

Introduction: Paradigm Shifts

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I came on board at *TRIC/RTAC* as associate editor at the beginning of 2016, just as the US presidential election campaign was beginning to gear up. Donald Trump was smashing opponents in the Republican primary race, but nobody—at least, nobody I spoke to or read in my preferred news feeds—really imagined he’d take the prize from Hillary Clinton. When my editorship began as we put our last issue to bed in October, many around the world were looking forward to Hillary making history, fearing but not fully believing the alternative was truly possible. And yet here we are, in spring 2017, coping with the harsh, frequently unjust realities produced by the new presidency of Donald J Trump.

The 2016 US election will be remembered as an internet-based take-down: the role of the ultra-right wing Breitbart news agency in mobilizing the Trump “base”; hacking into Clinton’s email servers that resulted in no charges but endless news stories and, finally, an unprecedented announcement by the head of the FBI just days before polling; “fake news”; and news via Twitter. This latter is, for me, one of the most important developments of the 2016 election cycle: somewhere between the constant tweeting of Trump himself and the endless recycling of his most outlandish statements on others’ feeds, Twitter *as news*—an election platform in 140 characters—virtually guaranteed the limit on nuance with which both major party candidates were allowed to engage. Outright lies and naked stupidity reigned, and no small part of the blame lay at the feet of the social media giants—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube—unwilling or unable to curb the proliferation of false, incomplete, or under-examined information.

This might seem an odd reflection with which to begin my first *TRIC/RTAC* editorial, but the lessons of 2016 for me as a scholar, editor, and educator are numerous and urgent. How can we, as teachers, researchers, and makers of socially aware theatre and performance, use the intellectual and creative tools at our disposal to understand *how* this election unfolded and draw from it better public engagement practices for the months and years ahead? How might theatre and performance, as art forms that imbricate makers and viewers mutually and demand in-the-moment, sustained encounters with human difference, respond to the failure of virtual platforms to provide such sites of encounter? If the web allows all of us to pick and choose our news, to ignore or dismiss the feelings, anxieties, and experiences of those with whom we overtly disagree, how, where, and in what forms can theatre respond?

As a journal, *TRIC/RTAC* took up this very question at our Management Board meeting in December 2016. We talked extensively about the journal’s place in the digital public sphere, and about what kind of role *TRIC/RTAC* might play as that public sphere evolves. Many journals our size and larger, both in Canada and beyond, are moving more and more of their content online, and creating value-added extras to promote greater web-based engagement. Born-digital platforms like *Performance Matters* and *Spiderwebs* are making conversation about theatre and performance online not just routine but exciting, vibrant,

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complex, and—most importantly of all—collaborative and community-driven. Performance work previously inaccessible to all but the luckiest (and sometimes wealthiest) live audiences now streams regularly to all corners of the digital earth: in cinemas worldwide (NT Live); on our personal screens via DigitalTheatrePlus or ontheboards.tv; and, of course, on that most democratic and affordable platform of all: YouTube. Theatre’s future might not be online (yet), but the conversations we have now, and will have in the future, with each other about theatre and performance increasingly *are* taking place online—and *TRIC/RTAC* needs to find ways to play a bigger part in those conversations.

The election of Trump is too easily—and dangerously—dismissed as the predictable failure of undereducated people to make the best choice for their families and communities. Anyone who has spent time in an undergraduate classroom lately knows, for example, that fairly well educated people can make all kinds of mistakes when trying to parse the overwhelming amount of information hitting them every day. If we take anything from the election of Trump, I hope it is the recognition that much serious work needs to be done in helping the citizens of our digital world learn to navigate the “information economy” more effectively—and that it should be arts and humanities workers at the forefront of that pedagogical labour.

I was knocked sideways in January when one of the smartest students in my undergraduate Performance Theory lecture told me that he had learned about the 1960s by watching a six-minute YouTube video. Another revealed that her friends prefer YouTube because it is “considered more intellectual than Snapchat” as a social medium. Our students are increasingly not buying hard copies of the books we assign, and their reading thresholds are dropping. Wikipedia is a go-to for basic research, whether we like it or not; YouTube is where they get their how-to intel, their history, their entertainment, and where they connect with versions of others just like them. It’s also where they encounter worlds apart—it’s exciting, wide-open terrain, but it cannot (except by very painful trial and error) teach them how to tell accurate information from outright lies. Like the consummate post-performer, YouTube presents it all as unvarnished, authentic, simply “real.”

These two sides of the digital coin—of the power of information, democratized—represent not just opportunity but responsibility to us as scholars of our cultural past, present, and future. Disengaging is no longer a choice; it is our ethical, our academic, our public, and our pedagogical responsibility to become part of a digital public sphere that encourages complexity, discovery, encounter, and debate, and to use online platforms to help others navigate virtual worlds more cautiously, curiously, and (genuinely) democratically. To that end, over the next few months *TRIC/RTAC* will be exploring the possibility of moving toward digital-only publication, and developing fresh pathways for disseminating the work we do to our core constituency of readers, as well as to students, to other interested scholars, and to the broader public.

