyone!