

## Works Cited

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ERIN HURLEY, ed.

### *Theatres of Affect. New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume Four.*

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2014. 296 pp.

ERIN HURLEY, ed.

### *Once More, With Feeling: Five Affecting Plays.*

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2014. 257 pp.

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In an October 2014 post on her popular blog *feministkilljoys*, Sara Ahmed challenges prevalent theorizations of *affect* that set it against *emotion*: “Affect,” Ahmed writes, “is given a privileged status [. . .], becoming almost like a missionary term that ushers in a new world, as a way of moving beyond an implied impasse, in which body and mind, and reason and passion, were treated as separate.” A fundamentally “gendered distinction,” this critical move undermines scholarship that positions the body and mind not only within *the* world but within *an emotional* world, resulting in an act of erasure of such “touchy feely”—that is, often, queer and feminist—scholarship from the adolescent canon of affect studies (Ahmed).

Erin Hurley’s collection *Theatres of Affect* (like her 2010 monograph *Theatre & Feeling*) offers a similar act of critical disruption, casting affect not as something to be read onto experience within theatregoing and –making, but as an intrinsic part of that experience. “[T]heatre matters because of its ‘life,’ which is to say, its affecting address and force that affirm the audience’s own liveliness,” Hurley writes in her introduction in reference to Annabel Soutar’s *Seeds*, a documentary play that explores the legal actions the American biotechnology corporation Monsanto took against Saskatchewan canola farmer Percy Schmeiser in the late 1990s (1). Documentary theatre, with its premise of truth-telling, may seem best suited to an examination of how theatrical provocations of affect play out in relation to the un-staged experience of an event. However, as the range of essays in this collection demonstrates, affect’s impact—its “impression,” to use Hurley’s term (after Ahmed)—is integral to an inclusive dramaturgical experience that is itself absolutely predicated on feeling and on emotion: “the affect-producing machine of theatre lets us know that we are (by letting us feel that we are here)” (3).

*Theatres of Affect* is divided into four sections: Affective Training and Emotion Management (or Acting); Feeling (Too) Close; Awkward Feelings; and Empathy. Each section contains, as complement to the thematic essays, an Artist Statement (the first section has

two), and the book is paired with *Once More, With Feeling: Five Affecting Plays*, which Hurley has also edited. Hurley's agile assembly of scholarly essays with artist statements and companion plays not only yields a holistic read of the works discussed and presented, but suggests a far-reaching methodological turn that recommends such a juxtapositional curation as the most effective, and affective, mode of critical inquiry and reflection of contemporary Canadian theatre.

In her Artist Statement, for instance, featured in the second section of *Theatres of Affect*, Julie Salverson writes of the drive toward creating plays about traumatic events that has moved her and her work, including her ongoing collaborative project concerning Canada's participation in the development of the atomic bomb. Rather than presenting the material *per se* of her research, Salverson instead considers the events and inclinations that lead her to it. She references her therapist, her acupuncturist, a belief held by the Sangoma people that when one's "spirit, or history, is blocked—not told—illness occurs" (127); she talks about her discomfort with playing with others as a child, and about her discomfort with becoming witness to others as an adult. By privileging the personal dramaturgy at stake in this piece, Salverson makes explicit the otherwise implicit personal methodologies that so often guide scholarly and creative projects.

Such personal trajectory compels the other pieces in this collection, and the essays and statements not only speak to the range of identificatory and sociopolitical facets of the Canadian theatrical and performance landscape, but speak through and in relation to each other toward a broader personal and global significance. Natalie Alvarez writes about and from the role of witness to staged conflict situations at the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre, a "live immersive training environment [. . .] designed to produce the next wave of front-line peacewarriors" (17). Alvarez's essay, "Affect Management and Militarism in Alberta's Mock Afghan Villages," opens *Theatres of Affect* and resonates through Helene Vosters's statement about her extended performance *Impact Afghanistan War* in the book's last section. Where David Fancy, in his statement "Becoming-Imperceptible in the Studio" shares how Deleuze and Guattari's 1980 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (as affective a critical text as there ever was) informed the development of his scholarly and creative practice, which also draws on Strasberg, Laban, and Artaud, F.P. Favel, in his artist statement "Monsieur Artaud and I: Peyote has a Lasso," relates, among other threads, Artaud's encounter with the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico in 1935 and the journeys of George Lightfoot, an Assiniboine from Mosquito First Nation, in less an intercultural than an intersectional historical retelling.