Our scholarly mandate will not change; we remain committed to publishing the very best, peer-reviewed writing on Canadian theatre and performance topics both historical and contemporary. The journal will, however, explore the possibility of becoming fully open-access, facilitating our participation in the conversations about Canadian theatre and performance already taking place online and easing the use of our most up-to-date research in high school and university classrooms. We already have a terrific new website and a

complete archive of the journal's materials online on which to build, and we look much forward to implementing as-yet-undreamed innovations in the process of ensuring theatre research in Canada holds pride of place in our nation's twenty-first century digital discourse.



In this issue of *TRIC/RTAC*, we offer a clutch of articles and an extended Forum piece that represent the very best of where our journal's work began, where it now makes its home, and where it might yet go.

Two pieces that take contrasting approaches to the writing of theatre histories represent our origins as *Theatre History in Canada*. In "An Effigy of Empire: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Canadian Imperial Nationalism During the Second Boer War" **Andrew Bretz** explores the 1899 Hallowe'en night performance of Shakespeare's popular comedy in Toronto and considers the ways in which that text mobilized but also complicated *fin-de-siècle* imperial nationalism. Styling the production an "effigy"—one that collides in his reading with the effigy of South African Republic leader Paul Kruger, burned during the political protest that erupted at the performance—Bretz argues that the performance and the events surrounding it "provide insight into Canada's uncomfortable relationship with its own imperial inheritance and ambitions" at a time of rising pro-empire sentiment [32]. Taking a much more personal approach, **Moirra Day** tells the story of her entanglement with George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, tracing forty years with the text and revealing how it might make fresh impact now as a model of ethical pedagogy. Reading the play loosely through the lens of its teacher character, Miss Donoghue, Day argues that it constitutes "a concentrated attack on Ryga's 'complacent educator'"—though not one that lacks compassion, nor one that avoids controversy and contradiction in its own imbrication with both [13].

Two further articles reflect critically on intercultural theatre production in, and in relation to, Canada today. **Josh Stenberg** takes readers to Taiwan, where the life of nineteenth-century Canadian Presbyterian missionary George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901) has become a staple of Taiwanese *gezaixi* stages. What might seem from the outside a peculiar appropriation becomes, in Stenberg's analysis, visible as performance-as-cultural diplomacy, as "Mackay's biographical narrative becomes a formula for strengthening Taiwanese consciousness by staging international recognition of Taiwan" [56]. Stenberg helpfully reminds us that intercultural performance always works both ways: "Canada and Canadians can also be tailored for Asian consumption, be admired as an exotic object, or act as the Other by which to fulfill or project aspirations" [56]. **Brenda Vellino** plants her focus firmly in Turtle Island soil, but like Stenberg queries the boundaries and the efficacy of theatrical interculturalism as it moves beyond its fraught history as a paternalistic and inherently consumerist practice. Her "Restaging Indigenous-Settler Relations: Intercultural Theatre as Redress Rehearsal in Marie Clements's and Rita Leistner's *The Edward Curtis Project*" asks how Canadian theatre makers are developing models for intercultural redress and putting the act of redress literally on stage for audiences to consider, examine, and debate.

Mirroring the concerns of these four articles, and speaking similarly to the complexity and cultural diversity of theatre histories in Canada, Ric Knowles offers a candid interview

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with ahdri zhina mandiola, Alison Sealy Smith, and Rhoma Spencer in this issue's Forum. As they reflect on the development of diasporic Caribbean theatre in Toronto, these three artists provide insight into their practices, their personal and cultural histories, and into the challenges of making intercultural theatre in Canada from the ground up.

But it is with this issue's French-language article, by Michèle Laliberté, that I want to end this introduction, because "Un surtitrage fonctionnel, artistique ou intermédial? Réalités théâtrales multilingues à l'ère numérique" is all about the imbrication of theatre and technology in intercultural spaces—and thus speaks beautifully to the challenges and opportunities I discussed earlier. What is the role of the surtitle in multilingual performance today? When is it about aesthetics? About logistics? How is the work of translation and adaptation complicated by surtitle production, and what are the needs of translators and adaptors in this work? Proceeding using a descriptive methodology, and basing her research on surveys conducted with stakeholders, as well as on interviews with surtitlers in Europe and Canada, Laliberté offers practical reflections on essential theatrical labour in the intercultural public sphere and glances fruitfully ahead to our upcoming special issue on multilingualism in performance, guest edited by Nicole Nolette and Art Babayants and due in November. Until then, enjoy!

Kim Solga
February 2017