Women of the Northern Stage: Gender, Nationality and Identity and the Work of Canadian Women Stage Directors

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,

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And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Studies in 1982 and 2006 conducted by the Canadian government and Canadian professional theatre organizations, respectively, revealed that Canadian women directors have been and continue to be underrepresented in relation to their male counterparts. Despite this disparity, however, Canadian women stage directors are creating innovative theatre and re-visioning traditional works. Whether directing work by and about women, re-staging canonical works, developing new multi-media work, or experimenting with new rehearsal methods, these women directors are ostensibly destabilizing conventional aesthetic forms and providing social critique through artistic innovation. Outside Canada, however, these women are largely unrecognized, and English language scholarship that investigates “American” or “North American” theatre often focuses exclusively on the US. Utilizing feminist historiography and qualitative case study methods, this study addresses that omission and investigates the work and directorial methods of four prominent Canadian women directors: Nina Lee Aquino, Kim Collier, Jillian Keiley, and Kelly Thornton. Through one-on-one interviews with each director, rehearsal and performance observations, and available critical reviews and archival documents, this project considers these directors’ artistic contributions, directorial methods, and the ways that gender, nationality, and other intersecting identities such as race, class, sexuality, and regionality impact their work. Ultimately, this project intends to contribute to the current and ongoing conversation about the status of Canadian women in theatre as well as to larger global discourses surrounding issues of gender, nationality and the arts.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> Directing theater as if gender…matter[s] is not different from good directing, but it begins with a certain awareness. A director has to believe that theater can change the way people think and how they see. She has to know that her position as a director is a political one as well as an artistic one.[1]

In 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada was formed by then Prime Minister Lester Pearson. Led by journalist Florence Bird, the Commission investigated measures that would give Canadian women equal opportunity to jobs and other roles in the public sector. An act arguably rooted in second wave feminism, the 1967 investigation and subsequent report, published in 1970, held bleak results. The report noted, among other things, that employers utilized sex-segregated wages and posted employment listings specifically designated as "female" and "male" jobs. Moreover, Canadian women earned 58 cents to every dollar earned by men.[2] Ultimately, the Commission made over 160 recommendations to the federal government, among them to create an official federal organization dedicated to ensuring women's rights and interests were considered in governmental policy-making and serving as a voice for women's equal participation in Canadian culture at large. In response to the Commission's report and suggestions, the government created the Status of Women in Canada, a permanent governmental organization that would be formally represented by a Minister on the Federal Cabinet and would function to "promote equality for women and

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[1] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 8.

[2] Brenda O'Neill, "Royal Commission on the Status of Women: Looking Back, Looking Forward," 23 May 2003, http://www.uwc-wpg.mb.ca/royal_commission_talk.pdf (accessed 15 September 2011).

their full participation in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada."[3] Thus, the creation of the Status of Women in Canada not only brought issues of gender parity to public attention but also opened doors for further investigations into women's roles in other aspects of Canadian society.

In 1982, the members of the Status of Women in Canada committee turned their eyes to the arts and specifically to theatre, commissioning Rina Fraticelli, then artistic director of Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, to undertake a study on the status of women in Canadian theatre. Focusing on the years 1978-1981, Fraticelli considered 1156 productions by 106 theatres across Canada. Her results revealed a significant gender disparity in Canadian professional theatre. According to Fraticelli, women comprised the "vast majority of theatre school graduates" and 60% of theatre audiences, but only 13% of Canadian professional theatre directors, 11% of artistic directors, and 10% of playwrights.[4] Although solicited by the government, Fraticelli's report was never published in full, nor was it acted on at a governmental level;[5] however, for the Canadian theatre community, the report served as a "wake up call" and a "lightning rod" for discussions of feminism and gender equality in Canadian professional theatre.[6]

In the years following Fraticelli's report, scholarship emerged in Canada that helped shed light on the often marginalized work of women, and feminist theatre

[3] Status of Women in Canada website, http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/abu-ans/index-eng.html (accessed 14 September 2011).

[4] Rina Fraticelli, "The Invisibility Factor: Status of Women in Canadian Theatre," *Fuse Magazine* (September 1982): 118.

[5] Statistics from Fraticelli's report were published in several Canadian feminist and arts-related journals such as FUSE magazine in September 1982. These publications helped spread the word among the Canadian public and Canadian theatre artists even if the government did not.

[6] Shelley Scott, *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work is Always Done* (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 21; Susan Bennett, *Feminist Theatre and Performance*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 4 (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), viii.

companies such as Nightwood Theatre – now Canada's oldest professional women's theatre – and Maenad Theatre Productions in Calgary, Alberta, came to prominence.[7] Additionally, feminist theatre festivals such as Toronto's Nightwood Theatre's Groundswell Festival (founded in 1985), Vancouver's Women in View Festival (founded in 1988), and Maenad Theatre's three-week-long New Voices/FemFest (founded in 1992) began to pop up around the country in the wake of Fraticelli's report.[8] Presumably these feminist impulses and influences would pave the way for greater participation by women in professional circles. To determine the progress of women in Canadian theatre, a follow-up study was commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts in 2006 to establish what ground, if any, women had gained since the early 1980s. Spearheaded by Nightwood Theatre, the Playwrights Guild of Canada, and the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, the study revealed that a disparity between genders still exists in Canadian theatre. Lead researcher Rebecca Burton's final report noted that although the overall number of women working in Canadian theatre was significantly greater than men, men continued to dominate key creative and authoritative positions, with women accounting for only 34% of Canadian directors.[9] While admittedly an increase from Fraticelli's report, Canadian women theatre artists – particularly directors and artistic

[7] Nightwood was founded in 1979 by Mary Vingoe, Cynthia Grant, Kim Renders, and Maureen White, and by the early 1980s it had gained prominence in Canadian theatre circles, particularly in Toronto. Nightwood Theatre will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 on Kelly Thornton. Maenad Theatre Productions was founded in 1987 and ran until 2000.

[8] A festival held annually in the winter, Women in View ran also for 10 years, from 1988-1998, and featured work by new Canadian women playwrights. It was also a festival that consciously incorporated the work of aboriginal Canadian feminists, a group that continues to be marginalized in Canadian theatre circles. Additionally, Maenad's New Voices/FemFest, ran from 1992-1996, as documented in the company's archive files which are held at the Glenbow Museum (http://www.glenbow.org/collections/search/findingAids/archhtm/maenad.cfm).

[9] Rebecca Burton, *Adding It Up: The Status of Women in Canadian Theatre,* "A Report on the Phase One Findings of Equity in Canadian Theatre: The Women's Initiative" (Toronto: Canada Council for the Arts, 2006), ii.

directors – were still not at parity with their male counterparts. The publication of Burton's report spurred additional dialogue surrounding the status of women in Canadian theatre, with a particular focus on women directors.

In recent years, the work of Canadian women directors and feminist theatre companies has received greater recognition in Canada. For instance, the Siminovitch Prize, a national prize created in 2001 and awarded annually in a three-year rotation to honor the innovative work of Canadian professional designers, playwrights, and directors, has been awarded to four directors since 2001, three of whom are women.[10] Also, three of the six total Ontario directors awarded the prestigious John Hirsch Directing Award since its inception in 1989 have been women.[11] Meanwhile, in 2008 Nightwood Theatre sponsored the 4x4 Festival, which specifically focused on supporting and bringing attention to the work of women directors, and in March 2011, a group of feminist artistic directors in Calgary, Alberta, began the "Girls Gone Wilde" festival, an event focused on celebrating and bringing attention to new Canadian plays by and for women.[12]

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[10] A competitive and prestigious award, the Siminovitch Prize is presented to rotating professional theatre artists across Canada to recognize "excellence and [to encourage] further exploration in Canadian theatre" (Siminovitch website). The recipient of the award receives $100,000, of which $25,000 goes to a protégé of the recipient's choosing. In March 2012, the organizers of the Siminovitch Prize announced – much to the surprise and regret of the Canadian theatre community – that 2012 would mark the final year of the award. (See CBC News, "$100K Siminovitch theatre prize to end after 2012," 16 March 2012, http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2012/03/16/siminovitch-end-theatre-prize.html.) The fourth (and now final) director recipient of the award was Daniel Brooks.

[11] Started in 1989 through a bequest given to the Ontario Arts Council by John Hirsch, one of Canada's most distinguished directors and former artistic director of the famed Stratford Festival, the John Hirsch Award is presented to a "promising theatre director" from Ontario triennially.

[12] Katherine Renne, "Females Try to Smash the Glass Ceiling," *Flash Forward Weekly* (24 March 2011), http://www.ffwdweekly.com/article/arts/theatre/females-try-to-smash-glass-ceiling-7180/ (accessed 4 September 2011). It is perhaps interesting to note the festival's use of "Wilde" within its title, which, for many theatre-going audience members, likely evokes thoughts of (male) playwright Oscar Wilde. While there is no documented explanation for this titular decision, one might speculate that it could be related in

As directors, Canadian women are creating innovative new forms of theatre, re-visioning traditional works, and, in feminist fashion, challenging the cultural status quo. Whether directing work by and about women, re-staging canonical works to highlight marginalized perspectives, or developing new, unconventional methods of approaching the rehearsal and production process, these Canadian women directors seem to be destabilizing traditional, conventional aesthetic forms, thereby providing critical social critique through artistic innovation. In both form and content, these women are paving ways for the work of women and, by extension, other marginalized groups, to emerge onto the Canadian theatrical scene and to allow their artistic voices and their visions to be recognized.

Several contemporary women directors in particular have gained prominence in Canadian theatre circles for their innovative and thought-provoking artistic work. One of the most notable women directors currently is Jillian Keiley, founding artistic director of Artistic Fraud, an innovative theatre company in St. John's, Newfoundland, and the newly named artistic director of the National Arts Centre's English theatre company in Ottawa.[13] Keiley has developed a mathematic- and music-based choreography and directing system called Kalideography.[14] Described as "startlingly original and radically

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some way to Wilde's extravagant and flamboyantly queer lifestyle and the way that this festival extravagantly celebrates new work by women playwrights.

[13] In March 2012, Keiley was selected to replace Peter Hinton as the artistic director of the English theatre company at the National Arts Centre (NAC) in Ottawa, Ontario. Beginning in August 2012, Keiley will take the NAC reins for a four year term. Although it is likely she will no longer serve as artistic director of Artistic Fraud in Newfoundland, in a March 27, 2012 interview with Melissa Leong of the *National Post*, Keiley affirmed that she would continue to "stay involved with the company" during her tenure with the NAC.

[14] Although writers such as Michael Devine (in an article in the *Canadian Theatre Review* 128, Fall 2006) have substituted the phrase with the similar-sounding and arguably more egotistical "Keileydography," Keiley herself is quick to note that the term "Kalideography" was coined in reference to the way that her method is "like directing a kaleidoscope" (Personal Interview, November 2012).

imaginative" by the 2004 Siminovitch prize committee, Keiley's work in the arena of new play development as well as staging techniques has earned her accolades across Canada and has made her one of Canada's most prominent women directors.[15]

Meanwhile, in Toronto – the veritable hub of English-Canadian theatrical activity – Kelly Thornton and Nina Lee Aquino are two directors whose work is being recognized for its innovative and community-specific nature. For director Kelly Thornton that community is the Canadian community of women and feminist theatre. Called a "theatrical trailblazer" and the woman responsible for "bringing the best of women's theatre to the masses," Kelly Thornton is the current artistic director of Nightwood Theatre.[16] In addition to her artistic leadership of Canada's oldest professional women's theatre, Thornton directs regularly for Nightwood and on other Toronto stages, and her work – such as the 2011/2012 production and 2013 remounting of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* – has been nominated for several Dora Awards including Outstanding Direction, and she also received the 1997 Alumnae Theatre Director's Award as well as the 2004 Pauline McGibbon Award, an award presented by the Ontario Arts Council to a member of the Ontario professional theatre community to recognize his/her "unique talent and a potential for excellence."[17]

Like Thornton, Toronto-based director Nina Lee Aquino serves a particular community within the Toronto theatre scene. In addition to being a founding member

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[15] Siminovitch Prize website, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winner_04.shtml (accessed 14 September 2011).

[16] "Kelly Thornton: Theatrical Trailblazer," *Shameless Blog: Your Regular Dose of Fresh Feminism for Girls and Trans Youth,* 6 November 2008, http://www.shamelessmag.com/blog/2008/11/kelly-thornton-theatrical-trailblazer (accessed 14 September 2011).

[17] Similar to the American Tony Awards, the Dora Mavor Moore Awards are awarded annually to honor professional artistic achievements in the Toronto area and include awards in areas of Outstanding Production, Outstanding Direction, etc.

and the first artistic director of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre (a position she held for seven years), Aquino spent three years as the artistic director of Cahoots Theatre Company, a group dedicated to the creation and production of works that investigate Canada's cultural diversity.[18] A young Toronto director and theatre artist (and the youngest director included in this study), Aquino continues to climb the ranks of professional theatre in Toronto, for in fall of 2012, Aquino, along with colleague Nigel Shawn Williams, was named the interim co-artistic director of Toronto's Factory Theatre, a mainstay in the Toronto theatre arena that has long dedicated itself to producing and cultivating new Canadian work.[19] In spring of 2013, Aquino and Williams officially assumed the duties of co-artistic directors of Factory Theatre, a move that further marks Aquino's recognition within the field and her increasing professional, artistic visibility. Noted primarily for her work on Asian-Canadian and ethnically-diverse theatre projects, Aquino has received numerous awards for her direction, including the 2008 John Hirsch Award and a 2011 Dora Award for Outstanding Direction for *paperSERIES* by David Yee. Her focus on developing work related to issues of diversity, particularly ethnic and racial diversity, speaks to an emerging trend in Canadian theatre that considers the cultural dimensions and dynamics of life in a country that has, since 1971, functioned under an official governmental policy of multiculturalism.[20]

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[18] Aquino was artistic director of fu-GEN for seven years, leaving to take a position as artistic director of Cahoots Theatre Company, a company similarly dedicated to diversity but on a broader level.

[19] Aquino and Williams had previously been artistic associates of Factory Theatre; however, in the wake a tumultuous and bitter battle between Ken Gas, the longtime artistic director of Factory, and the board of directors, that ultimately ousted Gas from his position, the pair was named the interim co-artistic directors.

[20] In 1971, Canada was the first country to adopt multiculturalism as an official governmental policy. This policy affirmed the "value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada website).

The ground-breaking work of women directors in Canada is not limited to the east or Toronto, however, as is demonstrated by the work of Kim Collier, the 2010 winner of the Siminovitch Prize. As co-founder and former artistic director of the Electric Company Theatre in Vancouver, British Columbia, Collier's work has been recognized nationally for its collaborative nature and visual spectacle, and Collier is often considered a driving force behind the resurgence of activity in Vancouver's independent theatre scene, including bringing attention to Vancouver-based women theatre artists. Moreover, her Toronto production of *No Exit* at Nightwood Theatre in 2009 was heralded as "one of the must-see shows in Toronto" for its thought-provoking multi-media staging and, when the production moved to Vancouver, it won two Jessie Awards, Vancouver's version of the American Tony Awards.[21] More recently, her production of *Tear the Curtain!*, a production that not only comments on the complicated, tenuous relationship between theatre and film but also inventively integrates both mediums within the same performance space. Collier received a Jessie Award nomination for her direction of *Tear the Curtain!* in 2011, and the production was re-mounted as part of Toronto's Canadian Stage season, thus attesting to Collier's expanding national recognition. Although the Electric Company is known for its collaborative, (mostly) collective creation, Collier has emerged as the company's primary director, and her directing talents have also earned her

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For more information on Canada's Multiculturalism Policy see http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp.

[21] "No Exit" review, *Stage Door*, 17 November 2009, http://www.stage-door.com/Theatre/2009/Entries/2009/11/17_No_Exit_%E2%9C%AD%E2%9C%AD%E2%9C%AD%E2%9C%AD%E2%9C%AD.html (accessed 15 September 2011).

a position as a Resident Artist at Toronto's Canadian Stage.[22] From Collier to Keiley, women directors across Canada are creating and producing work that is arguably shaping the trajectory of women and theatre in Canada and, by extension, contemporary Canadian theatre.

However, outside of Canadian theatre (and even within Canada, although to a much lesser extent), these women's names are largely unrecognized and their artistic contributions ignored by scholars. While Gordon McCall's chapter on Canadian women directors included in Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow's forthcoming (September 2013) *International Women Stage Directors* does offer a welcome, albeit cursory overview of several prominent English and French-speaking Canadian women directors,[23] a survey of directors listed in other scholarly texts reveals little mention of women directors and none from Canada. Shomit Mitter and Maria Shevtsova's *50 Key Theatre Directors* (2005) documents the careers of 50 directors from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries whose "theatre-making processes" have "marked" contemporary theatre practices, and while Mitter and Shevtsova acknowledge that their selection of directors is not intended to be definitive, they only include seven women directors among the fifty: Joan Littlewood, Pina Bausch, JoAnne Akalatis, Elizabeth LeCompte, Ariane Mnouchkine,

[22] In 2012, for instance, Collier received the Jessie Award for Outstanding Direction for the Electric Company's production of *All the Way Home*, and for many years, she has been listed as the director on numerous Electric Company productions.

[23] McCall focuses his chapter on Quebecois Brigette Haentjens, Artistic Director of the Shaw Festival Jackie Maxwell, African-Canadian director Diane Roberts, Jillian Keiley and former Buddies in Bad Times (Canada's leading queer theatre company) Artistic Director Sarah Stanley. Coincidently, Stanley currently serves as an artistic associate at the National Arts Center and is a close colleague and friend of Jillian Keiley. A special thanks to Mr. McCall for sharing his chapter with me prior to the volume's official publication. Gordon McCall, "Canada," in *International Women Directors*, ed. Anne Fliotsos, (forthcoming, University of Illinois Press, September 2013).

Anne Bogart, and Deborah Warner.[24] Moreover, while the text includes directors from diverse geographical locations including Europe, North America, and Asia, only one, a man – Robert Lepage – is Canadian.[25]

Other similar texts reflect the same situation. Shevtsova and C.D. Innes' *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre* (2009) features interviews with "nine of the most innovative theatre directors of our time in Europe and North America" but only two of the nine – Elizabeth LeCompte and Katie Mitchell – are women, and none are Canadian.[26] Moreover, the recently released second volume of *The Director's Voice* (the long-awaited supplement to Arthur Bartow's 1988 *The Director's Voice*) only includes American directors, although five of its twenty directors are women.[27] Only a few women seem to have risen to the top of the ranks of recognized professional theatre directors around the world. Moreover, the women who have gained scholarly and professional attention represent a limited global perspective. In an increasingly transnational society in which traditional borders are blurred and are increasingly permeable, it seems only logical that scholars begin to expand their purview to include other countries and artistic perspectives. Additionally, English language scholarship that investigates "American" or "North American" theatre all too often focuses exclusively on

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[24] Shomit Mitter and Maria Shevtsova, *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xvii.

[25] The authors note that their text is not intended to be a "United Nations of theatre, with proportional representation from five continents" (xvii). However, most of the directors included represent European and North American backgrounds. Robert Lepage is typically the only Canadian director listed in such texts, and much of the scholarship on directing in Canada tends to focus on his work. Moreover, while Canada at large "claims" Lepage as their own, he is specifically a Quebecois director, and French-Canadian/Quebecois performance is an inherently different "breed' from English-Canadian theatre.

[26] Maria Shevtsova and Christopher Innes, *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

[27] Loewith includes Anne Bogart, Elizabeth LeCompte, Emily Mann, Julie Taymor, and Mary Zimmerman.

the United States. As Seymour Martin Lipset provocatively argues in *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (1990), "Ignorant of Canada, Americans have had almost nothing to say about the creative arts in a comparative North American context."[28] In fact, more than once when I have revealed my Canadian research interest my American colleagues have responded with bemused smiles and comments of "there's theatre in Canada?" or "I don't know anything about Canada, much less Canadian theatre." Thus, recognizing the careers and work of the four aforementioned Canadian women directors as well as their individual artistic and directorial perspectives and methods seems to be a good place to begin addressing this scholarly shortcoming and, by extension, the cultural imperialism that underlies it.

These women have all been recognized as leading theatre artists in Canada and each of these women also identifies as a "feminist," an identity that seems to carry various meanings for each individual and does not necessarily translate into overtly political or "feminist" stage direction. However, they are directors; they are women; and they have self-identified as "feminists." As individuals in these identity categories, they share experiences and knowledge that their male colleagues presumably do not; consequently, their work offers fruitful territory for researchers interested in "how gender matters" in theatrical directing.

This study, therefore, investigates the theatre practice of these four Canadian directors, documenting and evaluating the artistic and social significance of their careers, with special attention to how their work is functioning, through process and performance,

[28] Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 58.

as (feminist) cultural criticism.[29] Questions guiding this study include: How does identity – specifically gender and nationality, but also, recognizing that aspects of identity are intimately and inextricably linked to one other, other identity categories such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class – influence the work and aesthetic approaches of these directors? What kind of work are they producing? How does that work relate to current perceptions of gender and identity formation in Canada? Using these four women as individual case studies, this project will document their careers and artistic contributions, considering their goals, choice of material, and their individual approaches to script interpretation, casting, staging, and artistic collaboration, and will attempt to assess the meaning and impact of their work as (feminist) critical practices and in relation to gender and national identity formation – both for them as Canadian artists and for their collaborators, their critics, and their audiences.

While I have long identified as and professed myself to be a feminist, I also realize that this term is ambiguous, challenging and has, over time, garnered some negative connotations, what Nightwood Theatre co-founder Cynthia Grant has called "derogatory, second-class implications."[30] Moreover, because contemporary feminist discourse recognizes multiple forms of feminism (or feminismS), it is necessary to delineate here how the term "feminism/feminist" is understood for this study. My understanding of "feminism/feminist" within the context of this study relies on Elaine Aston's explication of a "feminist approach to theatre-making" as one that challenges

[29] I place "feminist" in parentheses here because some of these directors are not explicitly working with a feminist intention; however, as a feminist researcher and director, part of my natural lens is to consider the ways that these women and their work are offering a feminist critique in that they draw attention to cultural hegemony and assumptions of identity (gendered and otherwise).

[30] Cynthia Grant, "Notes from the Front Line," *Canadian Theatre Review* 43 (Summer 1985): 45.

existing social, cultural, and political structures and encourages women "to 'see' their lives politically: to raise awareness of oppression and to encourage women's creativity."[31] More importantly, this understanding of "feminism" recognizes the significance of intersectionality – "the complex intertwining of multiple identities/inequalities."[32] Much in the way that Jill Dolan discusses feminism and identity in her blog, "The Feminist Spectator," my examination of these directors and their respective works considers "what they tell us about gender, sexuality, race, class and other forms of identity (in all their complex intersections and overlaps) as well as what they tell us about how to be human beings together in an increasingly complex and alienating world."[33] Ultimately, my use and exploration of feminism in this study is very much in keeping with Canadian Kate Lushington's view: "Feminism is a search. A constant questioning of accepted beliefs and hidden assumptions. It's not a state. Not an imperative, but a process."[34] It is my intent that this study will help reveal the different, dynamic ways these Canadian women directors and their work relate to gender, identity formation and "feminism," and how their work questions the accepted beliefs and hidden assumptions of gender, nationality, identity, and artistry in Canadian culture.

The justification for this study is multifaceted. First, Canadian scholars and theatre artists have begun to recognize the importance of the work of women and feminist theatre directors in general and are currently taking steps to correct the gendered imbalance indicated by Burton's 2006 study. In November 2009, Nightwood Theatre

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[31] Elaine Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2, 5.
[32] Sirma Bilge, "Recent Feminist Outlooks on Intersectionality," *Diogenes* (Oct. 2010): 59.
[33] Jill Dolan, "Welcome to the Feminist Spectator," *The Feminist Spectator* blog, posted 25 August 2005, http://www.thefeministspectator.com/2005/08/25/welcome-to-the-feminist-spectator/ (accessed 15 July 2012).
[34] Kate Lushington, "Fear of Feminism," *Canadian Theatre Review* 43 (Summer 1985): 11.

hosted a Directors Summit to help "propel career opportunities for women" in theatre.[35] The Summit featured prominent women directors from around Canada and the world who led workshops, discussions, and roundtables on topics such as new styles of directing as developed by women like Jillian Keiley and Quebecois director Brigette Haentjens, a "frank and open discussion of what it means to be a woman directing in Canada today," and a roundtable exploring how the women directors "explore, explode, inform and transform" their surrounding cultural context.[36] Following the Directors Summit and spurred by the perceived need for women directors to create collegial networks across Canada, Nightwood Theatre, in collaboration with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, began a significant initiative: to create a comprehensive database of professional Canadian women directors.[37] Now available through the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, the Catalogue is intended to "create opportunities and raise awareness of the breadth and diversity of talent that women in the field of directing have today in Canadian Theatre."[38] Thus, the studies by Fraticelli and Burton as well as events such as those hosted by Nightwood speak to the theatre community's continued concern about the status of women in Canada, the status of women in Canadian theatre, and more specifically, the status of Canadian women theatre directors. Set within this current cultural context, my study is quite timely and would bring attention to the work

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[35] Nightwood Theatre, "The Directors Summit," November 2009, http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/ index.php/whats_on/the_directors_summit1/ (accessed 1 September 2011).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Nightwood Theatre, "The Women Directors Catalogue," http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/index.php /artists/the_women_ directors_catalogue (accessed 4 September). To order this publication, visit http://www.pact.ca/Publications/Publications-to-Order.aspx/

and careers of four prominent women directors currently innovating and invigorating Canadian theatre.[39]

Also, while studies such as Fraticelli and Burton's do provide an illuminating view of the state of women in Canada and Canadian theatre, their content is primarily statistical. Another essential component to the examination of women in Canadian theatre is the exploration of the lived experiences of the artists themselves. After all, "[power] consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told," and as advocated by feminist theatre historian Charlotte Canning, the stories gleaned through interviews with women who are in the trenches, so to speak, provide a more "complex picture" of women's artistic, social, political positions.[40] Qualitative and post-positivist historical research is needed to allow the voices of prominent Canadian women directors to be heard. Moreover, as previously noted, most texts that discuss the work of directors do not include representations from Canada, much less women or feminist Canadian directors; thus by recognizing the voices of these women, this study will bring attention not only to the voices of women directors but also to the rich but often-overlooked English-Canadian theatrical culture.[41]

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[39] One of my Canadian colleagues, who teaches theatre at a Canadian university and works as a professional designer, noted in a recent conversation that "no one in Canada is doing this kind of work" on women directors. Personal conversation, 28 April 2013.

[40] Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989); Charlotte Canning, *Feminist Theatres in the USA: Staging Women's Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 18.

[41] In his guest blog entry for *HowlRound: A Journal of the Theater Commons* entitled "What's Wrong with Canadian Plays?" Howard Sherman notes the lack of American awareness of Canadian plays and playwrights and challenges his American readers to "see beyond our own borders and the theaters of the West End, especially when we can get to major cities in Canada in perhaps one-fifth the time it takes to get to London." Howard Sherman, "What's Wrong with Canadian Plays?," *HowlRound: A Journal of the Theater Commons*, 30 June 2012 (http://www.howlround.com/whats-wrong-with-canadian-theater-by-howard-sherman/ accessed 4 July 2012).

Method

As noted by Sonja Kuftinec in the introduction to her book-length study of the community-based practices of Cornerstone Theatre, selecting a specific methodology for her study of contemporary theatrical practice rooted within a community and cultural context proved difficult. Kuftinec queried, "How do I begin to responsibly survey the field to include its multiple aspects of historiography, practice, criticism, and theory? How do I do so in a way that moves between evaluation, appreciation, and documentation? "[42] While not looking at a specific theatre company, my study is similar to Kuftinec's project, as it documents and explores, with an eye toward "appreciation" and "evaluation," the "complex picture" of Canadian women's artistic, social, cultural and political positions.[43] Ultimately, Kuftinec determined that "no survey of this growing and shifting terrain can be complete" and to best explore her object of analysis she chose to rely on "a constellation of strategic methods."[44] Thus, in a similar manner, my study will draw on strategic methods from social sciences, humanities and the arts.

The method of this study is rooted in qualitative case study research – a holistic method of inquiry focused on gaining understanding of a phenomenon in its "real-life context" and from the perspectives of those being studied – but draws heavily on feminist historiography – a scholarly approach to theatre history that "rethink[s] historiography through a feminist lens" by working to uncover and recognize women's contributions to the "master" narrative from which they have been traditionally excluded – to provide a

[42] Sonja Kuftinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 2.
[43] Charlotte Canning, *Feminist Theaters in the USA: Staging Women's Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 18
[44] Kuftinec, 2.

useful context and historical framework.[45] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement's *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter* (1993), Charlotte Canning's *Feminist Theaters in the USA: Staging Women's Experience* (1996), and Sharon Friedman's *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works* (2009) provide useful models of work by women theatre artists that has been analyzed as "feminist," or at least, as having an impact on gender ideology and gendered behavior. Using interviews as the primary method of data collection, this study will document Canadian women directors' artistic, social, cultural, and political positions in the tradition of feminist historiography and the oral history narrative. In fact, Canning notes that the process of an oral history is a distinctly feminist approach to studying history. Through the oral interview, the interviewer and her participants "construct a collective historical subject together that offers a challenge to hegemonic interests," and in this way, the research and interview are "consciously created through collaboration," which is seen as feminist endeavor.[46] Thus, it seems appropriate such a model be used, in part, for this study of women and (feminist) directors.

The works of feminist historiographers Tracy C. Davis and Susan Bennett also serve as methodological models and further support the recognition of women's experience as an important feminist historiographical research and analytical tool. In her essay "Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History," Davis suggests three procedural questions that should guide a feminist methodology for theatre history so as "not just to study the phenomenon of women working in the theatre…but to examine the

[45] Charlotte Canning, "Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography," *Theatre Survey* 45, vol. 2 (November 2004): 227.

[46] Canning, *Feminist Theaters in the USA*, 19.

work process and its allotment of control and privilege to various artists and social groups, always seeking the consequences for performance."[47] Using these methods of feminist historiography will allow me to begin to answer these questions articulated by Davis, particularly "how does the ideology of the dominant culture affect women's status" and "how is the status quo maintained or challenged in artistic media?"[48] Thus, methods of feminist historiography and the oral narrative approach address the question of "what" – what kind of work are these women doing and what is the impact of that work on the artistic and socio-political culture of Canada.

While feminist historiography has provided questions to guide this research and methods for assessing the ways in which "gender [and other categories of identity] matters" in the work of these women, the study was also guided by a qualitative case study approach, a method of inquiry designed to explore "a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" and one that "concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts."[49] Using case study methods primarily as articulated by Robert Stake and Robert Yin, my study relies heavily on individual interviews with and multiple observations of each of these directors – Jillian Keiley, Kelly Thornton, Nina Lee Aquino, and Kim Collier – at work. As noted by Yin and Stake, the case study method is particularly helpful when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the surrounding

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[47] Tracy C. Davis, "Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History," *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 68.

[48] Ibid., 72.

[49] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* 4th edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 18; Robert E. Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies" in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* 3rd edition, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008), 120.

context are somewhat blurry, and the individual cannot be entirely or clearly separated from the context in which she exists. Qualitative case study research allows the researcher to examine the intersecting and overlapping aspects of "a complex entity located in a milieu or situation embedded in a number of contexts or backgrounds. Historical context is almost always of interest, but so are cultural and physical contexts. Other contexts often of interest are the social, economic, political, ethical, and aesthetic."[50] While the specific focus of this study is the work and experiences of Canadian women theatre directors and documenting these women's experiences is a significant part of feminist historiography and oral history narrative work, the fact remains that these women and their directorial work also emerge from specific cultural, social, political, and national contexts. Thus, the study not only reveals insights into these women's artistic careers and experiences but also, potentially, a glimpse into the current state of Canadian culture and Canadian theatre. This fact in mind, the case study method seems an apt approach to tackling these issues and looking at not only *what* work these women are doing (the nature of their work) but also the *significance* of the work in relation to the larger context of which they are part.

Although their aforementioned accolades and accomplishments offer ample support for their selection, there are several reasons these women were chosen for this study. First, they are directors who are working professionally in Canada. For the purposes of this study, I consider "professional" as directors whose livelihood comes from directing and for whom directing (and, for all of them at one point or another during

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[50] Robert E. Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies" in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* 3rd edition, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008), 127.

their careers, artistic directing) is their primary occupation. Second, all four women self-identify as feminists. As previously articulated, "feminist" here is considered broadly but generally refers to women whose work and personal ideology challenge existing social, cultural, and political structures and work to see women's lives politically, raising awareness of oppression and encouraging women's creativity. It is understood that each woman's feminist identification is conceived of differently and influences the form and content of her work in varying degrees, and it is these feminist variations that I hope to reveal, in part, through this study. However, it is important these women identify as feminists, for as Canadian feminist theatre scholar Susan Bennett notes "even when *women* are marked as the subject, *feminists* remain a silent sub-group, 'cordoned off' within the already cordoned issues."[51] Thus, through this study, I hope to give voice to the ways that feminism is at work in Canadian theatre and to bring the work of prominent women directors to the center, rather than relegating them to the sidelines as a "silent sub-group." Third, these four directors are well-known in Canadian theatre and have been recognized by the Canadian theatre community for their innovation in artistic form or content. Two of the four (Keiley and Collier) have received the Siminovitch Prize for direction, while Aquino received the John Hirsch Director's Award, and Thornton received the prestigious Pauline McGibbon Award from the Ontario Arts Council and was nominated for the Siminovitch Prize. Many of these women's productions have also received significant critical attention for their innovative, influential approaches in form and content; these critical reviews have also been consulted in an attempt to gain a sense

[51] Susan Bennett, "Feminist (Theatre) Historiography, Canadian (Feminist) Theatre: A Reading of Some Practices and Theories," *Theatre Research in Canada* (Spring/Fall 1992): 145.

of how their work has been received by critics and viewers and, by extension, how their work speaks to and against the Canadian status quo both aesthetically and socially. Additionally, all four are (or have been) artistic directors, a role that further affirms their place as leaders among Canadian theatre artists. Fourth, the women all work primarily within English-Canadian theatre.[52] While French-Canadian women directors such as Brigette Haentjens also merit attention, as Chantal Bilodeau notes in her article "Bridging the Two Solitudes," the French-Canadian theatrical tradition is quite different and has followed a different historical and developmental trajectory than has English-Canadian theatre.[53] Fifth, to better consider issues related to "Canadian-ness" and national identity, these women's works are primarily produced in Canada and for Canadian audiences – a trait that arguably roots them within a national context and may illuminate the ways that their work is read or produced to be read as "Canadian." Fortunately for this study, the women also represent diverse areas of the country: British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland. Thus, their experiences and work also more closely reflect the regional diversity of Canada.

Following the method of a qualitative case study, I chose to consider each of these women as an individual case, as the "uniqueness of individual cases and contexts [is] important to understanding" both the women's individual experience and aspects of the

[52] Because I do not speak French, this study is limited to English-language directors and their work. It is my hope that my study may inspire others to explore in a similar fashion the directorial work of Quebecois feminist women directors who have created their own distinct feminist Quebecois theatrical tradition.

[53] Bilodeau writes that "Canadian theatre is organized along the same cultural and linguistic lines as the country's politics. Although pluralistic and multilingual, Canadian theatre is not so much a cohesive entity as it is a collection of separate parts; distinct institutions produce Francophone and Anglophone plays for distinct audiences, and writers have a distinct aesthetic that evolved from distinct cultural and theatrical traditions." Canada is often called a land of "Two Solitudes," a term coined by Hugh MacLennan in his 1945 novel of the same name. Chantal Bilodeau, "Bridging the Two Solitudes," *American Theatre* (May/June 2012), http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/mayjune12/francophone.cfm (accessed 1 June 2013).

surrounding theatrical cultural context.[54] I considered each woman separately from the rest, extrapolating from interview data noting first the one or two primary themes that seemed to guide her particular narrative and directing philosophy and then the multiple sub-themes that seemed to support those larger themes. Once each director had been considered as an individual, I then brought the four cases together in a cross-case analysis to examine the themes that overlapped and were shared between the narratives. Additionally, as a feminist scholar influenced by theories of intersectionality which advocate for "the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed," I believe that recognizing the intersecting social, cultural, ethnic, political, economic, and gendered identities of these women is essential to providing a look at their world and their work "that is more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensioned, more truthful."[55] Thus, as part of my interviews with each director and our discussions of feminism and gender, other elements of identity naturally arose and were then discussed according to each director's individual background and experience. My interview protocol – a semi-structured protocol – was designed with this purpose in mind, as it allowed me to ask follow-up questions that addressed and illuminated these intersecting identities as they pertained to each director.

To begin the research process, I contacted each director via email and asked her to participate in the study.[56] Once each director had agreed – which they all did, without

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[54] Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995), 39.

[55] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, vol. 6 (July 1991): 1245; Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives,* eds. Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (Routledge: New York, 2010), 266.

[56] See Appendix A for the template of the participation request.

hesitation – I scheduled travel (to their home locations so as to provide me with a more concrete sense of the community from which these women's work spring), interviews, and rehearsal observations per the director's personal and artistic schedule. Throughout the late summer, fall, and early winter of 2012-2013, I then traveled to Vancouver, Toronto, and Ottawa multiple times to interact with these women as well as to observe their work in rehearsal and performance. Each woman was interviewed in a one-on-one situation and those interviews followed a semi-structured protocol of questions.[57] This semi-structured format provides a group of standard questions that are asked of each woman but, because it is only *semi*-structured, also allows the researcher to adapt the protocol for each unique case. For this study, the interview began generally with questions about each director's background and training. Then, after having established an initial rapport between myself and the director, the questions gradually transitioned and telescoped to focus more specifically on questions that pertained to her directorial methods, approaches, aesthetics, and representative productions. From there, I turned to issues of identity, asking each woman to articulate how she perceived feminism, "Canadian-ness," gender, and other identities to have impacted her artistic work.

While the interview protocol contained specific questions to guide the interviews, the semi-structured nature of the interview offered individual flexibility to address questions that arose during each interview and to cover topics that were particular or important to that director. Thus, the interviews were standardized but also allowed each

[57] See Appendix B for the informed consent form (completed verbally during the interview) and Appendix C for a list of the Semi-Structured Interview Protocol.

participant's voice and individual perspective to be heard.[58] Moreover, this semi-structured interview protocol placed the focus on each woman's experience and allowed her to narrate her own story in her own way, thus helping to mitigate the possibility that my positionality as a white, American, feminist scholar and director might influence their answers and the interview data. I felt it was important that each director had control, agency and authority in the articulation of her narrative. Consequently, the interviews were designed and conducted under the semi-structured protocol so that each woman was able to direct her narrative to reflect her own story and experience. Each of these interviews, which ran between 60 to 120 minutes in length, was audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and then transcribed for analysis in which I coded each interview, looking for both the larger themes that organized the director's narrative and several sub-themes that connected to her narrative and particular directorial philosophy.[59] Additionally, follow up interviews and discussions occurred with each director during rehearsal observations and via email.

As a director myself (and a feminist director, at that), I also recognize that much can be gleaned from observing a director at work in the rehearsal room and interacting with actors, as these observations speak to a director's process and often demonstrate in real time her theoretical and aesthetic approaches and methods. By and large, the actual process of creating theatre, specifically the director's work in the rehearsal hall, goes

[58] This project was approved via the University of Missouri's Campus IRB prior to the start of data collection. Per IRB, I informed each director of the purpose of the study as well as her participant rights; each director then verbally consented to participate. (A written Letter of Consent is included in Appendix B.) It is also important to note that participants were informed that they had the right to decline to answer any of the questions, thus ensuring their privacy and providing them agency within the research process.

[59] These larger themes then became the through line for each woman's chapter, and the sub-themes were organized in each chapter under three major section: the director's background and biography, her directorial methods, and her perceptions of influencing identities.

unnoticed, as the focus is primarily on the final and very public product. Recognizing the tendency to overlook this key element in theatrical production, performance studies scholar Richard Schechner, in his text *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, advocates for the importance of understanding the process of creating theatre – what he terms "performance knowledge."[60] For that reason, in addition to conducting interviews with the four women, I also observed each director at work in rehearsals so as to gain a better, experiential sense of her working methods and procedures. Throughout my research period, I sat in on at least two day-long rehearsals with each director, and, when time permitted, more. These rehearsal observations allowed me to gain a sense of how the director functioned within the rehearsal space: how she interacted with the performers and stage management, how she created a working atmosphere and environment, how she addressed problems such as interruptions or creative blocks, and more.

I also examined one of each woman's specific productions that is most representative of her work and directorial approach. Before the interviews and observations, I conducted preliminary research into each woman and her work and identified a production that appeared to be most representative (in form, content, and/or aesthetic) of that director's approach. As part of the interview, I also asked each director to identify a production (or productions, as was more often the case) that she felt was most representative of her work and then to explain the nature and extent to which that particular production (or productions) embody her directorial approach. For many, this was a difficult charge. After all, as Arthur Bartow notes in his preface to the second volume of *The Director's Voice,* "each directorial awakening is unique" and many

[60] Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 31.

directors – particularly directors who are working professionally and are involved with numerous projects at once – are so immersed in their work that it becomes difficult for them to step back and point to a single production.[61] Moreover, as artists interested in furthering and challenging their creative visions, many of the women struggled to identify their directorial signature or aesthetic. In fact, Kim Collier of Vancouver's Electric Company Theatre commented specifically that that question would be better answered by someone else.[62] Ultimately, it was left to me to determine which production upon which to focus, and in nearly all cases, the representative production is, in fact, the production for which I observed rehearsals and live performances, as the observations provided me with documentation and experiential knowledge of the director's methods as well as a first-hand view of her current directorial approach and methods.[63] For each of the representative productions, I analyzed available production materials (photos, video recordings or trailers, and, in all cases but one, the live performance itself), critical reviews, the play texts, associated study guides and educational materials, and any other available documentation. Additionally, whenever possible, I conducted formal and informal interviews with members of each director's creative team (stage managers,

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[61] Arthur Bartow, "Foreword," in *The Director's Voice* vol. 2, ed. Jason Loewith (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), viii.

[62] Kim Collier, Interview by the author, Vancouver, BC, October 2012.

[63] Director Nina Lee Aquino observed in conversation that directing, for her (and presumably many other artists), is dynamic and ever-changing. Aquino in particular noted that her work as a playwright and actor (most recently under the direction of Nigel Shawn Williams) helps inform her directing process, for by assuming another production role she is able to observe and experience other directorial strategies which she then incorporates into her own existent strategies. Thus, this study intends to tease out the core of each director's philosophy and strategies but also recognizes that those strategies can differ between productions and over time; however, the core instincts and style of each director likely remain evident and are the focus of this project.

actors, assistant directors, etc.) so as to gain a more comprehensive sense of her work and its perceived impact.[64]

Throughout the study, several strategies were taken to ensure the study's credibility, dependability, and confirmability – all qualities that contribute to the study's overall trustworthiness as articulated by qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba.[65] Perhaps most importantly, data was triangulated – a process of using multiple sources and perspectives to clarify meaning, verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation, and ensure the account is rich, comprehensive, and well-developed.[66] To this end, while the interviews and rehearsal observations comprise the core of the study, I also consulted archival records and documentation such as published reviews of the plays, published interviews with the directors themselves, video or photo documentation of productions, when possible participant-observation from audience members, and additional interviews with the directors' artistic partners such as stage managers, actors, and other collaborators. By using multiple data sources, I was better able to draw reliable conclusions by noting common themes that recur in multiple sources. Similarly, as suggested by many case study researchers including Lincoln and Guba and Robert E. Stake, I also utilized member-checking. At points throughout my study, I shared my data

[64] The individuals I spoke with varied from visit to visit and among the directors, as they were dependent upon which artists responded to my queries and who was available at the time. In the case of Kim Collier, I spoke informally with several actors as part of my rehearsal visits; for Kelly Thornton, I interviewed an actor who had worked with Thornton on several productions (including the original staging of *The Penelopiad*) as well as spoke informally with her assistant director as part of the observation process. For Nina Lee Aquino, I spoke with her collaborator and co-artistic director Nigel Shawn Williams and had informal conversations with several actors as part of rehearsal observations, and for Jillian Keiley, I spoke with her assistant director (who had also acted for Keiley in several past productions).

[65] Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 301-331.

[66] Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research,* 133.

and analyses with the participants to ensure credibility and confirmability.[67] This approach allowed the directors interviewed to identify and correct any information that may have been taken out of context as well as to elaborate on aspects that may have been unclear or minimally described during the initial interviews.

To ensure confirmability, Lincoln and Guba also advocate that researchers create an audit trail – a transparent, detailed description of the steps taken throughout the development, research and analysis processes. Thus, I also kept careful notes of my research journey as well as recorded my own assumptions, positionality and responses in a reflexive journal throughout the process. Moreover, I kept records of all raw data, field notes, and breakdowns of analysis categories (themes, definitions, etc.), and these themes and common threads will be discussed at length in Chapter Seven.

For each chapter of the study, each director is considered as a single case study and therefore examined on her own terms and within her specific geographical, cultural, and political context, and in Chapter Seven, I place the case studies in conversation with each other, utilizing a cross case analysis to identify common themes that emerge from the women's interviews, rehearsal observations, and representative productions. These common themes that appear among the case studies are discussed in my findings through theoretical feminist and gender studies lenses, particularly those related to intersectionality, or the overlapping and interconnected aspects of identity formation such as race or class in addition to gender, as articulated by Kimberle Crenshaw and Gloria Anzaldua. In this way, I hope to shed light on the artistic experience and influence of

[67] Although sometimes controversial (see Morse or Sandelowski), member-checking is considered by many qualitative researchers, particularly Lincoln and Guba, to be one of the most crucial techniques when establishing a study's trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln, 314).

these women directors, exploring the ways that feminism, gender, national and other intersecting identities (such as race, class dis/ability, etc.) shape and are manifested in these Canadian women's directorial work and artistic processes.

As a feminist and qualitative researcher, I also recognize the importance of contextualizing my own positionality and relationship with these women. As feminist scholar Kim England notes, qualitative research – particularly qualitative research that involves field work – is a "dialogical process" and "the research cannot conveniently tuck away the personal behind the professional, because field work *is* personal."[68] Moreover, feminist scholars and researchers Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Bieber and Abigail Brooks posit that the feminist researcher is "encouraged to openly acknowledge, and even to draw from, her situated perspective in the course of her research project."[69] Therefore, although I have designed this study to recognize the directors' voices and to provide them agency in the articulation of their narratives, I must also articulate my own position. Like these directors, I self-identify as a feminist, and my perspective of feminism draws from the work of scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Jill Dolan, Rebecca Dingo, and Judith Butler – many of whom are interested in how gender is performed and shaped by intersecting identities as well as the larger socio-political structures that surround us. Additionally, I am an "American Canadianist," or a US national who is interested in Canadian studies. I frequently am asked why I study Canadian theatre, and my response routinely includes two points. First, I have spent much of my life living close to the

[68] Kim V. L. England, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research," *The Professional Geographer* 46, no. 1 (1994): 83.
[69] Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Bieber and Abigail Brooks, "An Invitation to Feminist Research," in *Feminist Research Practice*, eds. Hesse-Bieber and Patricia Lina Leavy (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 15

Canadian border; therefore, Canada has always been part of my personal purview. Second, despite the rich and growing Canadian theatre scene, few Americans study Canadian theatre. Further, in addition to being a scholar, I also am a practicing theatre director. Because of my status as an artist-scholar, I am particularly interested in exploring the intersections between theatre theory and artistic practice, and the writings and work of women directors such as the American director Anne Bogart significantly influence my thinking about the process and philosophies of directing. Thus, when embarking upon my dissertation project, exploring the work of Canadian women theatre directors seemed a natural fit and an area which would provide me with scholarly insights as well as skills for practical application. Beyond being a feminist, American director, I also am a white, middle class, heterosexual, university-educated woman, and because I recognize the dynamic ways that my own multiple identities shift and influence my experience as a director, I hope that this study will illuminate the ways that these Canadian women directors' identities and experiences are similar to yet divergent from my own.

Literature Review

Because I am interested in recognizing these women directors' voices and perspectives in the manner of feminist historiography and examining each woman's work and experiences as an individual case study, my primary sources consist of data from interviews with the four women directors and their colleagues as well as the available documentation of the women's work such as critical reviews, director's program notes, play texts, and performance photos or videos; however, there are also secondary

resources in several areas that help ground my study in the surrounding Canadian cultural context and current scholarly conversation.

First, it is important to note that scholarship focused specifically on Canadian women directors and/or Canadian feminist directors is virtually nonexistent. Sarah Ferguson's 2008 dissertation *Canadian Feminist Women Directors: Using the Canon for Social Change* seems to be one of the only studies to look specifically at the work of feminist women directors in Canada. However, Ferguson notes that her interest lies specifically in "productions of plays from the traditional Western theatrical canon that feminist Canadian women have directed."[70] Although drawing on interviews in a manner similar to my study, Ferguson focuses on one show by each director and is specifically interested in the directors' feminist revisions of canonical works such as Katrina Dunn's production of *The Merchant of Venice,* Kathleen Weiss' adaptation of *Macbeth,* Hope McIntyre's staging of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Micheline Chevrier's adaptation of Chekhovian one act plays, and Jillian Keiley's production of *The Seagull*. Certainly my study will be in close conversation with Ferguson's, particularly in regard to the one director featured in both of our projects: Jillian Keiley. However, in the four or more years since Ferguson's research occurred, Keiley has continued to gain recognition within the Canadian theatre scene and create new work.[71] Moreover, my study introduces three additional Canadian women directors to the scholarly conversation

[70] Sarah Alexandra Ferguson, *Canadian Feminist Women Directors: Using the Canon for Social Change* (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2008), 5.

[71] Ferguson notes that her interview with Keiley was collected during a phone interview in March 2005. Since that time, Keiley has continued to produce work around Canada and has been awarded prestigious positions such as being named artistic director of the English Theatre Company at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, beginning in August 2012. Her continued work and presence in Canadian professional theatre (but relative lack of scholarly attention or international recognition) merits further and continued documentation and study.

and expands upon Ferguson's work not only to document these women's directorial oeuvres and rehearsal techniques through direct observation as well as interviews but also to consider the artistic work these Canadian women directors are doing beyond restaging canonical or classical texts.