Kirsty Johnston calls for feeling uncomfortable in "Whose Awkward Moments?: Affect, Disability, and Sex in *The Book of Judith*, *Time to Put My Socks On*, and *The Glass Box*," in which she extends Christine Kim's "insistence on the productive work of discomfort and minor narratives in theatre to fashioning a more inclusive public sphere" for bodies marked by racial and ethnic difference toward theatrical narratives that engage "bodies marked as disabled" (155). The intimacy of the plays Johnston includes extends into that asked of participants in Theatre Replacement's *BIOBOXES*, which Kim Solga takes up in her essay, "Meet Me at the Border." In its scrutiny of what Solga terms an "intercultural affect," Solga's essay also speaks to the hazards of "empathic identification" that Julie Buelle critiques in "Staging Empathy's Limit Point: First Nations Theatre and the Challenges of Self-Representation on a Settler-State

Stage.” And Nicole Nolette’s exploration of the critical *hopefulness* of theatre in “Bridging Saint-Boniface to Winnipeg and ‘Vice Versa,’” wherein the utopian project of cultural translation might be realized through bilingual productions, evokes the significance of actor training that Ursula Neuerburg-Denzer explores in her pedagogical reflection “High Emotion – Rasaboxes in the Emo Lab: Emotion Training for Actors in the Twenty-First Century.”

Caleb Johnston and Geraldine Pratt’s discussion of domestic labour, based on the challenges they encountered when organizing a tour of a testimonial theatre play about Filipino domestic workers in Canada in their essay “Taking *Nanay* to the Philippines: Transnational Circuits of Affect,” gracefully leads into Patrick Alcedo’s artist statement “Emotional and Religious Landscapes: The Making of the Documentary Film *A Piece of Paradise*,” which engages Filipino life in Canada through the lives of four women from the Visayas region of the Philippines in their experiences of the religious Ati-Atihan Festival season in Toronto. As a metaphor for the distinction between its participants’ public and private lives, their relationship to social institutions and practices in each, and, particularly, between the modes of labour these women perform in their “quotidian and festival lives” (214), Alcedo’s documentary film festival finds an unexpected relevance, too, to the challenges of artistic representations of the “real” that emerge in Sara Warner’s detailed elaboration of the tricky politics involved in the making and showing of the cinéma-vérité documentary *Jill Jonston, 1975* in her essay “A Gay Old Time.”

Finally, Heather Davis-Fisch’s “Complicated Feelings: *Tecumseh* As Literary Land Claim,” in which she argues that Charles Mair’s “*Tecumseh* not only demonstrates how the emotional labour of the literary land claim is enacted but also [. . .] reveals Mair’s inability to fully transmute his various emotional attachments into an ideological coherent script” (133–34), should be read alongside Dylan Robinson’s “Feeling Reconciliation, Remaining Settled,” which addresses the neoliberal trap of “inclusionary music performance” that, under the guise of interculturalism, is instead more of a “fitting of Indigenous musicians into Western paradigms of performance” (277). Robinson’s essay, suitably, concludes the collection, suggesting, as Davis-Fisch does, that affect’s failures might too yield ever more productive entry points of critical and artistic review.

*Once More, With Feeling* offers a similarly diverse yet interrelated set of works, their more subtle points of connection gestured toward both in Hurley’s introduction to the collection and in the introductions to each of the plays featured. These plays restage, if you will, the arguments Hurley brings together in *Theatres of Affect*, situating the theoretical encounter in the dramatic, while also making evident the places where the dramatic might expand beyond pre-set theoretical constrictions. Like the essays, the plays are based in the affective real: as Allison Leadley writes in the introduction to Theatre Terrific’s *The Glass Box*, the play, “[i]nspired by a conversation on disability, pleasure, and sexuality [...], calls upon the cast’s real-life experiences, anecdotes, and observations” (152). Or, as Nicholas Hanson writes of Michele Riml’s *RAGE*, one of the playwright’s works for young audiences which also appeals to adults, it “foregrounds feelings and emotions as essential elements” in its exploration of teen violence (95). That one might read about *Nanay* or *The Glass Box*, or about issues that relate directly to Olivier Choinère’s *Bliss*, or Nathalie Claude’s *The Salon Automaton*, in *Theatres of Affect*, and then read the plays themselves in *Once More, With Feeling*, is a boon to both scholars and practitioners.

“This is one of the reasons that a play—whether read or performed—is never the same twice,” Hurley writes in the introduction here. “It is not just that performance is only ever imperfect in its repetitions, it is also that the ‘bodies’ put in relation by the theatrical (or reading) event are never the same two times in a row” (ix). The “bodies” that Hurley puts in relation in the encounters of these two collections, from the scholarly to the artistic, and the personal to the theoretical (these categorical distinctions disintegrating even as I try to put them together here), also, are never the same. Nor, as Hurley makes clear, should they be.

### Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. “Out of Sorts.” *feministkilljoys*. 15 Oct. 2014. Web. 18 Dec. 2015.