Beyond Ferguson's text, the only other text that specifically mentions Canadian women directors is Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow's forthcoming text on *International Women Stage Directors* (September 2013). Unlike some supposedly "international" considerations of directors (which typically include little to no reference to Canada beyond Robert Lepage), Fliotsos and Vierow's text wisely includes a chapter on Canadian women directors by Gordon McCall. McCall's chapter provides a broad overview of the status of women in Canadian theatre and then briefly touches on five women: Brigitte Haentjens, Jackie Maxwell, Jillian Keiley, Diane Roberts, and Sarah Stanley. Again, Keiley is the only director shared between McCall's chapter and this study, a commonality that reinforces her prominence as a Canadian director and merit to be studied. However, McCall's chapter (and the text more generally) has a similar intention to Fliotsos and Vierow's first edited volume, *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* (2008), in that it provides brief profiles of these women's work and does not provide extended analysis of their individual stories or detailed exploration of their directorial strategies, rehearsal techniques, and representative productions. Thus, McCall's chapter in *International Women Stage Directors* provides a useful starting place and reinforcement for the necessity of this extended study of Canadian women directors.

As a study focusing primarily on the work of Canadian women directors, my project will also draw from the growing body of scholarship in Canada surrounding

feminist theatre and performance. Although these women are not all doing work that might be considered explicitly or politically feminist, they all identify as feminists, which, combined with their status as women, inevitably influences their work. Moreover, these feminist theatre and performance texts were among the first to consider the role of women in professional Canadian theatre and therefore provide a beginning context for discussions of the work of these women directors. First, the summer 1985 edition of the *Canadian Theatre Review (CTR)* provides a sense of the early development and emergence of feminist theatre in Canada. Titled "Feminism and Theatre," the issue includes several articles that explore ways Canadian women were working within existing theatre structures to foster feminist changes as well as several articles that discuss the collective work of feminist theatres such as Nightwood. [72] Also, in this *CTR* issue is an article by Kate Lushington discussing the Canadian cultural climate in regard to feminism and its impact on theatre. This early collection of *CTR* essays proves useful when looking at the historical trajectory of feminist theatre in Canada and the location of these women directors today.

Subsequent to the 1985 *CTR* issue, scholarship on Canadian feminist theatre and performance continued to appear primarily in journal articles and individual essays, most of which focused on systemic challenges facing particular women and women's theatre companies in Canada. For instance, Susan Bennett and Alexandria Patience's "Bad Girls Looking for Money: Maenad Making Feminist Theatre in Alberta" (1995) and Catherine Glen's "On the Edge: Revisioning Nightwood" (1995) both provide a glimpse into the

[72] There is, however, some dissention regarding the 1985 *CTR* title and its use of "and," as some feminist scholars posit that the "and" merely links the two terms and implies that feminist theatre is not an integrated part of Canadian theatre.

inner workings and challenges of running women's theatre companies, focusing specifically on the struggle to obtain government funding and early attempts to involve more women of color. Both of these topics – government funding and fostering the work of women of color – continue to be areas of concern for Canadian theatre artists; thus, these articles and others like them provide a better understanding of the historical context and development of feminist theatres in Canada as well as a more nuanced, informed view of the current arts culture in Canada.[73]

To gain a sense of contemporary developments in feminist theatre and performance in Canada, I turn to several more recent texts. Susan Bennett's collection of critical essays, *Feminist Theatre and Performance* (2006), published as part of the Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English series, includes essays published between 1985 and 2004 that discuss the work of women theatre artists across Canada, and while Bennett herself notes that is it a "sampler of critical engagements" with the process of creating feminist theatre and not a comprehensive look at Canadian feminist theatre, *Feminist Theatre and Performance* does provide an overview of the ways that feminist conversations and focuses have changed over time in Canada.[74] Also, Dorothy Hadfield's *Re:Producing Politics in Toronto: The Politics of Playing in Toronto* (2007) provides a careful and detailed look at feminist work in Toronto and the strategies seven feminist productions have employed to ensure a place in Canadian theatre history.

[73] In March 2012, the Canadian government released its budget recommendations which include cuts in many arts-related organizations such as the National Arts Centre, the National Film Board, and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. Fortunately, the largest governmental funding body for Canadian theatres and other arts groups, the Canada Council for the Arts, was spared cuts. For more information, see CBC's article "National museums, Canada council spared cuts," 29 March 2012 (http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2012/03/29/ottawa-budget-museums-spared-cuts.html, accessed 15 July 2012).

[74] Susan Bennett, "Introduction," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* vol. 4 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006), viii.

While Toronto-centric, Hadfield's text provides a valuable observation of the politics surrounding feminist theatre that are connected to the work of the directors in my study such as negotiating the "old boys' club" of mainstream theatre or interrogating how value or success of an artistic product is determined in mainstream theatre. Finally, Shelley Scott's historical account of the development of Nightwood Theatre and its feminist mandate in *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work is Always Done* (2010) proved helpful in understanding the background of Canada's most renowned feminist theatre company and its advocacy for advancing the work of Canadian women in professional theatre. Because of its very narrow focus on one company, Scott's text is not widely applicable to all of the directors; however, it is key in considering and charting Kelly Thornton's work, as much of her directorial projects and artistic career have been included under the Nightwood purview. Ultimately, the scholarship on Canadian feminist theatre and performance, while not discussing the directors and their particular approaches specifically, provides a historical and cultural background in which to situate my study and analysis of these directors' work.

Despite a lack of sources specifically exploring Canadian women directors, several texts do discuss women directors in other countries. Rebecca Daniels' *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (1996) and Helen Manfull's *In Other Words: Women Directors Speak* (1999) are broad qualitative studies that draw on interviews with a large number of women directors in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively. Also, Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement's *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter* (1993) focuses on specific feminist directing projects that provide models for or insights into the work

and approaches of my interviewees, while *Feminist Futures?: Theatre, Performance Theory* (2006) by Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris includes a chapter by Aoife Monks that considers the ways that a "new breed" of women directors in the US and Great Britain are critiquing history and performance in a feminist fashion while not explicitly assuming a "feminist" label. Although specific to the US and Canada, Monks' article in particular helps begin to contextualize and make sense of some of the Canadian directors' desire to activate a more inclusive feminist politic. Thus, while the information included in these texts served as a helpful source of comparison between Canada and other nations, this study strives to further the international conversation to include Canada.

Because of the lack of scholarly resources concerning women directors, texts on directing more broadly have helped shape the format and focus of the interviews and rehearsal observations for this study. Interview-based texts such as Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage's *In Contact with the Gods?: Directors Talk Theatre* (1996) and *The Director's Voice*, volumes 1 and 2 (2004, 2012), edited by Arthur Bartow and Jason Loewith respectively, provided support for the validity and questions asked during interviews with prominent (American) directors. Additionally, while little research exists surrounding the goings on of the rehearsal hall and directors approaches to rehearsal, Susan Cole began the conversation with her book, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (1992), in which she explores and documents the work of eleven directors (five of them women) in the rehearsal hall, an often sacred space in which a production takes shape but about which little is known or acknowledged by opening night. Additionally, Margaret Kathleen Sinnett's dissertation, "Rehearsal, a Story Map: A critical analysis of first person narratives about theatrical rehearsals," provided further insights regarding the

importance of what occurs with the walls of the rehearsal hall. However, as noted by both of these scholars, critical exploration of directorial practices in the rehearsal hall remains minimal and further discussion and documentation necessary.

Texts on feminist and gender theory as well as on aesthetic critical theories in relation to performance have also provided theoretical frameworks and lenses through which to understand how these directors' works function vis-à-vis the political or cultural status quo. In particular, texts that relate feminist and gender theory to theatre and performance are most useful when considering both how these women present themselves in the rehearsal space and how they create theatre. Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (1988) and Elaine Aston's *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (1999) as well as Judith Butler's theories of performativity as articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) will provide performance-focused feminist theory through which to analyze the work and responses of the feminist directors. Additionally, Anne Bogart's considerations of the role of the artist-director in *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (2001) and Jill Dolan's discussions of "utopian performatives" in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (2005) offer additional feminist, performative lenses through which to view the directors' works. Similarly, aesthetic theories of theatre (such as Brechtian theory, particularly Elin Diamond's feminist analysis of Brechtian techniques) prove useful when considering the ways these women's individual innovations aesthetically convey social critique. Feminist works on intersectionality such as Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Kimberle Crenshaw's foundational article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" as published

in the *Stanford Law Review* (1991), and Leslie McCall's essay "The Complexity of Intersectionality" as published in *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (2005) as well as works on critical race theory by feminist and critical race scholars Crenshaw ("one of Critical Race Theory's founding sisters"[75]) and bell hooks provide theoretical starting points for analysis of each case study – particularly that of Nina Lee Aquino – and the feminist positionality of each director in regard to gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, and other identity categories.[76]

Finally, women's and feminist work is, of course, shaped by the surrounding political, cultural, social and economic networks; I have therefore relied on a range of texts that paint a picture of the current political and cultural status quo in Canada, helping address and define the notion of "Canadian-ness" within the contemporary Canadian culture. Related specifically to the theatrical cultural climate in the various regions from which each director hails, the 21 volume Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English series, published by Playwrights Canada Press, provides collections of essays that speak to different genres, topics, and regions. Thus, Critical Perspectives volumes on *Theatre in British Columbia* (volume 6), *Theatre and Performance in Toronto* (volume 21), and *Theatre in Atlantic Canada* (volume 16) assist in painting a picture of the historical-cultural development of theatre in the provinces of these directors.

In addition to these theatrically-focused texts, the major national newspapers of Canada such as *The Globe and Mail* as well as regional news sources from each

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[75] Charles R. Lawrence III, "Who Are We? And Why Are We Here? Doing Critical Race Theory in Hard Times," in *Crossroads, Directions and a New Critical Race Theory*, eds. Francisco Valdes, Jerome McCristal Culp, and Angela P. Harris (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), xii.

[76] As the study progressed and themes emerged from each of the women's stories and works, specific feminist and gender theory texts were selected to aid in further analysis of those themes and areas.

director's province (such as the *Toronto Star, The Vancouver Sun,* or *Ottawa Citizen*) provide access to critical reviews on both a national and local scale, which are useful in determining public and critical response as well as charting the production history of each director. Beyond these sources, James Bickerton and Alain G. Ganon's *Canadian Politics* (2009) and Sourayan Mookerjea, Imre Szeman, and Gail Farshou's edited collection, *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader* (2009), informed my understanding of the current political and cultural situation in Canada. Moorkerjea, Szeman, and Farshou's *Canadian Cultural Studies* was particularly helpful in this regard, as it includes sections dedicated to "Race, Difference, and Multiculturalism," "Modernity and Contemporary Culture," and "National Identity" as well as the text of several historical government documents such as the Massey Commission's *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development of Arts, Letters, and Sciences* and the official statement on *Multiculturalism and the Government of Canada*. Moreover, Andrew Holman and Robert Thacker's essay "Literary and Popular Culture" in *Canadian Studies in the New Millennium* (2008) offers a succinct view of the Canadian "identity crisis" and discusses how popular culture, including theatre, contributes to a Canadian national identity. Finally, Mrinalina Sinha's essay "Gender and Nation" (2004) brings together all of these areas in a short but convincing analysis of the complexities inherent to the historical and ongoing relationship between gender and national identity. Ultimately, Sinha posits that "nowhere has feminism ever been autonomous of the national context from which it has emerged" and urges scholars not only to consider constructions of gender and nation in conversation with one another but also to explore this relationship within particular historical moments so as to "make visible the multiple, and often

uneven, ways in which particular forms of difference inform, and are produced by, the nation in any given historical moment."[77] Thus, Sinha's text in particular resonates with me as a researcher as it speaks to the issues I intend to illuminate through this study – issues of gender and feminism, the relationship between gender and nation, and larger notions of difference as evidenced in the work, experiences, and directorial methods of Canadian women directors.

Chapter Summaries

This study is organized in seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, which situates these four directors within the larger discussion of women in Canadian theatre and articulates the necessity of this project, Chapter Two, "Setting the Stage: Women and the Ideological Status Quo in 21st Century Canada," provides a general summary and overview of the current Canadian political, cultural, economic and artistic climate. Because much of this study's consideration of the directors places them and their work in relation to the status quo, this chapter helps to familiarize readers with current trends and issues of Canadian life, particularly in regard to women and gender, and paints a picture, however broadly, of the overarching ideological structures to which these women's work is responding.

Chapters three, four, five, and six then each focus on one of the directors, first setting her and her work within its proper regional and cultural contexts, then considering her own articulated approach to her work as well as analyzing a representative production, and finally highlighting particular themes that emerge specifically in relation

[77] Mrinalina Sinha, "Gender and Nation," in *Feminist Theory Reader* 2nd edition, eds. Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (Routledge: New York, 2010), 228-229.

to intersecting identities such as gender, feminist declarations, nationality, and ethnicity and their influence on her work and artistic experiences. While most of the directors featured here travel often and have projects in multiple Canadian cities, their origins are in specific regions, and they are often linked to or associated with their home province. Thus, for the sake of geographical clarity (and in an effort to consider the potential influence of regionality), the directors are considered geographically from west to east. As a result, Chapter Three, "'Expand[ing] their consciousness': Kim Collier, Total Theatre, and *Tear the Curtain!*," focuses on Kim Collier, former artistic director of Vancouver's Electric Company Theatre and current artistic resident of Canadian Stage.[78] Since she emerged as the collectively-based Electric Company Theatre's primary director, Collier has become known throughout Canada for her physically-based, visually spectacular, and highly theatrical productions, many of which explore the relationship between technology and live performance by bringing theatre together with film and digital media, all within the same performance space.

Chapters Four and Five move toward the center of Canada and consider two directors who are part of the English-Canadian theatre scene in Toronto: Kelly Thornton and Nina Lee Aquino. Chapter Four, "'Leading from the center' or 'Looking at women in all directions': Kelly Thornton, Feminist Theatre, and *The Penelopiad*," focuses on Kelly Thornton, artistic director of Nightwood Theatre, Canada's "oldest professional women's theatre in Canada."[79] Of all the directors included in the study, Thornton

[78] In an effort to maintain the prominence and authority of the directors' individual voices, each chapter is titled with a phrase taken directly from my one-on-one interview with her and that speaks to her core directorial aesthetic or philosophy.

[79] Nightwood Theatre, "Our Story," Website, http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/index.php/about/our_story (accessed 20 May 2013).

represents the most politically and visibly “feminist” director, and her directorial work is discussed in this chapter within the context of the Toronto professional alternative theatre scene as well as the feminist movement in Canada. Chapter Five, “‘Works that blur the borders’: Nina Lee Aquino, Diversity, Opening Doors, and *carried away on the crest of a wave*,” considers Filipino-Canadian director Nina Lee Aquino. The former artistic director for fu-GEN and Cahoots Theatre – both companies whose work comes from and speaks to culturally specific groups, Aquino brings issues of cultural and ethnic diversity to the directorial table, as much of her career has been invested in “do[ing] something for the community [of diversity in Toronto]” where she could, through theatre, bring diverse stories to the stage and in so doing “be an enabler and “an empowerer” for those often marginalized communities.[80]

From Toronto, Chapter Six continues the journey eastward, focusing on Jillian Keiley. Keiley’s work is strongly influenced by her upbringing in Newfoundland, a province on the extreme eastern shore of the country. An area known for its rough, unforgiving shoreline and often disparaged by the rest of the country for its perceived rural naiveté, Newfoundland saw a resurgence of “Newfie” culture and identity, and Keiley’s desire to support that cultural resurgence manifested itself in the creation of Artistic Fraud Theatre Company in St. John’s Newfoundland, which Keiley founded in 1995 and led as its artistic director for over 16 years. As artistic director of Artistic Fraud, Keiley became known for her inventive, physically-precise work, which led to the invention of music- and movement-based performance technique dubbed Kalideography. While Keiley assumed the position of the artistic director for the English Theatre of the

[80] Nina Lee Aquino, Interview by the author, Toronto, ON, 5 September 2012.

National Arts Center in Ottawa in August 2012, her highly collaborative directorial methods and strategies that inspired and underlie Kalideography are explored in Chapter Six, "'Making people feel shiny': Jillian Keiley, Community, Kalideography, and *Under Wraps*."

The seventh and final chapter features a cross case analysis, which places the individual case studies of each director in conversation with one another and considers themes that emerge across cases and among stories. In this final chapter and as part of this cross case analysis, I consider the ways these four women's stories, methods and experiences intersect as well as diverge. Bringing these women's personal and directorial experiences – all from different regions of Canada and representing different types of artistic and feminist engagements – in relation to each other will illuminate larger issues facing women stage directors in Canada and will provide an indication of how the situation for women directors has (or, in some circumstances, has not) changed since Burton's 2006 study. In this final chapter, I explore common themes such as modes of collaboration, methods of directorial leadership, form and content of works, and perceptions of feminism that emerged among all four directors' interviews and observations and may prove useful elements to consider for future studies of women directors in Canada and in other global contexts.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE STAGE – WOMEN AND THE IDEOLOGICAL STATUS QUO IN 21ST CENTURY CANADA

In order to answer the questions put forth by feminist scholar Tracy Davis – "how does the ideology of the *dominant culture* affect women's status" and "how is the *status quo* maintained or challenged in artistic media" – I believe it would be useful to establish the current cultural, social, political, economic and artistic context in which Canadian women generally and these directors in particular are working – and therein paint a picture of the ideological and cultural status quo to which these women's work is responding.[81] Statistically, women make up just over half of the overall Canadian population, and they have held this slim margin of majority for nearly three decades. In 2010, Statistics Canada reported that there were 17.2 million women in Canada, which accounted for 50.4% of the entire population.[82] As a whole, the female population of Canada is aging. In its 2011 report on the Status of Women in Canada (a report conducted by the government every 10 years), Statistics Canada projected that by 2036 senior women may account for over half of the total female population in Canada, while the proportion of girls (or women under 18 years old) is and will continue to hold steady at approximately 16%.[83] Additionally, the numbers of aboriginal and immigrant women in Canada have increased in recent years, with aboriginal women comprising 3% of the overall population of Canadian women, women from a "visible minority" (a term

[81] Tracy C. Davis, "Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 72.

[82] Covadonga Robles Urquijo and Anne Milan, "Women in Canada: Female population," Statistics Canada, 89-503X, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11475-eng.htm (accessed 29 May 2013).

[83] Ibid.

employed to point to non-aboriginal individuals who are of visually-identified ethnic or racial minority status) comprising 14%, and immigrant women comprising 19%.[84]

Political Life

Before looking specifically at the situation of women in Canada, we should take a moment to consider Canadian politics and political structures at large, for these elements structure and guide a nation's social, cultural, economic, and artistic trajectories as well as provide an ideological paradigm through which women's experiences are shaped. Politically, Canada functions as a parliamentary democracy under a system of federalism. Essentially, this designation means that Canada, as a former colony of Great Britain, recognizes the British Crown as its executive branch of government, with the appointed Governor General (currently David Johnston) representing the Queen on Canadian soil. Since the Canadian Confederation in 1867 as well as the passage of the 1982 Canada Act, which "patriated" Canada's constitution and thus ended the necessity for the country to request that the British parliament approve amendments to the Canadian Constitution, the Crown and the Governor General have been predominately symbolic figures, as the true political and legislative power is held by the Canadian Parliament. Parliament is led by the elected Prime Minister (currently Stephen Harper) and a bicameral system comprised of the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons, whose members are elected members of Parliament (MPs), holds the major political power, however, as the

[84] The majority of the women identifying as a visible minority are of Chinese descent, and the population of immigrant women is the largest that it has been in more than half a century. Issues related to this ethnic and racial diversity will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter in regard to the Canadian official policy of multiculturalism and the Canadian cultural "mosaic." Covadonga Robles Urquijo and Anne Milan, "Women in Canada: Female population," Statistics Canada, 89-503X, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11475-eng.htm (accessed 29 May 2013).

Senate's members are appointed by the Prime Minister and are disproportionately representative to provincial population.[85]

Much like the United States, Canada also functions under a system of federalism, which divides legislative decisions between two levels of government – the national and provincial (or, in the US, state) governments. Ten provinces and three territories compose the nation of Canada, and under federalism, the national government (led by the Prime Minister and House of Commons) decides issues of public policy and economics while other policy decisions are left to individual provincial governments. By many accounts, this system of federalism contributes to the strong sense of regionalism and regional distinction that exists throughout the country, and it is further compounded by the sheer geographic size of Canada, for it is the second largest landmass in the world and thus provinces or regions, for the most part, develop independently, existing in their respective corners of the nation. As political scientists Bickerton and Gagon argue, "Canada, then, is a country in which regionalism is both strong and pervasive."[86]

Perhaps the key distinction of Canadian politics is its reliance on "responsible government." Put simply, "responsible government" designates a system of accountability, referring to a government that is responsible to the people, or in Canada's case, is responsible to the representatives of the people. Under responsible government, the Prime Minister and the members of the Cabinet are collectively responsible to the House of Commons. If they lose the confidence of the House, then the government must

[85] There have, particularly in recent years, been movements and recommendations to restructure the Senate or to eliminate it. The current New Democratic Party (NDP) website in June 2013, for instance, featured a prominent ad that proclaimed, "It's time to abolish the Senate. Roll up the red carpet" (http://www.ndp.ca/).

[86] James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagon, "Regions and Regionalism," in *Canadian Politics*, eds. James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 84.

resign and/or elections called. Thus, unlike the United States which holds elections every four years without fail, Canada's election term is flexible; it can be up to five years or when a vote of "no confidence" is passed by the members of the House of Commons. For instance, in March of 2011, the Liberal leader in the House of Commons, Michael Ignatieff, initiated a no confidence motion against the Harper government, and that vote then passed 156 to 145 votes.[87] Because of this vote, elections were called and Canadians went to the polls in early May 2011. Ultimately, this notion of responsible government is intended to maintain the efficacy of the government on behalf of the people.

Within the election process, Canada also functions differently from the US and other similar nations in that Canadian elections follow a "first past the post," or "single member plurality."[88] In other words, each federal electoral district, or "riding," has one representative, and the person with the most votes in that riding wins the House of Commons seat and represents the riding (or electoral area) as the Minister of Parliament (MP).[89] It has been argued, however, that this system discourages the election of women and other marginalized, under-represented groups, for they are pitted directly against

[87] It is perhaps important to note in this example that this vote would initiate the fourth election Canada had seen in seven years, and this instability is largely due to the fact that Harper, a Conservative Prime Minister, was working with a minority government, meaning that neither the Conservative nor Liberal Parties had a majority in the House of Commons and therefore had to constantly negotiate with the other party to enact legislation. These negotiations subsequently created an unstable political environment and resulted in multiple no confidence motions.

[88] Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, "Principles and Characteristics of Single Member Plurality," http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/en-CA/docs/Weekend%20Three/Principles%20and%20Characteristics%20of%20Single%20Member%20Plurality.pdf (accessed 29 May 2013).

[89] In contrast, the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries use a proportional representation electoral system, which means that the number of seats won by a party is directly proportional to the percentage of the vote that party receives in an electoral district.

white males and must battle conventional attitudes and perceptions of "typical" politicians, a battle which can result in reduced financial and other forms of support.[90]

Another feature that complicates and contributes to this aspect of responsible government is Canada's political party affiliations. Unlike some countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and Australia which generally function under a system dominated by two political parties, Canada's party system is diverse, and politicians follow a very strict party line. Approximately 19 parties are officially registered and listed under the Canadian elections system; however, the primary parties represented in Parliament include the Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Green Party, Le Bloc Quebecois, and the New Democratic Party (commonly referred to as the NDP). In a consideration of the Canadian party system, it is also important to clarify each party's characteristics, as Canadian terms – particularly "liberal" – refer to slightly different political ideologies and leanings than they do in other countries such as the United States. Created in 2003 as a merger between two right-leaning parties, the Conservative Party, for instance, tends to advocate for a decentralized, smaller government with more power delegated to provinces. In contrast, the Liberal Party is the oldest party in the country and led the country for much of the 20th century; the Liberals tend to sit at the center of the political spectrum (not to the far left, as many Americans might assume), and historically have fluctuated between center-right and center-left. The third party that has gained significant ground quite recently in the Canadian political arena is the New Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP has been called the "democratic socialist alternative

[90] Julie Pool, "Women in Parliament," Library of Parliament Background Papers, Library of Parliament: Ottawa, Ontario, Publication 5-62-E, (14 July 2010), 5.

political party" and typically is the most left-wing, "liberal" thinking of the major political parties. Two other smaller parties round out the major Canadian political groups. First, the Green Party, as its name implies, emerges out of a desire for a grass roots democracy and holds at its core issues related to ecological and social justice as well as a green economy and sustainability. Finally, Bloc Quebecois is the party of the French-speaking Quebec and is rooted in the Quebec sovereignty movement, thus focusing on issues specifically related to Quebec and Francophone populations. Currently, Canada is governed under the leadership of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who is supported by a Conservative majority in the House of Commons.

Women and Women's Rights, Generally Speaking

Within this political system, Canada professes, as a nation, a great interest in and dedication to furthering and supporting the rights of women as well as other marginalized communities. In addition to being a participating member of the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women, Canada was also one of the first nations to sign and ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which set forth international standards intended to eliminate gender discrimination worldwide, and Canada also supported the 2002 Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, which created and implemented an inquiry and communication process for rights violations.[91]

On a national level, Canada also established the Status of Women Canada Committee in 1971, following the recommendation that resulted from the Royal

[91] Government of Canada, "Foreign Affairs and International Trade – Women's Rights," 30 April 2013.

Commission on the Status of Women. The committee is led by the Minister for the Status of Women, who is currently Rona Ambrose, a MP from Edmonton, Alberta who has chaired the committee since 2010. The Status of Women Canada's overall goal is to advocate for and offer input regarding gender equality in Canada, as its vision is of "a Canada where equality is achieved between women and men in all aspects of life."[92]

Perhaps one mark of equality for women is held in the right to vote. Women in Canada gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1919;[93] however, it was not until 1940 that complete equality in voting rights was obtained at both the federal and provincial levels. Moreover, while women had gained the right to vote in federal elections and the ability to hold seats in the House of Commons, it was not until 1929 with the famous "Persons Case" that women were considered "Persons" and awarded full and equal rights under Canadian law. A landmark in Canadian and Canadian women's history, the "Persons Case" emerged in 1928 when five Alberta women, known as the "Famous Five," moved to have a woman named to the Senate but initially were denied because women were not included among the "qualified Persons" eligible for Senate appointments as described in section 24 of the British North America Act (1867).[94] Not only did the Persons Case open the door for women to work at a governmental level but it also opened the doors to greater equality in other sectors, as women were now legally

[92] Status of Women Canada website, "Who We Are," http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/abu-ans/index-eng.html (accessed 29 May 2013).

[93] On a provincial level, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatechewan became the first provinces to allow women to vote in 1916.

[94] For more information on the Persons Case and act, see the University of Calgary's website on Global Perspectives of Personhood (http://people.ucalgary.ca/~gpopconf/person.html) or Robert J. Sharpe's *The Persons Case: The Origins and Legacy of the Fight for Legal Personhood* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2007).

recognized as persons able to participate in the development and governance of the nation.

While the Persons Case guaranteed women full legal status as "persons" in Canada, much like the United States and other nations around the world, the number of women who currently hold public office in Canada is significantly lower than that of men. While the United Nations has established the minimum benchmark of 30% internationally to ensure a critical mass of women parliamentarians, Canada, like many other nations, continues to fall below this mark, hovering around 20% since 1997 and currently ranking fifty-second in the world in regard to female representation in political office.[95] On a provincial level, there tends to be greater parity between men and women representatives; however, this varies between provinces, with Quebec ranking highest at 32.8% and the Northwest Territories lowest at 10.5%.[96]

As reported in a 2010 Background Paper on "Women in Parliament" published by the Library of Parliament, women are, for a variety of reasons ranging from increased familial responsibilities to a reluctance to engage in the perceived male-dominated and aggressive maneuverings of the political system, less likely to consider themselves fit for office and therefore less likely to seek parliamentary office.[97] Moreover, the report posits that beyond women's reluctance to self-nominate, the current policies and procedures of

[95] In September 2008, Rwanda was the first country to have more women members of parliament than men, at 56%. Generally Rwanda is followed by Nordic nations (including Sweden, Iceland, Finland, and Norway) and others who have initiated sweeping changes in their legislative practices to ensure the representation of women meets this benchmark. Julie Pool, "Women in Parliament," Library of Parliament Background Papers, Library of Parliament: Ottawa, Ontario, Publication 5-62-E, (14 July 2010) 1-2.

[96] Equal Voice, "Fast Facts: Women in Provincial Politics," 25 February 2013, http://www.equalvoice.ca/pdf/EV%20Fast%20Facts-%20Canadian%20Snapshot-%20March%202013.pdf (accessed 29 May 2013).

[97] Julie Pool, "Women in Parliament," Library of Parliament Background Papers, Library of Parliament: Ottawa, Ontario, Publication 5-62-E, (14 July 2010), 3.

the parties themselves further hinder the inclusion of greater numbers of women parliamentarians. According to parliamentary librarian and author Julie Pool, "the role of political parties in promoting and supporting women to run for nominations has been repeatedly identified as the most important factor in increasing the number of women in parliament."[98]

Despite this reluctance, however, the most recent elections, held in spring 2011, saw a record high of 76 women elected to the House of Commons. The election of these 76 women raised the percentage of women in the House of Commons to 25% - the highest percentage since the first female MP (Agnes Macphail) was elected in 1921. Most of the women elected during the 2011 election were from the NDP party, as the NDP's 40 elected women comprise 39% of the NDP caucus.[99] The other parties, however, do not fare as well, as the *Globe and Mail* reports only 17% of the Tories and Liberals' MPs are women and only one woman represents the Bloc Quebecois party. In addition to bringing in a record number of women parliamentarians as part of the 2011 election, one other election is of particular note: the election of Elizabeth May as the leader of the Green Party. May is the first woman party leader since Alexa McDonough served as the party leader of the NDP from 1995-2003.[100] Moreover, women currently serve as premiers (what Americans might term "governors") of five of the ten provinces and one of the three territories.[101]

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Anna Mehler Paperny, "Voters send a record 76 women to Parliament," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 May 2011.

[100] McDonough stepped down as NDP party leader in 2003, as she was fighting breast cancer, but she retained her seat as a MP until 2008.

[101] These women include Eva Aariak (Nunavut – Territory), Kathy Dunderdale (Newfoundland and Labrador), Christy Clark (British Columbia), Alison Redford (Alberta), Pauline Marois (Quebec), and

As in other Western nations, pay equity also has been an issue for women in Canada. As early as 1978, pay equity was included in the Canadian Human Rights Act; however, women continue to be at a disadvantage economically. As part of the 2013 International Women's Day celebrations on 8 March 2013, Liberal MP (and Canada's first astronaut) Marc Garneau spoke about the challenges facing contemporary Canadian women, and the first of those issues addressed by Garneau was pay equity. According to Garneau, Canada ranks "a poor 11th out of 17 comparable developed nations" with Canadian women earning "81 cents for each dollar received by their male counterparts."[102] Admittedly, Garneau's figure may be slightly exaggerated, as the Pay Equity Commission of Ontario estimates that in Ontario women earn only 72 cents per dollar earned by men; however, it remains that pay equity is an issue facing women in Canada today.[103] Issues of race further complicate these statistics, for as journalist and director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Income Inequality Project, Trish Hennessy notes, racialized women in Ontario earned 47 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized men.[104]

Kathleen Wynne (Ontario). While these women serve in positions of high leadership, it is also interesting to consider how they are portrayed as leaders and as women in the media, for in a conversation with a Canadian colleague in June 2013, he observed that there is a difference in the way that women premiers are characterized in contrast to men premiers. Equal Voice, "The Facts, Ma'am: Facts about Women in Politics in Canada," www.equalvoice.ca (accessed 29 May 2013).

[102] Marc Garneau, "What Canada can do about pay equity and getting more women into politics," *Globe and Mail*, 8 March 2013,

[103] "The Gender Wage Gap," Pay Equity Commission of Ontario, September 2012, http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/about/pubs/genderwage/wagegap.php (accessed 29 May 2013).

[104] The terms "racialized" and "non-racialized" are often used in discussions of race in Canada, with "non-racialized" essentially referring to white Canadians. Trish Hennessy, "Canada's Pay Gap," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 3 April 2013, http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/canadas-pay-gap (accessed 29 May 2013).

Diversity, Bilingualism, and Multiculturalism

In addition to the rights of women, Canada is also a nation known for its focus on diversity and human rights, and in light of this study's understanding of and interest in issues related to intersectionality (or the recognition of the ways that other identity categories such as race, class, sexuality, dis/ability, and other factors are intimately and inextricably linked to gender identity) it is useful to consider Canada's policies toward multiculturalism and diversity. In fact, a core component of the Canadian ideology and the construction of the contemporary status quo is its governmental dedication to bilingualism and multiculturalism.

Canada is a diverse country on multiple fronts. Linguistically, Canada recognizes two official languages (French and English), and while the majority of the population (67.6%) speaks only English, over a quarter of the population is bilingual and 13.3% speak French only.[105] In addition to recognizing two official languages, historically there has been a struggle to recognize the distinct Quebecois culture within the larger English-Canadian nation, and the Quebecois have attempted to secure their sovereignty from Canada by official referendum in 1980 and 1995.[106] While none of the directors considered in this study are Quebecois or identify French as their primary language, it is still important to note that this linguistic background surrounds them and might inform their perspectives. As the artistic director of the English Theatre at the National Arts Centre, Jillian Keiley is representing and generally speaking to an English-Canadian

[105] Christopher Raymond, Canadian Politics and Government, Lecture, University of Missouri, January 2011.

[106] Often the term "Two Solitudes" is used to refer to the lack of communication and distinctly different cultures of Anglophone and Francophone Canada. The term was first introduced in Hugh MacLennan's 1945 novel entitled *Two Solitudes.*

audience, for instance; however, because of her location in Ottawa, a government city located on the border of Ontario and Quebec (and therefore creating an inherently more bilingual culture), and within the National Arts Centre, Keiley is surrounded by this linguistic diversity.

Canada is one of the few nations in the world to have an official governmental policy of multiculturalism. In fact, in 1971, under the leadership of then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official governmental policy, thus "affirm[ing] the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language or their religious affiliation."[107] Famously articulated by Trudeau as "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework," the policy was then further institutionalized in 1982 with the passage of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a constitutional amendment that recognized multiculturalism as an important element within Canadian identity and Canadian values, and in 1988, the government passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which further entrenched and formalized the multiculturalism policy.[108] The Multiculturalism Act legally recognized "all Canadians as full and equal participants" in Canadian society and, perhaps more importantly, established legal measures to protect linguistic, racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in Canada.[109] However, unlike the American metaphor of the cultural "melting pot," a metaphor that presumes individuals entering the country will

[107] Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Canadian Multiculturalism: An Inclusive Citizenship," Government of Canada, 19 October 2012.

[108] The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is also often called the Canada Act, as it was a product of the surge of Canadian nationalism that emerged in the 1970s.

[109] Government of Canada, "Canadian Multiculturalism Act," 1985 (assented to 21 July 1988) Justice Laws website, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/FullText.html (accessed 6 June 2013). While the Act was first introduced in 1985, it underwent several revisions and was ultimately passed in July 1988.

mix together to assimilate and become one single "American" entity, the common Canadian metaphor to describe the nation's policy of cultural integration is that of a cultural "mosaic." While seemingly a small, semantic distinction, for Canadians the mosaic represents the belief perpetuated in the larger nationalistic discourse that Canada is stronger when immigrants bring in and maintain their own cultures within the larger Canadian nation-state, rather than melting the cultures together to create a single entity.[110] Thus, in the Canadian mosaic, racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity is maintained and joined together, like individual tiles in a mosaic that together create a beautifully-detailed work of art, to comprise the Canadian cultural identity.

One of the largest ethnic groups included and specifically recognized within the governmental policies of multiculturalism is the indigenous or aboriginal population. According to Statistics Canada, 2006 marked the first time on a Canadian census that the aboriginal population surpassed the million mark, and an increasing number of women identify as aboriginal (in 2011, about 3.8% of the total population of women in Canada), with First Nations making up the majority of aboriginal identities (60%) followed by Metis and Inuit.[111] While this study does not include a director of First Nations or other aboriginal heritage, it remains important to recognize this increasing number of aboriginal-identified women, for it speaks to an increasing need for representation of

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[110] Levine, Randy and Gifty Serbeh-Dunn, "Mosaic vs. Melting Pot," *Voices* 1, no. 4, (Spring 1999).

[111] First Nations is the term used to describe North American Indian populations in Canada, while Metis historically has referred to aboriginal people of mixed First Nations and European parentage and Inuit live in the Canadian Arctic region. In the Constitution Act of 1982 (Charter for Rights and Freedoms), the Inuit are listed as a distinctly recognized aboriginal people, separate from First Nations and Metis. CBC News, "Canada's aboriginal population tops million mark: StatsCan," 15 January 2008, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/01/15/aboriginal-stats.html (accessed 6 June 2013); Covadonga Robles Urquijo and Anne Milan, "Women in Canada: Female population," Statistics Canada, 89-503X, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11475-eng.htm (accessed 29 May 2013).

indigenous Canadian perspectives – women's and men's – on Canada's stages. While Native Earth Performing Arts – Canada's oldest professional Native theatre company – has been actively working in the Toronto theatre community since its founding in 1982 and is dedicated to "creating and producing Native performance works" and supporting the work of aboriginal artists, it remains that aboriginal perspectives can and should play a role for other companies interested in programming and producing Canadian art and performance.[112]

Further, in addition to an increasing number of aboriginal women, Canada has also seen an increase in the number of immigrants living within its borders. This information is particularly important to the consideration of this study, specifically the exploration of Filipino-Canadian director Nina Lee Aquino's directing oeuvre and methods, as this information quantitatively supports Aquino's artistic dedication to exploring ethnicity on and bringing diverse perspectives to Canadian arts. From 2001-2006, the female immigrant population grew by 14%, a statistic particularly striking because it is twice the rate of growth as seen in the overall female population.[113] Additionally, the growth in the Canadian immigrant population is intimately related to a common buzzword: "visible minority." Thus, of the population of Canadian women, 16% identify as "visible minorities," with Chinese and South Asian comprising the majority and, as is the case with director Nina Lee Aquino, Filipino ranking fourth.

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[112] Native Earth Performing Arts, "About Us," website, http://www.nativeearth.ca/ne/about-us/ (accessed 30 May 2013). Much like "feminism," the term "native" also has various and contested meanings. Thus, Native Earth also includes on its website the following definition: "When employing the term 'Native', we refer to the peoples Indigenous to this land, with roots spanning back before European contact. We fully respect and acknowledge every person's right to self-identify to her/his preference."

[113] Covadonga Robles Urquijo and Anne Milan, "Women in Canada: Female population," Statistics Canada, 89-503X, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11475-eng.htm (accessed 29 May 2013).

The importance of multiculturalism and discussions thereof is demonstrated not only by its political inclusion but also its academic and critical discussion. Texts such as Sourayan Mookerjea, Imre Szeman, and Gail Faurschou's *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader* (2009) include specifically designated and substantial sections on "Race, Difference, and Multiculturalism." However, while there is significant focus on the positive aspects of multiculturalism, it is not as rosy or as simple as the picture often painted by the government. As noted by Canadian scholar Himani Bannerji, there continues to be a difference of power among Canadians, particularly in regard to indigenous people and those of visible minority status. Bannerji writes that "bilingualism, multiculturalism, tolerance of diversity and difference and slogans of unity cannot resolve this problem of unequal power and exchange – except to entrench even further the social relations of power and their ideological and legal forms which emanate from an unproblematized Canadian state and essence."[114] Additionally, as recently as 14 May 2013, scholar Adam Kingsmith pointed out the "racist cracks" in the Canadian cultural mosaic on his blog published via *Huffington Post Canada.* In the post, Kingsmith argued that the Conservative Harper government as well as the mainstream media and the "collective national consciousness" have been reluctant to acknowledge the racial and ethnic prejudices that exist within Canadian contemporary society. Until these prejudices are recognized, Kingsmith urged, Canada "will remain a delusional society of 'regular,' ethnicity-free, whitewashed Canadians, where the ethnic or Indigenous 'Canadians' are merely tolerated – sort of, as guests in 'our' cultural

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[114] Himani Bannerji, "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multicutluralism and the State of 'Canada,'' in *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 331.

homeland."[115] Thus, while the Canadian cultural mosaic appears to accept and embrace multiculturalism, beneath the surface tensions continue to exist. Within this social and cultural milieu, directors – such as this study's Filipino-Canadian Nina Lee Aquino – are producing works that speak artistically and socially to these tensions and multicultural communities.

Religion

Connected to this growing multicultural (or, as scholars Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel propose, "intercultural") and immigrant population is the Canadian perspective on and approach to religion. In particular, the Muslim population in Canada has rapidly increased; since 2004, the Muslim population across Canada has increased by over 70%.[116] Although Muslims only compose a small overall portion of the religiously-identified population in Canada, this increase is the largest of any denominational group at this time.

In addition to a growing Muslim population, a substantial majority of Canadians – approximately 76% – identify with a religion, according to the National Household Survey released in spring 2011, and most of those church-goers – about 40% – claim Catholicism as their religion of choice.[117] However, while the number of Canadians who identify with a religion has remained at this same percentile for several years, Statistics Canada's National Household Survey revealed that the number of Canadians who claim no religious affiliation has increased, from 12% in 1991 to 16% in 2001 and 24% in

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[115] Adam Kingsmith, "Canada's 'Mosiac' Has Racist Cracks," *Huffington Post Politics Canada*, 14 May 2013.

[116] Reginald Bibby, "Religion in Canada is changing but it's not being abandoned," *The Globe and Mail*, 8 May 2013.

[117] Ibid.

2011, which means that one in four Canadians report no religious affiliation at all, and within these results, Canadian women tend to rank religion as important to them more than men, albeit only by a very slight margin.[118] Thus, as sociologist Reginald Bibby argued, “Canadians have hardly abandoned religion. Nevertheless, a growing number of people are living without it.”[119]

In light of these statistics, it is perhaps also important to note that Canada does not connect its religious affiliations with its politics or advertise religious affiliation publicly as many Americans seem to do. For instance, when I first moved to Missouri, a state on the edge of the American “Bible Belt,” one of my acquaintances who had once lived in Missouri herself warned me that one of the first questions I would encounter when meeting people in the area would be, “Where do you go to church?” In contrast, when discussing with a Canadian colleague the differences between the United States and Canada, my colleague observed that, in Canada, “we might go to church, but you don’t *tell* anyone if you do.”[120] Thomas Farr, the former director of the US State Department’s religious freedom office, further supports this observation, saying “Religion has always had a significant role in American public policy, right from Day 1…There was never the same impulse in Canada, understandably,” as Canada has had to balance the divide

[118] The National Household Survey (NHS) was introduced in 2011 by Statistics Canada and is intended to replace the long census questionnaire, Census Form 2B. Reginald Bibby, “Religion in Canada is changing but it’s not being abandoned,” *The Globe and Mail*, 8 May 2013.

[119] Reginald Bibby, “Religion in Canada is changing but it’s not being abandoned,” *The Globe and Mail*, 8 May 2013; Ron Csillag, “Canadians turning away from organized religion,” *Religion News Service*, 15 May 2013.

[120] Personal conversation, January 2013.

between the largely Protestant English-Canada and the Catholic French-Canada throughout its history.[121]

Sexuality, Children, and Family

Another value and aspect of life commonly identified with women is that of child-rearing and family structures. Statistics Canada, in 2011, reported an increased number of common law marriages and live-in partnerships. Most Canadian women in a partnership were in heterosexual relationships; however, Canada's same-sex couples have, since July 2005 and the passage of the Civil Marriage Act in Canada, also had the benefit of legally marrying nation-wide.[122] Overall, however, within these relationships, Canadian women are having fewer children and, if they are having children, they are having them at older ages. Approximately half of the births in Canada in 2008 were to women aged thirty and over.[123] This trend is likely due to women's increased focus on careers and an overall later age for initial marriage than in the past, and some scholars argue that this reduction in birth rate is also due in part to the increasing secularization of Canadian society.[124]

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[121] Qtd. in Ryan Maloney, "National Household Survey: Religion In Canada, US on Different Paths," *Huffington Post,* 8 May 2013.

[122] As early as 1999, most same-sex cohabitating partners in Canada had received the legal benefits typically associated with marriage, and by 2003, eight of ten provinces and one of the three territories had legalized same-sex marriage. However, the Civil Marriage Act of 2005 solidified the legalization nation-wide, and Canada became the first country outside of Europe and fourth in the world to legalize same-sex marriage nationally. (CBC News, "Same-sex marriage law passes 158-133," 29 June 2005.)

[123] Covadonga Robles Urquijo and Anne Milan, "Women in Canada: Female population," Statistics Canada, 89-503X, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11475-eng.htm (accessed 29 May 2013).

[124] Perhaps the most prominent scholars who have written on and argue for this trend are Barbara Boyle Torrey and Nicholas Eberstadt, who published an article, "The Northern American Fertility Divide, in *Policy Review* (October 2004).

Issues of Interest for Women and Feminists

Certainly, the contemporary socio-political context in Canada and the issues associated with that context are of interest to and concern for women (and feminists) in Canada, as that context inevitably shapes and influences women's daily lives. In fact, my recent conversations with women and feminist colleagues who hail from various cities across Canada indicate that issues related to equality generally speaking – such as equitable political representation, equal pay, equivalent opportunities in the labour force, etc. for men and women of any color or background – are important to Canadian women and feminists. However, within this larger social situation, there are issues that particularly impact women and that, as part of discussions of Canadian women's social status, frequently rise to the fore, often becoming a banner under which feminist activists rally. Admittedly, much like it is in the United States, these Canadian women's issues are many and overlapping, which makes them difficult to pinpoint definitively; however, a closer consideration of Canadian feminist activist discourse reveals several major areas that have received feminist and women's attention in recent years.[125]

Karen Cho's 2012 film documentary, *Status Quo? The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada*, for instance, highlights three areas which have received particular attention politically, socially, and culturally from Canadian feminists. Cho's film begins with a discussion and examination of issues related to violence against women and notes that not only in Canada but also at an international level violence against women has been and continues to be surrounded by silence. Particularly in Canada under Stephen

[125] It is not lost on me that these issues are echoes of the issues I, as an American scholar and feminist, often hear discussed in regard to women's rights in the United States and, to some extent, in other countries, and this realization only reinforced to me the transnational and universal nature of some of these feminist issues.

Harper's Conservative government, some feminists fear a further silencing and an increased denial of the ripple effect that violence against women causes in Canadian society. For many Canadian feminists, the Commission on the Status of Women, first launched in 1967 and which established the aforementioned Status of Women Canada committee in 1971, was a "cornerstone" or watershed moment in feminist and women's Canadian history, for the Commission was not only the first Royal Commission chaired by a woman (journalist Florence Bird) but also legitimized women's rights and supported their quest for equality.[126] Of the 167 recommendations made by the Commission, however, none dealt with gender and violence. Thus, since that time many Canadian feminists have seen it their mission to advocate for a wider social and cultural recognition of the role that violence in its various forms (domestic, sexual, emotional, human trafficking, etc.) plays upon the lives of Canadian women. The women included in Cho's documentary, for instance, point to the fact that while women continue to be subjected to violent acts in the home and in society the issue is not addressed within the Canadian political structures and, as a result, few steps are being taken to address the problem. Moreover, it is especially important to note that within the multicultural society that is Canada issues of violence against women are further complicated by issues of class, sexuality, and race; First Nations women in particular have long been subject to violence, often at the hands of white men.

The second issue addressed in Cho's documentary is that of reproductive and sexual justice. Although Canada has a more progressive and open policy in regard to

[126] *Status Quo?: The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada*, directed by Karen Cho, (Toronto: National Film Board of Canada, 2012).

abortion than other countries such as the US in that there are no legal restrictions on abortion, the issue remains among those addressed by Canadian feminists, particularly because the process for receiving an abortion varies between provinces. Under the Canada Health Act, Canada's "federal legislation for publicly funded health care insurance," women have the option for an abortion that would be covered under the governmental health policy.[127] However, in some provinces, obtaining these services can prove difficult; New Brunswick, for instance, requires at least two referrals before a woman can obtain an abortion, and as several women included in the documentary note, there is an overwhelming discouragement for women to seek out abortion, a social attitude that severely reduces women's agency and ability to make decisions about their own bodies and sexual health.[128] Of course, New Brunswick is arguably an extreme case of the repression of abortion rights and sexual justice for women in Canada; thus, perhaps the larger issue at stake and of concern here for Canadian feminists is women's rights to control and make decisions about their own bodies.

The third major issue addressed by Cho's feminist documentary is one closely related to sexual and reproductive justice: affordable and equal access to child care. For many years there has been a movement in Canada to put into place a national childcare system. While the Harper government has put into place some child care policies such as providing parents of children under six years old a taxable allowance of $100 per month for health care, many women and feminists continue to push for a universal child care system that would more adequately and equitably fulfill parents' childcare needs. As

[127] "Canada Health Care Act Annual Report 2010-2011," Health Canada, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/pubs/cha-lcs/2011-cha-lcs-ar-ra/index-eng.php#ack-rem (accessed 19 June 2013).

[128] *Status Quo?: The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada*, directed by Karen Cho, (Toronto: National Film Board of Canada, 2012).

noted previously, women tend to earn a lower wage than men, and this earning disparity is further compounded for women of color and single mothers; thus, the current allowance offers them minimal assistance. Additionally, the Harper government instituted a live-in caregiver program, a program that allows families to hire foreign caregivers and then ostensibly allows that immigrant eventually to apply for Canadian residency. However, as Cho's documentary and other feminist argue, this program only benefits particular classes of women and, perhaps even more problematically, tends to exploit women of color, for many leave their own families in hopes of increased opportunity in Canada only to find that they are overworked and face significant delays or denials to their citizenship applications – both of which are also forms of violence against women and particularly immigrant women.[129]

Beyond these three issues (which also seem to plague women and feminists globally), several other issues have been identified by feminists as those particularly impacting contemporary Canadian women. Speaking as part of the Vancouver International Women's Day events in March 2013, Canadian feminist spokesperson Jarrah Hodge discussed the issue of building intergenerational bridges in the feminist movement and indicated several issues with which feminists, regardless of generation, are still battling. According to Hodge, those issues include "representation and recognition" as well as "basic material inequality."[130] Within these larger areas, Hodge specifically pointed to areas such as pay equity, violence against women, and the "range

[129] Jarrah Hodge, "'Unskilled Labour': Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program," *Undercurrent* 3, vol. 2 (2006).

[130] Jarrah Hodge, "IWD Talk on Intergenerational Feminism," *Gender-Focus.com*, 13 March 2013, http://www.gender-focus.com/2013/03/13/iwd-talk-on-intergenerational-feminism/ (accessed 18 June 2013).

of insidious messages that tell women and girls how they need to look and behave to be considered valuable and legitimate."[131] Hodge's call to reconsider how women and girls are being conceptualized in the broader public eye is echoed by the Girls Action Foundation, a Canadian group focused on supporting the development of young women, which points to the ways that these "insidious" messages are also intimately connected to issues of women and girls' mental health, conceptions of body image, self-harm, bullying in the schools, as well as domestic, sexual, and physical violence.[132] Moreover, further speaking to the notion of feminist intersectionality with which this study is concerned, the Girls Action Foundation's report *Beyond Appearances: Brief on the Main Issues Facing Girls in Canada* from February 2013 notes that race further complicates and compounds these issues and experiences; for instance, in the instances of missing and murdered indigenous women which has come to greater public attention in recent years 17% of these cases are girls under 18.[133] Thus, much like the picture painted in Cho's documentary and other sources, the issues impacting women and girls in Canada are diverse and interconnected, and these interconnected, intersecting issues and identities are also under consideration within the work and experiences of the women directors included in this study.

Perhaps what is most striking about Cho's film on Canadian feminism are some of the women's statements featured at the film's conclusion. One woman's statement

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[131] Ibid.

[132] A look at the infographics posted under the Girls Action Foundation resource section points to larger social issues about which the Foundation is particularly concerned. These include "healthy living," "redefining leadership," "the media," "violence prevention," and "sexual health," and presumably these larger issues could be extended to apply to the larger population of Canadian women as well (http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/infographics, accessed 20 June 2013).

[133] Girls Action Foundation, Juniper Glass and Lee Tunstall, *Beyond Appearances: Brief on the Main Issues Facing Girls in Canada,* (8 March 2013): 27.

particularly illuminates the state of and attitudes toward feminism as a movement in Canada; one of the women featured throughout the documentary, this participant reflects on whether or not she is a "feminist" (a question also posed to the directors included in my study). After advocating for feminist concerns regarding First Nations women's safety and agency in contemporary Canada, the woman responds, firmly and proudly stating, "No. I'm a woman. I'm an indigenous, Mohawk woman."[134] In these words then, we see several elements that particularly seem to characterize the Canadian feminist movement and issues being addressed by feminists. First, the emphasis is not necessarily on being "feminist" as much as it is about "women" as a social, cultural, and political group and advocating for the rights of *all* Canadian *women*. Second, Cho's choice to include the aboriginal woman's statement here is further illuminating in that it speaks to the multiculturalism that infuses and often seems to drive the Canadian mindset.[135] While Canada's official policy of multiculturalism can, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, often prove problematic, it and its acknowledgement of the diversity that exists within the Canadian women's population remain issues that seem to play into the overall feminist movement and social issues addressed by feminists and women in Canada in a variety of cultural and political formats.

[134] *Status Quo?: The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada*, directed by Karen Cho, (Toronto: National Film Board of Canada, 2012).

[135] It also should be noted that Cho herself is Asian-Canadian and is originally from Montreal, Quebec, thus her own experience and standpoint is presumably one that recognizes the ways that issues of racial and ethnic diversity as well as language impact women's lives. Her other documentary films include *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain*, which chronicles the effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act of Canada, and several episodes in a documentary series called *Past Lives,* about Canadians in search of their ancestral roots.

Theatrical Status Quo

In addition to the situation of women in theatre as painted by the Fraticelli (1982) and Burton (2006) Reports as discussed in Chapter 1, it is also important to outline, however broadly, the overall artistic and theatrical status quo in Canada so as to better place and understand these women's artistic innovations and contributions to the larger theatrical landscape. However, while one can consider the statistical and perceived status quo in regard to the Canadian political and social life, when we turn to a consideration of the artistic and theatrical status quo, or the "mainstream," in Canada, the conversation becomes more complex and difficult to pin down. To that end, when asked "How would you describe mainstream theatre in Canada?" many of my Canadian colleagues first respond with a deep sigh, and that sigh is often followed with a "That's a hard question."[136] For, as in the American theater scene, there is great diversity in Canadian theatrical form, content, and aesthetic. In fact, as theatre artist Mayte Gomez noted in 1993, "it is no longer a matter of course to agree on what is 'Canadian' or what is 'professional,' let alone how 'art' or 'theatre' should be defined."[137] And that diversity is further complicated by the regional distinctions that accompany Canada's vast landscape.

Regionality versus Toronto-centricism

Arguably, however, the majority of English-Canadian theatre is centered in and around Toronto. Or perhaps more accurately, the common *perception* is that Toronto serves as the center of theatrical activities in English-Canada. Certainly, theatre is being

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[136] This response occurred on three different occasions when talking informally with three different colleagues in April and May 2013.

[137] Qtd in Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel, "Introduction," *"Ethnic," Multicultural and Intercultural Theatre, Critical Perspectives on Theatre in English Canada*, volume 14 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), x.

created and performed across the country, and as theatre practitioner and scholar Gordon McCall observes in his chapter on Canadian women directors as part of Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow's *International Women Stage Directors* (September 2013), "Canada's bilingual regional and independent theatre scene serves as a connective tissue of the nation's social, cultural, and political identity."[138] Moreover, many of my Toronto-based Canadian colleagues are quick to point out that other cities across Canada such as Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver are producing and contributing to the development of English-Canadian theatre. From the image-and physically-based avant garde theatre that emerged and energized the British Columbia theatre scene in the west during the 1990s to the community-centered companies who have strived to reclaim and rejuvenate the cultural heritage of Newfoundland and the Maritimes in the east during the same period, Canada's diverse geographic regions each offer distinct performative traditions that contribute to the larger Canadian performance milieu, and in Canada, much attention has been paid to the regional distinctions that make up the Canadian cultural, social, and political landscape.[139] Diane Bessai, writing as early as 1980, notes that while it may be difficult to characterize modern Canadian theatre or dramatic literature definitively, "for the present the term *regional* is the most descriptively useful," for "in the past decade, the period which has seen the definite rise of a native Canadian theatre at last, regional

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[138] Gordon McCall, "Canada," in *International Women Directors*, ed. Anne Fliotsos (forthcoming, September 2013), 1.

[139] Writing in 1965, during the emerging Canadian nationalist movement, geography scholar J. Werford Watson writes that "a growing sense of Canadian nationhood has not prevented a lively feeling of regional individuality" (1). These discussions of regionalism have continued in various disciplines such as political science, economics, and public policy throughout Canada's development. James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagon's edited volume *Canadian Politics* (2009) features a chapter by the authors on "Regions and Regionalism," and Patrick Malcolmson and Richard Myers' *The Canadian Regime* includes multiple references to and discussions of regionalism in relation to Canada's parliamentary government. JW Watson, "Canadian Regionalism in Life and Letters," *The Geographical Journal* 131.1 (March 1965): 21.

activity has made the most identifiable and creative contribution to the movement."[140] However, shortly after my colleagues gesture to the artistic contributions and diversity of Canada's regions, their recognition is often quickly followed by an admission and acknowledgement that Toronto has constructed itself to be the hub or jumping off point for English-Canadian theatre.[141] In discussing the difference between British Columbia (and more specifically the Vancouver) theatre scene, director Kim Collier, for instance, noted that "central Canada [and Toronto have] the challenge of ambition. And as a community some are really there [in Toronto] making art and talking to their community, and some are up to activities en route to somewhere [else]…I think in Toronto you've got Stratford and Shaw and New York and Chicago, and…you're just going to bump into more people [in Toronto] that…have a different departure around their career and what they're up to."[142] As Collier's comment implies, for many actors and theatre artists Toronto serves as the gateway for work in larger professional venues and significant recognition within English-Canadian theatre, and, in many cases, functions as the gateway to the ultimate "success:" American Broadway.[143]

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[140] Diane Bessai, "The Regionalism of Canadian Drama," *Canadian Literature 85* (Summer 1980): 7.

[141] In a recent conversation with one colleague, she also pointed to the fact that the National Theatre School for both English and French Canadian theatre is located in Montreal, which further complicates any chance for a definitive statement being made as to where the "centre" of English-Canadian theater production might be located.

[142] Collier, Interview. In her article "Theatre as National Import: On Being and Passing in the United States," performance studies scholar Erin Hurley discusses the ways that many Canadian artists cross the border and are interpolated into and assumed to be American due to the fact that "Canada has not often been recognizably distinct to or from its neighbour" (165). Hurley notes that this allows Canadians to not only be in America but also provides an increased visibility and legitimacy; however, she also urges Canadian artists to utilize that visibility to increase Canadian artistic representation south of the 49th parallel. See "Theatre as National Import: On Being and Passing in the United States" in *Performing National Identities: International Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Theatre*, eds. Sherrill Grace and Albert-Reiner Glaap (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003).

[143] According to Mel Atkey, "New York and London remain – in economic terms, at least – the major theatrical markets, and Canadian artists, for reasons of prestige, still harbor the desire to conquer

When it comes to English-Canadian theatre, Toronto has been central in developing and popularizing, publicizing, and, to some extent, legitimizing Canadian theatrical work. In her book, *The Emergence of an Alternative Theatre Movement in English Canada*, Renate Usmiani speaks to Toronto's centrality in developing work in English Canada, even titling the book's opening chapter, "In the Beginning was Toronto," a decision which speaks to the importance of the city to the development of English Canadian theatrical culture. Toronto has a thriving theatre culture, and the city has been integral to the development of English-Canadian theatre throughout Canada's history. As Toronto theatre scholar Michael McKinnie notes in *City Stages: Theater and Urban Space in a Global City* (2007), "If it is true that theatre has become an important part of Toronto over the past four decades, it is equally true that Toronto has become an important part of theatre during this time."[144] Historically, Toronto has been home to many English-Canadian theatre "firsts." For instance, the first Progressive Arts Club, a theatre that subsequently developed in other major Canadian cities to perform workers' theatre during the 1930s and 1940s, was founded in Toronto in 1931.[145] Called the Workers' Experimental Theatre, this company provided the initial glimmer of what would become the "alternative" theatre movement, a Toronto-based movement that evolved amid the surge of Canadian nationalism inspired by the 100th anniversary celebration of Canadian Confederation in 1967 and in response to the major professional

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them." Mel Atkey, *Broadway North: The Dream of a Canadian Musical Theatre* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History, Inc.: 2006) 192.

[144] Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 3.

[145] Renate Usmiani, "In the Beginning was Toronto," in *Theatre and Performance in Toronto, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 21, ed. Laura Levin (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2011), 23

models in Toronto during the 1970s, many of which were bringing in predominately American and British work – an issue that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Within the Toronto theatre scene and when considering the status quo of "mainstream" theatre in English-Canada, several key elements should be noted. First, a distinction is commonly made between "mainstream" and "alternative" theatres. This distinction is most commonly made in Toronto, as those terms have a particular historical legacy and meaning that has developed and changed over time, but they also carry weight and can be extended to some degree to larger discussions of Canadian theatre as well. In the wake of the 1951 Massey Report, which urged the development and federal government patronage of the arts through, among other measures, the establishment of the Canada Council for the Encouragement of the Arts, Letters, Humanities, and Social Sciences (formally established 1957 and later divided to become two organizations: the Canada Council for the Arts and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, or SSHRC, commonly pronounced as "shirk") as well as other cultural developments of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the theatre scene in Toronto began to shift away from the imported cultural products of America and Great Britain. Between 1969 and 1979, the number of theatres grew exponentially in Toronto, with over 50 listings of theatre buildings and companies included in the Canadian Theatre Checklist of 1979 – most of which were not in existence prior to 1969.[146]

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[146] Robert Wallace, "Growing Pains: Toronto Theatre in the 1970's," *Theatre and Perforamnce in Toronto* (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2011) 8.

Amid this economic, demographic, and artistic explosion, multiple "alternative" theatres arose, most of which had varying mandates and some of which remain vibrant and viable companies to this day. Some of the companies that emerged during this time in Toronto included Theatre Passe Muraille (1968-present); Toronto Workshop Productions (1959-1988), a company established and run by George Luscombe and focused on collectively-created works; the Factory Lab Theatre (1970-present), run by Ken Gass and dedicated to producing new, Canadian works; the Toronto Free Theatre (1971/2-1988) focused on revisionings and avant garde works; and Tarragon Theatre (1971-present). In recent years, the term "alternate" has become a more popular term with which to designate these companies, as the term "alternative" implies a more universal avant garde aesthetic that does not necessarily apply to the work of these companies whose intent was to provide an alternative (and often Canadian-based or homegrown) product to the "mainstream" companies who were producing canonical (typically American or British) works in traditional theatre spaces; however, like Toronto theatre historian Denis Johnston, I will employ the term "alternative," as it was the "first one that stuck."[147]

While some companies that emerged during the early 1970s disappeared by midway through the decade due to financial or creative difficulties, others – such as Tarragon Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, and Factory Lab Theatre (today simply known as the Factory Theatre and under the co-artistic direction of Nina Lee Aquino, featured in this study) – remained. Further, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, these companies had

[147] Denis Johnston, *Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatres* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 5.

integrated themselves into the fabric of the Toronto theatre culture, so much so that, according to Alan Filewod, by the early 1990s "the alternates [had] transformed the conditions of their existence to become the new mainstream."[148] Thus, these former "alternative" companies like Tarragon and Factory Theatres could now be considered the more prominent, or "mainstream," companies in Toronto. Although their dedication to producing work by Canadian artists in a professional, not-for-profit context continues to stand in contrast to the massive, for-profit theatres that bring in touring American and British musical theatre productions such as *The Book of Mormon*, *War Horse*, and *Cats*, these companies now seem to represent a more Canadian-centered "mainstream" in Toronto.[149] Because these alternative companies have become the new mainstream, other companies (such as the woman-centered Nightwood Theatre led by Kelly Thornton or the Asian-Canadian fu-GEN Theatre formerly led by Nina Lee Aquino) continue to emerge to push the edges and limits of the English-Canadian theatre scene and to speak to particular communities that companies like Tarragon and Factory do not. It is within this neo-"alternative" performance scene – both in Toronto and across the country – that we see the work of many of the directors included in this study emerge.

Theatrical and Canonical "Imports"

As noted above, the alternative theatre movement in Toronto began in part as a response to the surge of Canadian nationalism and a desire to foster more homegrown,

[148] Alan Filewod, "Erasing Historical Difference: The Alternative Orthodoxy in Canadian Theatre," *Theatre and Performance in Toronto*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*, vol. 21, ed. Laura Levin, (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2011), 56.

[149] In our interview, Nina Lee Aquino discussed the import of being asked to direct David Yee's *carried away on the crest of a wave* at Tarragon Theatre in spring 2013 and in that discussion called Tarragon a "forcefield" that, she hoped, would "open up doors" to work with other professional companies in Toronto. This statement indicates informally the esteemed place held by Tarragon in the hierarchy of Toronto (and, to some extent, English-Canadian) theatre.

"Canadian" work. While guide books generally identify Toronto as a "top theater destination," they also note within the very same sentence that "Canadians and Americans flock to Toronto to take in one of the many Broadway-style musicals, plays or concerts."[150] In fact, historically, many of the theatrical events that occurred throughout Canada (and particularly in Toronto) were imported products. From the 1606 performance of *Le Théâtre de Neptune* by the French Marc Lescarbot to the current season at the venerable Stratford Shakespeare Festival, dramatic scripts from countries beyond Canada (and frequently from colonial powers, at that) often have been par for the course on Canadian stages.[151] Theatre historian Diane Bessai refers to the historical "predominance of foreign professionals" in Canada, which impeded the development of a more native Canadian drama scene, and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* refers to the fact that "throughout the 19th century, and well into the 20th, Canadian producers, actors and playwrights faced overwhelming competition from foreign touring stars and companies," a competition which "seriously retarded the development of indigenous professional theatre."[152] Because of Canada's post-colonial status and close relationships with both Great Britain and the United States, many productions from these nations historically

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[150] "Toronto," GoCanada.about.com, website, http://gocanada.about.com/od/canadiancities1/tp/theatretoronto.htm (accessed 1 June 2013).

[151] This performance is often hailed as the "first" performance in Canada (and, according to some, the first in North America) and was performed on canoes and barges on the waters near Port Royal in 1606 to welcome the settlement's founders, Samuel Champlain and Jean Biencourt, back from an exploration expedition. Written by and for the French soldiers and settlers, the content of the play (or, more accurately, the masque) was rather imperialist in tone and although a re-enactment was planned in 2006 to commemorate the 400th anniversary, the imperial nature of the play prompted organizers to cancel the re-enactment ("The Theatre of Neptune" in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*).

[152] Diane Bessai, "The Regionalism of Canadian Drama," *Canadian Literature 85* (Summer 1980):8; "English-Language Theatre," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, James H. Marsh, editor-in-chief.

included and continue to include Canada (particularly Toronto) along their tour routes and British and American canonical works often appear on Canadian season programs.[153]

Beyond the "imported" productions, two of the most well-known, respected producers of Canadian theatre are the Stratford Shakespeare Festival (founded in 1953) and the Shaw Festival (founded in 1962). While neither is located *in* Toronto, they are both within driving distance of Toronto and often employ Toronto-area actors. Interestingly, while each of these festivals is a mainstay and landmark of Canadian theatre recognized around the world, they were founded to recognize and celebrate the work of canonical playwrights from the British Empire, William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw, respectively. Moreover, as noted by theatre historian Susan McNicoll in *The Opening Act: Canadian Theatre History from 1945-1953*, some artists and scholars of Canadian theatre posit that the origins of a truly "Canadian" theatre began only with the founding of the Stratford Festival in 1953 – despite the fact that there were no Canadian-based playwrights on the bill and, to this day, Canadian-authored or original works are minimally represented on the Stratford stages. For instance, of the twelve plays featured in the Stratford Festival's 2013 season, ten are British and American pieces from the classical or musical theatre canon, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Blithe Spirit*; two are relatively new works – one by revered Canadian playwright Judith Thompson – but both are on the festival's small, experimental stage.

[153] In a visit to Toronto during the fall of 2012, for instance, I attended a production at Soulpepper Theatre, a company begun by Canadian artists who had performed together at the Stratford Festival and wanted a venue to continue their artistic work and growth. In selecting my tickets, I was surprised to find that my only options were pieces from the American dramatic literature canon*: The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, *You Can't Take It With You* by Kaufman and Hart, and *Speed the Plow* by David Mamet. While Soulpepper does also present some Canadian pieces (and later in their season those Canadian-based plays became more prominent), the company also frequently features canonical works of American or British origins.

The case is similar at the Shaw Festival, whose 2013 line-up features British and American classics such as *Lady Windemere's Fan, Trifles,* and *Guys and Dolls*, although artistic director Jackie Maxwell has programmed *Peace in Our Time: A Comedy,* which is an adaptation of Shaw's *Geneva* written by Canadian playwright John Murrell.

A look at the directors featured as part of these venerable Canadian festivals also reveals a gender disparity similar to that painted in Chapter 1 and the Fraticelli and Burton reports on the status of women in theatre. Of Stratford's twelve plays in the 2013 season, four are directed by women. The Shaw Festival, on the other hand, does have more directorial gender parity with five of the ten plays directed by women. (This parity might be due in part to the role that the Shaw's artistic director, Jackie Maxwell, a powerful and well-respected woman in Canadian theatre, plays in the selection and programming process.) What is perhaps even more interesting is that none of the directors featured in this study – despite all of their accolades and recognition – has directed on the Stratford or Shaw Festival stage. While I recognize that this gap could be due in part to each woman's preference to direct in other venues and formats as well as their connection to other theatre companies, it is interesting that none of these prominent women directors have worked in connection with these esteemed national, "Canadian" festivals.

Realistic Narrative Structures

If imported and canonical work has also been part of the "mainstream" or prominent (read: marketable) formulations of theatre in Canada, it also logically follows that these "mainstream" or marketable choices tend to be of a realistic and often linear

narrative structure and style. For instance, in the Introduction for *New Canadian Realisms: Eight Plays*, Roberta Barker and Kim Solga note that "realism has established itself as the dominant performance language" on Canadian stages.[154] Moreover, Barker and Solga argue that realism shaped by European models (an interesting tie back to the above discussion of imported and canonical models) "played a crucial role in the emergence of a Canadian Drama that intervened in the lived realities of its own time and space."[155] Beyond Solga and Barker's observations, Felicia Londré and Daniel Watermeier note in their comprehensive *North American Theatre History* text that even as Canadian theatres worked to establish their own, homegrown artistic work in the years following World War II, mainstream theatres had "little incentive" to produce new plays by Canadian authors and therefore relied on canonical models of realism as supplied by British and American sources.[156] It seems that popular culture and mainstream Canadian audiences prefer realistic, linear narratives, and as Solga and feminist theatre scholar Susan Bennett observe, "professional theatre critics almost universally prefer them," a preference which publicly influences and reinforces for audiences the mainstream preference for realism.[157]

However, while realistic narrative structures tend to dominate mainstream stages, scholars like Barker and Solga have also recently set out to trouble and expand this discussion and consideration of "realism." In their *New Canadian Realisms*, Barker and

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[154] Roberta Barker and Kim Solga, "Introduction," *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre,* vol. 2 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012), 8.

[155] Ibid., 7.

[156] Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J Watermeier*, The History of North American Theater* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 455.

[157] Kim Solga and Susan Bennett, "Feminist in Realism in Canada: Then and Now," in *New Canadian Realisms*, vol. 2, ed. Roberta Barker and Kim Solga (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012), 190.

Solga, while documenting the historical legacy of realism on the Canadian stage, also remind us that "over the past thirty years realism has come primarily to be defined by political failure, especially in its representations of gender and of queer and minority subjectivities," pointing to the ways that minoritized groups often use realism in a political manner, sometimes as a way to express their own stories on the mainstream stage and sometimes as a way to critique European dominant structures.[158] Thus, realism provides a traditional dramaturgical foundation upon which women like these directors employ or subvert in order to find ways into or speak against mainstream, hegemonic theatrical structures.

The Risk of the New

Perhaps yet another important part of the equation to be considered when looking at what seems to make up Canadian "mainstream" theatre is the difficulty and risk involved with producing new plays. Numerous Canadian playwrights, artists, and critics have noted that in Canada there is a propensity for a new Canadian play to receive an initial staging but then not see any further stagings. Nova Scotia playwright Catherine Banks, winner of the Governor General's Award for Drama in 2008 and 2012, for instance, observed that "currently in Canada, it's really hard to get productions," and in fact, for her play *Bone Cage*, Banks herself put up the money and made arrangements for its initial staging because, despite any literary recognition it had received, no theatre

[158] Roberta Barker and Kim Solga, "Introduction," *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre,* vol. 2 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012), 3.

company was willing to take a risk on a new play.[159] Additionally, Jillian Keiley's first programmed season at the National Arts Centre's English Theatre Company was a direct attempt to counter this trend in Canadian play production as well as to support the development of the country's regional theatre scene (and the artistic aesthetic developments occurring in each region). In addition to the traditional model of selecting plays to feature the talents of the National Arts Centre's resident acting ensemble, Keiley also consciously programmed plays that had debuted elsewhere – such as *Kim's Convenience* by Ins Choi which had seen its debut in 2011 as part of the Toronto Fringe and its 2012 professional staging (and 2013 re-mount) at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre – with the intention that they would receive "dramaturgical or other support," continue in their development process, and even potentially appear on the National Arts Centre's main stage in the future.[160] Despite these developments, however, it remains that new scripts – or worse, those deemed "experimental" (a term used broadly but generally used to refer to non-realistic forms) – or performance formats are a risky venture for many mainstream or larger theatre companies, as they are not guaranteed to garner audience support as readily as the known quantity of a classic work or a musical. Thus, works by traditionally marginalized communities or works that push the boundaries of form or content (like those created by many of these women directors) are not as likely to recoup their investment.

[159] Banks' *Bone Cage* won the Governor General Award for Drama in 2008, and her newest work *It is solved by walking* won in 2012. Elissa Barnard, "Sambro playwright nominated again for Governor General's award," *Halifax Herald*, 2 October 2012.

[160] Patrick Langston, "NAC English Theatre Season in 2013-14 to feature Andy Jones in Tartuffe, Sound of Music for the family," *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 April 2013.

So Where's the Beef (Or, National Funding for Arts)

In light of the risk associated with producing new and unknown or experimental plays, one final element to consider when painting a picture of the current/contemporary Canadian theatre scene is the ever-present question of funding for the arts. As previously mentioned, the Canada Council for the Arts was established in 1957 in response to the Massey Report's call for federal government support of the Canadian arts like the federal arts-support that has historically been de rigeur in European nations. Granted, the Canada Council has, like other governmental organizations, seen financial cuts as part of a struggling global economy, but it still continues to maintain federal support for Canadian arts at a substantial level. In 2007-2008, for instance, the Canada Council awarded grants to nearly 1600 professional Canadian arts organizations, and over 2369 individual artists received grants to create art, conduct research, or engage in professional development.[161] Overall, public arts spending in Canada is approximately .21% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and .93% of total public spending, while in the US public arts spending accounts for approximately .02% of the GDP and .13% of the total public spending.[162] Further, total arts grants per capita from the Canada Council was, in 2003-2004, \$4.15, while the total arts grants per capita from the American National Endowment for the Arts during the same period was \$0.44.[163] Thus, while several other countries such as Finland and Germany outrank Canada in regard to national arts funding, the Canadian government continues to strive to support the arts at a national level and, in

[161] Jocelyn Harvey, "Canada Council for the Arts," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (accessed 10 June 2013).
[162] Claire McCaughey, "Comparisons of Arts Funding in Selected Countries," Canada Council for the Arts, October 2005, 1.
[163] Ibid., 5.

a North American context, continues to do so at a much higher level than its neighbors to the south.

Moreover, city and provincial governments also recognize and support the development of the arts. In Toronto, the election of mayor David Miller in 2003 demonstrated a renewed interest in employing cultural and creative arts to build the city. In Miller's words, "Creativity should play a role in every part of our daily lives…When it comes to city building, it is vital that we constantly challenge our own limitations and for ourselves to re-imagine everything about our city."[164] The recent opening of communal and shared artistic spaces such as the Daniels Spectrum Building (a renovated Regent Park Arts and Cultural Centre) in Toronto – which houses seven arts and community-oriented groups including Canada's oldest First Nations theatre company, Native Earth – and the development/renovation of Toronto's Distillery District for artisans and arts groups further supports on-going initiatives to build a cultural and theatrical presence in Toronto.

Thus, while this section has outlined some of the larger tenets and assumptions associated with "mainstream" theatre in Canada, it is important to note that in an increasingly global, transnational era, these boundaries and factors are increasingly being challenged and expanded – by the work of artists like the directors featured here as well as by the Canadian theatrical community at large. As Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel argue, there is an "emerging heterogeneity of audiences across the theatrical board" which, to borrow terms used by theatre scholar Natalie Rewa, "reflects" and

[164] Qtd in Laura Levin's "TO Live With Culture: Torontopia and the Urban Creativity Script," in *Space and the Geographies of Theatre,* Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English, vol. 9, ed. Michael McKinnie (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2007), 205. Miller led the city until 2010 and the election of controversial mayoral candidate Rob Ford.

"acknowledges" the "increasing diversity of our increasingly intercultural cities…within the troublesome postmodern nation that is now called Canada."[165] Renowned Canadian theatre scholar Alan Filewod further asserts that "Canadian theatre" is a "historically unstable" term that implies a "site of crisis."[166] However, it is precisely this instability that offers opportunities for these women directors to step in and continue to challenge the overarching institutions, for in large part, the innovative work that these women directors bring to the Canadian arts scene intervenes in this "site of crisis" and offers new and innovative ways of seeing the nation, gender, identity, theatre, and live performance.

But what does it mean to be "innovative" (and beyond that, "experimental" or "avant garde")? While "innovative" can refer to a myriad of elements, it is a term frequently associated with each of these directors in some capacity. To this end, I find theatre artist and director Rachel Parish's discussion of innovation as part of the Theatre Communications Group's blog series on Artistry and Artistic Innovation, particularly applicable to this study and the consideration of these women's works. Parish writes, "When we have something revealed to us that we have previously taken for granted, and then we use that in our art, then we're working in the territory of innovation."[167] In many and various ways these women's work takes issues related to the status quo – or to borrow Parish's words" that [which] we have previously taken for granted" – and

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[165] Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel, "Introduction: 'Ethnic,' Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre," *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* vol. 14 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), xvii.

[166] Alan Filewod, *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre*, Textual Studies in Canada Monograph Series: Critical Performance/s in Canada (Kamloops, BC: Textual Studies in Canada, 2002), 5**.**

[167] Rachel Parish, "Look Forward to Being Utterly Wrong," TCG Circle Blog, 29 May 2013, http://www.tcgcircle.org/2013/05/look-forward-to-being-utterly-wrong/ (accessed 30 May 2013).

responds to those elements artistically and/or politically, thus this project considers the various artistic and political innovations put forth by these four women directors.

Moreover, in addition to these artistic innovations, each of these women speak to the regional status quo and, by nature of their national reputations, are challenging the idea of a single vision of Canadian national theatre while also presenting work that speaks to distinct regional developments and innovations within those regional developments. As Canadian actor/director/scholar Christine Brubaker notes in considering the four directors included in this study, "They all occupy difference pieces of the Canadian landscape a little bit. Literally, geographically they do, but also, well you know, like Nina [Lee Aquino] comes from the world of the emergence of the non-homogenous theatrical setting, right? With leadership and intelligence and what stories are bring told and all that kind of stuff. You know, Kim [Collier] sort of emerged out of the whole west coast physical theatre scene. Jill [Keiley]'s crafted her own fucking unique international stamp way over on the east coast. And Kelly [Thornton] is, you know, fucking in the thick of Toronto theatre making – political."[168] Thus, the women included in this study not only emerge from the overarching Canadian political, social and cultural status quo but also relate to Canada as a whole, representing the geographical and artistic diversity of the Canada and the ever-evolving Canadian theatre scene.

[168] Christine Brubaker, Interview by author, Skype, 5 April 2013.

CHAPTER 3: "EXPAND[ING] THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS" – KIM COLLIER, TOTAL THEATRE, AND *TEAR THE CURTAIN!*

While working as a director in Seattle from 2006 to 2008, I heard whispers about the physical, experimental theatre work being done two hours to our north in Vancouver, British Columbia. Although this piqued my interest, at that time I did not have an opportunity to venture to Vancouver to see what, by all reports, was innovative, groundbreaking theatre. Then, as I began research for this project, I came across the name of Kim Collier on multiple occasions, and these references coupled with Collier's position as part of that innovative Vancouver-based experimental theatre scene about which I had heard so much inspired me to include her in this study.

During fall 2012, I traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, and spent several days alongside Collier at Progress Lab 1422, a warehouse-style rehearsal space that the Electric Company Theatre shares with three other independent, young theatre companies (Boca del Lupo, Rumble Productions, and Neworld Theatre) located in the busy Commercial Drive neighborhood of East Vancouver.[169] During this time, Collier was preparing for the re-staging of the Electric Company's 2010 production of *Tear the Curtain!*, a multi-media exploration of the relationship between theatre and film. I spent two full days in rehearsal with Collier – the last days the Collier and her ensemble would have in the Vancouver space with the actual set pieces and furniture before they were trucked across the country for *Tear the Curtain!'s* Toronto debut.

[169] For many years, rehearsal spaces have been at a premium in Vancouver. To combat this problem, the companies – all of which emerged around the same time and are key players in Vancouver's alternative theatre scene – banded together to purchase and share the Progress Lab 1422 space.

In addition to observing Collier in rehearsal, I sat down with her for an interview at a busy Italian restaurant just up the hill from Progress Lab 1422. Although we had already been through a full day of intensive rehearsal that included some of the play's key technological elements, and she and Jonathon Young, her collaborative partner and husband, were scheduled to board a red-eye flight from Vancouver to Toronto that evening to attend a wedding the following day (only to fly back to Vancouver for rehearsal a day later), Collier generously and openly talked with me about her work. Leaning across the table and often gesturing broadly to illustrate her point, the tall and lanky Collier, her bright (dare I say electric) blue eyes sparkling and squinting as she considered her craft, described her artistic work and vision as well as shared her experiences as a nationally-recognized woman director working in Canadian professional theatre. Through my direct observations of and conversations with Collier, I began to see the ways that Collier – both in her projects and her directorial method – is shaped and driven by the desire to make what she describes as "extraordinary," artistic works, particularly works that emerge from and speak to the surrounding community.

When people refer to Collier, phrases such as "innovative," "imaginative," and "bold theatricality" often emerge.[170] Throughout her career, Collier has gained a reputation for producing large-scale, multimedia productions that push the proverbial envelope of artistic exploration and vision and has been recognized for her "artistic risk

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[170] The phrase "innovative" appears frequently in reviews discussing Kim Collier's work, particularly that with the Electric Company Theatre but also with other companies. Both Vancouver critics – Jerry Wasserman from *The Province* and Peter Birnie from the *Vancouver Sun* – have employed this word more than once to describe Collier, even going so far as calling her in 2008 "the hottest, most innovative director in the city [Vancouver] right now" (Wasserman, 10 July 2008); Jerry Wasserman, "Bloody, brutal and brilliant: Kim Collier's modern take on ancient themes," *The Province*, 14 July 2008; Richard Ouzounian, "Kim Collier's biggest prize is an audience," *Toronto Star*, 19 November 2010.

and excellence" and her belief in the "power of community."[171] Although currently a resident artist at Toronto's Canadian Stage, Collier's roots and heart are based in Vancouver, British Columbia, the birthplace of the Electric Company Theatre, a company that Collier co-founded with Jonathon Young, Kevin Kerr, and David Hudgins in 1996 and that has become a leader in the alternative theatre movement in British Columbia.

The Electric Company Theatre (ECT or the "Electrics" as they are more commonly called) first broke onto the Vancouver and British Columbia theatre scene in 1996 with their production of *Brilliant! The Life of Nikola Tesla* at the Vancouver Fringe Festival. Since then the Electric Company has been heralded as "the only company in Canada doing that kind of physical and visually oriented work on such a grand scale," and their work, which seeks to "push the boundaries of what we think theatre to be," has inspired the creation of other alternative and experimental theatre companies in Vancouver such as Boca del Lupo, neworldtheatre, Theatre Replacement, and Radix, all of which make "their mark on west coast theatre by virtue of original, self-created work and unique performance protocols [such as site-specific and multimedia work], reinvigorating the local, and increasingly, the national scene."[172] While the Electric Company has been dedicated to creating their works collectively since their founding, over time Kim Collier emerged as the group's primary director, and now the directorial reigns arguably belong to her. According to Collier, when the company began, the

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[171] Siminovitch Prize News Release Archive, "$100,000 Siminovitch Prize in Theatre Awarded to Director Kim Collier," 1 November 2010, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/news_news_38.shtml (accessed 1 January 2013). .

[172] David Abel (managing director of Canadian Stage) qtd in Michael Harris, "Play Mates," *The Walrus Magazine* (May 2011), http://walrusmagazine.com/article.php?ref=2011.05-theatre-play-mates&page= (accessed 1 July 2013); Jerry Wasserman, qtd in Michelle Kneale, "The Electric Company Script Development Process" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2008), 3

directing and artistic work was done as a collective, as all of the artists had experience in acting, playwriting, movement, and directing and all provided input throughout the creation process, from brainstorming ideas to script creation to staging; however, she recalls that "it became very clear that [directing] was a natural strength I had. There was a point where Electric Company thought it'd be valuable to play to our strengths. And it's not like those other guys [collaborators Kerr, Young and Hudgins] don't bring their directorial impulses to the work, but we let me start being the leader…And so that put me into the director's role."[173] Although difficult to pinpoint the precise moment when Collier emerged as the Electric Company's director due to their origins in collective creation, it seems this distinction happened soon after the company's start and the performance of *Brilliant!*[174] Electric Company production records as well as multiple newspaper reviews specifically list Collier as co-director as early as 1999 for the Electrics' site-specific walking tour/production, *The Wake*, and in 2000 Collier won a Jessie Award for Outstanding Direction on *The Score*, a play about a female geneticist who must face her own genetic fears while on the verge of medical breakthrough that could cure cancer, as well as the Ray Michal Prize for most promising new director.[175]

Beyond the Electric Company, Collier also often directs for other theatre companies such as Vancouver's Bard on the Beach and Toronto's Canadian Stage, and her directorial work both with the Electric Company and beyond has gained her

[173] Kim Collier, Interview by author, Vancouver, BC, 22 September 2012.

[174] To this day, *Brilliant!* remains listed entirely as a co-creation by the ECT collaborators on the company archive and history of the website. Thus, it seems that, as part of that initial collaborative, collective process, the company recognized their strengths and following that production, Collier emerged as primary director, while Kerr and Young would become the primary playwrights.

[175] The Jessie Awards (or Jessie Richardson Awards) are Vancouver's version of the Toronto Dora Awards and the American Tony Awards. The Ray Michal Prize is awarded as part of the Jessie Awards to an emerging new director.

significant regional and national attention and acclaim. Further demonstrating her reputation as a prominent director on a national scale, in fall 2011, Collier joined Canadian Stage in Toronto as an artistic associate, where she would direct productions for Canadian Stage, one of Canada's largest non-profit theatre companies, as well as run the newly created MFA program in directing, a joint program between Canadian Stage and York University that specifically focuses on "large scale theatre directing."[176] In many ways, Kim Collier and the Electric Company Theatre's work speaks to the larger collective identity of British Columbia and a desire for, as Collier puts it, "total theatre," meaning a theatre focused on creating dialogue with the audience and providing a full, immersive theatre experience. For Collier, her artistic work is extremely focused on "building community…through making extraordinary works of theatre" that "create a pulse in the audience and the people, and it gets them talking when they leave."[177]

Certainly, Kim Collier has made a name for herself as a director in Canada. However, despite numerous newspaper and magazine articles that praise Collier's direction and a handful that focus solely on her directing, there has been little scholarly exploration of Collier's directorial methods and approaches. Several scholarly studies such as Kate Braidwood, Michelle Kneale, and Jessica Ruano's Master's theses chronicle the work and collective creation methods of the Electric Company Theatre at large, but none consider Collier's work outside of the Electric Company collective or specifically consider how she works directorially to create these large-scale, physical, highly

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[176] Canadian Stage, "York University MFA in Theatre Program," https://www.canadianstage.com/Online/default.asp?doWork::WScontent::loadArticle=Load&BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::article_id=E5776E71-8ACA-4B0B-AA05-39CD55CC63A4 (accessed 15 June 2013).

[177] Collier, Interview.

imaginative productions.[178] Therefore, a focused scholarly study of Collier's work solely as a director is necessary, merited and timely. This chapter takes up that charge by first documenting her achievements and career to date and then considering the common themes and sub-themes that shape her directorial work and methods both on stage and in the rehearsal hall. To examine Collier's directorial practices at work, I then consider her recent production of *Tear the Curtain!* as an in-depth case study (within this case study) of how her artistic goals and practices are embodied in production, and I conclude by exploring Collier's perceptions and experiences of feminism, gender, and other intersecting identities in an attempt to gauge their influence on her work. Intelligent, poetic, articulate, and intensely focused on her work, Collier is a difficult director to pin down or to characterize simply, for her work is robust, tackling complex themes and subject areas, and deeply artistic, creating striking visual images on a large scale; however, throughout our conversations and my observations of Collier, two major themes emerged that particularly seem to guide and inspire her directorial aesthetic and approaches: the importance of Art and the need for collaboration.

Before going further, I should clarify my use of "Art." While all of the directors included in this study talk passionately about making theatre, Collier's discussion of theatre and her work was infused with numerous references to "art": the importance of art, her desire to create art for the community, the power of art to heal and change, and

[178] See Kate Braidwood, "The Electric Company: Very Live Theatre" (MFA thesis, Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, August 2007); Michelle Kneale, "The Electric Company Script Development Process: Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2008); and Jessica Ruano, "Electric Company," in "Impressions of 'Newness' in English Canadian Theatre The role of festivals in the consecration and distribution of new work" (master's thesis, University of Ottawa, 2010). It is interesting to note that all three of these scholarly studies focus almost entirely on *Brilliant!*

more. In fact, the entry recorded in my field notes following my interview with Collier begins simply with "ART!" written at the very top of the page, and over the course of my rehearsal observations, several times I wrote down phrases such as "artful," "deeply artistic," and "work of art." Thus, I believe that much of Collier's approach and work is shaped by a focus on creating, in conjunction with her collaborative partners at ECT and the others in the room, "extraordinary works of art" that "expand [our] consciousness."[179]

Vancouver and British Columbia Theatrical Culture

Because Collier's work originates and has historically been rooted in British Columbia rather than in Toronto, the arguable "hub" of English-Canadian theatre, it is important to note this region's cultural and theatrical roots, for as Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage note in their introduction to *In Contact with the Gods?: Directors Talk Theatre*, the role of many directors is "defined…in relation to the theatrical and social situation around them."[180] This statement is perhaps especially true in the case of British Columbia – a province located far from the "center" or the urban centers of the Canadian nation as found in Ottawa, the national capital, Toronto, the nation's largest city, and Montreal, the largest French-Canadian city and home to a vibrant Quebecois theatre scene. As the protagonist of Canadian literary icon Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* quips, British Columbia was "as far away from Toronto as I could get without drowning."[181] Not only is British Columbia geographically distant from the center but the province's topography also poses unique challenges and great diversity. From the

[179] Collier, Interview.
[180] Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage, *In Contact with the Gods?: Directors Talk Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 2.
[181] Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (New York: Double Day, 1988), 14.

snowcapped mountains of Whistler to Vancouver Island, from the rugged beaches of the Pacific coast to the rolling wine hills of central British Columbia, British Columbia's landscape is varied and therefore difficult to characterize. Thus, because of its geographic location and topographic make-up, British Columbia is, in the words of historian Jean Barman, not so much a place but a "a state of mind," as it "hovers on the edge" of the nation, both literally and figuratively.[182]

Similar to – or perhaps fed by – the geographical location and topographical diversity that sets British Columbia apart from other provinces, British Columbia also professes a culture and attitude all its own. As British Columbia theatre scholar Ginny Ratsoy attests, British Columbia culture is "constructed as being self-consciously outside the norm," as the people of British Columbia recognize and locate their existence on the borderlands or the edge of nation and geography.[183] In British Columbia, the so-called mainstream is "elusive."[184]

This attitude of "outside the norm" and existing on the borders of the mainstream also feeds into contemporary British Columbia theatre culture, and has influenced theatre in British Columbia from its beginnings. During the 1950s and 1960s, a theatrical culture struggled to emerge in British Columbia, for at that time the province was largely

[182] Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia,* 3rd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 399.

[183] Ginny Ratsoy, "Introduction, Locating Place," in *Theatre in British Columbia*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*, vol. 6 (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), xxii.

[184] Ginny Ratsoy, "Dramatizing Alterity: Relational Characterization in Post-Colonial British Columbia Plays," in *Embracing the Other: Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English,* ed. Dunja M Mohr (New York: Rodopi, 2008), 296.

enveloped in a post-colonial moment and infused with traditional and predominately British values.[185] As a result, citizens were wary of the burgeoning theatre scene.

However, theatre in British Columbia continued to grow, and several new companies emerged. Perhaps the "flagship" company, the Vancouver Playhouse began in 1963 and, in contrast to other companies who were producing largely British and American imports, was determined to promote new Canadian drama.[186] In addition to the Vancouver Playhouse, other companies such as Touchstone Theatre and Tamahnous Theatre emerged during the 1980s and 90s with mandates to produce Canadian-made plays.[187] However, despite these companies' best efforts, the theatre scene in British Columbia – particularly in Vancouver, the largest city in the province and the city often pointed to as exemplary of British Columbia theatre[188] – remained "inordinately

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[185] Ginny Ratsoy and James Hoffman, "Playing Out of Place: British Columbia Drama," in *Playing the Pacific Province: An Anthology of British Columbia Plays, 1976-2000* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2001), v.

[186] Much to the dismay of the theatre community in Vancouver and, to some degree, across the nation, the Vancouver Playhouse closed its doors in March 2012 due to financial difficulties.

[187] Touchstone Theatre was founded in 1976 and continues to produce Canadian plays to this day under the artistic direction of Katrina Dunn. Founded in 1971 by John Gray, Tamahnous Theatre was an early alternative theatre model and from 1981-1988 was the resident company in the East Vancouver Cultural Center; the company disbanded in 1995. (For more information about Tamahnous, see Renate Usmiani's essay "Western Magic: Tamahnous Theatre and Savage God" in *Theatre in British Columbia*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*, vol. 6. The Tamahnous archive is available at the Simon Fraser University Special Collections.)

[188] Although Vancouver is the largest city in British Columbia and much attention is paid to its theatre scene as being indicative or representative of the larger British Columbia theatre scene, it is also important to note that some scholars and artists would argue that, because of British Columbia's diverse landscape, the cultural life of each area is quite distinct and cannot be characterized by Vancouver only. While this point is certainly not lost on me, my research and the work of Kim Collier is centered in Vancouver, so my analysis and knowledge is admittedly Vancouver-centric. Due to time and page constraints, it is impossible to provide a thorough or comprehensive history of British Columbia theatre at large. For further information about various aspects of British Columbia theater history beyond Vancouver, see the essays included in *Theatre in British Columbia,* edited by Ginny Ratsoy (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006) – specifically Denis Johnston's article "Drama in British Columbia: A Special Place."

depressing" throughout the 1970s and 80s due to low audience attendance and little diversity in performers or performance styles.[189]

This trend changed, however, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the Vancouver theatre scene found itself in a burst of creativity and artistic experimentation fueled by a number of young companies, such as Collier and the Electric Company, that embraced and expanded upon British Columbia's identity as a land on the edge. In 2002, *The Globe and Mail* theatre critic Alexandra Gill noted that, although Vancouver's theatrical culture had previously been "stuck in a bog" it was now "springing into full bloom…thanks to a growing number of diverse young companies that have distinguished themselves with imaginative site-specific works, startling visual imagery and highly evolved concepts that use physical movement (tap dancing, trapeze, stilt walking, you name it) to tell their thought-provoking stories."[190] Among those troupes, and arguably leading the charge, was the Electric Company Theatre, of which Kim Collier was part and for which she would soon emerge as its primary director.

Today, British Columbia theatre is, according to Ginny Ratsoy, "self-consciously outside of the norm," both acting outside of what might generally be considered "mainstream" Canadian theatre culture and consciously creating works that destabilize and subvert traditional expectations or normative theatrical structures.[191] This alternative

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[189] Alexandra Gill, "Lotusland in the limelight," *Globe and Mail*, 15 June 2002. During this time, Vancouver itself was still considered to some extent the rural, unsettled west, and even as late as 1990, blogger/writer Nicholas Kevlahan notes that when he moved to the UK most people he encountered had "only the vaguest idea" of where Vancouver was located so he would have to explain that it was "just north of Seattle." Because of this rural status, Vancouver likely was not high on the list to attract touring productions.

[190] Alexandra Gill, "Lotusland in the limelight," *Globe and Mail*, 15 June 2002.

[191] Ginny Ratsoy, "Introduction, Locating Place," in *Theatre in British Columbia*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*, vol. 6, ed. Ratsoy (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), xxii.

mentality and approach in many ways echoes the Quebecois theatre movement and aesthetics of Montreal and Quebec artists. Several theatre artists and scholars have commented on the similarities between the British Columbia alternative theatres companies like the Electric Company and Quebecois artists, including *Globe and Mail* theatre critic J. Kelly Nestruck, who in 2009 characterized both Vancouver and Montreal theatre as "shar[ing] an interest in vibrant visuals and a passion for toying with technology."[192] Moreover, Bob Allen, who decried British Columbia theatre of the 1970s and 1980s, noted that "outside of Quebec, Vancouver is far and away the most interesting centre for interdisciplinary exploration."[193]

At the Start of Art: Kim Collier's Biographical Info

While this interdisciplinary exploration and experimentation, particularly with physical theatre and storytelling techniques, are hallmarks of several young Vancouver-based companies, one of the first and most prominent is the Electric Company Theatre, led by Collier and her collaborators. As a director both with the Electric Company as well as when working in other venues with other companies such as the annual Bard on the Beach Festival, Collier has become well known for her artistic innovation and imaginative directorial vision, which commonly involves large-scale productions that incorporate technology and provide an immersive performance experience for the audience members. As Jessie van Rijn, longtime supporter of Electric Company and its current managing producer, notes, "as an audience member, I can tell you that many of her productions have taken up a spot in my 'theatre heart' and will be very difficult to

[192] J Kelly Nestruck, "Rambo, a photo riddle and a stab at subversion," *Globe and Mail*, 1 June 2009.

[193] Alexandra Gill, "Lotusland in the limelight," *Globe and Mail*, 15 June 2002.

dislodge."[194] Collier's focus on theatre as an art and creating powerful art, or in her words, "extraordinary works of art," that speak to her community is a key theme that emerges throughout her narrative.

Born in Kitimat, a small coastal city in northwestern British Columbia, in 1965 and raised in Kamloops, a larger city located in south central British Columbia, Kim Collier was raised in what she describes as a very "literary" family that was also active in "practical, essential acts of creation."[195] Collier recalls that although her father was a dentist, he would also "work away in the shop at night making jewelry or furniture or carving personalized cutting boards for all the women in the family" and her grandmother was a "prolific" potter as well as a weaver, embroiderer, and painter.[196] Growing up in this arts-infused environment, Collier also took part, calling herself a "crafty person," always "making gingerbread men and decorating them and trying to make a Christmas tree completely natural or, you know, just sort of all these little projects. Wanting an impulse event for people to gather around….trying to make happenings… So I was always crafting and making events that gathered people."[197] In these words, we see hints of what would eventually emerge as her directing aesthetic as well: the urge to create art in many forms, the desire to create arts-based events that would bring a community together, and, as demonstrated in the multiple repetition of the words "trying," her affinity for and willingness to tackle risky or challenging projects.

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[194] Jessie van Rijn, Personal email, 3 July 2013.

[195] Collier, Interview; Kim Collier, Siminovitch Acceptance Speech, 1 November 2010, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winners_designers10.shtml (accessed 1 July 2013). In a 2010 article by the *Vancouver Sun's* theatre critic Peter Birnie, Collier quips, "You could say I was raised at Shuswap Lake because I spent all my weekends and summers there." Shuswap Lake is located east of Kamloops. (Birnie, "More power comes to Electric Company Theatre," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 November 2010.)

[196] Kim Collier, Siminovitch Acceptance Speech, 1 November 2010, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winners_designers10.shtml (accessed 1 July 2013).

[197] Collier, Interview.

Fortunately for Collier, her literary family supported her artistic impulses. During her youth, her parents infused in her the belief that she could "do whatever [she] wanted to do" with her life, and after attending the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, and studying acting for two years, Collier found herself wanting further artistic adventures and left the University to travel to the Yukon Territory to perform vaudeville at the Palace Grand Theatre.[198] This experience in vaudeville, mime and physical theatre, too, undoubtedly influenced Collier's very visual style of staging and direction. Although she left the University of Victoria before finishing her degree, Collier's family supported her decision. In fact, when she voiced her plans to leave school and travel to the Yukon, her father suggested that she use the money she had saved to finance her college education to purchase a Volkswagen van.[199] He then proceeded to help her convert the van into a camper, removing seats and fitting the van for a bed and cupboards. His support did not end there; continuing the anecdote, Collier notes, "A month or so later I called him from Dawson City saying I really wanted to paint drawings on the outside of the van but I was worried it would lower the resale value. I received a box of paints in the mail general delivery. They made me feel that anything was possible. A permission to recognize that the right choice isn't always the practical choice. And with this, a gift of freedom."[200]

This value for art and risk-taking in pursuit of art, even if it takes one to the extreme northern territories of Canada, continues to infuse Collier's work and artistic methods and arguably was part of her instinct and desire to start an experimental theatre

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[198] Collier, Interview.

[199] Kim Collier, Siminovitch Prize Acceptance, 1 November 2010, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winners_designers10.shtml (accessed 1 June 2013).

[200] Ibid.

company in Vancouver. When she returned to school and began studying acting at Studio 58, the professional theatre training program at Langara College in Vancouver, Kim Collier met her future Electric Company Theatre collaborators. Their common interests in site specific work, physical theatre, and theatrical experimentation as well as their work ethic – as David Hudgins notes, "we would always stay late at school. Everyone else would go home, and it'd be two in the morning and we're still working on stuff…We're the workaholics"[201] – sparked a collaboration that would eventually become the Electric Company. Even at 20 years old, Collier was determined to start a theatre company that would go beyond traditional artistic expectations:

> I would talk about how I wanted to start a theatre company one day and create work…when we look back, when I was at theatre school, my class we would do things like decide to take all our voice presentations and we'd throw it to the next level. We'd try to bring all these cedar boughs in and we'd decorate the room and we'd – without the teachers asking, we're supposed to just deliver a series of texts but we could make it all into a larger conceptual thing around it.[202]

Thus, in 1996, only two years after graduating from Langara and Studio 58, the young Collier and her collaborators debuted *Brilliant! The Life of Nikola Tesla* at the Vancouver Fringe Festival. The play chronicles the life and inventive genius of Nikola Tesla, the mastermind behind the creation of a system for alternating electric current. In addition to considering Tesla's scientific genius, the play also considers the costs of that genius through an exploration of Tesla's romantic relationships as well as his professional relationship (or, perhaps more accurately, rivalry) with Thomas Edison. In addition to bringing together science and art on stage in the same breath, *Brilliant!* also

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[201] Adrienne Wong, "Interview: The Electric Company," Rumble Company website, http://static.rumble.org/trans/transmission1-1.htm (accessed 3 July 2013).

[202] Collier, Interview.

included several multimedia production elements, including, according to *Times Colonist* reviewer Adrian Chamberlain, slide projections, strobe lights, and film – all of which point to what would become a hallmark and continual feature of Electric Company productions which challenged the boundaries of traditional artistic mediums and messages.[203] Ultimately, *Brilliant!* earned the Electric Company (as a collective) two Jessie Richardson Awards, Vancouver's version of the American Tony Awards, for outstanding new play and outstanding production, and "put Vancouver's hottest theatre company on the map."[204]

Because *Brilliant!* had been collectively created, with all collaborators involved in all stages of the creation process from brainstorming and writing (each collaborator would write a section and bring it back to the group) to staging, the production did not specifically name a director.[205] However, as mentioned earlier, Collier soon emerged as the company's primary director, first listed as co-director with Kevin Kerr for *The Wake* (1999) and then given sole directing credit. For the vast majority of Electric Company productions since this time, Collier has been credited as director, and the other collaborators have similarly found their particular niche. Kevin Kerr specializes in playwriting (as is further evidenced by his receipt of the Governor General's Award for

[203] Adrian Chamberlain, "Review," *Times Colonist*, 3 Nov 2008. Chamberlain's review was written in response to the re-staging of *Brilliant!* at the Belfry Theatre; however, Chamberlain's comments about the technology remain relevant here.

[204] Jerry Wasserman, "Brilliant to Beastly plays," *The Province*, 13 Sept. 2006. For a detailed discussion of the development of *Brilliant!* and the Electric Company Theatre's collaborative process, see Michelle E. Kneale's MA Thesis, "The Electric Company Script Development Process: *Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla*," (University of British Columbia, 2008). The company's name – Electric Company Theatre – was inspired by this first production, not by the PBS television show for children: "It seemed a logical name [because of the first production's connection to Tesla]. And it's stuck all these years." (Kim Collier, qtd in Richard Ouzounian, "The Electric Theatre of Kim Collier," *The Toronto Star*, 17 November 2010.)

[205] Michelle E. Kneale, "The Electric Company Script Development Process: *Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla*," (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2008), 12-13.

Drama in 2002 for his play *Unity (1918)*), Jonathon Young regularly acts in ECT productions as well as occasionally collaborates on the scripts, with David Hudgins "flitting around the edges" due to other obligations and artistic ventures.[206] Of course, in a study concerned with issues related to gender and other identities, it should be noted that Collier's primary collaborators are three men. Certainly, this gendered pairing is not uncommon in theatre, as men playwrights do often collaborate with women directors such as in the case of Nina Lee Aquino and Jillian Keiley (Chapters 5 and 6); however, it is notable that Collier is the only woman within the collective. In considering Collier and her collaborator's discussions of the founding of the company, it seems that the collaborative origins had more to do with common artistic interests than a political intent – an element that further demonstrates the theme of "art" as it runs through Collier's narrative and her deep investment in creating powerful art work on stage. Also to be considered in this discussion is the fact that Collier's regular stage manager, a key member of the production team and with whom Collier as the director works very closely and has for "most of [her] career," is a woman: Jan Hodgson.[207] In her Siminovitch Prize acceptance, in addition to recognizing Kerr and Young as her frequent collaborators, Collier also recognized Hodgson, hailing her "artist's intuition" for calling a show and noting that "without it the projects we have created together would be bereft of her grace and timing and style."[208] Also, the highly collective and collaborative nature of the group's creation process reflects a non-hierarchical mode of working that likely mitigates power struggles due to gender.

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[206] Collier, Interview.

[207] Kim Collier, Siminovitch Prize Acceptance, 1 November 2010, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winners_designers10.shtml (accessed 1 July 2013).

[208] Ibid.

As an artist, Collier recognizes the intimate relationship her work and artistic identity has with the collective identity of the company, noting "there's me as a director versus Electric Company…they're two different things but they're also kind of the same thing."[209] However, as Collier's statement indicates, her identity and artistic impulses as a director do also exist beyond the purview of the Electric Company, and as the identified director for the Electrics, Collier's vision for staging and bringing the material to life on the stage arguably shapes significantly the final product or performance event and, by extension, the aesthetic and public perception of the company. Jonathon Young observes that "Kim has always had a real drive to produce events, where people come together and are part of an event, and I think that our theatre could be loosely described as event based in that there are elements of spectacle which have been often held in equal esteem, or given equal value to the script," and Kate Braidwood comments in her MFA thesis on the collaborative work of the Electrics that Collier "has emerged very much as director [and] her exploration of the physical has permeated the company's work deeply."[210] Thus, a consideration of several key Electric Company productions in conjunction with several of Collier's directorial work beyond the Electrics reveals several key tenets of her directorial and artistic aesthetic, her approach to "making extraordinary works of theatre" that speak to community and "expand [people's] consciousness."[211]

[209] Collier, Interview.

[210] Kate Braidwood, "The Electric Company: Very Live Theatre" (MFA thesis, Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, August 2007), 12, 14.

[211] Collier, Interview.

Total Theatre Explained – An All-Encompassing Theatrical Event

As part of "expanding consciousness" through her artistic work, Collier is also expanding notions of theatre, as is evidenced in what she calls "total theatre." While "total theatre" originated with Collier's work with the Electric Company, it continues to infuse, shape, and emerge as part of her artistic vision – both on Electric Company shows and in others.[212] Arguably an aesthetic term rather than a directorial style (such as Jillian Keiley's Kalideography, discussed in Chapter 6), Collier's "total theatre" characterizes Collier's work, both with Electric Company and beyond, and perhaps more importantly, "total theatre" speaks to the theme of art and creating art that seems to tie Collier's narrative together. When asked to describe her directorial approach and aesthetic, she begins by saying, "just to try and start really simply, I really believe in total theatre."[213] From there, she begins to poetically lay out her vision for "total theatre," a vision that often calls upon the phrases "community" and "illuminating or heart moving or challenging events, productions for people." Philosophically, Collier's "total theatre" is rooted in a deep desire to create art through which to engage with others, emotionally and intellectually. For Collier, each show is different and requires different elements and

[212] The phrase "total theatre" was coined by French actor, director, and mime Jean-Louis Barrault and, according to Suzanne Burgoyne Dieckman, refers to a "harmonious integration of theatrical elements which helps man achieve a harmonious integration of his own being – and of his individual being with the universe" (4-5). Although Collier did not refer specifically to Barrault during our conversations or her description of "total theatre," her background in mime and *Tear the Curtain!*'s references to Artaud suggest that she is aware of Barrault's work. Collier's "total theatre" also echoes some of Barrault's philosophical and aesthetic tenets, although it seems her "total theatre" expands upon Barrault's ideas to include the physical space to a greater degree and technology in performance. Suzanne Burgoyne Dieckman, "Theory and Practice in the Total Theatre of Jean-Louis Barrault" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1975).

[213] Ibid.

processes in order to leave the audience with something that they can "go away with" and "that will help move them forward in their lives, not backward."[214]

Within these poetic and philosophical goals lies the essence of Total Theatre.[215] Although difficult to define definitively, for as Collier noted it does change and adjust from production to production, I would describe Collier and the Electric Company's Total Theatre as a type of performance event that imaginatively extends the performance environment beyond the traditional stage and involves the use of the entire theatre space in ways that incorporate and often include the audience within the context of the performance event. The intent of these expansive and often-participatory performances is to create a complete, thorough, and, as the name suggests, *total* theatrical and artistic experience for performers and audience members, often prompting them to reconceive traditional expectations and boundaries of theatre. It also requires significant collaboration of the director and creative team to ensure that all production elements – of which there are usually many – seamlessly integrate and unify the entire event. Essentially, Total Theatre looks for ways to challenge, extend, and re-imagine the fourth wall and theatrical space by using the performance venue in all of its capacities, and through that reimaging of theatrical space and the performance experience, Total Theatre intends to prompt intellectual and emotional response – a complete artistic experience that gives the audience something to chew on. In many ways, Total Theatre combines elements of participatory theatre, site-specific theatre, and immersive theatre (a very recent trend and emerging phenomenon in American professional theatre as seen in

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[214] Ibid.

[215] For the remainder of this chapter, I will capitalize the phrase Total Theatre as a way to visually denote and recognize the importance of its philosophical tenets to Collier's vision, way of thinking, and overall directorial approach.

productions such as *Sleep No More* which bring audiences into non-traditional spaces and often involve the audience in the performance and as part of the performance environment).[216]

As a further testament to the power and innovation of Collier and Electric Company's Total Theatre approach, Canadian playwright Jordan Tannahill created an "anti-canon" of "works of Canadian theatre and performance [that] have been neglected or overlooked from the canon, based on (among other things no doubt) the difficulty of conveying their totality on the page."[217] For most of the productions on the list, the "difficultly of conveying their totality" was in the fact that they were highly physicalized productions, relying on visual spectacle and imagery over text or content. Among the 100 performances listed was not one but *two* Collier-directed productions: *Brilliant!* and *Tear the Curtain!*, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. Moreover, Tannahill describes the performances included on the list as significant "not because of their dramatic texts but for the total live event they presented."[218]

Several Collier-directed Electric Company productions demonstrate this Total Theatre approach and have become hallmarks of the company and of Collier's directorial work. First is the Electric Company's 2006 production, *Studies in Motion: The Hauntings of Eadweard Muybridge*, which premiered at Vancouver's PuSh Festival and was re-

[216] Patrick Healy, "Don't call it 'theater,'" *New York Times* (video), 23 June 2013 http://www.nytimes.com/video/2013/06/23/theater/100000002240614/dont-call-it-theater.html (accessed 24 June 2013). An article in the July 2013 issue of *American Theatre* magazine focuses specifically on the recent emergence of "immersive theatre" in the US. For more information see "The Walls Come Tumbling Down" by Diep Tran in *American Theatre* (July 2013).

[217] Jordan Tannahill, "Looking Beyond the Page: An Anti-Canon of 100 Essential Pieces of Canadian Theatre and Performance," 19 June 2013, https://www.facebook.com/notes/jordan-tannahill/looking-beyond-the-page-an-anti-canon-of-100-essential-pieces-of-canadian-theatr/240425689326720 (accessed 19 June 2013).

[218] Ibid.

staged in 2009 for performances at the Vancouver Playhouse, the Festival Transameriques in Montreal, the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, and, in 2010, Toronto's Canadian Stage.[219] Similar to *Brilliant!* and other Electric Company productions inspired by history and science, *Studies in Motion* examines the life and work of Eadweard Muybridge, the nineteenth century photographer whose work captured the frame-by-frame movement of humans and animals and subsequently introduced the concept of moving images. Featuring a "dazzling display of deftly choreographed naked bodies" directed by Collier in a series of images that bring Muybridge's photographs to life, *Studies in Motion* uses Muybridge's work as a jumping off point to discuss the larger issues of the costs of genius on one's life. In addition to revealing how Muybridge meticulously catalogued animal and human movement to break movement down to its most imperceptible parts, the play also depicted the moments in life that Muybridge could not dissect or scientifically puzzle out, including "the man he killed, the child he abandoned, and the woman he thought he knew."[220] The play also incorporates video and projection technology, a hallmark of Collier's work, to physically and theatrically recreate Muybridge's series of photographs.[221] Critics hailed the production as a "tour de force of technical achievement" and a "multimedia explosion," and many tipped their hat to Collier's direction in bringing all of the pieces together: "What makes this production so strong, however, is the tight collaboration between script, choreography, lighting and sound…director Kim Collier deserves the highest praise for deftly weaving all these

[219] In an interesting cross-border connection, American director JoAnne Akalaitis also directed a play about Muybridge called *The Photographer* in the early 1980s.

[220] "Studies in Motion," Electric Company Theatre website, http://electriccompanytheatre.com/projects/touring/studies-in-motion/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

[221] Pat Donnelly, "Performance flows after rocky start," *Gazette*, 30 May 2009.

elements together."[222] While Collier did collaborate with choreographer Crystal Pite on the production and *Globe and Mail* critic J. Kelly Nestruck commented that it was "difficult to tell where one's work ends and the other's begins," Collier's work has been and continues to be quite choreographic and visual in its own right, which perhaps made this collaboration especially smooth and heightened the productions elements of composition and choreography.[223]

As becomes apparent throughout her narrative and in examining her work, Collier's primary agenda is artistic. She is driven to create great, theatrical works of art that offer something – she terms it a "gift" – to her audiences. Within this artistic impulse, there usually does not seem to be an overtly political or feminist motivation, and considering the ways that her work is re-thinking traditional modes of creating theatre and traditional theatrical aesthetics, I would contend she does not necessarily need one. However, as a feminist scholar, I find it interesting to note here that *Studies in Motion*, similar to *Brilliant!* before it, looks at another historical male genius. At first glance then, this production might appear to reinforce understandings and perceptions of male scientific genius, and to some extent that may be the case. However, the way the production considers both the genius and the man shows a more balanced view of history, essentially a re-visioning of history in that the audience learns not only about the scientific contributions but also the life of this renowned scientist. As scholars such as those included in Sharon Friedman's edited collection *Feminist Revisions of Classical Works* might argue, these re-writings of history to include a more balanced perspective

[222] Peter Birnie, "Motion slickness from Electric Company," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 Jan 2006; Marsha Lederman,"Theatre," *Globe and Mail*, 1 Nov 2010.
[223] J Kelly Nestruck, "Rambo, a photo riddle and a stab at subversion," *Globe and Mail*, 1 June 2009.

could then be read as subversive to the dominant narrative and therefore somewhat political, if not feminist.

Shortly after *Studies in Motion*, Collier, with the help of her collaborators, produced yet another innovative, highly theatrical performance event. This time, however, it was not a new play but rather a new look at an existing text: Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*. Moreover, unlike some other Electric Company productions, *No Exit* credited Collier alone has having "conceived and directed" the production, thus demonstrating her particular artistic vision as well as testifying to her interest in exploring the intersections between live theater and film.[224] Originally produced at Vancouver's Center for Digital Media in 2008, Collier's version of *No Exit* placed each of the three hell-bound characters into rooms of their own, each of which were fitted with video cameras. The audience then watched their faces and actions on large, on-stage video screens, leaving the mysterious and sarcastic valet as The Man, the only character corporeally on the stage. The valet (played by Jonathon Young) then responds to the characters' video feeds as well as to the audience, thus putting a very contemporary, mediated spin on Sartre's 1944 script. Collier's mix of film and live action brought to the fore the sense of desperation and loneliness felt by the characters in the play, as each character is physically and visually confined to one space, with an unknown number of others watching, for all eternity (or at least for the duration of the play). Again, while Collier professed no explicitly feminist intention with the staging of *No Exit,* it does provide an interesting commentary on power relations, as the only character with whom

[224] "No Exit," Nightwood Theatre, http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/index.php/about/productions/no_exit (accessed 1 July 2013).

the audience interacts directly is male, while the others are limited physically as well as corporeally with no way to escape or truly connect to the audience. More striking than this gendered analysis, however, is perhaps the production's commentary on the influence of technology in our lives. By placing the characters not only in a limited physical existence but out of the playing space entirely and only projected on screens, Collier reinforced the ways that technology serves to trap and distance us. However, perhaps prophetically, there seems to be "no exit" from the madly increasing technological advances that may limit us further.

No Exit subsequently toured to Western Canada Theatre in Kamloops, Nightwood Theatre in Toronto (as part of Nightwood's 4x4 Festival and Summit on the status of women directors in Canada), and High Performance Rodeo in Calgary. Further, in 2011, *No Exit* toured internationally, as it crossed the American-Canadian border and was performed at the American Conservatory Theatre (ACT) in San Francisco. The critical response to the 2009 Nightwood/Toronto production of *No Exit* particularly lauded Collier for her direction. *Toronto Star* critic Robert Crew pointed to Collier's work from the very title of his review, "Heavenly direction in hell," and noted that "Collier knows exactly what she's doing, transforming a play that can feel somewhat musty these days into a vibrant, very modern theatrical experience" and that "Collier has opened up the play in new and unexpected ways." [225] Meanwhile, Robert Cushman of the *National Post* said of Collier's production, "visually, it's stunning."[226] The production earned several

[225] Robert Crew, "Heavenly direction in hell," *Toronto Star*, 13 Nov 2009.
[226] Robert Cushman, "The Devil made them do it, or so we're told," *National Post, 2*1 Nov 2009.

awards including Jessie Awards for Outstanding Production and the Critic's Choice Innovation Award.

Beyond the Electric Company, Collier has shared her Total Theatre directorial aesthetic and methods widely, working with other theatres and directing in other venues. For instance, Collier's 2012 production of John Logan's *Red,* about visual artist Mark Rothko and his relationship with his young student, at Canadian Stage (Toronto) and The Citadel (Edmonton, Alberta) was hailed by Edmonton critic Liz Nicholls as a "visually and aurally stunning production directed by Kim Collier";[227] the production featured multi-media technology in the form of projections by Brian Johnson, which cascaded onto the set during scene changes, and during intermission, extended the play's context by creating a "montage of pop art projected on rectangular canvases" that was so integral it, in the words of one critic, "replaced" the intermission.[228] More recently, Collier collaborated with photographer, filmmaker and director Stan Douglass to create *Helen Lawrence,* a film noir tale about a woman who arrives in Vancouver to find her husband's killer and which workshopped at the Banff Theatre Center in January 2013. Although still in development and scheduled to premiere in March 2014, *Helen Lawrence* is already garnering significant interest, for it continues Collier's interest in using film in the live performance space. Collier and her collaborators plan to "incorporate continuous live filming into a work of theatre...to construct a film, continuously, shot by shot, during the live production."[229] Why bring these mediums together? Collier responds characteristically, "It is the best way to tell the *Helen Lawrence* story. The future of

[227] Liz Nicholls. **"**Citadel's Red reveals unexpected depth**,"** *Edmonton Journal*, 19 Feb 2012.
[228] Erika Thorkelson, "Story brings painter to life in bold strokes," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 Jan 2012.
[229] Kim Collier, qtd. in Debra Hornsby, "The future of theatre cannot narrowly be defined," *Made in Banff: Banff Centre Blog*, 11 January 2013.

theatre cannot be narrowly defined…I believe we need a little bit of everything in the ecology of our theatre practice, from the completely unmediated single performer with a beautiful piece of script, to cinematic stage productions like this."[230] Once again, in this statement we see Collier's dedication to Total Theatre.

Directorial Methods, Strategies, and Aesthetic

This visionary directorial work and Total Theatre has earned Collier numerous awards, and when Collier was awarded the Siminovitch prize in 2010, Maureen Labonte, the chair of the selection committee, stated that "excitement around Kim's work is felt nationally. Her work is unique. There's a real sense of passion and innovation there, and of an artist who's developed her own style, her own theatrical vocabulary. She surprises audiences constantly," creating full performance events that stretch the boundaries of traditional theater and move her production into being considered entire works of art.[231] A closer examination of her narrative coupled by observations of Collier at work in the rehearsal room reveals several key elements that are fundamental to her directing and artistic approach and all of which contribute to Collier's conception of Total Theatre as well as the overarching themes of the importance of Art and fostering collaboration.

Collaboration and Community

While some might consider Collier an auteur director due to her imaginative and all-encompassing directorial vision and her particular directorial stamp associated with site-specific and multimedia works, her origins are in fact very much rooted in a sense of

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[230] Ibid.

[231] Qtd in Marsha Lederman, "For Kim Collier, a well-earned and timely award," *Globe and Mail*, 1 November 2010, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/for-kim-collier-a-well-earned-and-timely-award/article1241090/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

collective and collaborative working. Initial Electric Company productions, particularly *Brilliant!*, were created as a collective in which all members played a role in all elements of the process; however, as previously noted, the group soon began falling into their respective niches and skill areas, and Collier's niche was directing. Although perhaps not "collective" in the formal sense of the word which implies that the group as a whole makes all artistic decisions, the Electrics still value collaboration highly; in fact, in observing rehearsals for *Tear the Curtain!* there were moments during rehearsal when Young, who was acting in the production, would also offer notes to the actors. Because Young and Collier have collaborated together for so long (and are a married couple), these moments did not seem to bother either one of them, nor did it faze the cast, for the collaborative artistic impulse undergirds the company as a whole. Moreover, Young's suggestions often dealt with script changes (he co-wrote the script with Kevin Kerr and it had been revised for the Toronto re-staging) and smaller moments of movement, leaving the larger decisions to Collier.

Because of her origins in collective creation, a large part of Collier's motivation and way of creating her art is through collaboration and creating a sense of community – with the actors in rehearsal and with the audience through performance.[232] However, before she brings a play to her cast, Collier begins by interrogating her own artistic intentions and impulses for the project at hand, asking herself why she is doing this show at this time, what her point of view (or what some might call her directorial "concept") about the play is, and, perhaps most importantly, what her dialogue with her audience

[232] For a detailed analysis of the collective creation process of the Electric Company itself, see Kate Braidwood's Master's Thesis, "Complex Conductivity: The Ensemble Model of Electric Company Theatre" (Dell' Arte International School of Physical Theatre, August 2007).

will be. While these initial questions are largely introspective, they do illuminate the significant attention Ms. Collier invests in her projects from the start, and while many directors ask themselves, "Why this show and why now?" Ms. Collier's additional question regarding the audience speaks to her extremely community-centered approach. In the words of Collier:

> At the core I'm interested in building community. And I'm interested in having, creating illuminating or heart moving or challenging events, productions for people. So there is a real attention to what that gift is that you're giving and the construction of that [gift]. So, it's not just another show. Every show is like, "What's the conversation in form and content?" and particularly with the audience in mind…A lot of attention to the audience and in relationship to them going away with something that will help move them forward in their lives, not backward.[233]

Particularly striking about this statement is the metaphorical connection Collier makes between the theatrical product and gift giving. Because Collier values the community that surrounds her – both the creative agents in the process and the larger community of audience members – she seems to place that community and her artistic dialogue with that community in high esteem, offering them not simply entertainment but a carefully considered and thoughtfully rendered gift. In this way, her goal echoes that of director Anne Bogart, who also strives to "make the performance a *gift* for the audience" and writes in her book *A Director Prepares* that in order to "approach theatre as an art form we must be able to act in this empathetic sprit [and] create journeys for others to be received in the spirit of a gift."[234]

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[233] Collier, Interview.

[234] Eelke Lampe, "From the Battle to the Gift: The Directing of Anne Bogart," *TDR* 36:1 (Spring 1992): 41; Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5.

Actor-Centered and Inclusive

For Collier, this strong sense of community building begins in the rehearsal room. As a director, Collier is careful to ensure that all the actors involved in a production are part of the creative community for that show, and this actor-centered, inclusive approach was yet another sub-theme that emerged in her narrative. Philosophically, Collier strives for rehearsal space in which all actors are heard. According to Collier, "I believe in a room that has open dialogue, and I try to invite that. I try not to say, 'I'm the only one with the answers in the room.' I try to make it a hopefully generous working space."[235] Collier works to create this generous working space by offering time in and outside of the rehearsal to work through questions or concerns with actors. She related an anecdote about a recent show she did with an older actor who questioned "major conceptual things [Collier] was doing at the end." Rather than refusing to acknowledge the conversation, Collier dialogued with the actor and, his suggestions in mind, re-tried some moments in rehearsal. While she ultimately returned to her original vision, she viewed the conversation initiated by the actor as an opportunity to interrogate and think deeply about her approach – an opportunity she was only open to because of her strong sense of collaboration.

Moreover, when working with actors, Collier gives them room to introduce their ideas and follow their impulses. In her words, "I don't try to place things on actors. (*smiling*) I *could*, but I try not to. Like, I try to build from their impulses."[236] This collaborative strategy was evident in the rehearsals I observed for *Tear the Curtain!*;

[235] Collier, Interview.
[236] Ibid.

although the ensemble was nearing the final stages of the rehearsal process, several times during my observation visits the actors offered suggestions for alternate ways to play a scene and Collier gave each of those suggestions time to be voiced and to be played. Specifically for *Tear the Curtain!,* which featured many accomplished artists who were also talented playwrights and directors in their own rights, Collier acknowledged their expertise and encouraged their artistic input and experimentation. She often used phrases such as "let's try" or would encourage the actors to run through a moment to see what they would "discover" and "learn with each pass." Moreover, when an actor did implement a change offered by Collier, she consistently thanked the actor for making the change, therein recognizing the actor's work and attempting to make the actor feel valued as part of the team. Frequently at the start of a rehearsal session (for Collier carefully blocks out and schedules specific sections of time to work given scenes, therefore respecting the actors' time by not asking them to sit idly while she works with another actor), Collier would begin by asking the actors "what would be useful" for them to consider in that session or where the best place to start might be. Conversely, when giving notes at the end of the cast's first stumble through, she candidly asked the actors for their feedback on the run and their requests for areas to work on. The actors in the space seemed to respond to these strategies; they readily offered honest feedback and suggestions but also acquiesced to Collier's feedback if a moment was not working in the proper way. During a break, one actor commented to me that she had worked with Collier on multiple productions and "really love[d] working with Kim."[237] Overall, Collier's willingness to listen to others' voices in the rehearsal hall serves to subvert traditional

[237] Informal conversation, Vancouver, September 2012.

hierarchical modes of directing – the perception that the director is "the fancy person at the front of the room pontificating."[238] Instead, Collier creates an environment in which the director does not pontificate but opens the doors for communication and discussion, seeking actors' input and feedback throughout the process. This strategy is key to the way she builds a collaborative community in rehearsal.

Of course, some might argue that the Electric Company members' long standing collaborative relationship would discourage other actors from feeling part of the creative and rehearsal process; however, Collier consciously subverts that assumption by ensuring that all of the actors receive feedback in the room:

> If I were giving notes to Jon[athon Young] outside of the room, I try to speak them again in the room. So that the kind of notes people are getting in the room, that the co-collaborators are getting them, too. Even though you might have talked about it over dinner when you're doing re-writes and, you know, wrestling with the things. I think it's really important that everybody hears those things so they don't think that someone is exempt, or they haven't heard what the journey is. That they're also in it.[239]

During my observations of *Tear the Curtain!* rehearsals, Collier raised questions and expressed her concern about several dramaturgical moments of the play. Although she could have waited to provide that feedback to Young, as co-playwright of the piece, individually, she chose to broach the subject in the company of the entire cast, which further includes them in the creative journey and provides them an opportunity to offer feedback and suggestions to help remedy the problem, as several cast members were also playwrights and screenwriters.

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[238] Collier, Interview.
[239] Ibid.

Audience-Centered Community

Beyond the rehearsal hall, Ms. Collier's focus on building community extends to the audience and the surrounding theatrical community, another sub-theme that emerges as part of her work and that infuses her directorial aesthetic. Unlike central Canada which, according to Collier, has "the challenge of ambition" in which some artists simply take on projects en route to a larger artistic opportunity or goal, Collier notes that the Vancouver arts community functions differently: "Here in Vancouver, you're not going anywhere."[240] Those artists with great ambition have already moved on in pursuit of their dreams, so the artists who work in the Vancouver community have a common goal, a sense of stewardship toward the Vancouver and, by extension, British Columbia cultural life.

> When you come together around a work here [Vancouver], it's not because you need to be somewhere else but you're really doing the work…There's something going on here that, in terms of how we talk together, the generosity of resources that gets to the clarity of that 'together we're stronger' and together we're up to a common mission…I think that's something that is beautiful.

Thus, Collier's directorial work is created with careful consideration for multiple communities – her audience, her actors and her cultural community.

Art as Community Healing

As part of her goal to provide her audience with a total theatre experience, Collier realizes and passionately believes that art is an essential tool for a community, a vehicle through which to bring a community together and to create dialogue, and for that reason, she strives to create "excellent art with powerful messages."[241] Collier speaks

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[240] Collier, Interview.
[241] Ibid.

articulately and passionately about creating high quality – in her words "excellent" – and thought-provoking art for her community, saying "I know how important art is to understanding ourselves, to surviving the most extraordinary things when nothing else can work, art can be there for you."[242] In fact, Collier understands this idea perhaps all too well, for in July 2009, Kim Collier and Jonathon Young lost their 14 year old daughter Azra along with their nephew Fergus and niece Phoebe in a cabin fire while on vacation at Shuswap Lake. In response to the tragedy, the Vancouver arts community rallied around the family, taking donations and creating memorials at places such as Bard on the Beach, where Collier directed *Titus* the summer before. Fueled by their art, Collier and Young continued to make theatre as they mourned, perhaps using the creative process as an avenue for healing. Collier's take on art as an act of healing or survival became particularly tangible when she staged Tad Mosel's 1961 play *All the Way Home* in January 2012. While she had been wanting for some time to explore a play performed in an intimate setting, she was particularly drawn to Mosel's play, as it is "a simple acknowledgement of how we pass time on earth and how people move in and out of your life…[it's about] how we come together through conflict or loss."[243] To illuminate this theme of coming together (community) through art, Collier's staging of *All the Way Home* brought the audience members on stage with the actors and seated them on and all around the set, literally bringing them into the action and making them part of the play.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Kim Collier, qtd in Andrea Rabinovitch,"Kim Collier's All the Way Home is up close and personal," *Vancouver Observer*, 8 January 2012 https://www.vancouverobserver.com/culture/theatre/2012/01/08/kim-colliers-all-way-home-close-and-intimate (accessed 5 July 2013).

Along with Collier's belief in the power of art to heal is also her belief that powerful art and theatre also aids her audience, her community, in understanding themselves. As many scholars have long attested, theatre and other cultural artifacts are integral in the creation of a society's identity and in creating, reflecting (or, perhaps more importantly, destabilizing) a culture's values.[244] The philosophical and theoretical tenets that infuse Collier's direction reflect this increased sense of understanding through performance in conjunction with community building:

> I know that even way back in my 20s when I was having a really hard time, a lot of the theatre at that time in the 90s was breaking up a lot of issue based stuff. But it was sort of laying it out in a muck. It wasn't saying, "Well, here's a way through that" or "Here's the transformative moment." So I do believe in going down into the center of all these really hard questions and stuff, but I feel like, for me – for *me* as a director – when I do that I don't want to send my audience out the door again going [questioning look and gesture]…I saw a piece at SummerWorks [a theatre festival held in Toronto since 1991] this summer where they opened up a bunch of shit, and then I walked out afterwards feeling diminished, awful, and I needed to recover. So that's not the kind of theatre that I want to do. And let's say you have people who are suffering from an issue come into your show. If you're going to remind them of it or bring them to it, I would like to still help them when they leave again…it can still be just opening it up, but there is some little light at the end of the tunnel or there's some new turn in the ideas or the relationship so that they can maybe think about it in a different way or something. So when I've suffered in my life, I haven't wanted to go to plays that make it harder for me to go on living. I'm already having a fucking hard enough time. We have a lot of stuff on the news. We have a lot of stuff in our lives, a lot of stuff around us. *When I go to see a piece of art, I hope in some way it's going to expand my human spirit. It's going to expand my consciousness…*we know there is this extraordinary thing we have in our culture which is the arts, and the arts are an opportunity to be all those things that we know them to be. A mirror to the selves. To ask the hard questions. To reflect back things, to expand our hearts. And I always hope that when we go to the theatre we come out [and] that in some way something is added to our life, not been taken away.[245]

[244] For a fascinating discussion and theoretical expansion of the role of performance in constructing, reflecting, simulating, and destabilizing national identity (specifically Quebecois identity), see Erin Hurley's *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Celine Dion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[245] Collier, Interview. Emphasis mine.

In many ways, Collier's sentiments here echo those of performance studies scholar Jill Dolan who, in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theatre*, advocates for a conception of performance – particularly live performance – as a location where people come together "to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeing intimations of a better world."[246] This seems to be Collier's intention as well (and I would venture to guess these two women would get along like gangbusters), although Collier's vision of the utopian performative seems to push Dolan's theory a bit further to consider the ways that mediated performance and technological innovation might also prompt these same moments of hope and audience betterment. To this end, Collier revealed in our conversation her early plans for a production of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* in which she planned to cast multiple actors in the lead role so as to allow as many people in the audience a point of access to the story, a way to identify with the protagonist's struggle rather than simply write it off as a crazy woman's story. Although she saw the piece's difficulty and darkness, Collier was determined to allow the audience a glimmer of hope within the piece and was still in the midst of brainstorming ideas to make that happen in performance. However, these ideas and intentions speak to the overall theme of the importance of Art to a community's psyche, healing, and empowerment.

Visual Images and Physical Theatre

Another sub-theme that arose within Collier's narrative and discussion of her art was the extremely visual nature of her work. Collier professes to be a "big believer" in

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[246] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

the power of the visual image and understands that, while theatre is a text-based medium, it also relies significantly on visual storytelling and composition to convey its messages. While her work (and, by extension, the Electric Company's work) arguably has always contained a highly visual element, Collier fully realized the power of the visual image and its importance to her as part of her preparation for directing *Titus Andronicus* for Vancouver's Bard on the Beach festival in 2008. In preparing to direct Shakespeare's bloodiest work, Collier watched numerous Shakespearean works and realized that some she understood easily, while others were much more difficult to follow.

> I paid attention when I could understand the play or not. What I learned is when the blocking isn't helping communicate the story or the design and the choices – it doesn't have to be literal – when those other visual aspects to the evening aren't addressing what you want to communicate *actively* for the audience, I was having trouble understanding. Because I couldn't get it all just through hearing. And if the blocking is very non-specific, it just has people standing around, then it's not revealing the relationships or, you know, something metaphorically, then I have trouble hearing it.[247]

This realization reinforced for Collier the importance of the work she and the Electric Company had been doing all along. In this moment, she realized that, along with its focus on providing powerful messages for the community, her Total Theatre also featured a "fair amount of obsession to staging as well as designs."[248]

In fact, further reflecting this emphasis, or obsession, with visual staging and composition are the steps in Collier's typical directorial preparation process. In addition to a significant amount of research into the play and its context, Collier also begins by thinking about the physical world of the play, specifically the set design. "I visualize the set design over and over again in relationship to what it communicates, how the kinetics

[247] Collier, Interview.
[248] Ibid.

of the bodies and space move, what it means to transition, and how the whole piece will lift off, and I feel like the 101 of that for me begins with the physical space."[249] The import of the physical space becomes very apparent in Collier's production of *Tear the Curtain!* which was inspired by and created for performance in Vancouver's historic Stanley Theatre, and in an effort to achieve and create the world of the play, Collier spends significant amounts of time working with designers prior to the start of rehearsals. In addition to the scenic design, Collier often spends "weeks and weeks" on the sound design as well, "working with the composer around the material and finding the ways that the right, exact emotional feeling – because it's storytelling, too."[250] In fact, while I was in Vancouver in September of 2012, she was already in meetings with her designers for her Bard on the Beach production of *Hamlet*, which opened in July 2013.

Further in an interview with CBC News regarding *Studies in Motion*, reporter Martin Morrow notes the close collaboration between Collier as the *Studies'* director and Crystal Pite as its choreographer, to which Collier responds that her work itself is "very choreographic" and physically based, as she pays great attention to how actors' bodies move in and fill the space.[251] Collier's background in mime and physical theatre as well as her early interest in Quebecois artists such as Robert Lepage likely also contribute to her visual sensibilities, and in rehearsal, she is very precise about movement moments. For instance, during rehearsals of *Tear the Curtain!* Collier spent a significant amount of time exploring and solidifying a moment of group movement, a surrealistic slap that would not play properly without all actors performing it in the same way – a moment that

[249] Ibid.
[250] Collier, Interview.
[251] Martin Morrow, "Moving images: Multimedia wizard Kim Collier brings the photos of Eadweard Muybridge to life," *CBC News*, 3 December 2010.

required choreography and, when completed in unison, appeared a bit like a moment of modern dance.

Of course, this emphasis on visual staging is not without its difficulties. In addition to being passionate about her art and the power of art, Collier also is dedicated to producing art of high quality. Thus, there is a "very demanding director at the core of the work," and while her collaborative inspirations and background prevent her from becoming an auteur director or the aforementioned pontificating, all-knowing director, she does admit that, because she puts great thought and energy into creating the physical, visual world of the play, set designers may potentially consider her "a real big handful," as she often enters the room with very clear ideas of what the world of the play looks like.[252] However, the visual imagery and composition of the work is an essential element to Collier's work and her directorial process, and as former Electric Company managing director Nathan Medd argues, this precise visual conception of the world of the play is "one thing I [particularly] appreciate about Kim." According to Medd, Collier "tends to create from a starting place where any system that supports the creation should be either redesigned to best support that work, or custom-built. These could be systems of technology, or traffic flow, or colour, or thought, business models, theatre etiquette - whatever. It is a practice that demands flexibility from its surroundings to accommodate, and when that imagination meets the rigour, and the pursuit of truth, and the collaborative, community spirit of an artist like Kim, then resources tend to gather around that."[253]

[252] Collier, Interview.
[253] Nathan Medd, Personal email, 3 July 2013.

Extending the Performance Space – Technology, Multimedia, and Site-Specific

Closely linked to this emphasis on the visual telling and composition of the story is Collier's desire to probe the boundaries of live performance and challenge traditional narrative structures as well as performance mediums and locations. Although Collier admits that as an artist and as a director, her methods shift slightly from one show to the other, depending upon how she views that particular show reaching her audience. In regard to *All the Way Home*, Collier recalls, "The way I directed it was completely different [from her other more technology-enhanced works] because it had a different mission of what it was, what the material you were working with and what you wanted to do for the audience. So, I would say in that case I changed my directorial rules."[254] While she changes her rules from show to show, Collier states, and other theatre artists readily agree, that her artistic tendency is "large," as she rarely directs productions with small casts or in small intimate settings. While her rules may change from production to production, there does seem to be one element (or sub-theme) that remains consistent with her Total Theatre and desire to create art that prompts dialog among her audience: the ways in which Collier seeks to extend the performance space, in her productions, as if trying to immerse or further involve her audiences in the production - whether that be via the incorporation of film, the use of a particular site, or asking the audience to move along with the action of the play.

Within this sub-theme of extending the world and physical space of the play, is Collier's frequent incorporation of technology and multimedia as a key part of the performance event. The use of technology is quite intertwined with Collier's work with

[254] Collier, Interview.

the Electric Company, for, as Collier articulates, she and her ECT collaborators have long been interested in

> dealing with new medias and using anything that we have. So all art forms come together in this one art form – from film to music to staging to composition to dance to language to text to acting. All of it. And depending on the piece, [we ask ourselves] which ones do you use? […] We've been on the frontier of thinking about new technologies and new media and how that relates to our art form. So we've experimented from the get-go across those things as they've developed…the relationship between film and theater, mediation and mediated moment.[255]

Thus, many Collier productions – both with the Electric Company and beyond – incorporate or are created around new technologies and film. As previously discussed, Collier's productions of *Studies in Motion* and *No Exit*, for instance, both included technology such as projections and film; *No Exit* in particular pushed Collier's artistic use of technology and film further, as the live video feeds of the three characters in their respective hells comprised the core of the performance.

Because technology and multimedia play such a significant role within the context of the performance space, Collier also frequently includes the technological and design elements within the rehearsal space. This strategy provides better preparation for her actors, stage manager and designers before technical rehearsals begin and, because there are often many elements of technology and multimedia that are integral to the performance and Collier is quite particular about staging, provides her an opportunity to sit beside and talk through elements with the designers early in the process. In fact, the Progress Lab rehearsal space was designed with these technological experiments in mind, for it is a large space with high ceilings and plain white walls and is equipped with a

[255] Collier, Interview.

sound and projector system, which we utilized during the rehearsals for *Tear the Curtain!* Although the production was about a month away from opening, during one of the rehearsals I observed, the lighting designer came in and, together with Collier, watched the stumble through of the show, complete with the filmed video portions of the show, for it was essential for the lighting designer to see the film against the live action to plot his design. Collier sat with him during the run – an anomaly from what I had seen previously, for she tended to perch on a chair between the two rehearsal tables so that she had ready access to the stage where she would work with the actors. Ultimately, this technological exploration is driven in part by Collier's natural curiosity and interest in creating art that matters and that offers her audiences opportunities to think, feel, and dialogue about the work. Much like her British Columbia culture which inhabits and embraces its location on the edge, Collier embraces a great "curiosity for new forms…curiosity for [exploring] the new territory in theater."[256]

When it comes to new territory, on occasion this new territory becomes literal. While many of her productions feature film and other technologies in the same space as live performance, Collier's "large" directorial vision also expands to include methods or approaches that bring the play beyond the physical space of a theatre through site-specific work in community-centered spaces. This is particularly true of her early work, such as her 1999 work *The Wake*, which was a processional, site-specific piece created for and on Vancouver's Granville Island, a site important to the Vancouver community which therefore imbued the performance with meaning for the audience beyond the site-specific staging. Similarly, Collier's *The One that Got Away* (2002) by Kendra Franconi was a

[256] Collier, Interview.

play about a Jewish woman's confrontation with her grandfather's death, and in conversation with the Jewish community, the play was performed at Vancouver's Jewish Community Center. During the course of the play, Collier had the audience following the actors through the space, ultimately ending up in the swimming pool where the action unfolded in the water. Admittedly, site specific work of this nature is not entirely new; however, Collier's focus on this type of work that expands audience's notions of the performance environment – either through technology, film, and multimedia or through site-specific performance in a location that is particularly evocative for the community – speaks to her desire to create theatre that is going to "expand my heart…expand my human spirit…expand my consciousness."[257] Thus, Collier's artistic impulse to expand the physical performance environment reinforces her philosophical desire as a director and, to some extent, a community activist, to expand and create dialogue for her community. In these moments, Collier reminds me very much of Anne Bogart, who often expresses her theories and reflections on directing and art in a similarly poetic manner. In Bogart's *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*, she writes, "In the theatre we can choose to create moments in which everyone watching has a similar experience or moments which trigger different associations in everyone. Is our intention to impress the audience or to creatively empower them?"[258] While Collier's work does normally impress by the physical (and, in some cases such as *Tear the Curtain!,* philosophical) scale of the production, I would argue that her overall intention with any of these productions is to creatively empower her audience and her creative

[257] Collier, Interview.
[258] Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 107.

ensemble, which she does directorially by looking for new ways to expand the performance space through technology or physical venue and make it an entire experience rather than "just" a performance, as well as making space in the rehearsal hall for discussion and encouraging the actors to explore and follow their impulses. As Collier's Total Theatre is about creating a total, nearly immersive experience for her audience and community, her directing techniques and methods are very much immersed in her aesthetic and philosophical approach to creating theatre as Art that can heal, inspire, and prompt thought.

Tear the Curtain! – A Case Study

Many of Collier's artistic impulses, methods and theories come together in her recent production of *Tear the Curtain!* In 2010, Vancouver's Electric Company Theatre premiered *Tear the Curtain!*, a surreal, film noir tale set in 1930s Vancouver and in which Vancouver's Stanley Theatre figured prominently. Directed by Collier, *Tear the Curtain!* earned high praise when it opened in Vancouver for its innovative combination of film and live performance and its stunning visual story. Vancouver critics such as Peter Birnie of the *Vancouver Sun* hailed it as "a beautiful swirl of film and theatre" and posited that one "would have to reverse Niagara Falls to top *Tear the Curtain*! This mind-blowing examination of art is both deeply meaningful and broadly entertaining."[259] Marsha Lederman from *The Globe and Mail* noted that *Tear the Curtain!* "may be the most integrated work in the company's history."[260] In fall of 2012, the production was then re-mounted and transported across the country for its Toronto premiere at Canadian

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[259] Peter Birnie, "A mind-blowing examination of art," *Vancouver Sun*, 17 September 2010.
[260] Marsha Lederman, "Show Must Go on," *Globe and Mail,* 14 September 2010.

Stage's Bluma Appel Theatre. In the words of critic Martin Morrow, *Tear the Curtain!* is "a full on mash up of theatre and film," as the production not only segues seamlessly from one medium to the other but also comments, or perhaps more accurately theorizes, on the tension that exists between film and theatre, ultimately prompting the audience to question what is truly *real* and original – both in life and in performance – and thus begins to probe Collier's intention of creating dialogue within the community via her art and Total Theatre.

The plotline of *Tear the Curtain!* is, to put it most simply, complex. Some, in fact, would go so far as to call it "confusing." In fact, reviews from both the Vancouver and Toronto runs commented on the complexity of *Tear the Curtain*'s plot, and when I attended the staging in Toronto in October 2012, the patrons sitting directly behind me commented several times that they were "not sure quite what was happening but it sure is beautiful" and that the play was "a little confusing." However, Collier and the Electric Company recognize and embrace this potential for confusion, and to this end, the program notes for the Canadian Stage production are titled "Why *Tear the Curtain!,* or in other words, what?" and they begin by readily admitting that "there will be more than one answer."[261] Inspired by Vancouver's Stanley Theatre and set in 1930s Vancouver, *Tear the Curtain!* is in many ways an homage to the (American) film noir genre; thus, the plot features many twists and turns which are in keeping with the stylistic features of the genre.[262] A "mash-up" of theatre and film, *Tear the Curtain!* follows theatre critic Alex

[261] Jonathon Young, Kim Collier and Kevin Kerr, "Creators' Note," *Tear the Curtain*! program, Canadian Stage, October 2012.

[262] Admittedly, the term and genre of film noir emerged in the 1940s, somewhat later than the setting of *Tear the Curtain*. However, the style of the film noir seems to be a good complement to and vehicle for the plot and themes that are integral to *Tear the Curtain!* Thus, despite the historical

Braithwaite (played by Electric Company member and Collier's partner Jonathon Young) on what eventually becomes an existential, surrealistic journey.[263] The play opens with Braithwaite attending a performance of a play called *The Swan*, during the course of which he becomes infatuated with its star, a femme fatale named Mila Brook (played by Laura Mennell).[264] In a conversation with Brook following the performance, Braithwaite learns that while Mila has gained fame as an actor, she wishes to break into film, as she finds the genre more "real" (and thus introduces the core theme of the production, the battle between theatre and film and a quest for discovering true authenticity). Shortly thereafter, Braithwaite happens across a mysteriously kooky (and potentially homeless) man who claims to be Stanley Lee, the director of an avant garde theatre company called the Empty Space Theatre.[265] As part of this encounter, Braithwaite is mysteriously commanded to "undo yourself in my [Lee's] name," and he returns to the newsroom with the inspiration to write a "think piece" called "Tear the Curtain."[266]

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anachronism, the style seems well-suited for the piece (and only a few critics commented on the discrepancy, likely because the film noir genre gestures to the time period of the 1930s).

[263] In his 2012 review of *Tear the Curtain!*, *Globe and Mail* theatre critic Martin Morrow called the production "a full on mash-up" of theatre and film. Martin Morrow, "Tear the Curtain: The film part is better than the theatre," *Globe and Mail*, 10 October 2012.

[264] *The Swan* is a play originally written by Hungarian playwright and novelist Ferenc Molnar, the English version of which debuted on Broadway in 1923. While *The Swan* was popular, its greatest success was found in the film adaptation, *One Romantic Night* (1930), which starred Lillian Gish in her first "talkie."

[265] The name of the theatre company here is indeed a reference to Peter Brook's book, *The Empty Space*.

[266] A smaller plot point involves the fact that Braithwaite is also faced with a potential re-structuring of his Vancouver newspaper that would force him to expand his coverage to include more than strictly theatre reviews. This tertiary plot point is perhaps a fitting correlation to the contemporary state of journalism in which physical newspapers are closing or restructuring to accommodate a predominately online format.

Figure 1. Jonathon Young as theatre critic Alex Braithwaite in *Tear the Curtain!* (Film still) Courtesy of Electric Company Theatre/Canadian Stage.

Meanwhile, a second strand of the plot revolves around two warring gangs of mobsters, each vying for possession of an empty lot on Vancouver's Granville Street. While the Irish gangster Patrick Dugan (played by Gerald Plunkett) intends to build a theatre on the lot, the Italian leader Max Pamploni (played by Tom McBeath) has an eye on the lot as the home of a movie palace. Further complicating this rivalry is Mila Brook, who is currently Dugan's stage star but has been meeting in secret with Pamploni about breaking into the movies. During the course of the play, Alex Braithwaite becomes caught in the middle of the gangsters' dispute, further complicating his journey. Thus, between the two rival gangs, we see the tension between industries of theatre and film, a particularly relevant topic for the play's time period, as the advent of "talkies" and the growing popularity of movies began to impact the theatre industry and audiences.

Still another layer here is Mila Brook's association with a secret society, a society connected to the mysterious Stanley Lee's former Empty Space Theatre and who fights for an ambiguous cause they simply call "Liberty." Of course, Alex Braithwaite gets

caught in the mix here as well, and he – and the audience – finally learn that Liberty is yet another representation of the real in performance: a prototype of the television, which threatens rather prophetically to upset the uneasy balance between theatre and film by bringing entertainment to the masses in their own homes. Ultimately, Braithwaite – the hero of this film noir tale – finds his way out of this existential crisis and to the end of his surreal journey with the help of his faithful sidekick and eventual love interest, Mavis (played by Dawn Petten). The final moments of the play find Mavis and Alex at the movies (in the front row of the theatre audience), ready to witness the showing of Lillian Gish's first "talkie." Filled with references to the avant garde in the form of Artaud and Cocteau, *Tear the Curtain!* raises questions about the tensions between art and entertainment, theatre and film, authenticity and performance.

However, *Tear the Curtain!* does not just question the relationship between film and theatre, it *performs* it. Half of the production is performed on screen. The production's opening segment, approximately 10 minutes in length, occurs entirely on film, complete with opening credits in a film noir style, before the grand drape on screen and on the stage lift simultaneously to reveal the action just displayed on screen continuing on stage. The same characters on the screen are now physically present on the stage and in the scene the audience just watched on film. Throughout the play, filmed segments of the action trade off and continue the stage action, and vice versa, thus telling this story about the competition between the two mediums *by using* both mediums together.

Figure 2. Cast (Dawn Petten, Jonathon Young, Liza Mennell on film; Scott Bellis and Dawn Petten on stage) in combined film/stage sequence in *Tear the Curtain!* Photo by Bruce Zinger. Courtesy Electric Company Theatre/Canadian Stage.

In many ways, the creation of *Tear the Curtain!* could perhaps be considered a natural evolution of Collier and the Electric Company's collaborations as well as a culmination of the majority of the elements previously discussed as characteristics of Collier's directorial vision and methods. In a 2006 interview, Collier reflected upon her experience directing in both film and theatre, having at that time just completed the stage project *Studies in Motion* and the filmed version of *The Score*, and when asked which medium she preferred to direct, Collier thoughtfully replied, "Now that I've encountered both [film and theatre], I'd love some of each because you're expressing different parts of yourself as an artist."[267] Although Collier and her collaborators had previously experimented with the use of technology and film on stage, this conversation seemed to

[267] Kim Collier, Shaw TV Interview with Fanny Kiefer, 7 June 2006.

herald the further exploration that would come in not only their acclaimed production of *No Exit* but also (and perhaps most explicitly) in *Tear the Curtain!*.

Tear the Curtain! itself was inspired by the history of Vancouver's Stanley Theatre, and in its first iteration, the play was performed at the Stanley Theatre itself, thus reinforcing Collier and the Electric Company's interest in Total Theatre and site-specific work. Commissioned by Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre in 2006, *Tear the Curtain!* marked a major collaborative moment in Vancouver in that it brought together the mainstream and alternative theatre companies, represented by the Arts Club and the Electric Company Theatres, respectively. Moreover, the process of creating the film and stage aspects of the piece was an "unprecedented collaboration" between the Vancouver film and theatre industries.[268] In researching the Stanley Theatre, Kim Collier and her collaborators discovered that the space had originally been intended as a vaudeville theatre but had opened in December of 1930 as a movie house with a showing of Lillian Gish's first "talkie," *One Romantic Night* – a historical transformation that particularly intrigued Collier and her collaborators. Built by Ontario's Frederick Guest, the Stanley spent many years as a movie house until its close in 1991. By 1998, the Stanley had been refurbished and opened, ironically in light of its original intent, as a venue for live theatrical performance by Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre. Since that time, the Stanley has become an important institution of the South Granville neighborhood in which it resides. According to the South Granville community website, "The Stanley Theatre is more than just a building. It is the heart and soul of our South Granville neighbourhood. It draws people into our community and it creates a unique experience that cannot be

[268] Program notes, *Tear the Curtain!*, Canadian Stage, October 2012.

found anywhere else in the city. It gives us roots and provides consistency as everything around us is changing."[269]

Inspired by the Stanley's history as a live-theatre-turned-movie-theater-turned-live-theatre and its prominent place in the South Granville community, Collier and her collaborators used the space's dual identity and its 1930 showing of Gish's first "talkie" as the basis of *Tear the Curtain!* and then created a fictional story to fill in the remaining plot elements. According to Collier,

> We wanted to go and set ourselves a challenge of looking at the intimacy of theater and film. So not using the media and the theatre as a design or as a narrative extra but just really ask[ing] yourself what it would be like to put the two together. So we knew we wanted to do that, and we researched the Stanley Theater. And we just *loved* that it was going to be a vaudeville theater but then it opened as a cinema, then it became a theatre again and then all of its dual identity history. So we thought, "Perfect!" Formally we want to ask these questions about theatre and film, and a venue has that identity."[270]

Thus, in addition to the production premiering at the Stanley Theatre itself, Collier and the creative team spent three weeks (of 12+ hour days) filming the film segments in and around the Stanley Theatre. As a result, when the audience first saw Alex Braithwaite entering the theatre, they saw the box office windows and very same doors that they themselves had entered only moments before, and when the grand drape in the Stanley-on-film rose, the very same grand drape in front of the audience seated in the Stanley Theatre also rose, making the sense of place palpable in a highly meta-theatrical moment.

This site-specific and historical inspiration in mind, I argue that *Tear the Curtain!* stands as a strong example of Collier's artistic interest in creating and building

[269] South Granville Business Improvement Association, "Stanley Theatre," http://www.southgranville.org/history/stanley-theatre/ (accessed 15 May 2013).
[270] Collier, Interview.

community as well as her interest in technological innovation and site-specific performance. Moreover, *Tear the Curtain!* also speaks to the ways that Collier seeks to infuse her art with an eye for her community. As Collier stated in her Siminovitch Award acceptance speech:

> I believe that ultimately, at the bottom of it all, beneath the love of artistry, beneath my ambition, beneath the sweat and tears and worry and excitement and pressure and doubt, creating community is what my theatre work has been about. To create moments in time that will be undeniably present and shared. To engage audiences directly. To jump-start their emotional or intellectual connection to the material, to themselves and to each other. To provoke or inspire or even insist on dialogue after the show. To give the audience an incredible opportunity to feel alive. Alive because they just participated in an event they had not experienced before and which they never expected.[271]

As demonstrated in previous Electric Company productions, researching and exploring historical moments or individuals is an interest of the Electrics, but in particular Collier is drawn to creating art for and with Vancouver audiences, for in her words "there is nothing better than learning about your home" and sharing that knowledge with the audience through performances.[272]

In fact, when the production opened in Vancouver in 2010, the Vancouver community largely embraced it. Critics hailed the production as "clever," "a marvel," and "nothing I have seen before,"[273] as well as noted that Collier and the Electric Company had "taken the hybrid of cinema and stage to a new zenith."[274] Additionally, audience members noted that the show "defies tradition," with its mix of filmed and live

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[271] Kim Collier, Siminovitch Award Acceptance, 1 November 2010.

[272] Peter Birnie, *Vancouver Sun*, "Innovative theatre company shapes Storyeum show," 27 May 2004.

[273] Mark Robbins, "*Tear the Curtain!* pushing the boundaries of conventional theatre," *Gay Vancouver: Vancouver's Online LGBTQ Guide*, 16 September 2010, http://gayvancouver.net/theatre/review-tear-the-curtain/ (accessed 1 July 2013).

[274] John Jane, "Review," *Review Vancouver,* September 2010, http://www.reviewvancouver.org/th_tear_curtain2010.htm (accessed 1 July 2013).

action in one production and one venue.[275] In an illuminating connection that further illuminated the show's combined use and discussion of theatre and film, critic Colin Thomas quipped that *Tear the Curtain!* was "like Hitchcock in 3D."[276] Beyond comments about the show itself, many critics pointed to Collier's direction, calling it "visionary," and noting that Collier "guides us ably through a highly complex juggling act."[277]

Of course, as might be expected with any production with the layers and multiple plot lines that *Tear the Curtain!* includes, the high praise was accompanied with some criticism, most of which was in response to the production's length and its complexity.[278] Michael Harris, writing for the *Globe and Mail,* praised Collier's direction but suggested that she "could have paired the thing down," estimating that it was approximately 30 minutes longer than it should be.[279] Beyond these critiques of the show's length, there were also comments about the play's text and complexity. Colin Thomas from *The Straight* quibbled with the play's "symbolic language," calling it "hyperbolic and inaccurate."[280] Several anonymous comments posted in response to Thomas' story agreed with his critique, with one in particular angrily noting that the complex plot made

[275] From Tear the Curtain promotional video, courtesy of Electric Company Theatre.

[276] Colin Thomas, "Tear the Curtain! one of this season's most ambitious projects," *The Straight*, 17 September 2010, http://gayvancouver.net/theatre/review-tear-the-curtain/ (accessed 1 July 2013).

[277] Colin Thomas, "Tear the Curtain! One of this season's most ambitious projects," *The Straight,* 17 September 2010; Michael Harris, "A war between art forms," *Globe and Mail,* 16 September 2010, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/a-war-between-art-forms-fought-in-a-theatre/article1391289/ (accessed 10 May 2013).

[278] When I saw the re-staged Canadian Stage production in October 2012, the production ran over two hours and 30 minutes. While I was not able to find a precise run time for the original Vancouver production, I would venture to guess it was close to three hours, as the script for the re-staging had been revised and streamlined (although some Toronto audience members argued that it was still a bit too long).

[279] Michael Harris, "A war between art forms, fought in the theatre," *Globe and Mail*, 16 September 2010.

[280] Colin Thomas, "Tear the Curtain! One of this season's most ambitious projects," *The Straight*, 17 September 2010.

him (and, he contended, the rest of the season subscriber base) feel like he wasn't "quite smart enough to get it."[281] Of those twenty-two comments posted in response to Thomas' article, however, only two indicated a strong negative reaction to the play; while six of those twenty-two agreed with Thomas' comments about the complexity of the piece and its ideas but ultimately expressed appreciation for the performative experiment. One of the Electric Company and Collier's interests is in destabilizing and experimenting with traditional narrative structure, and in an interview prior to the show's Vancouver opening, Collier readily admitted that *Tear the Curtain* was an experiment in form and narrative.[282] By and large, despite critiques of the play's complexity or length, most critics of the Vancouver production agreed with the commentators on Thomas' article, largely agreeing that the play's trouble spots were outshone by its unusual approach. Harris called the play a "wondrous puzzlement" but ultimately (as did most Vancouver critics) noted that it "was worth the headache," while Jerry Wasserman's final comment on the play read "prepare to be confused a little, exasperated a little, and mesmerized a lot" and Peter Birnie of the *Vancouver Sun* observed that it "would have [his] head spinning on opening night – but for one fact. *Tear the Curtain!* is so gripping and exhilarating, so fast and fun, that I was instead left feeling giddy at how good things get when money meets real talent."[283]

[281] Anonymous, comment to "Tear the Curtain! One of the season's most ambitious projects," *The Straight*, 27 September 2010.

[282] Kathleen Oliver, "Film and theatre fuse in the Electric Company's Tear the Curtain," *The Straight*, 8 September 2010., http://www.straight.com/arts/film-and-theatre-fuse-electric-companys-tear-curtain (accessed 1 May 2013). In this preview article, Collier notes that she's not sure if the experiment will work but that she's enjoying the conversation that it is inspiring.

[283] Michael Harris, "A war between art forms, found in the theatre," *Globe and Mail*, 16 September 2010; Jerry Wasserman, "Tear the Curtain!," *Vancouver Plays* – Theatre reviews, volume 75, (September 2010); Peter Birnie, "Mind Blowing," *Vancouver Sun*, September 2010. Another interesting parallel can be seen between Collier and LeCompte here in that Jason Loewith in *The Director's Voice*

Beyond these more general comments about the production's strengths and weaknesses, the Vancouver audiences also commented on the Vancouver-ness of *Tear the Curtain*, a commentary that directly reflects Collier's Vancouver roots and interest in creating a dialogue with her community. Marsha Lederman of the Vancouver wing of *The Globe and Mail* noted, "It's very much a Vancouver story: a site-specific ode to one of the city's favorite venues – a bold innovative idea."[284] Additionally, Michael Wheeler, a theatre practitioner from Toronto who received a grant to work with and learn from Kim Collier and thus followed her work on both the film and stage rehearsals for *Tear the Curtain!*, notes that the production "re-imagine[s] Vancouver within an archetypically American *film noir* aesthetic….[but] it is not just *film noir* gangsters, dames and crazy film integration within a vacuum. It is an ode to the City of Vancouver. It is attached to a particular perspective about what it means to make art in this place, in this era, and everything that generations of artists have gone through to arrive at where they are today."[285]

(volume 2) describes LeCompte's work as "juxtaposing classic texts with unexpected elements in performances that include spoken word, dance, highly deconstrctued design ideas and a heavy mix of technology….The deconstruction is so complete that delineating the performance's point of view is almost impossible" (214).

[284] Marsha Lederman, "The show must go on," *Globe and Mail,* 14 Sept 2010.

[285] Michael Wheeler, "Director in Training: Tonight Alex Braithwaite will Tear the Curtain!," 11 January 2011, http://praxistheatre.com/2010/09/director-in-training-tonight-alex-braithwaite-will-tear-the-curtain/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

Figure 3. Jonathon Young (Alex Braithwaite) and Dawn Petten (Mavis) celebrate a break through on the “think piece” in *Tear the Curtain!* Photo by Bruce Zinger. Courtesy Electric Company Theatre/Canadian Stage.

In addition to its physical connection to Vancouver in the form of the Stanley Theatre, the text of *Tear the Curtain* also provides commentary on perceptions of British Columbia and firmly roots the play in Vancouver:

> MAVIS: You know what your trouble is?
> ALEX: I’m a hack writer living in a hick town.
> MAVIS: No.
> ALEX: A hick border town where we’re raised on foreign ideas and foreign stories which we imitate, pretending they’re our own…I should have left when I was twenty and gone where the action is.
> MAVIS: You just don’t know what you want, Alex. I’m sure we may be hicks compared with other places, but don’t deny yourself the privilege that gives you.
> ALEX: What privilege?

MAVIS: The freedom to create our own future.[286]

In these words, the Electric Company collaborators call directly on the perceptions of British Columbia as discussed earlier in this chapter and, rather than eschewing them, they embrace them, paying homage in the text and through the site-specific staging (and filming) of *Tear the Curtain!* to the Vancouver and British Columbia community.

Because of *Tear the Curtain*'s "homegrown," British Columbia roots, it would seem unlikely that the production could or would be performed in a location that was not the Stanley, much less outside of Vancouver. However, despite the Vancouver-centric nature and inspirations for the show, in 2012 *Tear the Curtain!* kicked off the Canadian Stage 2012-2013 season at the Bluma Appel Theatre in Toronto, and according to Collier, the larger themes of the play make it applicable beyond its original Vancouver audience: "There's so much to the piece, and one layer of it was the fact that it was shot in the Stanley and grows from the Stanley. But I think another theater can stand in for that, and I think that's just one layer, or one reflection that goes away, but I think there's so much there that just stands, regardless."[287]

What are these larger themes, and do they apply to communities beyond British Columbia? As noted in the program notes for *Tear the Curtain!*'s Canadian Stage run, there is "more than one answer" to a consideration of the larger themes of the play.[288] In fact, each time I observed the play in rehearsal or performance or discussed the play with Kim Collier, different themes and conversations emerged for me as an audience member.

[286] Excerpt from *Tear the Curtain!* as printed in Michael Wheeler's "Director in Training: Tonight Alex Braithwaite will Tear the Curtain!," 11 January 2011.

[287] Collier, Interview.

[288] Young, Kerr, and Collier, "Creators' Notes," *Tear the Curtain!* program, Canadian Stage, October 2012.

Most prominently, however, *Tear the Curtain!* probes and questions the notion of truth and reality – specifically within the parameters of performance. While the filmed moments of *Tear the Curtain!* offer close ups of the characters and is afforded the benefits of using real, actual locations (such as the Stanley Theatre and, in some moments, Vancouver's Stanley Park), the moments on stage allow the audience to see the actors' bodies and hear their voices *in* the moment. Thus, each medium is made tangible in a different way within the scope of one production. In fact, by placing the mediums directly in relation to each other within a single performance space, Collier was able to draw upon what feminist scholar and semiotician Elaine Aston calls the "sphere of disturbance," a moment in performance "which requires the spectator to 're-examine the rules' of drama" and as part of that re-examination requires the spectator's "collaboration and active participation in the production of meaning."[289] In this way, as Alex Braithwaite searches throughout the play for the "ultimate presence," the audience, because of the "seamless blend" of film and stage direction, must also collaborate and actively participate in the event. Thus, Collier's *Tear the Curtain!* involves the audience intellectually and emotionally, while problematizing the notion of what is or can be real, particularly in performance.[290]

What further complicates Collier's staging and the overall discussion of this notion of live-ness and question for the "ultimate presence" is the fact that in Collier's

[289] Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1991), 33.

[290] Jon Kaplan, "Tear the Curtain!: Live action and film combine to create a fascinating puzzle of a production," *NOW Magazine* 32, vol. 7 (October 18-25, 2012). The word "seamless" appears frequently in reviews of *Tear the Curtain* – both in Vancouver and Toronto. Other similar phrases such as "fluid interplay" (Kathleen Oliver, "Film and theatre fuse in Electric Company's Tear the Curtain!") and "blend" (Nicole Fairburn, "Theatre Review;" Keith Bennie, "Tear the Curtain is a thinkie not a talkie;" and others) and "hybrid" (Drew Rowsome, "Tear the Curtain! A heady hybrid tickles the intellect and entertains;" J. Kelly Nestruck, "Tear the Curtain;" and others) also frequently appear.

staging of the play six of the ten cast members play multiple roles. Only the actors playing Alex Braithwaite, Mavis, Stanley Lee, and Mila Brook (Jonathon Young, Dawn Petten, James Fagan Tait, and Laura Mennell, respectively) play a single role. Even within these four "stable" actors, though, there is some discrepancy, as Mennell's character Mila Brook also plays multiple roles within the world of the play, for she is an active player moving between the worlds of film, theatre, and "Liberty" and changing from blonde bombshell to sleek brunette from one scene to the next. Thus, even her "reality," her identity, could be called into question.

These questions of reality and illusion, truth and performance, mediated image and "live" bodies – all wrapped up in the portrayal of the historical relationship between theatre and film – seem particularly pertinent in a contemporary society so infused with technology and media. Thus, in employing significant technology within the world of the play (per Collier's innovative directorial tendency), Collier and the Electric Company offer opportunities for conversations about both historical legacy and contemporary culture.

Ultimately, *Tear the Curtain!* does not seem to privilege one medium – theatre or film – over the other; rather, its intent is to question identity – at one level the identity of the Stanley theatre with a history of film and theatre within itself and at another our own identities. As Collier states, *Tear the Curtain!* is meant to ask the big questions about "who we are, how do we form our identities. What is this to be Canadian in a way with the cultural material from America? Being honest with yourselves. How art helps us awaken to who we are. You know, how Hollywood behaves on us versus how those ideas

stem in me. All those things."[291] Thus, while there might be debate over whether or not *Tear the Curtain!* can translate from its Vancouver origins to other parts of the country, Collier's claim that the production goes beyond the site-specific origins in Vancouver's Stanley Theatre seem valid, speaking to a larger sense of "Canadian-ness" and an on-going concern that American culture and media would saturate and overwhelm the Canadian market.[292]

The Canadian Stage study guide created for the 2012 production of *Tear the Curtain!* in Toronto further reinforces the applicability of Collier's suggestion that the larger issues raised by the play itself speak to a community beyond Vancouver. The study guide's overview of the play's origins concludes by noting that although *Tear the Curtain!* was inspired by the Stanley Theatre in Vancouver, "the piece that resulted, however, posed questions that are valuable beyond that site."[293] As Collier has asserted, she is interested in offering her audiences something around which they can dialogue, and in *Tear the Curtain!* she not only offers a "stunning visual spectacle" but also uses her film and stage direction to raise questions of reality and identity.

Certainly, for a study interested in questions of intersecting identity, *Tear the Curtain!'s* questioning and problematizing of the truth and authenticity of identity is apt, raising questions about which identity then is "real" and which are socially constructed realities. But is there a feminist critique or message that can be considered through *Tear the Curtain!*? Generally, in content and form, *Tear the Curtain!* is not a "feminist" play,

[291] Collier, interview.

[292] This attitude is reflected in the Massey Report (1951), which staunchly advocated for Canadians to devote time and resources to developing a distinctly Canadian arts and cultural entertainments, likely in response to the fact that cultural and theatrical works in Canada's past were often imported from Britain or America.

[293] *Tear the Curtain!* study guide, Canadian Stage, Toronto, October 2012.

as it does not address issues specifically related to women or gender. However, in form, Collier is subverting expectation and challenging traditional narrative structure and form, a strategy that could be read as a subtly feminist venture in its resistance to theatrical norms. In fact, it might be argued that by placing live and filmed performance within one venue (and, for the 2010 production, the same venue that the audience is viewing on the screen in front of them), Collier effectively creates a space similar to what feminist scholars Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement describe in regard to feminist subversions of classic texts: "a thought-provoking space can open up between the audience's expectations of the text and what they actually are given to see…it creates a space in which audiences catch themselves in the act of making assumptions and brings them to a halt."[294] These sorts of thought provoking spaces are precisely the spaces Collier intends to create with her art – spaces in which the audience is asked to question their assumptions, perhaps not about gender identity but identity and authenticity more broadly, and begin to dialogue and think beyond the performance itself.

On Intersecting and Influencing Identities

In her acceptance speech for the Siminovitch Prize in 2010, Kim Collier stated,

> For me, live performance is a rare place where we share the investigation of *who we are, what we believe,* and find a collective experience in an increasingly mediated world that pulls us apart and forces us into isolation. . . . Theater is that bottomless place of discovery where we can always find the new, the curious, the remarkable, the insight, the wisdom. It is the muse of my questing life.[295]

Tear the Curtain! is reflective of Collier's artistic philosophy, as the play, in addition to

[294] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 89.

[295] Kim Collier, Siminovitch Prize Acceptance Speech, 2010. Italics mine.

questioning the reality of performance mediums, destabilizing traditional narrative structures, and commenting on notions of place, also contains commentary on other social and cultural markers, particularly, as Collier previously noted, related to issues of identity. Thus, the second strand of this project considers the various identities such as gender, race, class that influence each director's experiences and methods – identities that are woven into discussions of who each woman is as a director and what she believes.

On Feminism and Gender

To introduce Kim Collier's approach and reflections on this issue of identity as it pertains to her experience, I thought it pertinent to draw from *Tear the Curtain!* itself. In one fleeting but fascinating moment in the play, Scooter, another reporter in the newsroom, turns to Mavis and asks for her opinion on his column…"as a woman." Amid the surrounding hubbub of the news room and other (male) reporters' voices, Mavis scoffs slightly, quickly telling him that he does not need to include his addendum because her perspective as a woman is "automatic." While this moment is small in contrast to the larger questions and plot points of the play, it does speak to Collier's conception of feminism. While Collier does identify as a feminist, she is quick to note that she is somewhat uncomfortable with the term and its often political connotation:

> I have never really felt like I've used the fact that I'm a woman to get me anywhere I go, and I don't play that card. I'm just a person who does things, and I grew up in to the world, inheriting, 'You're a person in the world, you can do things and do whatever you want if you put your energy behind it.' So I never really ever saw the fact that there might be issues whether you're a woman or not, what you could do or not. But then, when I did become a director, when I started having a leadership role, I did discover that there were things, that I did feel things that, I think, were because I was a woman. And then I went, "Hmmm." […I think] we should make sure that there's no discrimination or whatever, but I

> didn't want there ever to be a policy in place that I got a job because I was a woman.[296]

In this statement, Collier does seem to acknowledge that sexism exists, as her statement that "we should make sure that there's no discrimination" implies. However, Collier does not take an actively or overtly political position with her feminism because, much like Mavis, Collier states, "I *am* that position."[297] It is part of her, but it is not a part that she feels should be distinguished from the rest nor, as she noted several times during our conversation, is it something she has employed specifically to get her ahead in the world.

Although Collier posits that she has not used her gender to get her ahead or to obtain a position simply because she is a woman, issues related to gender have influenced her and her thinking as a young director. Collier observes that the directing impulse was likely "always in [her]" and she certainly has, through productions such as *Tear the Curtain!, Brilliant!*, and *Studies in Motion*, demonstrated her directorial prowess and "large" artistic vision that explores and expands the limits of the performance space, challenges boundaries of live/filmed performance, and experiments with traditional narrative structures. However, for some time, Collier shied away from directing:

> I didn't think I could be a director because I thought directors were people [who] on day one and throughout the rehearsal period pontificated from a great intellectual sort of position around the meaning of work and had great command of language, in that way, and history. So that older model of how we perceive a director as being all knowing, all controlling, smarter than everybody, and generally male or whatever. So it never occurred to me that I could fill that role. Until later when I realized, 'Oh my god, directing is so much more than that. That's just one aspect of it.'[298]

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[296] Collier, Interview.
[297] Ibid. Emphasis original.
[298] Ibid.

This older conception of The Director, the one person who is the Auteur or the All-Knowing One, is more prominent in older (and arguably masculine models) of directing and is famously associated with European directors, where the auteur director, the single visionary for the production who creates and functions under a particular artistic signature, reigns.[299] Collier's comment here is also illuminating in that it hints toward assumption that the field of directing is typically a male-dominated field with little room for women. In fact, the vast majority of directors considered under this auteur director rubric are men such as Robert Wilson or Peter Brook, and Avra Sidiropoulou's text on the auteur director considers predominately men such as Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, and Alfred Jarry. While the trend of directing as a men's profession might be changing as proposed by a recent article in the *New York Times*, which discussed the "rise of female directors" on the American Broadway, during Collier's early years in the profession, directing was largely a masculine field, as indicated by both the Fraticelli and Burton reports (as discussed in Chapter 1).[300]

Collier's sentiments about feminism and issues of gender reflect an on-going discussion in feminist studies. The topic of feminism is a touchy, as the "f-word" has assumed a somewhat negative connotation over time. As Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner notes

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[299] For a recent analysis of the European auteur director, see Avra Sidiropoulou's *Authoring Performance: The Director in Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). The emergence of the term "auteur" in regard to direction can be found in French film theory of the 1950s. Most sources point to François Truffaut as its originator and his essay entitled *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema* (1954). In contrast to the auteur director, there are other "types" of directors, from what Michael Bloom notes in his book *Thinking Like a Director* calls the "no-approach director," who is simply interested in working with actors and not concerned with the vision for the overall production, to the "conceptualist or auteur" director (71). Bloom notes that there are many other kinds of directors who fall on a spectrum between these two types.

[300] Patrick Healy, "Staging a Sisterhood," *New York Times,* 31 January 2013, http://theater.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/theater/female-directors-more-prominent-in-new-york.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed 1 July 2013).

in her book, *The F-Word: Feminism in Jeopardy*, many contemporary young women are antipathetic toward the word "feminism" and are reluctant to assume the weight and assumed confines of the label.[301] Further, as Toril Moi asserts in a 2006 article for *PMLA*, during the 1990s, the term "feminist" was attacked by the conservative right wing and then a plethora of material "by malcontent feminists and ex-feminists, or women with various ideas of how to change feminism, further the conservative feminist-bashing agenda," which ultimately resulted in a generation of women who believe in equal rights for both genders but are hesitant to label themselves as "feminist."[302]

Similarly, Aoife Monks in her essay published in *Feminist Futures?: Theatre, Performance, Theory* discusses a "new breed" of women directors who do not view their work as explicitly engaging in feminist politics or issues, and it seems this description might fit Collier to some extent.[303] However, Monks continues, pointing out that although these women profess no explicitly feminist intentions or feminist engagement in their artistic work there are still subtle ways that their work can be read as "feminist" in its staging or artistic experimentation. Moreover, Leslie Hill and Helen Paris argue that plays might contain "feminist strands" that are woven into the work, "more embedded, less obvious," and therefore are not as readily identified by the critics or audience members.[304]

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[301] Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, *The F-Word: Feminism in Jeopardy* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2004), 5.

[302] Toril Moi, "'I Am Not a Feminist, But…': How Feminism Became the F-Word," *PMLA* 121, vol. 5 (October 2006): 1739.

[303] Aoife Monks, "Predicting the Past: Histories and Futures in the Work of Women Directors," in *Feminist Futures?: Theatre, Performance, Theory,* eds. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 89.

[304] Leslie Hill and Helen Paris, "Curious Feminists," in *Feminist Futures?: Theatre, Performance, Theory,* eds. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 66.

In a similar fashion, Collier's conception of feminism centers more on broader notions of equality that recognize individuals not as differentiated by gender but as humans in all of their diversity, and this view also infuses her productions, albeit subtly rather than intentionally as in other more explicitly feminist directors' work like Kelly Thornton (see Chapter 3). In regard to the Electric Company's *Studies in Motion* production, for instance, Collier noted that the intent behind the inclusion of naked bodies (male and female) on the stage was not sexual, rather to emphasize the bodies as "humans – as they are."[305] While not directly related to gender per se, Collier's comment and awareness of the sexualized nature of human bodies – male and female – does relate to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's conception of the spectator's gaze as traditionally male and therefore traditionally making women the passive and often sexualized object rather than the active agent of the gaze. Perhaps more importantly, however, Collier's statement speaks to what appears to be her sense of equity for all people as humans, regardless of what sex or gender identity one inhabits – an attitude that might be considered, to borrow the words of feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty, an "inclusive vision of feminism," which is "attentive to borders while learning to transcend them."[306]

Additionally, in casting her Bard on the Beach production of *Titus Andronicus*, Collier – like many contemporary directors often do – chose to cross-gender cast several roles. However, one of Collier's cross-gender casting choices was the role of Bassanius

[305] Collier qtd in Martin Morrow, "Moving Images," CBC News, 3 December 2010, http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/theatre/story/2010/12/01/kim-collier-studies-in-motion.html (accessed 3 July 2013).

[306] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

(who was renamed Bassania), and with this artistic choice Collier then brought issues of lesbian partnership and sexuality to the stage via Bassania and Lavinia's relationship. On a basic and practical level, Collier's intent in this cross-gender casting was a conscious effort to get more women on stage but also reflected her focus on gender as being part of the *human* experience: "I very consciously made a mixture of female and male…I really tried to strike a balance and to make everything *as human as possible*."[307]

Further support of Collier's human-centered, inclusive feminist view can be found in Collier's director's notes for a 2007 production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which Collier directed at the Chemainus Theatre Festival on Vancouver Island. In her notes, she observes that

> the themes of truth and equality embedded in *A Doll's House* mean a great deal to me. I come from an extremely progressive family and live within a very progressive marriage. But even in this context, in the back of my mind, way deep, deep down, I remain aware that I need to actively pursue this goal of equality. That at any time I need to know I have what it takes to get by in the world. That I have not let myself become defined wholly by another. That I have not, while participating in this relationship, fallen into a gender stereotype or started delivering myself in a package approved by society as a female. That I have remained true to me.[308]

Certainly, Collier recognizes that sexism exists in contemporary society and supports equality for women; however, as a professional director, it seems that her gender and her feminism comes second to her work as an artist and as an individual. Rather than assuming a publicly politicized or an activist mode of feminism, it seems that Collier's version of feminism leans toward a third wave (although likely not post-feminist, as she seems to still see a need for feminism as a way to gender equity) feminism that advocates

[307] Lynn Mitges, "Revenge, violence explored," *The Province*, 8 July 2008. Emphasis mine.
[308] Kim Collier, "Director's Notes [for *A Doll's House*], Chemainus Theatre Festival, Vancouver Island, BC, September 2007.

a broader understanding of feminist aims and a recognition of individuals' intersecting identities.

While Collier adheres to a broader conception of feminism, it does not mean that her experience as a professional director and a woman in Canadian theatre has not been marked – even minimally – by assumptions of gender and other identities. For instance, Collier admits that although she was brought up in an equitable household and did not have to think about differences in equality related to gender, "when I did become a director, when I started having a leadership role, I did discover that there were things– that I did feel things that I think were different because I was a woman."[309] For instance, she notes that "early on" in her career, as she was "carving out that territory" for herself as a director, she discovered that she would be sitting at a production meting and that she would see no eye contact from the (male) designers. Complicating matters further was the fact that Collier was collaborating with men. "I found it really fascinating to go to a table where some other, say, male designers or something joins us at the table or technical director, and I watched how it was natural for the eye contact to never go to me but just to the other men at the table. I was like, 'Hmmm. How interesting.'"[310]

Collier quickly notes, however, the other identities and issues at play that complicate pointing to gender as the only contributing factor in these interactions. She adds a disclaimer, saying that in addition to gender, "it's my personality type, too. I think I'm a bit of a handful. So it could be gender" or it could be related to other aspects of who Collier is as a demanding, thoughtful, careful, and visionary director.[311] These

[309] Collier, Interview.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.

statements, however, also echo those noted in texts such as Helen Manfull's *In Other Words: Women Directors Speak* and Rebecca Daniels' *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* which provide multiple examples of women who, upon assuming the role of the director, feel compelled to assume more aggressive, traditionally masculine attitudes and experience this same sort of gender interplay.

Within the conversation about the complexity and difficulty of reading these interactions as only indicative of gender difference, Collier also subtly points to another factor: age. While she acknowledges that she has experienced some elements of gender bias in her interactions with some male theatre professionals, she notes that it has not been her primary experience. By and large she has, as previously stated, not had to (or wanted to) play her card as a woman to get what she needed. She points to age as well as increased experience and, by extension, recognition as contributing factors to her ability to not have to "rely" on her gender: "I don't think it [gendered discrimination] happens as much anymore because I think I've gotten to a point where as a director I think people are starting—that I've come to a point where there is, there is respect in the room. Like you're more of a known quantity."[312] At 47 years old and at this point in her career, Collier has gained a national reputation as a powerful and visionary director; she is established, and that established reputation earns her greater influence and respect from those colleagues who may have refused to look her in the eyes during design meetings previously. Along with her increased reputation and visibility in the field, Collier's age also seems to play a role. According to Collier, directing can be a complicated venture

[312] Collier, Interview.

"if you're a younger female. Like for example, when I was editing…[a film of an Electric Company play] and I worked with an editor who was about 15 years older than me who wanted to be a director all of his life, but he was still an editor…And then I was a girl, coming in, afforded this extraordinary opportunity of getting to edit my first film. Just getting handed that opportunity already and *clearly* that was a dynamic that he found upsetting. [It] was hard for him to process."[313] However, this experience occurred early in Collier's career and now these sorts of things happen much less often. With age comes an assumption of greater maturity and greater experience; with maturity and experience comes a perception of wisdom; and with age, maturity, experience, and wisdom comes a greater respect – all of which might serve to mitigate, at least to some degree, the gendered assumptions and unconsciously (or consciously?) sexist responses Collier experienced, particularly during the earlier years of her directing career.

Beyond these interlocking issues of gender, experience, and age, Collier also refers – albeit subtly – to issues of social conditioning and, to some extent, privilege. In discussing her background, Collier states that as a child she "never really ever saw the fact that there might be issues whether you're a woman or not, what you could do or not" and that she did not need to take a feminist stance because she "didn't feel like there was an issue, in a way."[314] Collier was raised in what appears to be a liberal family in which traditionally gendered roles were shared. Her father, for instance, worked as a dentist but also cooked the family's meals. Thus, the surrounding environment and social conditioning experienced by Collier during her formative years served to shape her

[313] Collier, Interview.
[314] Ibid.

opinion of gender difference and the need for a politicized feminism. However, as sociologist Allan Johnson argues in *Privilege, Power and Difference,* privilege is an inherent part of Western society and, particularly those who are privileged – with an upbringing infused with ideas of equity and ability, with a racial identity that is perceived as "better" than another, etc. – it sometimes becomes difficult to see the inequality at play because it does not directly impact them. To this end Johnson writes, "This means privilege is always a problem for people who don't have it and for people who do, because privilege is always in relation to others."[315] Thus, while Collier was fortunate to grow up in a family environment that gave her the freedom to choose her own path, regardless of gender, it also places her in a position of privilege, which might explain in part her feelings about the necessity of a political feminism.

However, these initial feelings and perceptions aside, Collier does not deny that there is value in women's work or that women's work in theatre merits curation and attention. Collier notes:

> Right now, I think it will be just really wonderful if we kept having more women leaders because I think our future of the world… I mean, the older I get the more I feel that there is something that – I mean, we all bend. We all bend…but that I do think women do bring something to the table that at times men don't, and if art is one of our primary places where we're in discussion, if there's not enough female leaders or playwrights in the art, then we're missing really important things. I do believe that.[316]

In fact, Collier does just that. When awarded the Siminovitch Prize in 2010, for instance she was asked to name a protégé (who would receive $25,000 of Collier's $100,000

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[315] Allan Johnson, *Privilege, Power and Difference* 2nd edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), 8. Similarly, American author James Baldwin once stated that "to be white in America means not having to think about it." While Baldwin was specifically talking about race in American society, his comment further illustrates the essence of Johnson's notion of privilege.

[316] Collier, Interview.

award per the award requirements), and Collier selected young director Anita Rochon not only because of Rochon's imaginative directorial vision but also because she is a leader, for "female leaders in our profession – or any profession are super important" and Collier "sees [herself] reflected in her."[317] Additionally, in a June 2013 interview regarding Bard on the Beach's support of new and emerging directors, Collier specifically noted that the Bard on the Beach artistic director Christopher Gaze also has an eye for gender parity: "He let me transfer from contemporary new works…And there's other folks too. He launched Dean Paul Gibson, he launched Meg Roe. And there's a nice balance between female and male directors. I really respect that."[318] Her inclusion and recognition of Gaze's attempts at gender parity in directing allude to the fact that issues of gender, while not playing a primary or overtly political role in her artistic work, do impact Collier's perspective and are part of her purview. Thus, while Collier does not perceive her feminism as overtly political, she continues to support the development of and equal opportunities for women.

While Collier's directorial aesthetic and approach are largely dominated by her vision of a Total Theatre and a dedication to prompting significant dialogue through extraordinary works of art, interlocking identities of gender, age, reputation, and even regional location also influence Collier's work – some more subtly than others. Moreover, these identities cannot – and, in my opinion, should not – be separated from her work, as all the pieces come together to make Collier who she is. The complicated,

[317] Peter Birnie, "Vancouver director picks up theatre prize," *Edmonton Journal,* 2 Nov 2010; Melissa Leong, "Vancouver director wins $100,000 prize, *National Post*, 2 Nov. 2010.

[318] "Directors embrace the challenge of Shakespeare's work," *Vancouver Sun*, 5 June 2013, http://www.vancouversun.com/Directors+embrace+challenge+Shakespeare+work/8483686/story.html#ixzz2VT8yWSpO (accessed 8 June 2013).

interwoven nature of these identities and her artistic approaches is much like Collier's dual identity as an Electric Company collaborator and a director at large.

On Canadian-ness

In a discussion of identity and the ways that identity shapes experience and artistic impulses, it seems necessary to consider Collier's view of the way her work functions within and speaks to the larger cultures of British Columbia and Canada. As an artist dedicated to Total Theatre and creating "illuminating or heart moving or challenging events, productions" and art for her community, Collier's discussion of what it means to be Canadian is largely rooted in Vancouver. When asked to discuss Canadian-ness and the ways that one sees Canadian-ness through theatre, Collier, like many of the directors included in this study (and many Canadians, for Canada has long been known for its uncertainty surrounding a unified national identity as characterized by Northrup Frye's now famous question "Where is here?" that he posed in his introduction to the first *Literary History of Canada* in 1965), begins with questions rather than answers, musing "Canadian theatre? How does our work fit inside of Canadian theatre? Or what is Canadian theatre?"[319] From there, Collier's discussion of Canadian-ness begins with by recognizing variance across the country according to region: "I guess my experience is that Canadian work looks very different in different places and with different artists." This statement reflects the frequent discussions and overall importance of Canadian regionalism as discussed in Chapter 2. Collier goes on to admit uncertainty,

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[319] In the conclusion of his *Literary History of Canada,* Frye wrote that Canadians were less "perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as, 'Where is here?'" and this question is often uttered in discussions of Canadian identity, as it is, generally speaking, difficult to pin down definitively. (Northrup Frye, qtd. in Jean O'Grady and David Staines, "Introduction," in *Northrup Frye on Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), xxxiii.); Collier, Interview.

in regard to a larger sense of Canadian-ness: "I don't think that there is…I don't know that I can detect anything Canadian specifically…I don't know."[320] Thus, while a single national identity might be elusive, Collier's discussion of Canadian-ness and Canadian theatre comes out of her community, her work in Vancouver. According to Collier, although Canadian theatre appears differently across the country "in the English-Canadian theatre tradition, I think that our [Electric Company] pieces are kind of striking a conversation between what's happening in Quebec [a movement-centered, physically-based, visual style in the manner of Cirque du Soliel] and in English."[321] However, Vancouver's position on the far western edge of the country, far from the theatrical hubs of Quebec or Toronto, places them in a unique physical and metaphorical position – on the "frontier of the art form while still being able to talk with the mainstream," arguably allowing Collier and the Electric Company room to experiment further and create their own brand and style of theatre.[322] As a Vancouver artist, Collier's work (both with the Electric Company and others) reflects/has been influenced by and influences her regional roots, as her company is an "independent theatre company that does not shrink back from exploring how narrative works…We're always deconstructing that or constructing different ways and really testing how we tell our stories, both in the form and in the content. But with the Total Theatre perspective…[it also provides] a dialogue for the larger theatre audiences here" in Vancouver and British Columbia. If British Columbia is a land on the edge, then it seems logical that its art and leaders, like Collier, would push and explore to the edges of the discipline and beyond.

[320] Collier, Interview.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid.

Perhaps more than some of the other productions featured as representative of the work by the women directors featured in this study, Collier's *Tear the Curtain!* speaks to an overarching sense of Canadian identity, particularly in regard to its regional focus and roots. In many ways, it is a Vancouver story. It was created for a historical and beloved Vancouver landmark; it was created by Vancouver artists for a Vancouver audience. Although there are certainly larger philosophical and thematic elements at play that can and do reach audiences beyond Vancouver, the fact remains that both the play and the production itself emerge from and are connected to their Vancouver community, reflecting Collier's own directorial process in which "step one" is to interrogate why she is doing this play for this particular audience in this particular moment. Although the production did tour to Toronto and its audiences were, by and large, fascinated by and appreciative of the play's integration of film and live performance, nearly all the Toronto responses pointed to the production's Vancouver roots. Thus, one particular moment in the play – for me, one of the most powerful moments of the piece – seems to answer and echo Northrup Frye's question of Canadian idenitity, "Where is here?" During this moment, the protagonist Braithwaite, conflicted between two warring mediums of film and theatre and consumed by the search for the "ultimate presence" in any medium, stands at center stage. The stage lights go out and the house lights come up. In a moment of truth, honesty, vulnerability and connection, he – as character Alex Braithwaite and actor Jonathon Young – looks to the audience, pauses, and simply states, "We. Are. Here." In the moment of the play, the question of "where is here" as raised by *Tear the Curtain!* seems primarily in regard to authenticity and reality as set up by the juxtaposition of film and live performance; however, this moment also could be seen as a

powerful connection to the production's regional roots and Collier's intention to speak to and inspire dialogue in her community. For the Vancouver audience, it is possible that there was more willing investment by the Vancouver community in the fact that the "here" of both the film and the theatre – on historical and physical levels – were made much more tangible in Vancouver at the Stanley than in another theatre. After all, as Canadian literary icon and author of the feminist *Handmaid's Tale* Margaret Atwood has noted "for members of a country or culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive."[323] Thus, in many ways, Collier's production of *Tear the Curtain!* fulfills Atwood's urging, for the production could be seen as her attempt, her "gift," to her community – a way for her art as embodied by Total Theatre to help her community survive, experience shared knowledge of their place, and engage in dialogue.

Although Collier identifies as a feminist and recognizes that issues of gender have impacted and influenced her at various points in her career, her work and artistic philosophy is not necessarily focused on exposing structures of power as related to gender or explicitly addressing socio-political issues that relate to the status of women in Canada. However, focus on art does take a political stance as she states that art is "central to the development of a literate, engaged and active citizenry; one which, in the context of a market-defined society, helps us actively define the values of the world we wish to live in."[324] Moreover, her position as a woman in the upper echelons of professional Canadian theatre directors and, moreover, as a recognized artistic innovator

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[323] Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977 and 2004), 18-19.

[324] Mike Youds, "Westsyde alum wins richest theatre prize, *The Daily News – Kamloops*, 3 November 2010.

and visionary, is notable and marks a "feminist" and political intervention in that her presence and work opens doors and provides a role model for other women artists. As a director and an artist, Collier is constantly striving to create, through performance and Total Theatre, "that magic place that can happen in the arts when we release enough."[325] Through her imaginative, large-scale, thought-provoking technological "mash-ups" such as *Tear the Curtain!*, Kim Collier encourages her actors and audience members by providing work that "is pushing different terrain, so don't run from it yet. And [I want to] try to keep making spaces for that."[326] While her voice trails off at this moment in the conversation, her passion for the work and deep dedication to her work as an artist shines brightly in her eyes and animates her gestures – even after a long day of rehearsals and with a late night flight to Toronto ahead. Collier's final comments to me speak to the essence of her directorial work, methods, and aesthetic - her desire to create theatre as great art and through that art, to create opportunities for dialogue:

> I think over and over again I learn it's about the community and that my particular route to building community was through making extraordinary works of theatre. And so the artistic excellence is necessary because then it creates a pulse in the audience and the people and it gets them talking when they leave. You know, like that all goes together…So I think that's really at the core of it. I love making things for people.[327]

And those "things" that Collier is making are creating a "pulse" in her audiences, for through her work she challenges the boundaries of theatre and art by bringing two forms together in one space or expanding the world of the play beyond the confines of the stage. Both in rehearsal and in performance, Collier's work serves to, as former ECT managing

[325] Collier, Interview.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.

director Nathan Medd observes, “bust up old models and systems to fit the moment.”[328] And through it all, Collier’s desire to create art – moving, powerful, innovative, and “extraordinary” art – shines through, prompting us, as in *Tear the Curtain!* to “expand [our] consciousness” and think about theatre and art a little differently.

[328] Nathan Medd, Personal email, 4 July 2013.

CHAPTER 4: "LEADING FROM THE CENTER" AND "LOOKING AT WOMEN IN ALL DIRECTIONS" – KELLY THORNTON, FEMINIST THEATRE, AND *THE PENELOPIAD*

In the fall of 2009, during the beginning of my second year as a doctoral student at the University of Missouri as well as my musings about what my larger doctoral dissertation project might become, Nightwood Theatre – Canada's oldest professional women's theatre located in Toronto, Ontario – celebrated its 30th season. As part of Nightwood's 30th "birthday" celebrations, it held the *4x4 Festival*, which featured productions, workshops, and a Director's Summit. This event, which drew more than 16,000 audience members and involved 150 delegates from across Canada, "put the spotlight" on the work of the female director, and showcased the talent of four of Canada's "top women directors" – Kim Collier (discussed in Chapter 1), Weyni Mengesha, Eda Holmes, and Nightwood Theatre's own Kelly Thornton – in four different productions.[329]

As a director, I was particularly interested in this Summit, as it spoke to many of the same concerns and issues of gender disparity that I had observed and read about in American theatre in regard to women working as professional directors. Thus, my academic and artistic interests were piqued. Further, in conjunction with these events, Nightwood – in collaboration with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) – was also compiling a catalog of women directors working professionally across Canada. When finished, the catalog would be distributed to theatres throughout

[329] "4x4 Festival Overview," Nightwood Theatre website, http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/index.php/about/productions/4x4_festival (accessed 2 March 2013).

the country in hopes of encouraging them to seek out and hire more women to direct on their stages. Through further exploration of this Summit, the catalog, and Nightwood Theatre itself, I subsequently discovered the seed of an idea for this dissertation project and became acquainted with Nightwood Theatre's artistic director, Kelly Thornton, who would become the first woman I approached to be part of this project (and the one with whom I spent the most time). Thus, while Kelly Thornton does not open or close the pages of this dissertation, her story is – literally and figuratively – situated centrally, as it has been central and key to the inspiration for and development of this project.

In 2001, Kelly Thornton took the reins of Nightwood Theatre, Canada's oldest professional women's (read: feminist, although the term is absent from the current website as well as the 2006 revision and publication of the company mandate) theatre company.[330] Since that time, Thornton has energized the company, taking it from an organization that operated on a $300,000 annual budget to one that operates on approximately $850,000 each year and serves an increased artistic and political function within the surrounding community.[331] As theatre scholar and Nightwood historian Shelley Scott notes, from the beginning of her tenure as artistic director, Kelly Thornton has been focused on raising the profile of Nightwood Theatre and positioning it "not as an alternative or marginal company but as Canada's 'national women's theatre.'" These efforts were marked by an initial strategic initiative that included a three year plan as well

[330] By and large, the Canadian theatre community refers to and considers Nightwood Theatre a feminist theatre company. However, the mandate does not explicitly identify it as a feminist company; rather, the focus is on women's works and women artists. While this focus is arguably feminist in nature, the fact that the company does not explicitly identity as "feminist" and instead broadens its purview (or, in some opinions, de-politicizes) to look at women more generally is intriguing and somewhat surprising. However, once one learns more about Kelly Thornton and her philosophy on leadership and women's issues, this broadening of mission begins to become clearer.

[331] Kelly Thornton, Interview by the author, Toronto, ON, 5 September 2012.

as hiring a fundraising consultant and board-restructuring consultant.[332] Scott writes, "Thornton has done a good job of constantly emphasizing Nightwood's critical and artistic successes and working to solidify its legitimacy at a national level, to garner the company the respect and recognition it deserves."[333] While Thornton's work as an artistic director and company leader is significant, so too is her directorial work, for she is not only a director by trade and training but also directs at least one production per season at Nightwood.

Perhaps due to the significant cultural reputation and historical legacy created by Nightwood (and/or perhaps due in part to the collective nature and approach of much feminist scholarship), much of the scholarly work that includes Thornton considers her as Nightwood's artistic director and specifically within the context of Nightwood Theatre. Shelley Scott's text, *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work is Always Done*, for instance, offers a comprehensive history of the company, and Scott's discussion of Thornton is therefore intimately linked to Thornton's work and role as an artistic director for the company. Beyond Scott's text, newspaper articles and other features typically consider Thornton specifically in conjunction with her Nightwood leadership role.[334]

While Thornton's work with Nightwood does encompass a significant portion of her career and her role as the artistic director of the feminist company marks her as a

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[332] Shelley Scott, *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work is Always Done* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 171.

[333] Scott, 177.

[334] Further testament to the need to consider Thornton's work beyond her association with Nightwood is a conversation I had at the 2013 Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR) conference in Victoria, British Columbia. Having described my project to a new acquaintance and colleague, she revealed that she had, early in her career, interned with Nightwood Theatre and had worked with Thornton. My new colleague went on to praise Thornton's directorial vision and work, noting that Thornton is an "amazing director, one of the best I've worked with" and lamenting that Thornton's work as a director is not documented or studied in detail beyond Thornton's association with Nightwood as its artistic director.

political voice in response to larger theatrical structures, Kelly Thornton's directorial work and vision merits attention in and of itself. After all, as Buddies in Bad Times artistic director Brendan Healy wrote in his open response to the scandal at the Factory Theatre in fall 2012, "I am not the theatre company and the theatre company is not me."[335] Moreover, Thornton has been recognized for her directorial work on multiple levels. She received a Dora nomination for outstanding director for *This Hotel* (2002) and *The Penelopiad* (2012) and was nominated for the 2010 Siminovitch Prize. Her direction has been hailed as "clever" and "gifted…awesome in its clarity and focus."[336] In light of these awards and accolades, a more focused look at her directing career – both with Nightwood *and* beyond the company – and her particular directorial vision provides valuable insight into her work as a woman and as a feminist director. Although her work as a director is closely linked to her work as Nightwood's artistic director, Thornton is not only her theatre company; she possesses her own aesthetic and methods, much of which are focused around the theme of "being in and leading from the center," a theme that emerges from Thornton's narrative and speaks to both her place within Canadian feminist theatre and her directing oeuvre, methods and approaches.

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[335] Brendan Healy, "Four thoughts for my future self," 4 September 2012, quoted on *The Legion of Decency* blog, 5 September 2012, http://the-legion-of-decency.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-four-truths-of-being-artist.html (accessed 6 September 2012). Buddies in Bad Times is Toronto's leading LGBTQ theatre company. In response to the firing of long-time artistic director Ken Gass at Toronto's Factory Theatre in September 2012 and the subsequent controversy, Healy posted his "Four thoughts for my future self" on Facebook, a post that quickly became viral. The details of the Factory scandal will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4 in regard to Nina Lee Aquino, as Aquino was appointed one of the interim artistic directors at Factory in the wake of the scandal.

[336] Desiree O, "Kelly Thronton: Theatrical Trailblazer," *Shameless Magazine*, 6 November 2008; Robert Crew, "Not so happy about *The Happy Woman*," *Toronto Star*, 9 Mar 2012; Allan Gould, "Theatre Review: *The Penelopiad*," DO section of *Post City Review,* 21 Jan. 2013.

This chapter, then, surveys Thornton's career as a director as well as her directorial vision and working methods, and explores the ways her directorial aesthetics are made manifest in her work, specifically the 2012 and 2013 staging of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, a production that Thornton identifies as representative of her directorial work and aesthetic and that was so successful it prompted a re-mount. I begin by placing Thornton in context – both in relation to me and my connection with her and in the larger theatrical and historical context of feminist theatre in Canada and Toronto. Then, I document Thornton's career prior to and during her time at Nightwood in an attempt to consider her directorial work as distinct from her work as an artistic director (although the two inevitably reinforce and complement each other). With a sense of Thornton's directing history in mind, I then look specifically at her directorial methods and ways of working in the rehearsal hall, identifying sub-themes that characterize her approach to working with actors and texts and that relate to the overall theme of "being in and leading from the center" that so infuses Thornton's narrative. As part of my examination of these sub-themes and Thornton's working methods, I use Thornton's recent production of *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood as a representative case study of her work, considering how the play, in content and form, relates to Thornton's directorial approaches and women's and feminist issues. Finally, I examine Thornton's experiences with and perspective on issues of identity such as gender and Canadian-ness.

Setting the (Feminist) Stage: Nightwood Theatre and Feminist Theatre in Canada

Kelly Thornton and her work are situated within not only the Toronto theatre milieu as described in Chapter 2 but also the feminist theatre movement in Canada.

Because the bulk of Thornton's directorial work is intimately connected to her position as artistic director of Nightwood Theatre, it is useful to contextualize Nightwood within the development of feminist theatre in Canada before specifically examining Thornton's directing oeuvre and methods. Although Thornton herself is too young to have been part of the Toronto-based alternative theatre movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s as described in Chapter 2, her current company, Nightwood Theatre, was itself part of the emerging companies of the late 1970s and, since then, it has become a key part of the Toronto theatre landscape. Founded in 1979 by Cynthia Grant, Mary Vingoe, Kim Renders and Maureen White, Nightwood admittedly emerged somewhat late in Toronto's nationalist, alternative theatre movement. However, as Shelley Scott notes, that later emergence also allowed the company to reflect "all that had gone on a short while before, yet [to develop] in its own unique direction."[337] Today Nightwood, under Thornton's leadership, is arguably Canada's leading women's theatre company and a key player in the Toronto theatre landscape. While Nightwood's current mandate does not specifically contain the word "feminist," it is and has been widely considered Toronto's foremost feminist theatre company. To demonstrate the centrality of Nightwood to the Canadian feminist theatre trajectory, a simple Google search for "feminist theatre in Toronto" reveals that over three-quarters of the resulting hits are related to or point to Nightwood Theatre. Additionally, Susan Bennett's anthology *Feminist Theatre and Performance in Canada* features 16 essays that chart the development of feminist theatre in Canada as a whole, and of those 16 essays, five refer to or are connected directly to Nightwood

[337] Scott, 39.

Theatre.[338] Thus, because much of Thornton's career (since 2001) has been inextricably linked to the political, feminist theatre of Nightwood Theatre, it is perhaps beneficial to contextualize her work within both the development of theatre in Toronto and, within that, the artistic trajectory of Nightwood, as Thornton's leadership as well as directorial work has shaped the company's political and feminist output.

As noted previously, the Toronto theatre culture and the development of alternate/alternative theatres in Toronto was tied in large part to notions of nationalism and a national focus on developing the arts and the city as a national cultural center. Similarly, the feminist theatre movement in Canada was closely linked to notions of Canadian nationalism and the desire to create alternative options to the for-profit theatres and the cultural imports brought to the stage from the American Broadway and the British West End. As feminist theatre scholar Amanda Hale writes, "Canadian feminist theatre co-emerged with Canadian nationalism as it was manifested in the alternate theatre movement."[339] As Canada's most well-known feminist/women-centered theatre company, much of the feminist theatre movement and development in Toronto and, to some degree, Canada is wrapped up in Nightwood.

However, Nightwood Theatre has not always been Toronto's only or primary feminist theatre. During Toronto's alternative theatre boom of the 1970s, two feminist companies emerged: Red Light Theatre, which opened in 1974 and ran for three seasons,

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[338] Three articles specifically center on Nightwood Theatre (one is a reflection by Cynthia Grant, former artistic director; another is a discussion by Shelley Scott of the company's evolving mandate; and the third argues for the current/continuing need for Nightwood's existence). A fourth article discusses *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet* by Anne-Marie MacDonald, a play originally workshopped at Nightwood, and the fifth mentions Nightwood several times in its discussion of women's voices in Canadian theatre.

[339] Amanda Hale, "From A Dialectical Drama of Facts and Fictions on the Feminist Fringe," ed. Laura Levin, *Theatre and Performance in Toronto, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 21 (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2011), 40.

and Nightwood Theatre.[340] According to Nightwood co-founder Cynthia Grant, Nightwood's emergence at this time "must be seen as a part of the generation of theater in Toronto which includes AKA Performance Interfaces, Buddies in Bad Times, Necessary Angel, and Theatre Autumn Leaf," companies who emerged to meet the needs of specific marginalized communities such as women and LGBT or specialized artistic forms such as experimental opera; together these groups, in the fashion of many small, young (and broke, or "not financially established") companies, brought their resources together to form the Theatre Centre in 1979, and according to Grant, "presented the city's most exciting and innovative work" for several years.[341]

From Nightwood's beginning in September 1979, co-founders Grant, Mary Vingoe, Kim Renders and Maureen White were adamant that the company not be considered strictly a feminist or "women's theatre." While their resistance might be due in part to a fear of ghettoization for a political label such as "feminist," the label was difficult to resist, as Grant's recollection of the first Nightwood interview with the Toronto critic Ray Conologue demonstrates. In the interview, Conologue, Grant recalls, was less focused on the theatrical imagery of Nightwood's initial project, *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, a play based on the novel by Sharon Riis, and more on the fact that Grant's new company was a "women's theatre." Grant expressed her surprise that this was his focus:

[340] The name of the company, "Nightwood Theatre," was inspired by Djuna Barnes' novel, *Nightwood*, which co-founder Cynthia Grant read as part of a Women's Studies program at the University of Toronto. She was intrigued by "the history and the lyricism of *Nightwood*, an enigmatic title by a brilliant, under-recognized female author whose own story was at once both stellar and tragic. Years later, I would be drawn to the title to name a new theatre company." Cynthia Grant, "Still 'Activist' after All These Years? Reflections on Feminism and Activist Theatre, Then and Now," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance*, ed. Susan Bennett (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), 148.

[341] Cynthia Grant, "Notes from the Front Line," *Canadian Theatre Review - Feminism and Canadian Theatre* 43 (Summer 1985): 44.

> "Where does it say that we've formed a women's company in the press release?" I asked. Well, it didn't, but the company, by virtue of who was directing and producing the piece – me, a female – about the story of a woman – a fictional Ida Johnson – presented as a women's theatre company. Hmm. This was the beginning of a 'negotiating of identity' that continues for women artists. Yes, I've always been a woman and a feminist but I didn't realize that this would be in the forefront of how the world saw me as an artist.[342]

Echoing Grant's sentiments, co-founder and respected Canadian director Mary Vingoe noted that "feminism was not the primary reason for starting the company. Only later did it become a significant factor when we began to be identified as a group of four women running a theatre company."[343] Thus, while perhaps not entirely intentional, Nightwood's politically feminist mandate and direction was established and began to evolve from its very moment of origin.

Interestingly, this notion of being "women-centered" or "feminist" continues to be a negotiation for Nightwood and its leadership, including Thornton. Nightwood seemed to embrace its identification as a feminist theatre for many years, and many in the Canadian theatre community have long considered it a feminist company.[344] However, a revision of the company's mandate in 2006 (under Thornton's leadership) is notable in that the new version of the mandate did not include a single specific reference to "feminism" or "feminist theatre"; instead, it professed a focus on simply "women." This shift in mandate presumably allows more flexibility in publicity and encourages

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[342] Cynthia Grant, "Still 'Activist' after All These Years? Reflections on Feminism and Activist Theatre, Then and Now," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 4, ed. Susan Bennett (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006), 149.

[343] Mary Vingoe, "Notes from the Front Line," *Canadian Theatre Review – Feminism and Canadian Theatre* 43 (Summer 1985): 45.

[344] Throughout Shelley Scott's book, the most comprehensive text of Nightwood's history, Scott discusses Nightwood as a feminist company. Critics regularly refer to Nightwood as "feminist" in their description of the company as part of previews and reviews; moreover, in casual conversation, Nightwood is typically described as a feminist company.

attendance by a wider cross section of audience members. As frequently noted by numerous Toronto theatre artists and bloggers, lagging audience attendance has been and continues to be a concern and bone of contention for Toronto companies, especially in light of the current economic climate. In addition to a recurring discussion about "The State of Theatre" by guest artists on the popular *Blog TO*, an open letter written by Buddies in Bad Times artistic director Brendan Healy to the Toronto community, published in April 2013, speaks to an ongoing struggle to bring in audience members.[345] Healy writes of this issue as an "industry-wide phenomenon," noting that Buddies is "hardly the only theatre in town faced with this problem [of garnering audience]. In fact, I recently participated in a historic meeting between several of the artistic directors in the city to discuss this critical issue. We all recognize that these are exceedingly challenging times for the arts in Canada."[346] Thus, the 2006 Nightwood mandate revision speaks in some ways to this difficulty and the political (and financial) danger of labeling a company too narrowly, and the 2013 Nightwood season slogan further exemplifies this desire to expand and reach a greater audience: "Theater for everyone. Made by women." Thus, in this way, Nightwood and Thornton continue to ride a fine line between celebrating the work of women and grappling with more negative, narrow assumptions of feminism.[347] According to Thornton, she believes Nightwood has a responsibility to

[345] This blog series ran in 2006 and 2007 and featured conversations/interviews with Toronto theatre artists of diverse backgrounds, including Kelly Thornton, Catherine Hernandez of Factory Theatre, Daniel Shehori of Second City Toronto, and others.

[346] Brendan Healy, qtd in "Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's Brendan Healy Writes an Open Letter to Theatregoers (or the Lack Thereof)," by Carly Maga, *The Torontoist*, 4 April 2013, http://torontoist.com/2013/04/buddies-in-bad-times-theatres-brendan-healy-writes-an-open-letter-to-theatregoers-or-the-lack-thereof/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

[347] In her text, *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work is Always Done*, Shelley Scott suggests that women's and feminist theatre companies develop from one of two backgrounds: a desire to politically

present "a very broad, broad outlook into what defines what a feminist theatre should be doing" and to "look at women in all directions" so as to reach the largest audience and paint an accurately diverse picture of contemporary women and women's experience.[348] This difficult and, dare I invoke the often-feminized term "delicate," balance between being feminist and appealing to diverse audiences further influences Thornton's work individually as a director as well and will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Feminist politics aside, Nightwood Theatre's productions have been characterized by several aspects since its beginning, and those characterizations, in some capacity, have also influenced Thornton's directorial work – thus it is necessary to explore those "expected" aesthetics of the company at large. Since the company's beginning, for instance, the founders of Nightwood expressed a desire to experiment with form and content on stage, pushing the limits of what was seen in Toronto's mainstage venues and marking their place among the alternate-as-mainstream theatres of Toronto. In the words of co-founder Kim Renders, the primary goal of Nightwood's productions was to explore the limits of performance and "to deal with relevant issues, feminist or otherwise, and our plans for the future are no different."[349] This experimentation continues today under Thornton's leadership to some extent, as the company programs plays that represent a variety of stylistic forms – from traditional psychological realism as demonstrated in the 2012-2013 season by *Between the Sheets* to more ensemble-based, physical storytelling

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express feminist ideals or a desire to rectify the lack of opportunity for women in theatre. Nightwood, it seems, reflects the second.

[348] Thornton, Interview.

[349] Kim Renders, "Notes from the Front Line," *Canadian Theatre Review - Feminism and Canadian Theatre* 43 (Summer 1985): 46.

theatrical spectacles as seen in *The Penelopiad* – and plays that speak to issues such as work/life balance, fertility, classism, violence against women in war, and others.

Nightwood's early work was also largely collective – both in artistic production and administration. Its first productions – *The True Story of Ida Johnson* (1979) and *Glazed Tempera* (1980) – were collectively created in collaboration with other organizations and employed experimental staging techniques, which "would continue to define Nightwood's production history" during these early years and, to some extent, beyond.[350] As the company gained prominence and, like its alternative theatre compatriots, became more mainstream during the mid to late 1980s, shifts in leadership and production creation methods ensued. Some of Nightwood's founders, for instance, moved on to form other companies; for example, Cynthia Grant left Nightwood in 1986 to begin the Company of Sirens, a company that, in contrast to Nightwood at the time, was a more grass-roots company, or a "grouping of more politically engaged women" whose work was more politically feminist and activist.[351]

According to Shelly Scott, the mid-1980s and Grant's departure marked a second major phase in Nightwood's development, as the company moved toward a more mainstream model and invested more thought in financial and other forms of development. Part of this development phrase included a shift toward a more traditional structural model with a single Artistic Director, rather than a collectively-directed

[350] Scott, 58. Scott details several of Nightwood's early productions in this text, and for more information on the early plays and methods, please see Scott's text.

[351] Cynthia Grant, "Still 'Activist' after All These Years? Reflections on Feminism and Activist Theatre, Then and Now," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*, vol. 4, ed. Susan Bennett (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), 150.

company.[352] A part of this developmental shift was also reflected in the type of productions Nightwood staged, as many were less collectively created and more focused on a script by a single author. Although still interested in furthering women's work, Nightwood – much like their mandate and its recent revision – was also looking to "broaden" its reach, looking to garner larger audiences as well as to tackle works by women of more diverse backgrounds.[353] While this issue of diversity remains a bone of contention, it is important to note that Nightwood strategically selected to move in this direction.[354]

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Nightwood has seen many further changes but has continued to be defined as one of Toronto's "most influential theatre companies" and the "highest-profile feminist troupe in Canada," offering opportunities to women theatre artists and fighting for women's voices and bodies to be heard and seen on the contemporary Canadian stage.[355] As Nightwood's artistic director since 2001, Kelly Thornton is intimately connected to this mission, bringing her past artistic experiences and training as well as her exuberant personality and leadership vision to the Nightwood and, more broadly, the Toronto theatre scene.

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[352] Shelly Scott, "Collective Creation and the Changing Mandate of Nightwood Theatre," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* volume 4, ed. by Susan Bennett (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), 109.

[353] Kim Renders, qtd in Shelley Scott, "Collective Creation and the Changing Mandate of Nightwood Theatre," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* volume 4, ed. Susan Bennett (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), 116.

[354] Shelley Scott, "Collective Creation and the Changing Mandate of Nightwood Theatre," in *Feminist Theatre and Performance, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* volume 4, ed. Susan Bennett (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2006), 109. A thorough and comprehensive history of Nightwood Theatre is available in Scott's full length text, *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work is Always Done*.

[355] Corinne Rusch-Drutz, "Feminist Theatre in Toronto: A Look at the Nightwood Theatre," in *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century,* eds. Sharon Anne Cook, Lonran McLean, and Kate O'Rourke (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 271, 274.

The Beginnings of a Leader and Director: Kelly Thornton's Background

Because Thornton, as artistic director, is at the center of Nightwood Theatre and therefore her work is frequently tied to Nightwood, it is perhaps useful to chart briefly her background and career both in association with and beyond Nightwood, in order to understand how her upbringing and past experience have helped shape her directorial work and her desire to "lead from the center."[356] Born in Brockville, Ontario, a town located on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River about an hour's drive from Ottawa, in 1965, Kelly Thornton gained a global perspective early in life, as at age nine, she and her family moved to Melbourne, Australia. It was during her time in Australia that Thornton first discovered theatre, as her older sister attended Rosin City College, a teacher's college which focused on dance and drama. "That's when I first started to get into [theatre]. I mean, I hung around her and her friends and went to all of their shows and kind of started to see, just that whole world of theater. It opened up for me."[357] However, Thornton's own school, even upon her return to Canada at age 15, did not have strong or "serious" programs in drama. As a result, when Thornton entered university at the University of Western Ontario, she (in the way of many theatre artists who are discouraged from or do not consider theatre a viable career path) entered with other disciplinary intentions.

These alternate disciplinary intentions are not, however, surprising, when one considers Thornton as a person. Upon my first meeting with her, I was immediately struck by her intensity, candor, physical exuberance, and ability to change directions of a thought or conversation on a dime. Even while sitting behind the director's table and

[356] Thornton, Interview.
[357] Thornton, Interview.

watching rehearsal, she displayed an intensity of focus, as she leaned forward into the scene, occasionally and subtly mouthing the words along with the actors and then leaping to her feet when something the actors did struck her with inspiration or excitement. These things in mind, it was no surprise that Thornton's disciplinary interests changed and she was drawn to theatre. At first, Thornton looked to psychology; however, after suffering through her first 8:30 am calculus class, a requirement for the psychology major, she "immediately went to add-drop and changed [her] major…[she] changed [her] whole focus and it became an English, philosophy major."[358] While Thornton eventually transferred to the University of Guelph – where her beau at the time also attended – and found her way to the theatre major through an elective course that "hooked" her into the program, she maintained divergent academic interests. At Guelph, she was a dual major in English and theatre, and within her theatre training, she was able to get her "hands dirty" in multiple theatrical areas, including writing, costumes, lighting design, directing, and acting, providing her with a diverse range of skills and interests to employ in her professional work upon her graduation from Guelph in 1994. While many artists possess divergent interests, it is particularly important to note these in regard to Thornton, as these divergent interests and academic backgrounds continue to play into Thornton's work as a theatre artist, propelling her to tackle complicated, political, and intertextual pieces that address a wide variety of issues and assume diverse theatrical forms.

For Thornton (much like most of the other directors featured in this volume), several key moments occurred in her artistic development during which, to borrow Thornton's words, a "penny dropped" and inspired a moment of clarity and direction.

[358] Thornton, Interview.

For Thornton, the first of these "penny drop" moments was the moment in which she realized that she wanted to be a director. Although she, like many of the women included in this study, began her career as an actor (and occasional playwright), Thornton quickly realized that her go-getter personality and proclivity to taking charge made her a "difficult actor." She recalled that although she "started on the actor's route of, like, the audition game" she "very quickly" realized, "'Ugh, I don't know if I can do this all my life. You know, like audition and like wait for the phone to ring.'"[359] Unlike acting, directing, for Thornton, simply "felt right," and even when working with other directors as an actor herself, she tended to put herself in the director's place and mindset. At this point, she found herself at a loss:

> I was in this place of, "Why am I, you know, what's – what's…why am I not being propelled?" And then my husband said to me, "Well, people don't know what to give you." He said, "What are you?" and I'm like, "I'm a theatre artist!" [*laughs*] Which is just so vague in retrospect. And he said, "People don't know what to give you until you tell them what you want." And, and so it really was kind of like this thing that was one of those moments in life when you go, "Aaaaah," and the penny dropped. And I was like, "You know what, I don't have to be a writer and an actor and you know…" So, I've really focused in on directing.[360]

Since that influential moment and decision, Thornton has centered her artistic work in the world of directing, and those efforts have met with success and accolades. In 1997, she was awarded the Alumnae Theatre Director's Award for her work on *The Visit* by Swiss playwright Friedrich Durrenmatt, and throughout her career, she has been nominated for numerous Dora Awards in best direction.[361] Perhaps most notably,

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[359] Thornton, Interview.

[360] Ibid.

[361] The Alumnae Theatre was founded in 1919 by women graduates of the University of Toronto, and continues to perform in Toronto under the mandate of presenting the "best in classic and contemporary plays and provid[ing] opportunities for women in theatre" (Alumnae Theatre Company website).

Thornton was nominated in 2010 for the Siminovitch Prize in direction (an award that two directors featured in this study, Kim Collier and Jillian Keiley, have also won) and in 2004 she was awarded the Pauline McGibbon Award for direction. Moreover, several organizations have recognized Thornton specifically for her work with and for women, naming her a 2008 YWCA Woman of Distinction and honoring her at the 2005 International Women's Day Breakfast, hosted by Minister of Parliament (MP) Sarmite D. Bulte. She seems to be doing something right.

However, Thornton is quick to admit that she has a "strong administrative side as well," which led her to her artistic directorship. During her early years as an artist and while working with her husband as part of a small, "Indie" company called Bananafish, Thornton often served as the producer, writing grants and assuming administrative duties as well as occasionally acting, writing and directing. Moreover, for two years prior to moving into her current position at Nightwood, Thornton curated the annual Rhubarb Festival, a two week festival, now in its 34th year, that falls under the auspices of Toronto's queer theatre, Buddies in Bad Times, and brings in national and international work to produce "a hotbed of creativity and experimentation" in theatre and performance for the Toronto community.[362]

These administrative skills also apply to her directing career, for, as numerous introductory directing textbooks note, administrative and organizational skills are essential to success as a theatrical director. Interestingly, however, this administrative drive is, in many cases, deemed a masculine trait. Director Liz Huddle's discussion of

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[362] "Rhubarb Festival," *Buddies in Bad Times* website, http://buddiesinbadtimes.com/shows/the-34th-rhubarb-festival/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

the masculine-feminine balance at work in the director's role as part of Rebecca Daniels' *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* points to this perceived gendered distinction. Huddle notes, "I have tremendous masculine tendencies in terms of drive and push and administrative capabilities, but as I create, it's my feminine instincts I rely on."[363] Although Huddle's comment reflects a rather essentialist perception of gender, her comment is interesting, particularly in light of the fact that in many large theatres such as the Stratford Festival men have traditionally been in the artistic director's seat. Thus, the fact that women directors such as Thornton (and the other directors in this study, for all currently hold or have recently held artistic director positions) are also artistic directors is notable. Thornton recognizes the importance of women in the artistic director's role as well, positing that having more women artistic directors would provide more opportunities for women directors

> One of the things that had happened the year before [in 2008, prior to the 4x4 Festival and the Director's Summit] was that about eight artistic director jobs came up and they were all held by men. Oh no, they were all held by men *except for one*; one was held by a woman. And it basically was a [game of] musical chairs. And at the end of it, all eight were held by men. So, no women came on board; it was just like… It was depressing. So my theory was that – and they were big houses, too – so my theory was that it came back to the director. Because if a director wasn't getting the opportunity to direct on the main stage, um, when the job came up they [the women directors] would never be able to be considered because they'd never had the practice of directing on that main stage. Yeah. So my theory was get more directors directing on the main stage, in the bigger houses, in the A houses, and then when those jobs come up they'll at least be considered candidates.[364]

Although a circular logic, Thornton's point here is valid, illuminating, and in keeping with the theme of "being in and leading from the center" that emerges in her narrative.

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[363] Rebecca Daniels, *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996), 22.

[364] Thornton, Interview.

For Thornton, the relationship between the positions of artistic director and director are not linear or hierarchical in nature, they are reciprocal and cyclical. If women assumed more artistic directorships, they would then be in a place of power to hire more women directors, allowing those directors to gain the necessary experience to further their careers and potentially become artistic directors themselves and continuing the cycle. Thus, for Thornton, it is not by working from the top down but by working from the center of the profession, from places of power at the center, that more doors and opportunities will be opened and the cycle continued.

Because the worlds of directing and artistic directing are so closely linked for Thornton, it is perhaps wise to classify Thornton's work in two sections: that assumed outside of Nightwood Theatre and that assumed as part of her Nightwood role. As Buddies' artistic director Brendan Healy notes, the work of an artistic director is very much in service of the company he or she serves; the work of an artistic director is to "be completely devoted to the ideas that have created the theatre company and to push these ideas forward" and "to be held personally and publicly accountable to how these ideas are managed."[365] However, despite the feminist politics that presumably run through and shape Thornton's directing as part of her artistic directorship at Nightwood Theatre, common strands that run through her work in both areas – within and beyond the Nightwood context – are the ways that her works seem to explore and push the limits of gender portrayal on stage and, in so doing, probe larger social concerns.

[365] Brendan Healy, "Four thoughts for my future self," 4 September 2012, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/notes/brendan-healy/four-thoughts-for-my-future-self/446294168756912 (accessed 4 January 2013).

Prior to assuming the artistic directorship of Nightwood, Thornton was largely working within the "Indie" theatre scene of Toronto. With her husband, actor Alex Poch-Goldin, Thornton directed and sometimes acted in as well as wrote pieces for the aforementioned Rhubarb Festival, a Festival that Thornton was asked to run in April 2000. As is typical in fringe and independent theatre scenes, Rhubarb and Thornton's early career embraced a form of socially and politically oriented work, and many of these works also included commentaries on gender and sexuality. For instance, in the fall of 2001, a year prior to assuming the artistic directorship of Nightwood, Thornton directed *Jekyll* by Ruth Madoc-Jones and Erika Hennebury at Canadian dell'arte Studio. This production featured Madoc-Jones and Hennebury as actors and, while remaining true to the original story of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, placed women in the primary roles as a means of exploring the story's themes in regard to gender. The resulting production was hailed by critics as a "creepily stylish" and sexy "gender reversed feminist yarn in which the protagonist's lesbian proclivities are awakened."[366]

Beyond these explorations of gender and sexuality on stage, Thornton's other non-Nightwood works (generally undertaken before her tenure at Nightwood) demonstrated her forward-thinking attitude and her drive to create highly theatrical, thought-provoking, socially-conscious productions. A newspaper article published in the *Toronto Star* shortly before Thornton graduated from Guelph, for instance, recognizes her as a "talented young newcomer [who] plunged headlong into the Toronto theatre scene via Buddies in Bad Times' wild and crazy Rhubarb! Festival," speaking to

[366] Vit Wagner, "Dr Jekyll's latest transformation works well," *Toronto Star,* 4 Feb. 2000.

Thornton's willingness to take risks by engaging in the alternative, independent (and often edgy) theater scene of Toronto as well as her interest in developing new works that push the proverbial envelope.[367] As a young artist, Thornton seemed to engage fully and fearlessly with her artistic work, starting a "social issue based company" that toured the country and made appearances at the Rhubarb! Festival as well as worked with other programs in Toronto that were dedicated to fostering young artistic talent.[368]

From within this early portion of Thornton's career emerged *This Hotel*, a play that starred Thornton's husband, actor Alex Poch-Goldin. *This Hotel* followed a man who finds his wife in the arms of another and mentally escapes to a surreal hotel where his sexual fantasies are fulfilled as a bellhop, "obsequious to the point of lasciviousness," leads him from room to room and person to person.[369] *This Hotel* first debuted in 1998 and was later re-staged, under the auspices of Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, for the Toronto Fringe Festival in 2001. This production in particular garnered Thornton significant critical attention for her "deliciously surreal," "faultless," "daringly different," and sexy production.[370] In addition to exploring the impact of infidelity on an individual, the surreal text also featured characters from all walks of life (a vamp, a homosexual lover, etc.), which also speaks to Thornton's professed desire to "push the envelope" and direct plays "that have a razor's edge where the situation has high stakes."[371] While this directorial element will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, it is important to

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[367] Robert Crew, "Through the Rhubarb! Peephole: Kelly Thornton heads this year's new play festival," *Toronto Star*, 4 Feb 2001.

[368] Thornton, Interview.

[369] Kate Taylor, "Hotel with a surreal surprise," *Globe and Mail*, 12 May 2001; *National Post, "*T.O. Selected Listings," 26 May 2001.

[370] Ibid.

[371] Jasmine Chen, "In a Word: Kelly Thornton, Artistic Director at Nightwood Theatre," *The Charlebois Post* blog, 12 September 2012, http://www.charpo-toronto.com/2012/09/in-wordkelly-thornton-artistic-director.html (accessed 4 January 2013).

note here, for it reflects the type of themes and plays she tackles outside of Nightwood as well as within.

Like most incoming artistic directors, Thornton inherited her first season at Nightwood in 2001; thus, the 2002-2003 season marked the introduction of Thornton's directorial style, as she programmed and directed *The Danish Play* by Sonja Mills. Based on Mills' great-aunt who was a Danish poet and resistance fighter during World War II, *The Danish Play* was, according to Thornton, a "raging, raging hit. Very much like *This Hotel*."[372] It also fit the Nightwood mandate for women-centered work nicely, and Thornton herself noted that Mills' piece was "perfect for Nightwood, highly political, about a woman in society who rises and then falls and in the end fights against her own society."[373] The critics largely seemed to agree, noting its feminist themes as well as Thornton's direction: "staged with utmost theatrical invention."[374] The show went on to tour internationally in 2004 to Aveny-Teatret in Copenhagen as well as nationally to the Magnetic North Festival, an annual theatre festival that, since 2001, has rotated between Ottawa and cities across Canada with an intention to "celebrate both the originality and maturity of Canadian theatre."[375] Due to popular demand, the production was re-mounted in Toronto in 2007.

From *The Danish Play*, Thornton continued her artistic trajectory with Nightwood, and while the plays she has directed at Nightwood are too numerous to discuss in significant detail here, several merit mention, as they provide a sense of

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[372] Thornton, Interview.

[373] Liz Nicholls, "A tale as timeless as that other Danish play," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 June 2004.

[374] Liz Nicholls, "Hennig remarkable in story of courage and obstinacy," *Edmonton Journal*, 11 June 2004.

[375] Magnetic North Theatre Festival, "About," website, http://www.magneticnorthfestival.ca/about/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

Thornton's oeuvre and directing background with Nightwood.[376] For instance, *China Doll*, by Marjorie Chan and produced by Nightwood, directed by Thornton in 2004, expanded her directorial repertoire and points toward her commitment to taking risks both as an artistic director and director in her productions' content, theme and diversity. Featuring an entirely Chinese cast, including the playwright herself, *China Doll* was developed as part of Nightwood's Groundswell Festival, a festival of new works by women held each year in the attempt to foster young Canadian women playwrights, and was then revised and slated for a full production the year following its Groundswell debut. Like *The Danish Play*, *China Doll* seemed right up Nightwood's alley, so to speak, as it explored the beginnings of feminism in China through the metaphor of bound feet and the eyes of a Chinese woman newly introduced to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. While some more traditionally-oriented Chinese women in the audience criticized the production for the main character's "selfish" methods of putting herself and her feminine liberation ahead of her culture, the critics generally praised Thornton's direction, and the play itself spoke to an initiative to increase racial and cultural diversity on the feminist stage of Nightwood.[377] In her characteristically bold humor, Thornton recognized the challenges this piece brought to the stage and her directorial approach, quipping in an interview that she called herself "'the dumb whitey' all the time," as she came from a "self-described 'Heinz 57' background," or a mix of multiple ethnic, largely European backgrounds.[378] However, despite this challenge of being the racial and cultural outsider, Thornton tackled the production and brought new, diverse perspectives to the feminist

[376] For a timeline of Thornton's directing credits and career, please see Appendix E.
[377] Gord McLaughlin, "New shows take on the R-word: Cheeky satire upends racial power structure," *National Post*, 14 Feb 2004.
[378] Ibid.

stage – a leading from the center and telling women's stories from all backgrounds that shapes her narrative and continues to infuse her work and directorial methods.

Directorial Methods, Strategies, and Aesthetic

While plays such as *This Hotel*, *The Danish Play*, and *China Doll* speak to Thornton's oeuvre and, to some extent, her diverse yet political, directorial aesthetic, the second part of this project considers the specific directorial methods and approaches she employs which serve to shape the final product and have earned her recognition both as part of this study and throughout Canada. *How* can Thornton's directorial aesthetic and approaches be described? *How* does Thornton work in the rehearsal room?

Collaboration

If the first "penny drop" moment occurred for Thornton when she discovered her true interest and passion for directing, a second "penny drop" moment is integral to an exploration of Thornton's directorial techniques. As noted in the previous chapter on Kim Collier (and will be noted throughout this study), a tension exists within the directorial role between the power inherently wielded by the director, one who is largely "in charge" of shaping and unifying all elements of the production, and a director's expressed desire (or need) to work collaboratively and non-hierarchically. Numerous introductory theatre texts also posit that theatre is naturally a collaborative medium, as it requires the work of many individuals, from playwright to designers to actors to stage managers, to bring a script to life on the stage; however, directing text books encourage young directors to take charge of the production, as they are the "author" who unifies the show. Inevitably, in the world of the director – even a director who intends to foster

collaboration – there is a tension between these elements, and a subtle yet perceptible hierarchy exists, as the actors, designers, and others generally look to the director for the ultimate decision. The director must negotiate and find the balance between these elements. For Thornton, when it comes to directorial leadership and this negotiation of power dynamics, she professes an interest in "lead[ing] from the center" and strives to be a "very non-hierarchical director," assuming a highly collaborative approach that is very much in keeping with the results of Rebecca Daniels' study on American women stage directors, the majority of whom "express[ed] the belief that collaboration is extremely important to their directing process" and in fact "define[d] their work even more clearly than the notion of artistic leadership."[379]

Much in the same way as Daniels' American directors, the Canadian Thornton is very clear in articulating her desire to collaborate, or, in Thornton's phraseology, "lead from the center."[380] This perspective emerged early in her career when she directed an ambitious musical adaptation of *Animal Farm* with young actors. Shortly before the show's opening, Thornton watched a run-through of the piece, only to discover that the students were struggling with the material and were unable to come together to unify the production: "everybody was in a different play."[381] Uncertain how she would find a way to bring the cast together and rectify the production, Thornton turned to an ancient Chinese ritual used to determine one's fortune and to guide decision-making processes: throwing an *i ching* (or *yijing*).

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[379] Rebecca Daniels, *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996), 94.
[380] Thornton, Interview.
[381] Ibid.

Used for over 3000 years in China by scholars, artists, and emperors as a mode of divination, the *yijing* involves a group of hexagram tiles that each feature six lines which, when thrown and interpreted by using a document called *Changes*, would reveal the "patterns of cosmic change and devise a strategy for dealing with problems or uncertainties concerning the present and the future."[382] While *yijings* can be interpreted in many ways (some ancient Chinese scholars would spend days or even months studying a *yijing*), generally the results speak to a guiding philosophy that is intended to help one make artistic and other fundamental choices as part of her life journey. When Thornton consulted the interpretive text of *Changes*, the "penny dropped" for a second time in her life, as she discovered her *yijing*'s meaning – to lead from the center – and therein was able to articulate the core of her directing philosophy:

> "The leader in the west will lead from the front. The leader in the east will lead from the center. Lead from the center and all shall be well." It was another one of those moments when like the penny dropped. I was like, "Lead from the center. Yeah." Because it's true. If you're leading from the front you can get shot in the back. (*laughs*) You know? Um, and you don't see what's behind you; you don't see – you don't see your people that are fighting with you if you're going into battle. From there I kind of started to think about what the center is and that I was like, if it's a wheel that each spoke goes – like that each person on your team is a spoke and you have to deal with each person individually, that each person – let's say each actor in the play – that each person needs a different psychological approach. That each person is an individual and that each spoke makes the wheel go around. And you really have to stand in the middle and make sure that you have a personal, personalized relationship to get everybody to the same place.[383]

Interestingly, as an observant feminist reader may note, Thornton's directing metaphor extends to include a rather masculine imagery of wartime battle; however, at its core, despite the masculine metaphor, Thornton's approach also reflects what some scholars

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[382] Richard J. Smith, *The I Ching: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 4-5

[383] Thornton, Interview.

might consider a traditionally feminist approach in that it focuses on fostering a strong group dynamic as well as a sense of collectivity and community in which all individuals are valued. Thus, community and collaboration is a sub-theme that emerges under Thornton's larger theme of "leading from the center." As Ruth Madoc Jones notes in an interview with the *Toronto Star* in regard to the distinction between a mixed gender and all female cast, the "creative voice, the creative energy is different [in an all-female cast]…there is a sense of community there that I think is absolutely vital."[384] In her direction, Thornton attempts to foster a similar sense of inclusion and community, as she leads from within the ranks of her actors and creative team, regularly asking for input and ensuring that all have the same goal in mind. In many ways, Thornton's approach speaks to Robert Knopf's observations of power dynamics in directing as articulated in *The Director as Collaborator* (2006). Early in his text, Knopf argues that this sense of collaboration is more than "simply execut[ing] the director's detailed idea"; rather, it is essential to creating "goodwill" in the rehearsal space and "gets each person's mind working toward the same end."[385] Similarly, Thornton's desire to lead from the center of the group in order to foster a sense of inclusion and a common goal speaks to a collaborative directorial approach and intention, and in observing Thornton and her methods in the rehearsal hall, this *centered* sense of direction becomes evident on multiple levels.

[384] Robert Crew, "A broadside of meaningful theatre: Groundswell fest gives female playwrights a strategy of their own," *Toronto Star*, 16 May 2002.

[385] Robert Knopf, *The Director as Collaborator* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2006), 2.

Fostering Young Talent

While Thornton's "lead from the center" approach is evident in her interactions with the actors (and will be discussed further momentarily), it is also perceptible within the first moments of entering her rehearsal hall, as she surrounds herself with a diverse group of women, which notably includes many young, woman artists. To this effect, in June 2008, Thornton was awarded the YWCA Toronto Women of Distinction Award, for which the award committee noted that Thornton's works not only "challenge the status quo of artistic vision, displacing the centrality of male experience" but also that Thornton "makes a home for women developing artistic careers…[her] tenure [at Nightwood] has been marked *by clear emphasis on opening doors of theatre to new generations of talented women*."[386]

Each time I set foot in Thornton's rehearsal hall, I was struck by the number of youthful faces sitting behind the creative team's tables, watching and presumably learning from the mentorship and modeling of Thornton and more experienced artists. *Between the Sheets,* for instance, was written by emerging young playwright Jordi Mand, and Mand's script was workshopped as part of the 2011 Nightwood Groundswell Festival before being selected by Thornton to receive a full production on the Nightwood stage, directed by Thornton herself, the following year.[387] Additionally, the stage manager for *Between the Sheets* was a recent (2007) graduate of the Queen's University Drama

[386] YWCA Women of Distinction Alumnae, emphasis mine.

[387] Mand herself graduated from the National Theatre School in 2006 and was an alumna of the Write from the Hip program which is focused on developing young talent. The Groundswell Festival began in 1986 in conjunction with International Women's Day and it continues to produce influential works-in-progress that advance women's theatre and particularly feature the work of young/emerging women playwrights. This year's Groundswell Festival included, for instance, a new play by Canadian playwriting icon Judith Thompson that dealt specifically with the evolving definition of feminism and the hesitancy of younger women to label themselves as "feminist."

Program and explained to me that she had found her way into the Toronto theatre scene by assistant stage managing several past productions for Nightwood. In addition to these talented young artists, Thornton also employed an assistant director on both *Between the Sheets* and *The Penelopiad*; the assistant director for *The Penelopiad* in particular professed very minimal experience in directing but was quick to note Thornton's influence and willingness to bring her on to assist, saying, "When Kelly asked me to AD this [show], how could I say no?" One actor who has worked with Thornton on multiple shows, including the original staging of *The Penelopiad*, further reinforced my observations, asserting that "she does it [encourages young talent on stage and in administration and leadership roles] better than anybody, because I don't think she's worried about status and boundaries – all that shit…[she's] open to engage them on anything."[388] As I watched Thornton work with these young artists, I quickly realized that Thornton does not expect them to simply sit back and observe as she models the expected or "proper" directorial behavior; rather, Thornton consistently and regularly requests their feedback during breaks and also, particularly in the case of *The Penelopiad*, asks her assistant director to provide insights as part of the regular notes session with the entire cast, a strategy that involves them directly in the collaborative act, encourages them to take an active role in the creative process and vividly demonstrates her collaborative, "lead from the center" directorial approach.

As previously stated, Thornton's role as a director is also closely tied to her role as an artistic director. Thus, this propensity to collaborate with and mentor young artists is revealed not only in Thornton's rehearsal hall but also in her larger programming

[388] Christine Brubaker, Interview by the author, Skype, 5 April 2013.

vision for Nightwood. In conversation, Thornton is quick to assert her desire to "open doors" for young women artists in Toronto, and while in our conversation her inclusion of young talent on her production teams went unremarked, she did point to several new play development programs and their importance to her work (as well as to the larger feminist movement and desire for women's empowerment):

> I started a program – which now we don't do but we did for a number of years – called Busting Out, which is…I want to bring in young girls who don't identify themselves as feminist. Like, all the youth programs that we have – Write from the Hip (which was here before I got here) and then Busting Out (which was even earlier, for 12 to 16 year olds) – I wanted to bring in young girls. Number one: that's a really vulnerable age group. They're totally falling through the cracks. Girls are feisty until they hit puberty, and then they lose all their power and they start seeing themselves on billboards in sexualized imagery and it's just—their whole identity goes down the drain and has to be built back up. And yet, they will not call themselves feminist. And a lot of the young girls were like [*makes anxious, scared sound*]. But I think for me, part of my personal mandate, was to try to educate that it [feminist] is not a dirty word and that we should open the doors to young women that don't necessarily identify with it so that they can understand by coming in the door that we're not, you know, angry separatists. We're actually, you know….they agree with the values; if you name the values, they'll agree with everything and then they'll say "But I'm not a feminist."[389]

In her role as the artistic director of Nightwood as well as a director who has long been artistically engaged with social issues and issues of gender in her work, Thornton is on the front lines of this ongoing battle surrounding the term "feminist" and, in keeping with her directorial strategy to "lead from the center," Thornton opts not to fight the battle head-on, per se, but to create opportunities – both as a director in the rehearsal hall and as an artistic director in her company's programming – to foster young (women's) talent by bringing them into the circle and showing them the way from within.

[389] Thornton, Interview.

Beyond the mentorship of and modeling – leading by example from the center of the production – for young women, Kelly Thornton's directorial philosophy of "leading from the center" is also manifested in her behaviors and procedures within the rehearsal hall. In an interview with the *Toronto Star*'s At Home edition, Thornton described herself as a "pretty bold, funky, warm and welcoming person."[390] In fact, in my observations and interactions with Thornton, I found this statement quite true and, to some extent, I believe it is an element of Thornton's personality that feeds and perpetuates her centered approach to leadership. In my journal following my first rehearsal observation of Thornton in rehearsal for *Between the Sheets* by Jordi Mand during the late summer of 2012, for instance, I noted that there was an "energy, sometimes frenetic but always creative and filled with humor" in the air in Thornton's rehearsal hall and a sense of "bold enthusiasm" and "welcoming openness." When I first arrived, for instance, Thornton greeted me with enthusiasm and stopped rehearsal activities to introduce me to the entire cast and crew, a gesture that made me, even as an outside observer, immediately feel welcome and part of the team.

Actor-Centered

That same welcoming, inclusive and collaborative nature and an openness to receiving input from all involved in the process, which is demonstrated in Thornton's mentorship of young talent, also very much seems to infuse Kelly Thornton's interactions with her actors – yet another aspect of the strategies and philosophies that distinguish Thornton's particular directorial approach. In working with actors in the rehearsal hall,

[390] Kathryn Kates, "Kelly's Thornton's house has heart and energy," *Toronto Star – Homes*, 4 October 2008, http://www.thestar.com/life/health_wellness/2008/10/04/kelly_thorntons_house_has_heart_and_energy.html (accessed 1 July 2013).

Thornton continues to "lead from the center" by deconstructing the traditional directorial hierarchy and encouraging the actors to engage and invest in the development of the production. Thus, another sub-theme that can be drawn from Thornton's work and narrative is an actor-centered approach to directing. In Thornton's words, "I give everybody voice. Um, it's a very collaborative room."[391] In observing Thornton, this approach becomes quite apparent. In both sets of rehearsals that I attended, Thornton welcomed and encouraged her actors' input. In *Between the Sheets* rehearsals, for instance, Thornton and the actors were in the middle of the rehearsal process, still fine-tuning blocking and exploring character development. At this point in the process, she regularly touched base with the actors at the start of the rehearsal as well as after breaks to see how the actors would prefer to proceed, offering them the options "to review or push ahead." Moreover, in rehearsals for both *Between the Sheets* and *The Penelopiad* Thornton frequently asked the actors how it "feels on the inside," and often this question preceded any of her directorial notes, a strategy that seemed to encourage actors' investment and elicited actor-centered feedback. Additionally, while in the midst of blocking and character-building rehearsals such as I observed with *Between the Sheets*, Thornton allowed her actors ample time to feel out the scene and come to decisions on their own regarding their character's logical response and movement. In fact, following rehearsal one afternoon, Thornton spent nearly an hour with one of the *Between the Sheets* actors who had gotten "stuck in a jag" about a particular aspect of her character and simply needed the time and space to talk it through with Kelly in greater detail than

[391] Thornton, Interview.

the regular rehearsal timeframe would allow.[392] While this additional time did admittedly cut into Thornton's other scheduled obligations (specifically my individual interview with her which was fortunately flexible in scheduling), Thornton intuited that the actor required this time to wrestle with the character, and while she engaged in conversation with the actor about it, offering questions and possible options for the character's objective, Thornton was careful not to dictate the actor's choice but rather sought to facilitate the actor's creative process.

As a collaborative director with a "lead from the center" approach, Thornton is also very cognizant and respectful of her actors' time and emotional states. After a technical rehearsal for *The Penelopiad* which ran especially late into the evening, Thornton opted to email and hand-deliver notes to the actors the following day rather than requiring the actors to stay any longer after an already taxing day. While she did not eschew the post-run-through feedback process entirely, Thornton took time to discuss first how the actors felt about the run-through and then to note her major critiques that were applicable for the ensemble before she dismissed the actors for the evening, remaining in the space with her production team for an additional hour to work through technical notes before the next day's final dress rehearsal. It is perhaps also interesting to note that as part of the truncated, late night notes session, Thornton and the cast also shared a pitcher of beer from the bar which is housed in and adjacent to the Buddies in Bad Times' performance space, as this action, however small, is demonstrative of the sense of ensemble, community, and respect created within Thornton's rehearsal space.

[392] Thornton, Interview.

At the Center of the Action (or, "On her feet")

However, despite her collaborative nature and inclusive approach to working with actors, Thornton does not always simply sit back and watch from her seat behind the director's table; rather, she frequently is on her feet, interacting with actors in and around the space. Certainly, this involvement further demonstrates her desire to lead from the center, as she literally moves to the center of the action rather than sitting back and observing from the sidelines. This readiness to leap into the fray may be due in part to her own training as an actor as well as her personality and boundless energy. As noted by an actor who has worked with Thornton on several productions, Thornton is flexible with boundaries and "has no problem jumping across the room and getting in there";[393] moreover, nearly every page of my rehearsal observation notes for both *Between the Sheets* and *The Penelopiad* indicate that Thornton was on her feet, moving with the actors and entering the playing space. In *Between the Sheets*, Thornton undoubtedly offered opportunities for the actors to process and respond to the play and their place within the play – particularly at the beginning and end of the rehearsals; however, throughout the rehearsal period, she regularly leapt to her feet, inspired by an idea or an actor's question, and bounded into the playing space. While Thornton's frequent presence in the playing space could be read as an invasion of the actors' space and an act of control rather than healthy collaboration, my observation was that the actors' responses to Thornton's physical presence was positive and receptive. They seemed to welcome her energy, and in fact some seemed to feed off of it, returning to the scene with more focus and intensity than during the previous run. It is perhaps this active engagement as modeled by

[393] Brubaker, Interview.

Thornton in these moments that then feeds their excitement and engagement in the material and Thornton's directorial vision. As one actor noted, Thornton's active and often physical engagement in the actors' work allows for "these crazy moments of indulgence" which are "a real strength of hers" and ultimately reinforce to the actors that there is flexibility within Thornton's directorial vision, through which they can then find a sense of ownership. In the words of one actor, "she is always present with us," open and willing to listen to and incorporate the actors' input into the final product. In this way, Thornton's energetic, active directorial approach embodies Anne Bogart's thoughts on the importance of risk and presence in the rehearsal space: "In the heat of creation, there is no time for reflection; there is only connection to what is happening. The analysis, the reflection and the criticism belong before and after, never during, the creative act."[394] Thus, Thornton's presence and active collaboration in the rehearsal space allows for the possibility of creative risks – both on the part of the actors and the director.

Thornton's desire to be an active participant and collaborator on stage during the rehearsal process did not seem to end when the production moves into the final phases of the production process. My observations of *The Penelopiad*, for instance, occurred during the final technical rehearsals, and during breaks in which the lighting cues were being re-written or sound levels were being re-set, Thornton moved to the stage, giving specific notes to specific actors in hushed tones, individualizing the feedback for each actor and thus making her feel part of the ensemble and essential to the production. As one actor observed, for Thornton collaboration means that her personal, social, and

[394] Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 50.

artistic "boundaries blur in and through and around" and as a result, "she doesn't mind other people's boundaries doing that, too."[395] While some directors might flinch or resist entering the playing space for fear that it would be perceived as too demonstrative or a directorial admonishment to "do it this way," Thornton's directorial philosophy of "leading from the center" seems to require and feed off of this active, hands-on approach.

This blurring of boundaries between roles and traditionally hierarchical power also may account for what I observed to be a rather casual rehearsal room atmosphere. For instance, in rehearsals for *Between the Sheets*, I was fascinated to note that rehearsals often did not begin right on time as I had observed in other professional rehearsal situations, and there were numerous moments during which Thornton entertained lengthy discussions with the cast and crew – occasionally in regard to the script itself but also about larger issues that may (or may not) impact the world of the play. While this casual atmosphere could be due in part to the fact that the play was only a "two-hander" or that the actors cast in the roles were respected and established Canadian actors – Susan Coyne, who has had a long career on the Canadian stage and screen as a writer and actor in such things as the TV mini-series *Slings and Arrows*, and Christine Horne, an emerging talent on the Toronto theatre and, to some extent, film scene – such a casual atmosphere could also potentially work against Thornton if she was faced with actors who were less reliable or professional. Or, perhaps her willingness to get on her feet and work with the actors is simply because Thornton is working with woman actors and, therefore, a more inherently collaborative setting is created which allows this casual atmosphere to be more possible? While the specific answer to these questions might be

[395] Brubaker, Interview.

difficult to pinpoint, Thornton notes that, for her, the opportunity for all actors to collaborate and have a voice in the process does not reduce her authority but augments it, for, because of this directorial strategy, all are invested in the same process and are working toward the same goal. Thornton observes that while she encourages collaboration, "I still have the authority. I actually think you have more authority when you are not afraid to let other people speak."[396] For Thornton, bringing her actors and other collaborators into the process as well as joining them as an active participant in the process is key to her understanding of directorial leadership and her desire to lead from the center. By asking for her actors' input and allowing them to have voice and agency, Thornton builds a level of trust and respect in the rehearsal hall. Per her role as director, Thornton has power and is tasked with unifying the production under her vision, but she feels that because she takes the time to build this trust and to recognize the actors' input the actor will more readily respond to her direction than if she forced her ideas on them. Although she may be leading from the center and from among her "troops," she has more authority because she involves them in the process, putting them in the center of her focus.

Looking at Women in all Directions

If Thornton as a director is interested in "leading from the center" (a rather holistic and circular metaphor) then, interestingly enough, another similarly holistic metaphor characterizes a another sub-theme of her directorial work and philosophy: a consideration and depiction of "women in all directions." Much like the other directors included in this study, Thornton's directorial work is created with a specific community

[396] Thornton, Interview.

in mind, and for Thornton it is, per her position as Nightwood's artistic director but also per her own directorial prerogative, the community of women. Thus, in addition to being awarded the aforementioned YWCA Women of Distinction Award, in 2004, Thornton won the Pauline McGibbon award, an award presented to early career theatre professionals in Ontario who have "displayed a unique talent and a potential for excellence."[397] In presenting the award to Thornton, the award committee identified her work in furthering women's stories as part of her unique directorial contribution, hailing her a "theatrical trailblazer…responsible for bringing the best of women's theatre to the masses."[398]

However, what is "the best of women's theatre"? Certainly, the terms "best" and "women's theatre" are both questionable and ambiguous. My assumption is that "women's theatre" refers to theatre by and about women, much like that produced by Nightwood as a feminist theatre company.[399] However, my concern is not the semantics of these words; rather it is how these descriptors are characterized and embodied by Thornton's work. Despite these accolades, some critics and patrons argue that Thornton does not always bring the "best" of women's theatre, or perhaps more accurately the "best of women," to the masses. For instance, after having seen a production programmed as part of Thornton's Nightwood season in 2011, one of my Canadian colleagues observed that she did not think the production painted a particularly

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[397] Ontario Arts Council, "Pauline McGibbon Award," http://www.arts.on.ca/Page136.aspx (accessed 1 June 2013).

[398] Desiree O, "Kelly Thornton: Theatrical Trailblazer," *Shameless Magazine* (6 November 2008) http://www.shamelessmag.com/blog/2008/11/kelly-thornton-theatrical-trailblazer/ (accessed 1 May 2013).

[399] In light of the earlier discussion about Nightwood's evolving mandate and the distinction between women's theatre and feminist theatre, I do find it interesting that "women's theatre" was used rather than "feminist theatre." Admittedly, the phrases are often used interchangeably, but when one considers each term's meaning and connotation, it becomes clear that they are not precise synonyms.

heartening picture of contemporary womanhood and therefore was not appropriate for Nightwood's feminist (or women-centered) mandate. Further, after seeing *Between the Sheets*, which examines the complicated nature of contemporary womanhood in its depiction of a meeting between a middle aged, career-oriented mother and her son's young teacher (and her husband's mistress), one audience member complained that Thornton's production "proves to be entirely anti-feminist" because the play indicated that "women can't have their cake and eat it too."[400]

However, Thornton counters these critiques by noting an element that guides her directorial choices: "I don't feel it's my job [as a director] to just tell heroic stories about women. I feel it's my job to tell, to look at women in all directions. To look at our, how flawed we can be and, you know, how brave we can be. I don't think it's like, just tell the, you know, the stories of our successes."[401] Subsequently, many of Thornton's directorial endeavors assume a political stance. However, as noted by an actor who has worked with Thornton significantly, this politicized nature and Thornton's willingness to "go there politically" is "her huge strength" as a director and artist.[402] According to Thornton, "it's about looking at women in all directions and really for us to really tell women's stories. To just tell women's stories is a political – especially in the climate where not enough women's stories are being told – it's political to just stand here and tell a woman's story."[403] Thus, while, as discussed in the overview of Thornton's work and in conversations with several artists who know Thornton's work, her directorial "palate

[400] Martin Morrow, "Straight As for a tense, awkward parent-teacher interview," *Globe and Mail,* 25 Sept 2012, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/theatre-reviews/straight-as-for-a-tense-awkward-parent-teacher-interview/article4567792/ (accessed 5 October 2012).
[401] Thornton, Interview.
[402] Brubaker, Interview.
[403] Thornton, interview.

has been vast and huge," she also is, by and large, willing to take risks in her play's content so as to consider women, and people, more broadly, from all angles and directions. Thornton herself, in fact, is hard pressed to identify a single, particular directorial aesthetic that encompasses all of her work, and in our interview, she pointed to the diversity of her work – from the "theatrical invention" of *The Penelopiad* and the "intense, intense situation" and "deep emotional performances" of *Between the Sheets* and *The Danish Play* – as her directorial stamp.[404] However, this notion of showing women in all directions seems to underlie, feed and propel her artistic politics and directorial selections.

This notion of showing women in all directions then can be seen in her directorial play selections as well as her casting and rehearsal techniques. Although it received some accusations of being "anti-feminist," *Between the Sheets* was more frequently noted for its complicated portrayal of the women's relationships and the way in which it "takes an all-too-familiar scenario – a young woman's relationship with an older married man and the wounded wife's reaction – and *examines it from all the angles*."[405] Moreover, in rehearsal, Thornton's directorial mission to show women in all their colors and directions (which also is arguably reflective of her early collegiate interests in psychology) manifests itself in her encouragement to actors to explore the psychology of their characters. Christine Brubaker, an actor who has worked with Thornton on multiple productions including *The Danish Play* and the original staging of *The Penelopiad*, observed that in all of the Kelly Thornton productions she has worked on, Thornton

[404] Ibid.

[405] Martin Morrow, "Straight As for a tense, awkward parent-teacher interview," *Globe and Mail,* 25 Sept 2012, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/theatre-reviews/straight-as-for-a-tense-awkward-parent-teacher-interview/article4567792/ (accessed 5 October 2012). Emphasis mine.

pushes her actors to investigate and discover the psyches of and the relationships between the play's characters: "'Who are these people?' Kelly brings that to the table immediately. So it's story, story, story. Relationship, relationship, relationship."[406] In this drive to consider the characters in all of their complicated dimensions, Thornton strives to help an actor understand why he or she is engaging in a particular action. This strategy was further evident in the rehearsal hall, for she entertained actors' questions about character development at length and, in *Between the Sheets* in particular, encouraged them to draw on their characters' emotions to achieve the proper emotional "ramp" to a climactic scene.

Use of humor

While mining these psychological and emotional depths of character might be potentially taxing on the actors, Thornton tends to balance it with a boisterous, sometimes off-color sense of humor. Her large laugh frequently echoes through the rehearsal hall, both as part of personal conversations and at appropriate moments in the script, and she also is quick to offer up a joking comment or remark, particularly when providing notes to actors following an especially intense emotional acting moment. Although some of her humor may be shocking or perceived as off-color – such as her regular reminders to the actors of the psychological drama *Between the Sheets* to not "blow your wad too soon" – it is perhaps because of the off-color nature of these remarks in a professional (and feminist) environment that they receive a smirk or chuckle from the cast and crew. Through these comments Thornton demonstrates that this is a safe environment where humor and risk-taking creative behaviors are encouraged and supported. As noted by

[406] Brubaker, Interview.

sociologists and scholars of interpersonal communication, humor can not only relieve tension in a group work situation (like a rehearsal) but also increase a sense of ensemble or community. According to Dr. Paul McGhee, one of the earliest advocates for the study of humor's impact on human behavior, "Shared laughter and the spirit of fun generates a bonding process in which people feel closer together— especially when laughing in the midst of adversity."[407] Beyond group cohesion and tension relief, humor can also enhance creativity, as an environment which includes laughter also relaxes individuals, thus reducing the risk of harsh criticism and encouraging greater creative risk-taking.[408] While these comments are true of humor in the workplace, they can also be applied to Thornton's directorial techniques in the rehearsal hall in which intensely theatrical or psychological moments must be rehearsed multiple times over. As Anne Bogart posits, "Without embracing the risk, there can be no progress and no adventure. To attempt to perform articulately from a state of imbalance and risk imbues the action with extraordinary energy" and, I would add in the case of Kelly Thornton, extraordinary humor.[409]

Thornton's idea of showing *all* aspects of women, however, runs contrary to many feminists and feminist theatre scholars. Noelia Hernando-Real and Barbara Ozieblo, for instance, write in their edited collection of essays *Performing Gender Violence* that it is "important for women playwrights to create female characters that will

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[407] Qtd in Eric Romero and Kevin Cruthirds, "The Use of Humor in the Workplace," *Academy of Management Perspectives* (May 2006): 61.

[408] Eric Romero and Kevin Cruthirds, "The Use of Humor in the Workplace," *Academy of Management Perspectives* (May 2006): 62.

[409] Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 48.

be positive role models for women, rather than…'monsters.'"[410] While Hernando-Real and Ozieblo are referring here to women playwrights, I believe that some feminists would also extend it to women directors. However, for Thornton, it seems that considering these monstrous aspects of femininity and womanhood is also essential to examining the role and depiction of women in contemporary society, an attitude that more closely follows Eleanor Wachtel's assertion that "a feminist theater need not mirror a particular image but simply include women in its reflection – albeit in ways that are not culturally sanctioned within the patriarchy."[411] Thus, through complex portrayals of women, many of which are further propelled by Thornton's probing questions in rehearsal that ask the actor to get inside the character's head, Thornton and her directorial work speak back to and subvert these "culturally sanctioned" heroically positive images of women.

Other theatre artists also seem to echo Thornton's artistic desire to look at women in all directions. A recent blog post by American theatre artist Rachel Grossman, for instance, critiques the "pseudo-post-feminist" contemporary culture and notes that, as a "Gen-X artist, administrator, and newly emerged organizational leader who is trying to find her grounding in a field dominated by male leaders, hierarchical organizational structures, and coded language, in which appearances often matter more than knowledge or skill, monetization metrics more than impact, product more than process," she is often asked, because of her gender, "to carry forth the responsibilities of creating theater that holds to gender equity as a guiding principle and presents positive images of women.

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[410] Noelia Herndando-Real and Barbara Ozieblo, "Introduction," in *Performing Gender Violence: Plays by Contemporary American Women Dramatists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

[411] Eleanor Wachtel, "Two steps forward," *Canadian Theatre Review – Feminism and Theatre* 43 (Summer 1985): 9.

Kind of a lot to put on a girl."[412] In a commentary worth citing at length, Grossman continues,

> As an ensemble theater artist, I believe I can and should make shows with any mix of male or female characters in order to shape the strongest, most complex experience and tell the best story. I rely on the assistance of my collaborators to shape characters appropriate to the world we're creating within the world in which we live. The dogs and ponies [a theatre ensemble working in Washington DC] draw inspiration from pop culture and traditional narratives, and mash them up into recognizable contemporary archetypes—sometimes in positive and other times in less-than-flattering light. I would be lying if I said I didn't feel beholden to present positive female leaders…As I surface as a leader and mentor—for artists, producers, and administrators, female and male—I find myself exploring the whole picture with them—the pink, blue, and purple areas.[413]

In these words – particularly the notion of "exploring the whole picture" and the "pink, blue and purple areas" – Grossman echoes Thornton's directorial and political mandate, despite the critique of feminists who wish to see only positive representations of women fill the stage of a feminist theatre company. Thus, perhaps Thornton's feminist philosophy is the mark of a developing turn and expanded philosophy in feminist thought and performance.

Inclusion and Diversity

Of course, Thornton's directorial intention to "show women in all directions" is not without its challenges, as some of her artistic colleagues in Toronto also question portrayals of diversity within the feminist, politically-oriented theatre staged by Thornton. One Toronto artist of color noted, "That's why Nightwood is around, right?

[412] Rachel Grossman, "A Lot to Put on a Girl: Playmaking in Pseudo-Post-Feminist America," *HowlRound* blog, 26 April 2013 (http://www.howlround.com/a-lot-to-put-on-a-girl-playmaking-in-pseudo-post-feminist-america?utm_source=HowlRound.com%27s+Email+Communications&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=d7b8ef5d85-DAILY_RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN (accessed 1 June 2013). Emphasis mine.
[413] Ibid..

To fight for women's voices. They've had very diverse choices, but for me, they're still very white. And I still can't relate. Like even I still don't feel at home in their theatre. Like they're very white and very middle class."[414] While this artist does not deny the work that Thornton is doing for the community of women, these sentiments (recorded in 2012) echo those uttered in a long-standing feminist debate; as Teresa deLauretis penned in 1988, "the first feminist emphasis on sexual difference as gender (women's difference from man) has rightly come under attack for obscuring the effects of other differences in women's psychosocial oppression."[415] While Thornton as an artistic director and a director writ large intends to consider women in all directions, this task is undoubtedly problematic and challenging.

However, a look at Thornton's oeuvre – particularly within her Nightwood career in which we see the majority of her major directorial work occur and a definite feminist association – reveals her attempts toward addressing these issues of diversity within the community of women. For instance, Thornton's production of *China Doll* by Marjorie Chan in 2004 dealt explicitly with issues of race and featured a cast comprised entirely of Asian-Canadian actors. Additionally, *Bear with Me*, written by Diane Flacks and directed by Thornton in 2005 considers motherhood from a queer, lesbian perspective, while issues of age (an area often overlooked when considering issues of diversity within the feminist movement) are broached in *Mathilde*, directed by Thornton in 2006 as well as the recent *Between the Sheets*, which folds issues of age and perceptions of women at various ages into its discussion of sexual infidelity. Undoubtedly, when attempting to

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[414] Anonymous, Interview by author, Toronto, ON, 6 September 2012.

[415] Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," *Theatre Journal* 40, vol. 2 (May 1988): 155.

reach the larger community of women, there are multiple lenses through which to peer, making it difficult to satisfy all in one moment or one production. Thus, while women are the community for which and to whom Thornton's directorial work speaks, her mission to see them in all directions proves difficult to accomplish at all times.

To her credit, Kelly Thornton recognizes this difficulty, even expanding her discussion of diversity to recognize the difficulty of reaching beyond Canadian borders:

> Diversity is a thing that we are constantly trying to– we constantly are having discussions about, like trying to keep as much diversity [as possible]. We have a couple of writers in development that are from diverse communities. But in terms of the global issues, I think that's—occasionally I get recommendations like, "Oh, here's an Iranian playwright that came through somebody." But it's hard to go any further because it's a play that needs development and she's in Iran. Anyway, so it's still a bit of a puzzle for us to solve, but I certainly think that in terms of the subject matter, the kind of issues we should be dealing with [it is important]. We have to start looking at those.[416]

Although Thornton may not be experimenting with form in the way that Kim Collier is exploring and deconstructing the relationship between technology and live performance as in *Tear the Curtain!*, she is speaking to a specific audience community and probing political topics in her pieces – both currently and pre-Nightwood. What's more, Thornton's energetic and collaborative rehearsal environment fosters a sense of ownership and investment for the actors both in her as a director-leader and in the production itself. As actor Christine Brubaker notes, "I feel supported by the direction as an actor in [Kelly's] stories; that my story, my problem, my issues, my conundrums – no matter how big or small – will be addressed and considered as a great [or important] as my costume or set." Perhaps even more tellingly, Brubaker notes that she would work

[416] Thornton, Interview.

for Kelly (as well as Jillian Keiley whose work and methods are explored further in Chapter 5) "in a heartbeat…I will drop everything and will figure out how to make it work, just because I have such respect for their work and the relationships they create."[417]

This strong sense of actor-investment, collaboration, and ensemble-based relationships fostered by Thornton in her role as a director is perhaps most notably demonstrated in her production of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, first staged for Nightwood in January 2012 and re-mounted the following year. In fact, Thornton herself indicated that *The Penelopiad* was a "coming out" of sorts for her directorially in that it proved to the Toronto theatre community that she was not only the Nightwood Theatre artistic director but also a director in her own right.[418] As Thornton noted in our interview:

> I think people have noticed me for a long time, you know. I think certainly people respect me as a director, and I've got quite a long list of good, great well-reviewed shows. But I think when, when I staged *The Penelopiad* last year I think it was such a huge – the scope of it was so huge and the spectacle, Atwood's script allows for that kind of spectacle – and it's multi-locational but it's very simple in terms of how we staged it. It's very physical theatre. There's a lot of imagination how we go from one place to another with very simple set pieces that just kind of change and the bodies create the imagery…Someone said to me, "You know, you've always been respected but I think people were like, 'Oh my god!' with *The Penelopiad*." [*laughing*] It was like, "Wow! She can really direct!"[419]

Throughout my conversations and interactions with Thornton, she discussed her diverse directorial interests and production styles; however, repeatedly in both our interview and subsequent informal discussions, Thornton pointed to *The Penelopiad* as an exemplar of her work. Thornton employed it as an example more often than she did any of her other

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[417] Brubaker, Interview.
[418] Thornton, Interview.
[419] Ibid.

previous works, and her staging earned her a Dora Award nomination for Best Direction in 2012 and ultimately won an award for Best Ensemble Acting. In fact, the popular and critical response to the production was such that Nightwood re-mounted the production in January 2013, and I was then able to observe Thornton in a series of final rehearsals as well as opening performances of the show. Moreover, *The Penelopiad* is arguably a feminist and "very Canadian" play, two characteristics that speak to particular areas of interest to this study.

***The Penelopiad*: A Case Study**

"Now that I'm dead, I know everything." With these words begins *The Penelopiad*, an adaptation of the Odysseus myth by Canadian literary icon (and author of the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*) Margaret Atwood. In Atwood's adaptation, Penelope, Odysseus's faithful wife and, as Atwood quips, the first "desperate housewife" – "Absent husband, teenage son giving lip and breaking curfew, louts gobbling up foodstuffs, a servant problem – who wouldn't be desperate?" – reveals her side of the events depicted in Homer's *The Odyssey*.[420] In a manner similar to Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (but in an arguably more explicitly feminist manner), Atwood's take on the Homeric epic brings Penelope's voice to the fore, as she – now a resident of the underworld – recounts the events of her life: from her birth and near-drowning by her superstitious father (thank goodness she was saved by a flock of purple striped ducks) to her marriage at 15 years old to the wily Odysseus and her clever but deadly scheme to save herself from the

[420] Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad – The Play* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 2.

suitors who appeared during her husband's long absence.[421] While the Penelope that appeared in Homer's myth was chaste, patient and the faithful wife, now in the afterlife, she has a chance to tell the story herself:

> Down here everyone arrives with a sack. Each one is full of words – words you've spoken, words you've heard, words that have been said about you. Some sacks are very small, others large; my own is of a reasonable size, though a lot of the words in it concern my eminent husband. […] After I was dead, they turned me into a story; though not the kind of story I would have preferred to hear. I waited. I waited some more. Now that all the others have run out of air, it's my turn. Once, people would have laughed if I'd tried to play the minstrel – there's nothing more preposterous than an aristocrat fumbling around in the arts – but who cares about public opinion now? The opinion of shadows, of echoes. So I'll spin a thread of my own.[422]

As part of this "thread," Penelope reveals her story as well as the story of her twelve handmaidens – maids who are only mentioned in passing in the original Homeric epic. Maids who during the siege of suitors are conscripted by Penelope to help fend off the lustful, horny men using *all* of their feminine wiles and then are hanged when Odysseus returns to Ithaca and determines he must cleanse his palace from their filth. Filled with typically Atwoodian wry humor and poetic, mythic language, *The Penelopiad* turns the traditional male-centered myth of *The Odyssey* on its head, giving voice to its female characters – Penelope and her twelve handmaidens – and ultimately offers a complex critique of gender, class, war, and the "fairness" of "justice."

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[421] The true "feminist" intent of Ruhl's plays such *Eurydice* is arguable. While many critics have dubbed *Eurydice* a "feminist" play because it places the often-overlooked women's story at the center, others have resisted this label, preferring to consider Ruhl a playwright who writes plays about women rather than a playwright who writes feminist plays. Interestingly, this discussion echoes the early labeling of Nightwood as a "feminist" theatre company simply due to the fact that four women founded and ran it. I would, however, argue that re-visioning a historical, traditionally patriarchal story from a woman's perspective can and is a feminist venture. Some re-visionings, like Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, are more politically and obviously feminist.

[422] Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad – The Play* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 3, 5.

There are multiple layers of adaptation, of telling and re-telling and, in production of staging and re-staging, at work in *The Penelopiad.* As Atwood herself so eloquently and poetically claims, the play is "an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo of an echo."[423] While the first three echoes are the story's origins in oral history of the Trojan War, Homer's *The Odyssey* itself, and the post-Homeric re-tellings of the Trojan War stories by later writers, the fourth echo is Atwood's novella *The Penelopiad*, first published in 2005 as one of the first contributions to British publisher Canongate's initiative to create 100 myth revisions by the year 2038.[424] The fifth echo was a 40 minute reading of a dramatized version of the novella, which grew from conversations with British director Phyllida Lloyd and in which Atwood herself played Penelope: "I read the part of Penelope on that occasion and lived to tell the tale."[425] Clearly something went well in that reading, for it led to a sixth echo: the full stage adaptation of *The Penelopiad.*

The first performance of the stage version of *The Penelopiad* occurred in the United Kingdom in 2007 and was crafted as a joint production between Canada's National Arts Center (a company currently under the artistic leadership of another director featured in this dissertation, Jillian Keiley, but at that time under the leadership of Keiley's predecessor, Peter Hinton) and the United Kingdom's Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Considering Canada's tenuous, post-colonial relationship with and attitudes toward Great Britain, this collaboration is rather interesting and unexpected. To

[423] Margaret Atwood, "Author's Introduction," *The Penelopiad – The Play* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), v.

[424] Margaret Atwood, a mainstay in Canadian literature for her novels and non-fiction work, and author Jeannette Winterston were the first to accept the challenge, creating adaptations of the Odysseus and Atlas myths respectively.

[425] Atwood, vi.

that end, the 2007 production was hailed by critics in both countries and Atwood herself as an "unprecedented" collaborative venture, and although helmed by British director Josette Bushell-Mingo, it featured an acting ensemble of six Canadian and six British actors.[426] After opening at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 2007, the production was slightly revised by Atwood and then traveled to Canada's National Arts Center (NAC) in Ottawa. Despite this being an "unprecedented" collaboration between the two countries and a play by Canada's darling Atwood, the RSC/NAC production received decidedly mixed reviews overall, citing uneven acting, inconsistent pacing, and "a production seriously out of balance."[427]

Since the RSC/NAC production, several productions of *The Penelopiad* have been staged throughout Canada, and perhaps one of the most significant is Nightwood Theatre's. In 2012, Nightwood first staged Atwood's tale at Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, and then returned to re-mount the production in January 2013. Directed by Thornton and starring Megan Follows (an accomplished actress perhaps best known throughout Canada and the world as Anne Shirley in the *Anne of Green Gables* TV series of the mid-1980s), Nightwood's production of *The Penelopiad* is notable for multiple reasons, and it also speaks to Thornton's directorial sensibilities on several levels.

Nightwood's status as the oldest women's theatre in Canada and its accompanying feminist mandate seem fitting complements for Atwood's feminist re-telling of the Odysseus myth. Further, not only is Nightwood an apt venue for this show but the production itself earned accolades and garnered significant critical attention for

[426] Atwood, viii.

[427] Catherine Lawson, "An enthralling Penelopiad," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 23 September 2007.

both of its stagings. Following the 2012 production, Nightwood's *The Penelopiad* received nominations for six Dora Awards – for outstanding production, direction, choreography, set design, costume, and performance of an ensemble. The production ultimately won for Best Ensemble Acting, as the actors playing the maids all not only took on multiple roles to tell the story but also their bodies often formed parts of the set (such as chairs in the dining room at Penelope's in-laws in Ithaca or the boat, with Penelope forming the figurehead at the bow in the iconic boat scene when Odysseus sails to Ithaca, as pictured in Figure 4). Moreover, the women performed precise choreography and musical numbers. So tight that, as one reviewer noted and I observed in rehearsals, if one actor was off the error was glaring.[428]

Figure 4. Sailing to Ithaca (2012). Photo by Robert Popkin. Courtesy of Nightwood Theatre.

[428] Dorianne Emmerton, "Review: The Penelopiad," *Mooney on Theatre* blog, http://www.mooneyontheatre.com/2012/01/14/review-the-penelopiad-nightwood-theatre/ (accessed 1 March 2013).

At first glance, *The Penelopiad* – both on the page and stage – is decidedly feminist in content and form. The combination of this ensemble of women and Atwood's re-telling of the story that places Penelope and the maids' story at its center speaks to the feminist nature of the play, but Thornton's staging worked to further accentuate that feminist intent in several ways. First, from the opening moment, Penelope is fully in control of our attention on stage and therefore the story, as a door opens in the blackness and Penelope walks out, smoke billowing around her, her white dress shining in the light. This reveal is quite a spectacle and a powerful visual moment but it also gives Penelope center stage, literally. More than half of the rest of the text belongs to Penelope, and often Thornton has Penelope deliver her monologic moments at center stage – visually reminding us of to bring the marginalized stories to the center.

Figure 5. Megan Follows as Penelope (2012). Photo by Robert Popkin. Courtesy of Nightwood Theatre.

Moreover, the play's inclusion of the twelve handmaids who act as the Greek chorus further the feminist message both through the text and visually in performance. Like a traditional chorus, the maids and their songs punctuate Penelope's story, commenting on the events and, by interrupting her story, haunting her:

> we are the maids
> the ones you killed
> the ones you failed
>
> we danced on air
> our bare feet twitched
> it was not fair[429]

As they chant, the maids spin large ropes in the air and beat them rhythmically on the floor, evoking a childlike sense of jump rope but visually hinting at what would become their demise – all in physical and vocal unison.

Moreover, in nearly all of the choruses that punctuate and comment upon the play's action, the maids' stories and experiences are central.[430] Frequently, they refer to themselves and their stories rather than focusing on Penelope's story alone – allowing them to own the story of *The Penelopiad* as much as Penelope. For instance, following Penelope's narration of her birth and infant experience of being saved from drowning by a flock of purple ducks, the maids perform a chorus entitled "Kiddie Mourn, a Lament"

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[429] This phrase "we are the maids/the ones you killed/the ones you failed" is repeated again in the second act, further reinforcing the haunting lyrics and rhythm in Penelope's psyche. Atwood, 4.

[430] Only twice during the choral numbers do the maids not draw their own experiences into the mix. First, at the end of the first act, they take on the roles of sailors and sing of the "wily Odysseus" and his journeys in an ode that functions largely as exposition. However, while the maids do not claim the story as their own, the simple fact that the twelve maids tell of Odysseus' adventures ensures they remain at the center of the story. The second instance in which the maids do not bring in their own experiences is during the song they sing while weaving (and unweaving) the shroud with Penelope. Unlike the other odes, however, which stand apart from the action often in their own scenes or performative moments, the weaving song is part of the overall action of the scene, which may explain why it does not include the maids' perspective as the others do.

which connects Penelope's birth to their own: "We too were children. We too were born to the wrong parents." However, within moments, the maids' story points to the differences between Penelope's circumstance and their own; unlike Penelope whose parents were a king and a demi-goddess (a Naiad), the maids were born to "poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents; parents who sold us, parents from whom we were stolen."[431] In Thornton's staging, this and all choruses are performed with the women moving in unison; even if they speak individually, it is difficult to pinpoint from which mouth the words come, as the visual and aural effect points to the power of the collective body and voice of women. These moments not only demonstrate Thornton's ability to create community in rehearsal and in performance but also draw attention to the class differences at work in the play, which create an imbalance of power between Penelope and her maids and about which Atwood seems to be commenting.

Figure 6. Penelope and the Maids in "The Birth of Telemachus" (2013). Photo by John Lauener. Courtesy of Nightwood Theatre.

[431] Atwood, 9.

Of particular note here is that the cast is entirely made up of thirteen women – Penelope and twelve maids. Atwood notes in her introduction to the script that the chorus could be "all female, mixed, or even all male"; however, for the Nightwood production Thornton chose to maintain the all-female ensemble. Thus, in addition to playing the Greek chorus, the ensemble members also played multiple other roles in the play – male and female. Odysseus, for instance, was played by Kelli Fox, and the love scenes between Penelope and Odysseus were some of the sexiest love scenes I have witnessed – not because of the gendered and sexual physicality (although Fox inhabited Odysseus' swaggering manliness convincingly) but because of the deep emotional connection Megan Follows and Kelli Fox brought to the stage. Commenting on the Nightwood actors' honest embodiment of the masculine characters within this feminist piece, critic Richard Ouzounian commented that "the way director Kelly Thornton leads her all-female cast to play men more convincingly than most men could makes for a superb evening."[432] Similarly, critic/blogger Katherine O'Brien quipped that "I mean this in the best possible way but these women were all really successful at playing men. Kelli Fox as Odysseus and Maev Beaty as Laertes were particularly adept in this. I swear that's a compliment."[433]

The other maids also played men at various times throughout the play. At one particularly striking moment, following the slow motion rape scene after the suitors discover Penelope's plan to trick them, Thornton had the actors transition from the

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[432] Richard Ouzounian, "Review: The Penelopiad is Stunning Theatre," *Toronto Star*, 12 January 2012, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2012/01/12/review_the_penelopiad_is_stunning_theatre.html (accessed 1 March 2013).

[433] Katherine O'Brien, "Review: The Penelopiad," *Mooney on Theatre* blog, 13 January 2013, http://www.mooneyontheatre.com/2013/01/13/review-the-penelopiad-nightwood-theatre-2/ (accessed 1 March 2013).

obnoxiously arrogant and violent suitors to the wronged maids with simply the shedding of a costume piece. In this way, then, Thornton, through her all-female cast and these cleverly staged moments, provided the possibility for a fluid gender performance – neither entirely male nor entirely female – and reinforced the social construction and performed nature of gender roles ala Judith Butler, as they took on and shook off multiple characters and genders all within the physical body of the female actors. Moreover, by having those transformations happen on stage in a carefully choreographed, stylistic movement served a Brechtian purpose, making what had been familiar strange and drawing the audience's attention to the performance of gender. In so doing, Thornton's staging revealed the "ideology encoded in the plot, language and structures" of the classic text and the performance.[434]

Figure 7. Penelope (Megan Follows) and Odysseus (Kelli Fox). Photo by John Lauener. Courtesy of Nightwood Theatre.

[434] Sharon Friedman, "Introduction," *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 2.

However, a feminist analysis of *The Penelopiad* and Thornton's direction of it is not as simple as it seems. In fact, one of my Canadian colleagues recently mentioned that one of her students, who had seen the January re-mount, had come stomping into her office after seeing the production and had said adamantly, "I don't think it's feminist. At all." Many of my colleague's students debated the production's feminist intentions and wondered why Thornton would not only program this and other plays like it into the Nightwood season but also direct it. It is not, after all, strictly a celebration of women's independence, nor does it contain only positive role models for women, elements which some feminist critics and playwrights advocate for, as Thornton has seen in response to other productions such as the aforementioned *Between the Sheets*. In *The Penelopiad*, the maids are all forced (or coerced, rather) to be objectified, veritably selling and giving themselves to the suitors in their mistress's place and allowing their bodies to be used for the greater good of another woman: Penelope. Moreover, Penelope is the one behind the scheme; thus, she is complicit in the objectification of her faithful servants' bodies and ultimately in the destruction of their lives. Seeing these things happen on stage is then quite powerful, and perhaps even more so when Telemachus, Penelope and Odysseus' son, ordered by his father essentially to "man up" and hang the twelve maids, is played by a woman. As a result, it complicates our witnessing of the event because even though we *understand* Telemachus to be a young man, we *see* women (Penelope) putting other women (the hand maids) in harm's way *and* women (the actor playing Telemachus) killing those women. It is no wonder that my colleague's young feminist student struggled with identifying *The Penelopiad* as a feminist piece.

Perhaps this complicated view of feminism is just the point – both of the play and Thornton's staging. After all, Thornton is firm in stating that her artistic vision and, by extension, her directorial vision for this production is to "look at women in all directions."[435] For Thornton, this seems to mean looking at women who may not be positive role models but women who are complex and face complicated circumstances that may or may not result as the women might intend, and this angle is demonstrated via *The Penelopiad.* As feminist theatre scholars Noelia Hernando-Real and Barbara Ozieblo note, "Women today need protagonists who have dared to fight the expectations of patriarchy in order to fulfill themselves, successfully *or not*…[and] provide new models, women who do – *sometimes* – manage to control, if not triumph over, traumatic experiences."[436] Thus, *The Penelopiad* as a script and story in and of itself fits within that purview, and Penelope fulfills that "sometimes" element of overcoming patriarchal authority in a feminist protagonist model. While she does subvert and resist the larger patriarchy that surrounds her, her resistance comes with a price and at the expense of other women. Further, Atwood's tale, while disturbing that women could perpetuate such horrors on other women, also raises questions of class and, to some extent, race, as Thornton's cast was quite diverse, including women of perceptibly Indian-Canadian, African-Canadian, and First Nations backgrounds. Although race and ethnicity do not specifically factor into the events of the play, Thornton does seem to encourage the practice of particular ethnic beliefs and practices. Prior to the preview performance of *The Penelopiad*, for instance, the actor with First Nations background came through the

[435] Thornton, Interview.

[436] Noelia Hernando-Real and Barbara Ozieblo, "Introduction," *Performing Gender Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4. Emphasis mine.

performance space with a softly smoking, braided bundle of sweetgrass and "smudged" the space, a First Nations' purification ritual that drives negative influences out of a space, allowing good spirits to enter.

Overall, Atwood's tale paints a very complex, and not entirely pretty, picture of the impact of class within women's lives. While the maids were manipulated and sacrificed in part for their lower class backgrounds, Penelope also faces issues of class, particularly as related to gender. As a young upper class woman, Penelope, like the maids, is objectified first by her father who essentially throws her away at birth and then offers her as a prize, then by Odysseus who wins her as a prize in a race, and later by the suitors who seek her kingdom by marrying her. However, she is also the queen and therefore is of a higher class than her handmaids. Thus, she has social, and for that matter financial, power, and that privilege enables her (or actually forces her in that she needs to keep her kingdom intact) to act as she does. The play presents a complicated, multilayered, and, to some degree, accurate portrayal of contemporary women, particularly in times of hardship and war.

Kelly Thornton spoke to this element in our interview:

> *The Penelopiad* is a different, an interesting play because it's—Atwood is really dealing with feminism and classism. So that's an interesting thing because it's about slavery and so it's also—Penelope is very first world kind of woman but she's dealing with, you know, she talks about it's really about a woman coming to terms with her own culpability, that she, you know, she says, "We were like sisters." But really, "go ahead and have sex with them so that I can go to my room and be safe." … So I think Atwood's really exploring the divisions of feminism which have always been kind of pretty provocative subject matter, you know. Like you know, that feminism is a white woman's movement and it's so…..[437]

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[437] Thornton, Interview.

Thornton's words trailed off here, and it seems that Atwood on the page and Thornton on stage are pointing to the fact that feminist stories are not simple but rather that even within the feminist movement and women's groups, there remains a hierarchy, and inequality continues. Moreover, the one who executes and demands the women's deaths is a man, which reinforces the fact that no matter how much power Penelope has, she is still a pawn in a patriarchal game. A pawn with the power of class standing behind her, but a pawn nonetheless. In fact, this costume design of Penelope's wedding garb particularly reinforces this image of her as a chess piece to be taken: "And so I was handed over to Odysseus, like a package of meat. A sort of gilded blood pudding."[438] Even the way she is forced to hop and scurry with small Morticia-Adams-esque steps after being wrapped in the dress (a movement that inevitably received laughs from the audience) implies a woman whose power has been bound.

Figure 8. Penelope (Megan Follows) and her mother (Tara Rosling). Photo by Robert Popkin. Courtesy of Nightwood Theatre.

[438] Atwood, 19.

Part of being a feminist, Thornton's production and directorial method seem to be communicating, is to recognize that we are not only here to celebrate women but to grapple with larger issues related to being a woman and the ways that feminism and the women's experience is complicated by surrounding social structures and issues of privilege within the same group. Moreover, although Odysseus is at war presumably to protect his land and possessions – including his wife and her maids – the play and Thornton's staging show the ways that the terrors of war also reach the homefront; thus, through both Penelope and the maids, we see the impact of war at home and on women of all classes. As actor Kelli Fox posits, *The Penelopiad* and Thornton's directorial choices provide "an opportunity for women to take a certain amount of space onstage, and time, and tell a story about us. And when I say about us, I mean as human beings, in the same way men have been telling stories as human beings for a long time."[439]

A second piece of this puzzle of *The Penelopiad* rests in the fact that it has, since the 2007 RSC/NAC production, been performed on multiple Canadian stages. From Calgary to Vancouver to Winnipeg to Edmonton, theatres across the country are tackling this complicated and witty feminist play. However, when we look at American stages, it is virtually non-existent. Although Boston University did a one night only production of it in February, evidence of other American productions is nonexistent. Why is this? In light of all of the mythical adaptations created on American stages, from Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* and *The Odyssey* to Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, one would presume that a play such as *The Penelopiad* would make its rounds of American stages.

[439] Kelli Fox, qtd in David Berry, "On the Town with The Penelopiad's Megan Follows and Kelli Fox," *National Post,* 4 January 2013, http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/01/04/on-the-town-with-the-penelopiads-megan-follows-and-kelli-fox/ (accessed 10 January 2013).

Perhaps, although I would contend this issue is not entirely insurmountable, it is too Canadian? Kelly Thornton noted:

> It's a *very* Canadian play. Like an original cast member from the British-Canadian co-production between the RSC and NAC came to our opening night here and said, "It's just so great to see a Canadian version of this." And she said, "It's not that, you know, half the company was Canadian last time, but the Brits didn't necessarily understand all of Atwood's jokes. They didn't quite understand the wry humor. And so it's great to hear it in the mouths of an entirely Canadian cast."[440]

Perhaps this "Canadian-ness" explains part of the Nightwood production's success. Unlike the RSC/NAC production, Thornton's was an entirely Canadian cast which featured multicultural actors representative of the Canadian cultural mosaic. Additionally, it featured Canadian cultural icons in Megan Follows, Margaret Atwood, and other major names in the Canadian theatre scene. Not only that, but it was performed at Canada's national women's theatre in Toronto, Atwood's hometown and the English-Canadian theatre capital. However, even after noting that *The Penelopiad* is a "Canadian" play, Thornton also notes that "I don't even know if I can put my finger on it [Canadian-ness] exactly."[441] Thus, while *The Penelopiad* may speak to a Canadian sensibility, the myth of Canadian-ness remains intact, although the myth of gender has been troubled throughout this production via Atwood's text and Thornton's staging.

On Intersecting and Influencing Identities

As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, the second strand of this project considers the various identities such as gender, race, class that influence each director's experiences and methods – identities that are woven into discussions of who each woman is as a

[440] Thornton, Interview.
[441] Ibid.

director and what she believes. All of the directors included in this study work within specific communities; however, those communities are not necessarily communities focused on furthering explicitly feminist concerns or consciously deconstructing gendered notions of behavior as their primary project. Thornton, on the other hand, has the benefit (and challenge) of working in and leading from the center of a feminist – or at least woman-centered – company; therefore, her directorial and personal politics are constantly engaged with notions of feminism. However, because Thornton so regularly engages in feminist artistic discourses, she also has the unique opportunity to influence conceptions of feminism, creating and re-creating her as well as others' perceptions of the often-contested term; this grappling with feminism in all of its dimensions is evident and regularly demonstrated in a consideration of Thornton's directorial oeuvre and specifically in *The Penelopiad.*

On Feminism and Gender

While Thornton carries the mantle of feminism with her in the form of the feminist mandate of Nightwood at all times, she is quick to note her support for an inclusive form of feminism, and, like many of the other directors included in this study, her reluctance to engage in or perpetuate a narrowly-defined feminism. To this end, Thornton recalls her initial interactions with the board members of Nightwood as part of the interview process for the artistic director position she currently holds:

> It was a very politically charged board that interviewed me, and I think they were potentially a little bit afraid [that] I wasn't going to uphold that mandate. I used to joke and say, "Yes, well, my first season will be men, men, men. As the mainstage production." (*laughs*) You know, I totally bought into the mandate. The artists on that hiring committee were right into me; I think the more non-artists on the board, the very politicized women, were more questioning: "Is she

> feminist *enough*?" And I was like, "If it's a private club, I don't really want to be a part of it."

In light of Thornton's professed directorial desire to "look at women from all directions" and to "lead from the center" so as to engage with and include *all* individuals involved in a production, it is not entirely surprising that her view of feminism is somewhat broad and inclusive. Moreover, her humorous and, some might contend, sassy retort further demonstrates Thornton's proclivity to use humor to diffuse a tense situation, as her story directly reflects not only an on-going tension within feminist theoretical discourse regarding the degree to which individuals (for, in some broader conceptions of feminism, men can be and are feminists, too) profess and practice their various feminism(s) but also her intent to challenge, expand and demystify (de-scarify?) for younger generations the meaning of the "f-word." Much like the other directors included in this study, Thornton considers "feminism" to be "really about the struggle for equality" and every human's desire to be "treated as an equal in our society."[442] In a rare moment of complete and absolute seriousness during our interview, Thornton mused about the socio-political complexities of finding true gender equality:

> It's endless when you get into the pit of what it is to truly be equal. It's like, "Well, I want to be treated [equally]. I don't want to sew, I don't want to be on a billboard, I don't want my daughter to have to look at girls in tight jeans looking like…you know." It's an endless struggle. But these are first world issues…and I think we have to keep fighting …for equal [rights] and equality in all sectors. An equal voice at the table. And certainly in politics, getting more women into politics. It's all about women in leadership, really. The world would change if we have an equal voice at the table...That's really a *huge* issue in other parts of the world. We are privileged. We're standing in a very privileged place, but to not even be considered a citizen with any rights in so much of the world is really, you

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[442] Thornton, Interview.

know…I think that's what we should go to war for.[443]

This statement, while indicative of Thornton's inclusive sense of feminism, also alludes to her understanding of the difficulty posed by diversity within the feminist movement as well as her own positionality and privilege as a first world, Canadian woman. As feminist scholar Minnie Bruce Pratt has written, it is only once an individual recognizes her part in the oppression of women that things will ever begin to change, for in that recognition we quickly "begin to understand how false much of our sense of self-importance has been" and recognize that we ultimately "need to find new ways to be in the world."[444] Thus part of Thornton's feminist, directorial mandate seems to be to help her actors and audiences to find, or at least begin to see, those new ways of considering feminism and of "be[ing] in the world."

Another way in which Thornton differs slightly from the other directors included in this study is in her discussion of gender discrimination she has experienced in her professional artistic career. In our interview, Thornton had little to say about the difficulties of working with male actors on productions and the gendered distinction she has experienced in her professional interactions. This omission is likely due to her very public position as the artistic director and, therefore, the primary director for Nightwood. Because of her affiliation with Nightwood and the company's woman-centered stance, Thornton is expected to speak for that community; subsequently, she has received less "flak" from male actors because they assume her identity as a woman (and feminist) is simply part of the gig when hired by Thornton. Also, because of the nature of the plays

[443] Ibid.

[444] Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: skin, blood, heart," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, eds. Carole Ruth McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2010), 267.

Nightwood produces, there are fewer male actors, and while Thornton does collaborate with designers who are men, such as the sound designer for *Between the Sheets*, the majority of the designers on Thornton's creative team during my observations were women; therefore, she presumably has fewer interactions overall with men in this professional capacity. Although gendered encounters and assumptions of gender are not Thornton's primary experience, she does argue for the necessity of women-centered, feminist artistic work like Nightwood's. To this end, she relates a particularly poignant, gendered interaction with a male newspaper critic:

> He interviewed me and then said, "Well, you know, what's the point of a women's theatre company in the 21st century? Aren't we beyond that?" And I was like, "Oh yeah! We're totally….we're enjoying equality in all sectors." And he kind of laughed because, you know, it was clear I was making a joke, but I could see in his eyes that he didn't really get what I was talking about. And I always talk about like this…like, there's a façade of –

On Canadian-ness

As Thornton searched for the proper words to describe the on-going gender disparity and inequality, she instead turned to an illustrative metaphor, one interestingly also connected to constructions of Canadian-ness:

> I equate it to the TransCanada Highway through Canada. [It] has forest on the highway. So when you're driving across the country, you see these beautiful forests and you think, "What a beautiful country I live in!" But if you go a mile in, it's clear cut. They don't want to show the public the clear cuts. So, I always equate the façade – the forest façade – the façade of women in power in Canada in artistic roles. Because at that point [at the time of the interview with the male critic], you had Marti Maraden running the National Arts Centre and you had Jackie Maxwell running the Shaw Festival, and so you're like, "Well, what's the big problem?" And you had Glynis Leyshon running the Vancouver Playhouse. But I was like, "It's a façade. You've got a couple of big leaders, but there's a whole country of theatres. And two or three is not equality, my friend."[445]

[445] Thornton, Interview.

It is perhaps interesting that Thornton's explanation here is linked to her own Canadian identity and sense of Canadian-ness, a second identity marker that this study is particularly interested in exploring. When asked to pinpoint what it means to be a Canadian and a Canadian woman director, Thornton paused a moment before answering,

> I don't know. Maybe it's a deep inferiority complex. (*Laughing loudly*) Well, I mean…Canada does struggle with—you guys [America] are a super power. You take up a lot of space. There's no question that you are, you know, you're a confident nation and you're kind of raised to be, to think that you're the best place in the world. And maybe [Americans engage in] more self-analysis…like, we [Canadians] are in therapy (*Laughs*) with ourselves.[446]

To further illustrate this sense of Canadian-ness, one that *The Penelopiad* also encompasses, Thornton tells of an encounter with a woman from rural North Dakota who, seeing regular reports on the news that cold weather was "coming down from Canada," assumed that winter was the only season that Canadians experienced, which prompted Thornton to realize that

> American education doesn't actually—it has a lot to talk about itself but it doesn't really look outside of itself. Whereas I think Canadians are, we look at ourselves in context. You know, we're kind of constantly battling British and American influences. And you know, Canadian content, Canadian theatre didn't really get going and developing its own voice until the 70s. And before that it was like British and American imports. Yeah. So, we, yeah, we're trying to, you know, struggle against our inferiority complex. We're struggling to, to, to be seen.[447]

Thornton is not alone in perceiving this national identity crisis or inferiority complex. In his article "Canadian-American Relations in a Turbulent Era," Munroe Eagles argues that America considers Canada but minimally; however, for Canada, "the enormity of living next to a global hegemon heightens the sensibility of all Canadians to

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[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.

such assumptions of continental consensus" and fosters a sense of inferiority in which Canadians generally feel compelled to point out their differences from the hegemon to the south.[448] While this discussion of Canadian-ness might seem somewhat disconnected from a discussion and examination of Kelly Thornton's directorial strategies, aesthetics, and methods, it can, to some degree, be tied to Thornton's artistic work and contribution in that Thornton's work could be viewed as working to combat this inferiority complex on a national as well as a feminist level. For instance, Thornton's mentorship of young women as part of her creative team and, even more importantly, the play development programs Thornton has instituted and supported – from her early career with the Rhubarb! Festival to Nightwood's Write from the Hip and Groundswell Festivals – foster young *Canadian* artists' plays and talent, a strategy that fulfills in part the recommendation of the 1951 Massey Report not only to encourage the development of Canadian plays but also to "make provision in Canada for the more advanced training of young artists."[449] While Thornton's intentions might not be consciously a nationalistic endeavor, these programs dedicated to developing new Canadian plays and young talent as well as her work on the "very Canadian" *The Penelopiad*, written by Margaret Atwood – herself a Canadian icon and frequent theorist of constructions of Canadian national identity – demonstrate the ways that Canadian directors such as Thornton are striving to confront and mitigate the Canadian "inferiority complex."

It also is rather noteworthy here to observe that Thornton is quietly subverting the Canadian inferiority complex through *feminist* modes of production and, as discussed in

[448] Munroe Eagles, "Canadian-American Relations in a Turbulent Era," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39, vol. 4 (October 2006): 823.
[449] Canada, "The Theatre," *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences,* Report, Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951.

the case-study-within-a-case-study, through Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. In her critical commentaries on Canadian national identity, such as her 1982 essay "Canadian-American Relations: Surviving the Eighties," Atwood has painted a picture of the American-Canadian relationship with Canada in the position of the female in relation to the dominant, vocal, aggressive (read: male) America.[450] Thus, as Constance Classen and David Howes note, the "figure of the female is well suited to represent the Canadian character," for in Canada "national identity and gender were both predicated on second-class status."[451] Thus, Atwood seems to provide an apt yet uncanny link between gender/feminism and Canadian-ness within this discussion, and Thornton, although perhaps not consciously or deliberately, draws upon both of these elements to articulate the multiple ways that identities such as gender, nationality (and others, although discussions of class or sexuality seem to play a secondary role in Thornton's personal narrative and experience, even though she does recognize their importance within her directorial and administrative work to some extent) inform each other and her experience as a professional artist. This in mind, then, her desire to "lead from the center" as a director seems apt, as she is situated in the center of the Toronto and feminist theatre communities and as a result is able to see women, as well as other aspects of identity, in all directions.

Like the other directors in this study, Kelly Thornton creates work shaped by and designed for the community from which she springs. As a professional artist working as

[450] Margaret Atwood, "Canadian-American relations: Surviving the eighties," in *Second Words* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1982), 389.

[451] Constance Classen and David Howes, "Margaret Atwood: Two-Headed Woman," on *Canadian Icon: Law, Anthropology, and Canadian National Identity*, http://canadianicon.org/table-of-contents/margaret-atwood-two-headed-woman/ (accessed 10 May 2013); Rosemary Sullivan, *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 128.

a director and artistic director within the competitive Toronto theatre scene as well as representing and working within Canada's most well-known women's theatre company, Thornton must balance her work between the two communities – finding ways to bring in audiences while also meeting the women-centered aesthetic and mission of her company through her productions and rehearsal techniques. Unlike some of the other directors included in this study, Thornton seems particularly aware of her status as a leader of the Toronto and, perhaps more importantly, feminist, theatre arena and overwhelmingly it seems that she accepts that role with characteristic Kelly Thornton-esque relish and enthusiasm. This awareness might in large part be due to the very political nature of her work and the ability of her company to focus on serving the needs of a specific community. However, as noted several times throughout this chapter, meeting the needs of that specific community can also prove difficult, as there exists great diversity within the community of women and feminists. Thus, Thornton seems to be regularly performing a balancing act, an act that, unless "you carry the mandate around" you do not fully realize its weight or import. Thornton observed that even she "didn't see it" to its fullest extent before she began working with Nightwood: "I was just a young, a young theatre artist, a young director, and doing my job, doing my work. And then once I carried that mandate around like a suitcase, I was like, 'Okay. There's a little bit of imbalance here, boys.'"[452] Because of that mandate, Thornton's directorial work logically and perhaps naturally takes on a more political and feminist perspective, one that considers women in all directions and in which she leads from the center – all in an attempt to right this imbalance.

[452] Thornton, Interview.

CHAPTER 5: "WORKS THAT BLUR THE BORDERS" – NINA LEE AQUINO, DIVERSITY, OPENING DOORS, AND *CARRIED AWAY ON THE CREST OF A WAVE*

Unlike the other women included in this study who I first encountered through their directorial work, I first discovered Nina Lee Aquino as a playwright, specifically her play *Miss Orient(ed).* Co-written with Nadine Villasin, the play considers the conflicting messages and perceptions of beauty in pageant culture and how those constructions of Western beauty influence non-Western participants.[453] Humorous but insightful in its critique of gender, cultural identity and globalization, *Miss Orient(ed)* – which, when first staged in 2003, featured Aquino's talents as an actor as well as playwright – caught my eye.[454] In researching the play, I quickly discovered that Aquino was not only a playwright but also a dramaturg, actor, and director.

Shortly after I was introduced to (and admittedly fell in love with) her play, Nina Lee Aquino entered my life again when she was awarded honorary lifetime membership to the Canadian Association for Theatre Research, an organization to which I also belong. As the petite Aquino took the stage for her acceptance speech, she radiated confidence and spoke with passion about Asian-Canadian theatre. Clearly, Aquino has her feet in

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[453] According to Aquino, beauty pageants are popular in the Philippines – "the beauty pageant is one of the most sacred things in Filipino culture. If you're a beauty contestant, you're worshipped;" however, in setting the play within that culture Aquino and Vilasin also realized that "the winners were usually the ones who looked Western." (Nina Lee Aquino, qtd in Ric Knowles, "Between There and Home: An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (Winter 2006): 81.)

[454] Admittedly, I have additional scholarly interest in pageant culture, for as part of a graduate seminar in Performance Ethnography I researched, interviewed and performed women who were involved in pageant competition. Additionally, *Miss Orient(ed)* marked the first professional production by the Carlos Bulosan Theatre. The Carlos Bulosan Theatre, a professional theatre whose work is rooted in the Filipino-Canadian experience, began as an amateur, community-centered company called the Carlos Bulosan Cultural Workshop. However, by 2003, the company realized that to better serve its community it needed to transition from an amateur community theatre to a professional theatre company and Aquino's play served as the company's professional debut.

multiple worlds and wears multiple artistic hats: she is a member of the Filipino-Canadian community of Toronto, the academic community, and the professional theatre community of Toronto; she also is a director, artistic director, playwright, actor, and dramaturg. These multiple worlds and roles presumably provide her with an awareness that others may not have, as she is particularly conscious of how these worlds and identities interact with and rub up against each other.[455]

In the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa declares herself a "border woman," or one who lives in the liminal space of the borderland, both physically on the US/Mexican border and theoretically as a woman who inhabits multiple identities.[456] While geographically located further north, Filipino-Canadian director Nina Lee Aquino, like Anzaldua, is similarly situated in the borderlands. And perhaps this geographical switch to the northern border is not too far-fetched, for Anzaldúa notes that the borderlands are not limited to a specific geographical or territorial border: "The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the southwest. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle and upper classes touch."[457] In fact, of the directors studied thus far, Aquino and her work offer a unique

[455] Incidentally, Aquino was also the most responsive to my request to participate in this study. While this responsiveness could be for many reasons, I imagine that part of her support and willingness to participate was due to her understanding of academia and the need to explore the intersections between scholarship and artistic work, as she received her Master's degree from the University of Toronto, and much of her MA project involved working with living Asian Canadian theatre artists to begin to document their work and legacy.

[456] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* third edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987 & 2007), 19.

[457] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* third edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987 & 2007), 19.

entry point for discussions of identity, particularly racialized identity, for much of her work is in conversation with and undertaken with an eye toward encouraging diversity and gaining greater recognition for racial/ethnic perspectives beyond what theatre scholar Laura Levin deems the "salad bar approach to multiculturalism."[458] Thus, this discussion of Nina Lee Aquino and her directorial work is very much informed by Anzaldua's theory of the borderlands, as it not only provides an apt theoretical framework for Aquino's work but also is a theme that frequently is voiced and demonstrated by Aquino herself as part of her narrative as well as is echoed in the scholarship surrounding her work.

This discussion and exploration of Aquino's directorial work also occurs during a time when Canadian theatre scholarship is particularly focusing on exploring issues of globalization and ethnic and racial representation in contemporary performance. The spring 2013 issue of *Theatre Research in Canada* (*TRiC*) focuses entirely on the development and impact of cross cultural, transnational relationships in Canada and between Canada and other nations. Moreover, Playwrights Canada Press, a leading Toronto-based publisher of Canadian plays and scholarship, has recently begun a new series of texts grouped under the title *New Essays in Canadian Theatre*; this series consists of volumes that are designed to fill "gaps in the critical record" of contemporary Canadian scholarship, "taking new approaches, often, again, from minoritized and under-represented perspectives and always introducing topics that have never before received

[458] Laura Levin, "TO Live With Culture: Torontopia and the Urban Creativity Script," in *Space and the Geographies of Theatre, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 9, ed. Michael McKinnie (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2007), 213.

book-length coverage."[459] Of the first three topics covered by the series – perceived "gaps in the critical record" – two of them address theatre related to ethnicity: Asian Canadian theatre (edited by Nina Lee Aquino and Ric Knowles and published in 2011) and Latino/a Canadian theatre (edited by Natalie Alvarez and published in 2013).[460] Moreover, each edition of critical essays is accompanied by a second text, an anthology of representative plays for that topic, and in the case of Asian Canadian theatre, not one but two accompanying anthologies were published. Moreover, as Eleanor Ty notes in her literary analysis of Asian North American narratives, "Filipino American works are often under-represented in studies of Asian American literature,"[461] and while Ty is specifically referring to the Filipino literature from the United States, I believe it can also be extended to apply to Filipino Canadian drama and literature.

Moreover, in the past 18 months, I have seen Aquino's career explode and expand. While a recognized director in Toronto, Aquino had been somewhat marginalized in that her work was associated primarily with theatres such as fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre and Cahoots Theatre, both of which are professional companies but companies focused specifically on reaching and representing diverse communities – a designation that potentially limits the scope, reach, and recognition of their work. However, in a short amount of time, the 36-year-old Aquino has moved further into the upper echelons of the Toronto theatre scene. In September 2012, following the

[459] Ric Knowles, "General Editor's Preface," in *New Canadian Realisms*, eds. Roberta Barker and Kim Solga (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012), v. The series includes a book of critical essays on the topic and an accompanying book (or books, as is the case in Asian Canadian theatre) that includes representative scripts. It is the intent of the editor and publisher that the essays and scripts can then be used as course texts in colleges and universities.

[460] The third area to be covered in the 2012 edition was *New Canadian Realisms* (edited by Roberta Barker and Kim Solga).

[461] Eleanor Ty, *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 29.

controversial firing of Ken Gass, longtime artistic director at Toronto's Factory Theatre, Aquino and Nigel Shawn Williams were named interim co-artistic directors for the Factory, and in February 2013, the duo officially was named the Factory's new co-artistic directors. Although Aquino had served as artistic director of both fu-GEN and Cahoots Theatre Company, directing a production at Tarragon Theatre (one of the more prominent alternative-turned-mainstream theatres in Toronto) and being named the official co-artistic director of the Factory marks a further expansion of her career, as the Factory has a lengthy historical legacy and is generally considered one of the major alternative-turned-mainstream theatres in Toronto. Also, Aquino, in tandem with Williams, was named one of the top "people to watch in 2013" by *The Torontoist*, a further testament to her expanding reputation and skyrocketing artistic/professional career.[462] All these things in mind, the inclusion of and attention to Nina Lee Aquino – an up-and-coming Filipino-Canadian woman director – is necessary, timely, and significant.

This chapter explores Aquino's work under the overarching theme of the borderlands and examines the related sub-themes that emerge from an examination of her work and narrative to further support and/or complicate that discussion of diversity within the Canadian theatrical and cultural context. While Chapter 2 provided an overview of the Canadian official policy of multiculturalism as well as the current demographic and socio-political status of ethnic and immigrant women, to begin this chapter I provide a brief summary of Asian-Canadian Theatre so as to better situate

[462] Steve Fisher, Chris Dart, Kevin Scott, Carly Maga, Corbin Smith, and Kelli Korducki, "People to Watch in 2013," *The Torontoist*, 8 January 2013, http://torontoist.com/2013/01/people-to-watch-in-2013/ (accessed 15 June 2013). It should also be noted that this People to Watch in 2013 list was not solely comprised of artists; rather, the list included Toronto icons such as the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team, two listings for the Toronto Mapleleafs hockey team, a hand-crafted artisan company, and several actors, musicians, and filmmakers.

Aquino and her work within the diverse theatrical community that has shaped and benefitted from her artistic work. Within this context and in connection to the burgeoning Asian-Canadian theatre scene, I then situate Aquino's development and career as a theatre artist and director, with special attention to the ways her work has long focused on and advocated for bringing issues of diversity to the Canadian stage. From there, I examine Aquino's specific directorial techniques as evidenced in my rehearsal observations of Aquino during *Ching Chong Chinaman*, which Aquino directed for fu-GEN Asian-Canadian Theatre Company in February/March 2013, as well as *Every Letter Counts*, for which she served as playwright and lead actor in January 2013. As part of this discussion of Aquino's directorial approach and oeuvre, I analyze *carried away on the crest of a wave*, Aquino's most recent collaboration with playwright and long-time collaborator David Yee, which premiered at the Tarragon Theatre in May 2013, focusing particularly on the ways that the play and Aquino's staging speak to the theme of the borderlands and bring diverse communities to the stage. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at the ways that Aquino's multiple, intersecting identities shape and complicate both her work and overall experience as a woman director in Canada, ultimately helping her continue to probe, challenge, subvert, and re-articulate portrayals of diversity on Canadian stages.

Asian-Canadian Theatre in an "Officially Multicultural" Society: A Brief Summary

What is included under the term "Asian-Canadian" theatre? While a specific cultural group and distinct from Latino/a Canadian or First Nations communities, there is also great diversity within the group itself, including Filipino-Canadian, Korean-

Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, Japanese-Canadian, South Asian-Canadian, etc. Thus, Nina Lee Aquino and others often use the term "Pan Pacific Asian" as an "umbrella term consisting of various communities – Filipino, Korean, Chinese, Japanese."[463] Regardless of the term used, in her introduction to *Love + RelASIANships,* the anthology of plays published as a companion text to her *Asian Canadian*: *New Essays on Canadian Theatre*, Nina Lee Aquino writes that the "pre-existing record of our [Asian-Canadian] presence in the Canadian theatrical milieu and the written dramatic canon is almost non-existent."[464] As previously noted, scholarly documentation and study of Asian Canadian theatre in any capacity prior to Aquino's text was minimal, and in fact, when Aquino embarked upon her Master's thesis project at the University of Toronto and began to research Asian Canadian theatre, she quickly realized that there was no scholarship on the area, so instead she began to create her own, interviewing working Asian Canadian theatre artists such as Jean Yoon, Terry Watada, and M.J. Kang and ultimately concluding in her thesis that "Asian Canadian theatre artists needed a home, a place to flourish and develop their art and that would promote them."[465]

Since the 1980s, a number of theatre companies have emerged, particularly in Toronto, as places for artists from diverse backgrounds to call their artistic homes. Despite the aforementioned "salad bar approach" to multiculturalism in Toronto as well as the problematic nature presented by the Canadian official policy of multiculturalism

[463] Nina Lee Aquino, "Introduction," *Love + RelASIANships*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), ix.

[464] Ibid., viii.

[465] Ric Knowles, "Between There and Home: An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (Winter 2006): 76. Jean Yoon is an Asian-Canadian playwright and actress who has significant stage and television credits; Terry Watada is a Japanese-Canadian playwright and poet; M.J. Kang is a Korean-born actress who has worked on Canadian and American stages.

(discussed briefly in Chapter 2), the emerging independent theatres have worked to bring attention to racially- and ethnically-marginalized communities, those who rarely see faces like theirs on the prominent, mainstream stages such as Stratford. While some companies focus on very specific racial and ethnic communities – such as Native Earth Performing Arts (First Nations and aboriginal voices), Obsidian Theatre (black Canadian voices[466]), Carlos Bulosan Theatre (Filipino-Canadian voices), fu-GEN (Asian-Canadian voices), and Alameda (Latino/a Canadian voices) – still others focus on diversity on a larger scale – such as Cahoots Theatre, whose tagline claims "theatre in full colour" and their mandate declares a dedication to "the creation, development and production of new works that investigate the complexities of Canada's cultural diversity, and examine the intersections of these cultures," which includes race, ethnicity, language, dis/ability, sexuality, class and gender.[467]

While these companies have emerged and are gaining increasing attention within the Toronto theatre scene, winning Dora awards and other accolades, they still struggle to gain recognition both in the scholarly and professional worlds. As part of a panel at the International Summit on Directing in the Performing Arts in Toronto in June 2013, David Yee, a Chinese-Scottish Hapa Canadian playwright and the outgoing artistic director of

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[466] I use the term black rather than African-Canadian here for several reasons. First, it is the term used by Obsidian on their website and as part of their professed mission. Second, while African-Canadian does function as an umbrella term that is largely meant to mean "black," I recognize that it is limiting to deem Obsidian as a company that *only* presents work by *African* Canadian artists, as black Canadian artists can also immigrate from other geographical locations besides Africa.

[467] Cahoots Theatre, "Mandate," website, http://www.cahoots.ca/company/mandate/ (accessed 26 June 2013). It should be noted that until 2012 Nina Lee Aquino served as the artistic director of Cahoots and part of her work as artistic director was to revise, clarify, and expand the mandate of the company. Also, some readers might be curious to know when each of these companies emerged on the Toronto theatre scene: Native Earth Performing Arts (1982), Carlos Bulosan Theatre (originally Carlos Bulosan Cultural Workshop, an amateur venue, 1982), Cahoots Theatre Company (1986), Obsidian Theatre Company (2000), fu-GEN (2002), Alameda Theatre Company (2006).

fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre (as well as Aquino's frequent artistic collaborator), cited Ins Choi's play *Kim's Convenience*. While Yee expressed pleasure that Choi's play about a Korean convenience store owner in Toronto is seeing a major re-mount following a sold out initial run at the more mainstream Soulpepper Theatre, he also wished that "we [fu-GEN] could have done it"; however, he readily admitted that the young company could not afford to stage the production. Thus, we see the double-edged sword that exists for these companies and artists, for they must compete for audiences and funding against the larger, more established and more mainstream companies. In regard to ethnic and racial minorities theatre companies, for many years, funding from the national government was split between funding dominant culture arts groups and funding minoritized groups; however, certain governmental changes and restructurings in the early 1990s, implemented to better accommodate the official policy of multiculturalism, meant that all arts organizations were eligible for a "slice of the shrinking arms-length funding pie from the arts councils," raising the stakes of competition for these specialized companies.[468]

However, the simple fact that plays like Choi's are gaining attention on these larger, more mainstream stages is also somewhat heartening. While Aquino has said that her goal is to ensure that "theatre in Toronto looks like the inside of a TTC bus" and that goal is still far from fulfilled, the inclusion of these plays on mainstage seasons is encouraging and marks development in the Asian Canadian theatre scene.[469] One could

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[468] Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel, "Introduction: 'Ethnic,' Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre," *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* volume 14 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009) ,viii.

[469] Lesley Ciarula Taylor, "Ghetto walls around immigrant theatre crumbling," *Toronto Star*, 31 August 2009, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/2009/08/31/ghetto_walls_around_immigrant_

also similarly track the development and expansion of the content of Asian Canadian plays over the past several decades. As Aquino discusses in her introduction to *Love + RelASIANships*, plays written early in the development of Asian Canadian theatre tended to primarily tackle issues related to the recent immigrant experience, including portrayals of "displacement, immigration, homesickness and questing to Gold Mountain" and featured a "sense of longing and nostalgia, a fierce connection to roots and the mother tongue and dreams of what could have been and what life is now."[470] Of course, as with any artistic trajectory, over time the prominent issues portrayed in Asian-Canadian drama changed slightly as playwrights came to grips with the immigrant experience and began to accept Canada as their homeland (and perhaps Canada began to accept them). As a result of this acceptance, by the 1990s, the newer generation of plays confronted the "baggage of what that [calling Canada home] means" and dealt with the phenomenon of existing with a hyphenated ethnic identity such as Filipino-Canadian.[471] From the 1990s on, the plays and issues addressed therein continued to expand, so much so that contemporary Asian-Canadian plays address quite a broad range of subjects. According to Aquino, "There's a new wave of playwrights who are coming out writing about whatever feels relevant to them without connecting it in any obvious way to being Asian or Asian-Canadian."[472] However, while not perhaps "obvious" in their Asian-Canadian-ness, it remains that these plays, by the very nature of the playwright's existence as

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theatre_crumbling.html (accessed 1 June 2013). TTC stands for Toronto Transit Commission, and the users of the TTC are extremely diverse.

[470] Nina Lee Aquino, "Introduction," *Love + RelASIANships,* vol. 2 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), x. The phrase "Gold Mountain" has been used by the Chinese to describe western areas of North America (particularly California and British Columbia) and originated in reference to the many Chinese immigrants who flocked to the areas during the gold rush in the 1850s.

[471] Ibid.

[472] Ibid.

Asian-Canadians, is marked – even slightly and subtly by their Asian-Canadian positionality and experience – their work simply does not call upon or evoke those themes as explicitly as they have in the past.

The trajectory of Asian-Canadian theatre is arguably still in the midst of its development, and while the expanded range of subject matter and topics does make it more difficult to isolate specifically "Asian" Canadian plays, it is precisely this broadening and wider application that Aquino and other Asian-Canadian artists find most exciting, for within this expansion the Asian-Canadian theatre community also can begin to point to the connections between their experience and others' experience in the Canadian cultural, political and artistic arenas. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel further reinforce this expansion of issues as addressed in and by Asian-Canadian and other multicultural/intercultural theatres, positing "as the generations of theatrical work issuing from minoritized communities rolls on, there seems to be less and less concern about dominant culture audiences or assumptions (they are, perhaps, no longer relevant), and less and less uniformity about the kinds of issues addressed," while those writing within the intercultural or ethnic theatre movement such as Catherine Hernandez observe that these diverse voices are "moving on from the usual immigrant identity story and trying to move to more universal themes that happen to be framed by a specific cultural lattice. This is particularly important to me since it gives me the freedom to make my work less autobiographical, then I have more flexibility with my storylines and how they develop."[473] Overall, within this current stage of development in Asian-Canadian theatre,

[473] Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mundel, "Introduction," *"Ethnic," Multicultural and Intercultural Theatre*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* volume 14 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), x; Catherine Hernandez, "The State of Theatre," posted on *BlogTO*, 10 January 2007

this broadening of scope in theme and content (and, for some, in form) allows them as artists to start "opening our eyes to the world around us and letting that world influence our storytelling. We are starting to realize that *we are all connected*…[and by sharing these works with the larger Canadian population] chances are you'll never look at an old Chinese woman on the bus the same way ever again."[474] Thus, in many ways, the genre of Asian-Canadian and, more broadly, intercultural theatre may inhabit but it also *employs* the experience of the borderlands to express, claim, educate, and articulate cultural identity within a multicultural Canada, and Nina Lee Aquino is situated directly within this cultural and theatrical milieu, having worked with several companies throughout her career in an effort to bring the voices of the margins to the center.

A Lifetime of Crossing Borders: Nina Lee Aquino's Background

The theme of the borderlands infuses Nina Lee Aquino's background, as she has been crossing many borders throughout her life, literally and figuratively. Growing up, Nina Lee Aquino, then Nina Aquino, lived in a variety of places, as her mother was a diplomat for the Philippines government. Although Aquino was born in the Philippines, shortly after her birth, her mother accepted a position at the embassy in Houston, Texas; thus, the first six years of Aquino's life were spent in and were "shaped by" life in Houston.[475] From Houston, she returned to the Philippines before she moved to Canada at 17 years old as part of another of her mother's diplomatic assignments. The one consistency within this border crossing lifestyle for Nina Lee Aquino was the theatre, and

(http://www.blogto.com/theatre/2007/01/the_state_of_theatre_catherine_hernandez/, accessed 2 September 2012).

[474] Nina Lee Aquino, "Introduction," *Love + RelASIANships,* vol. 2 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), xi.

[475] Nina Lee Aquino, Interview by author, Toronto, ON, 3 September 2012.

Aquino found her way to the stage at a very young age. In addition to taking acting, singing, and dancing classes, while living in Houston, Aquino was discovered at a school recital and "drafted in" to play the lead in a touring production of *Annie* – her "first gig."[476] Being cast in the production not only inspired her passion for theatre but also brought her first experience of subtle racism and highlighted her "visible minority" status, although she was not fully aware of it at the time:

> At that time, there was already a big controversy over the choice of me. Because, well, Little Orphan Annie is usually like a white, red headed girl with the iconic curls, and so they just didn't quite know what to do with my hair. Whether to put a wig on me or to just curl my hair or you know—. But I was totally unaware of those things. It was only now that my mom actually revealed to me, later on, "Yeah, you know, they had a big problem with that." So, in the end they just decided to curl my hair. (*laughs*) But that was the start of everything, you know.[477]

Indeed, it was the start of everything – perhaps more than Aquino knew at the time, for it not only began her career in theatre but it also began, at least initially, her role in opening doors – a sub-theme that frequently arises as part of her narrative – and creating awareness for nontraditional casting measures, as she forged the way to bring minority perspectives and faces to center stage.

In addition to Aquino's literal, geographical border crossing during her youth, she also crosses borders in a more theoretical sense within her theatre work, meaning that she works in multiple theatrical disciplines and areas. Like many of the directors included in this study (particularly Thornton and Collier), Aquino began her theatrical career as an actor, and although she now identifies predominately as a director and artistic director, she continues to cross the border between the director's table and the stage, occasionally

[476] Aquino, Interview.
[477] Ibid.

acting in productions as well as serving in other production roles.[478] She is an accomplished dramaturg, playwright, artistic director, *and* director, and depending upon the production, Aquino may don a different hat or even two, as I observed when I sat in on rehearsals of *Every Letter Counts* in February 2013, a play she wrote about her uncle Ninoy Aquino, a prominent figure in the Filipino revolution that occurred in the 1980s and ultimately ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos from power, and in which Aquino also acted. Thus, during my observations, I witnessed multiple moments when the director, Aquino's colleague and co-artistic director at Factory, Nigel Shawn Williams, would ask to "speak to the playwright," prompting Aquino to come out of the stage/performance area and transition from Nina-as-actor to Nina-as-playwright. During these moments, Aquino quickly shifted gears; however, during the project at large, her focus was clearly on her work as an actor. Whenever posed with a question or suggestion for revising the text, she generally agreed to the change with a quick "sure" or "sounds good to me" – a response that was likely informed by both her own directorial work on new plays and her experience as an actor in the production, having heard herself that a line did not work as originally written. Thus, while it is true that acting experience shapes each director's approach(es) to working with actors (as has been indicated by both Collier and Thornton), Nina Lee Aquino's continued presence on the stage (and in other theatrical positions) arguably gives her a more accurate and active window into the actor's experience and perspective, which then shapes how she works with actors.

[478] Aquino's willingness to and active practice of crossing into other theatrical areas further sets her apart from the other directors included here, for Collier, Thornton and Keiley rarely act any more, preferring to work as a director and, on occasion, a dramaturg.

Moreover, Aquino's work as an actor (and even playwright and dramaturg) also allows her to learn from the other directors with whom she works, such as Nigel Shawn Williams. In fact, when I returned to Toronto to observe her in rehearsals for *Ching Chong Chinaman,* for which Aquino traded hats yet again to move into the director's role, she mentioned that she would be interested to see if I felt her directorial approach demonstrated reflections of Williams' direction, as she felt she had learned from him directorially during her time acting in *Every Letter Counts*. While identifying Williams' specific influences would prove difficult for me as a director and scholar, as I had not seen Aquino direct previously and therefore had no starting point from which to analyze and compare what I observed of her as a director for *Ching Chong Chinaman,* her realization and recognition that she did learn from her work as an actor with Williams in *Every Letter Counts* suggests that she is open to expanding her directorial perspective and attuned to how her experiences with other theatre artists and working in other theatrical areas influence and potentially shape her work.

Beyond this border crossing within the theatrical arena, Aquino also moves between and inhabits the border between theory and practice, scholarship and professional artistic work. She is, for instance, the only director in this study to have received her Master of Arts degree, a scholarly endeavor that she undertook at the University of Toronto and through which she discovered the dearth of scholarship on Asian Canadian theatre. Aquino recalls that during her research in pursuit of her MA is "where fu-GEN [the Asian-Canadian theatre company which Aquino was integral to

beginning] really started for me."[479] Because there was no scholarship on Asian Canadian theatre, in order to complete her thesis project, Aquino started from scratch, and her research took the form of interviews with Asian-Canadian artists, a living research project in which scholarship and practice not only aligned but overlapped. From that research, Aquino realized that there needed to be a "company or a home for Asian Canadian artists."[480] Thus, in 2002, Aquino collaborated with several fellow Asian Canadian artists (Leon Aureus, Josephine Chim Bertrand, and Susan Aceron with Lisa Kim, Charmaine Lau, Ping-Ya Lee, Richard Lee, Hiromi Okuyama, Siu Ta, Ian Wong, David Yee, Dale Yim) to create fu-GEN Asian-Canadian Theatre, a company whose name is short for "future generation" and is dedicated to creating and producing new work by and for Asian-Canadians.

In addition to founding fu-GEN, Aquino spent seven years as the company's first artistic director. As part of creating and running this artistic home for Asian-Canadian theatre artists and playwrights via fu-GEN, Aquino also directed several productions, all of which, in keeping with the fu-GEN vision to "serve the Asian Canadian theatre artist" and explore "the underlying Asian Canadian story," dealt with issues of identity and bringing Asian Canadian stories to the forefront.[481] *Banana Boys* (2004)*,* for example, was adapted by fu-GEN member Leon Aureus from the novel by Terry Woo. Although the play, as the title suggests, is centered around five male characters, it deals with issues of not only masculinity but also the young men's identity in regard to their status as Canadian-born Chinese. As Toronto's *NOW Magazine's* Jon Kaplan argued, the play

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[479] Aquino, Interview.
[480] Ibid.
[481] fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company, "About Us," website, http://fu-gen.org/about-us/mandate/ (accessed 26 June 2013).

breaks new ground in both Asian-Canadian theatre and discussions of gender, for "far fewer works have looked at the experiences of Canadian men from Asian cultures" and these young male characters particularly wrestle with the displacement of Canadian-born Chinese (or CBCs), who had been culturally told that CBCs were lazy and undisciplined in contrast to whites or FOBs (Fresh Off the Boats).[482] Thus, the play looks at quite contemporary issues of Asian Canadian-ness as well as gender, and while Aquino was the only woman in the rehearsal room, a situation that presumably created some sort of gendered dynamic, her own experience living in multiple cultures and within multiple identities provided her an insight and ability to direct this piece that other directors (such as those included in this study) might not have readily had access to.

Another early fu-GEN production that was integral to establishing Aquino's career within Asian-Canadian theatre and introducing her to the larger Toronto theatre community was *the lady in the red dress* by David Yee in 2009. Although Aquino and Yee had been collaborators at fu-GEN prior to *the lady in the red dress*, this production marked the beginning of what has become a long-standing and celebrated director-playwright collaboration. Yee, at the request of the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC), had written a letter to the government, protesting a bill that proposed insufficient reparations for the historic Chinese head taxes and 1923 Chinese exclusion act. Following that letter, Yee and the CCNC received an email that accused them of creating a media ploy surrounding the bill. Furious about "a motherfucker from BC [who] wrote back calling the CCNC liars, saying the whole thing wasn't a real issue," Yee then used the public and artistic forum of the stage to respond, writing and, with

[482] Jon Kaplan, "Banana Boys club," *NOW Magazine* 24, vol. 3, 16-23 September 2004.

Aquino's directorial eye, staging *the lady in a red dress*.[483] In the style of film noir- and graphic novels, the play is about a lawyer who works for the Canadian Department of Justice and encounters Sylvia, the titular lady in the red dress, who tasks him to find Tommy Jade, a Chinese immigrant from the 1920s.[484] From there, the protagonist begins a dark, gritty, time-traveling adventure through which he must come to terms with the history of Chinese Canadian relations and reparations as well as how it impacts all Canadians' lives. Yee's play went on to win the Governor General's Award for Drama, and the performance earned Aquino a nomination for a 2009 Dora Award for Outstanding Direction.[485] Since *the lady in the red dress*, Aquino and Yee have become frequent collaborators. Aquino calls Yee her "number one collaborator" and "one of my dearest friends in the whole universe."[486] The two have worked on productions such as *paperSERIES* (2011, for which Aquino won a Dora for Outstanding Direction) and *carried away on the crest of a wave* (2013).

However, Aquino's theatrical interest did not lie only with the practical elements of creating theatre and bringing diverse perspectives to the Canadian stage (and therefore public eye); rather, Aquino also noted that her "ultimate dream was to at least start the first ever Asian-Canadian theatre conference. Not just artists but academic. Like that has

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[483] David Yee, qtd in Jon Kaplan, "Yee is seeing red," *NOW Magazine* 28, vol. 21, 20-27 January 2009.

[484] For Yee, Sylvia is "the voice I wish for Chinese Canadians, a mix of Bruce Lee and Confucius and all the ghost stories about the vengeful bride with white hair. She's the voice of struggle, fighting for Chinese Canadians throughout history." Qtd in Jon Kaplan, "Yee is seeing Red," *NOW Magazine* 28, vol. 21, 20-27 January 2009.

[485] The Governor General Awards are prestigious national awards that are presented annually, and winners are selected from a national pool in a variety of literary areas.

[486] Leslie Barcza, "10 Questions with Nina Lee Aquino," *barczablog*, 6 April 2013, http://barczablog.com/2013/04/06/10forninaleeaquino/ (accessed 6 June 2013).

been my dream. To go alongside the [practical work]."[487] In keeping with this dream to bring together the academic and practical work in Asian Canadian theatre, Aquino not only organized just such a conference in spring 2010, one of her final events as the artistic director of fu-GEN, but also published the first anthology of critical, scholarly essays on Asian Canadian theatre (2011) and two volumes of Asian Canadian plays, both entitled *Love + RelASIANships* (2009). In this way, Nina Lee Aquino has her feet in both theatrical and academic worlds, thus inhabiting and bringing together multiple areas and backgrounds, all with the intention of bringing increased attention to the Asian Canadian theatre community and in so doing destabilizing the Anglo- and Eurocentric nature of most mainstream Canadian stages and scholarship.

In 2009, Aquino became artistic director of Cahoots Theatre, a move that was prompted by her desire to continue to push against the borders of what she could do within and for her community. As a Master's student Aquino had already felt this push to do more and something in her, a "restless" feeling that told her "You can't stop here." [488] This feeling again resurfaced around her seventh year at fu-GEN. Aquino recalls that "when we did *lady in the red dress*, which was our first mainstage show outside of Factory Studio and it was at the Young Centre [for the Performing Arts, an arts center created in partnership between Soulpepper Theatre and George Brown College's Theater School], I already kind of felt like that restless feeling again, going, "There has to be something bigger than this that I can do.""[489] Serendipitously, around this same time Aquino heard of an opening at Cahoots Theatre, and although she was not sure she would

[487] Aquino, Interview.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid.

get the job – because "I didn't have enough experience or I was too young or whatever" – Aquino applied for and was awarded the position of Cahoots' artistic director in September 2009.[490] It should also be noted here that Aquino, albeit subtly, points to the issue of age in this anecdote – an issue and sub-theme that has arisen in the other directors' narratives in some capacity and an identity marker that is rarely discussed but is clearly an influential factor in the experience of professional women directors. While Aquino did not pause to consider or expand on this issue of age, it remains notable that she did mention it here, subtly demonstrating yet another intersecting identity that influences Aquino and women's experiences, as age (youth or old age) can be perceived to be a limiting factor to women's career options and paths. Also, Aquino is a petite woman, measuring just around five feet tall, so her small physical stature likely compounds this issue, for it contributes further to the perception of youth and the assumption that youth means inexperience. Fortunately, however, the Cahoots hiring committee recognized Aquino's vision and abilities, hiring her to become the new artistic director – perhaps a mark of Cahoots' awareness of and advocacy for diversity.

Aquino then spent nearly five years, from 2009 to 2013, as the artistic director of Cahoots Theater Company, and as part of her leadership she not only expanded the mandate of Cahoots but also gained increased directorial recognition, particularly for her continued collaboration with David Yee. In keeping with her previously stated desire to do more for her community, her tenure with Cahoots expanded upon both the company and her own articulation of diversity. In the early days of Cahoots' initial founding during the 1980s the company's focus had been on giving voice to artists of color,

[490] Ibid.

"because there was no color back in the day on the stages."[491] Thus, when Aquino arrived at Cahoots in 2009, fresh from working with fu-GEN, a company dedicated to a very particular racial and ethnic community, she revisited the Cahoots mandate with the intention that it not simply become the "catch all" or "an ethnic smorgasbord"; rather, Aquino's revision and expanded vision for Cahoots was one that was a

> …mash up of everything. And what color is that? I don't know. It could be any…And so for me it's that Cahoots…works [are ones] that examine, investigate. And I really want to use those words because they're really active. And they're really ongoing. So the works don't necessarily offer clean solutions. So works that examine, investigate the complexities and the intersections of, I guess, Canadian life. Whatever that means, right? You know, works that blur the borders.[492]

Thus, in these words, we hear Aquino almost directly echo Gloria Anzaldua's charge to create theories and approaches that "cross borders" and "blur boundaries" – a further testament to the theme of "borderlands" that seems to influence Aquino's work throughout her career.[493] Moreover, this statement also alludes to Aquino's understanding of individuals' existence in multiple identity categories, recognizing the fact that "we are all multifaceted creatures" and that those many facets inevitably influence our lives and should be portrayed on stage, as Cahoots' tag line states, "in full colour."[494]

Throughout all of this border crossing and Aquino's forward-thinking attempts to do something more for her community, two closely intertwined sub-themes arise from Aquino's narrative: the need for a strong support system and the desire to "open doors."

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[491] Aquino, Interview.
[492] Ibid.
[493] Gloria Anzaldua, *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan and Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxv
[494] Cahoots Theatre Company, "Mandate," website, http://www.cahoots.ca/company/mandate/ accessed 28 June 2013).

These themes, while inherent in much of Aquino's story thus far, were instilled in her by two very specific moments and people. As an undergraduate student, Aquino initially attended York University, but she quickly discovered that she did not have a strong support system there of like-minded friends or mentors. This lack of support limited her success and investment both academically and artistically. Chastened and frustrated by this first experience with undergraduate life, Aquino transferred to the University of Guelph the following year, and there discovered what she felt she had been missing at York: a strong support system, particularly faculty mentors who recognized her distinctive talents and urged her to embrace her artistry and diversity.

The first of these mentors was Ric Knowles, a professor of Theatre Studies and respected Canadian theatre scholar. Aquino's first encounter with Knowles was in his Fundamentals of Directing course, which, according to Aquino, "changed my life in a way."[495] For her final project in Knowles' class, Aquino directed the second act of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. Although she had been a quiet student in class throughout the semester, following the performance of her final project, Knowles was reportedly speechless, and shortly after, he called Aquino into his office and said, "You know, you tell beautiful stories." According to Aquino, "I think that was the beginning of that [a career in directing] for me."[496] Since that time, Aquino and Knowles have collaborated frequently in both the scholarly and artistic worlds, co-editing the *Asian Canadian* volume of the *New Essays in Canadian Theatre* and working as director-dramaturg on multiple new plays, most recently *Sister Mary's a Dyke?!* in June 2013. To this end, it is

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[495] Aquino, Interview.
[496] Ibid.

intriguing (and somewhat anomalous) that Knowles, a white man and therefore a representative of the dominant culture, serves in this mentorship capacity for Aquino, who has become known for her focus on giving voice to culturally marginalized groups and her work with diverse creative teams; however, perhaps Knowles' encouragement *as* a member of the dominant culture and his own willingness to engage critically with dominant cultural hierarchies was just the opening and support Aquino needed at that point in her life to begin her work as a director who brings traditionally marginalized stories to life on the stage.

Although she had been crossing borders much of her life, Aquino's time in university also marked a period when Aquino rejected being the "other" and her hyphenated identity. In reflecting on her play *Miss Orient(ed)* co-written with Nadine Villasin, Aquino admitted that the three Filipino characters featured in the play – each of which relates to a perspective of the Filipino identity such as the naïve new immigrant, the proud Filipina Canadian, and the Filipina who rejects her roots – were iterations of herself. "I went through those phases. I did, in university, dye my hair blonde and pretend not to speak Filipino. There was a phase in my life when I totally didn't want to be 'other.'" However, Aquino continues," Finally, now, I can call myself, clearly, proudly, Filipino Canadian, as opposed to before, when it was 'No, I'm Canadian,' or 'No, I'm Filipina.'"[497]

Perhaps part of Aquino's realization and eventual ownership of her cultural identity came in part via a second key member of Aquino's own support system at

[497] Nina Lee Aquino, qtd in Ric Knowles, "Between There and Home: An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (Winter 2006): 82.

Guelph: Judith Thompson. Thompson, a highly respected Canadian playwright, taught Aquino playwriting and while encouraging her to write from her experiences, also offered Aquino another venue of artistic expression and a life lesson that has shaped (or even solidified) Aquino's career path and philosophy. Aquino recalls,

> I went into her office once and she took out this book, *Mother Tongue*. Boom. Put it in front of me and said, "I want you to direct this." I'm like, "Why this?" "I think it's important." You know? And at that point, still I said, "Can't I be an actor?" Because I was still trying to decide. And she goes, "You know, Nina, you can be an actor. I think you're a wonderful actor. I think you can still be an actor, but I think there's something bigger in store for you. You have a bigger purpose. Because if you're an actor, you'll be one of the hundreds of thousands of artists trying to break through this wall." And at that time, I didn't know what she meant by "This Wall." "But if you become a director, you can be that door on that wall. And open it up that way."[498]

And open up the proverbial door of opportunity for traditionally marginalized voices Aquino did. In directing *Mother Tongue* Aquino broke new ground by bringing the first non-white play to the Guelph theatre department. Aquino's production also reached beyond the rather homogeneous (white) casting pool of the drama department: "One was from Waterloo, a computer science major; one was an environmental science major in Guelph; and another one was an engineering student."[499] Thus, even as a beginning director, Aquino reached out and, urged by Thompson, opened the door not only to Asian actors but also to students beyond the drama department and Guelph itself.

These experiences and supportive influences energized and inspired Aquino, and while she already had the instinct and desire to see herself and other diverse perspectives reflected in the work (as demonstrated by her interest in *Mother Tongue* and her willingness to reach actors outside of the department), these moments further solidified

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[498] Aquino, Interview.
[499] Ibid.

her desire to be a theatre activist and "cultural leader."[500] In fact, this sub-theme of being a cultural leader and a role model for her community comes up frequently in her narrative as well – both as a political and artistic position. Perhaps more than any other director included in this study, Aquino realized that her role as the director comes with significant power, power that she would then use in constructive ways to "do something for the community. I can be an enabler, I can be an empowerer."[501] As her mentor and now-collaborator Knowles attests, Nina uses her role as a director to open doors for as many artists from diverse backgrounds as possible, "bringing different cultures, genders, sexualities, ages, abilities, and other kinds of difference, as well as different disciplinary specialties, to bear on a project."[502] Thus, she not only opens doors but also is a support system for others.

At this point in her career, Nina Lee Aquino has recognized and embraced her status as a spunky, petite, Filipino-Canadian woman director, and while she readily acknowledges those identities' impacts on her life and experience, she also celebrates that difference, finding additional ways to maneuver within Toronto theatre culture and, in so doing, opening doors for not only herself but also other artists from diverse backgrounds. In fact, her most recent collaboration with David Yee, *carried away on the crest of a wave*, which premiered on the alternative-turned-mainstream Tarragon Theatre in spring 2013 (and will be discussed at length as the case study for this chapter), did precisely that, as it not only brought a story created by and infused with Asian Canadians' experiences to the prominent Tarragon stage but also marked the first time an Asian-

[500] Aquino, Interview.
[501] Ibid.
[502] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.

Canadian woman had directed for Tarragon's main stage. Thus, this production and others such as *the lady in the red dress* and *Sister Mary's a Dyke?!* (which she directed for Cahoots Theatre in June 2013) mark the ways that Aquino both inhabits the borderlands of multiple identities and pushes against the established boundaries of Toronto mainstream theatre in an attempt to support diverse voices and open the door for other artists like her to begin crossing and blurring traditional artistic boundaries.

Directorial Methods, Strategies, and Aesthetic

Although Nina Lee Aquino exists and works in multiple theatrical disciplines, she has, particularly in recent years, become known primarily as an artistic director and, the focus of this study, a director. Winner of several awards for emerging directors as well as a Dora Award winner and nominee for Outstanding Direction, Aquino's work has been characterized as "elegant," "imaginative," and "stylish" for its use of movement and staging to create worlds that come in a variety of forms but nearly always embody and feature diverse perspectives.[503] Many contemporary directors, including the other women directors included in this study, would argue that their work and their "typical" aesthetic varies between productions, and as a director, Nina Lee Aquino is the same. In our interview, she noted with a smile and a chuckle that "if anything, I've learned not to stick to one thing. That every production, every play and playwright has its own needs and that I need to really, like water, adapt…I've embraced the inconsistency of the process and just trust that there will be one. And that it's not a formula."[504] In this way, one might

[503] Stephen Hunt, "Paper connects a city of stories," *Calgary Herald*, 21 June 2012; Martin Morrow, "Fresh and funny, Paper is full of potential," *Globe and Mail*, 23 March 2011; Yvette Nolan, personal email, 26 June 2013.
[504] Aquino, Interview.

say Aquino is embracing the inconsistencies of the borderlands and the liminal spaces provided by the borders' unfixed nature; at the borders things blur and within that blurring there exists, to invoke cultural anthropologist Victor Turner's phrase as applied to liminal spaces, a place of "pure possibility," and this phrase seems particularly apt when applied to Aquino and the creative process of theatre.[505]

New Plays, New and Diverse Voices

A look specifically at Nina Lee Aquino's directing reveals further connections to the theme of opening doors that so influenced Aquino's own development, for she is known for her work on new plays, which functions artistically as a way to bring perspectives and voices from the borderlands to the fore. In addition to having a "good eye for good writing," she specifically chooses to work with new plays from, as mentor and regular dramaturgical collaborator Ric Knowles observes, "minoritized cultures, or plays that work across cultures."[506] Aquino herself bluntly states that she has "never been interested in working with, you know, Shaw or Shakespeare," two canonical voices that traditionally have dominated the Canadian cultural scene, with prominent festivals dedicated to each of their work.[507] Moreover, her penchant for new work also supports her professed dedication to develop new voices for the Canadian stage, voices that are not often heard in mainstream theatres due to their culturally or racially marginalized status, and this response can then be viewed as yet another way to fulfill two previously

[505] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 97.

[506] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.
[507] Aquino, Interview.

discussed sub-themes: opening doors and serving as a support system for the Asian Canadian theatre community.

Aquino's directing resume reveals that her productions – most of them new plays – have largely come from or are centered around new and diverse voices. (Perhaps this sub-theme is better simply titled "new"?) From *Banana Boys* (2004) and *the lady in the red dress* (2009) to *SIA* (2012) and *Sister Mary's a Dyke?!* (2013),[508] Nina Lee Aquino's productions have explored and pushed the boundaries of intersecting identities through performance. Even when directing a play that is not explicitly focused on diversity in its content or story, Aquino naturally seeks out diversity in her casting. When directing *The Monster Under the Bed* at Young People's Theatre (YPT), for instance, Aquino auditioned many actors and ultimately cast a Filipino boy in the lead role, a Korean man as the father monster, a white boy as the son monster, a Filipina woman as the mother and female characters, and the half Chinese, half Scottish David Yee as the incidental characters. It was not until after finally casting the production that Aquino realized, "Oh wow, my choices really – whether or not I'm at fu-GEN, Cahoots, or YPT, they're just that diverse."[509] Thus, although Aquino is a professional director who works with a variety of theatre companies and naturally seeks to reach the largest audience base possible, her primary directorial and artistic interest is to support the multicultural community and consider intercultural stories and bodies on stage. Along with diversity in content, Ric Knowles points to Aquino's focus on depicting a diverse and colorful picture on stage as a key tenet of her direction: "She likes the rehearsal hall to be as

[508] *SIA* by Matthew McKenzie is about a Canadian volunteer at a Liberian refugee camp who is held hostage and tortured for his Western status, and *Sister Mary is a Dyke?!* by Flerida Pena is a solo show about a young woman of color coming to grips with her sexuality in Catholic school.

[509] Aquino, Interview.

diverse as possible…She privileges "other" in her hiring and casting, wanting good people in every role, culturally specific where possible, but at least, if at all possible, from non-dominant culture when she can."[510] In this way, similar to all of the directors discussed thus far, Nina Lee Aquino and her work are also focused on building, supporting, and portraying a community – a community rooted in diversity.

Collaboration and Community

Within this artistic community and in keeping with the sub-themes of opening doors and encouraging diversity, Nina Lee Aquino also surrounds herself with a strong collaborative team. Thus, the theme of "collaboration" also emerges as a strong part of Aquino's narrative and directorial work. Chinese/Scottish-Canadian playwright David Yee is Aquino's frequent collaborator – much like Jillian Keiley's collaboration with Robert Chafe (discussed in Chapter 6) and, to some extent, Collier's collaboration with her Electric Company colleagues (discussed in Chapter 3). Similar to Keiley and Collier's collaborative relationships, it is interesting to note that Aquino collaborates with a male playwright. Of course, these types of collaborations are not uncommon, as can be seen in the frequent collaboration of American director Anna Shapiro and playwright Tracey Letts or playwright Bruce Norris's preference to work with Shapiro or Pam MacKinnon.[511] Moreover, the male-female playwright-director collaboration might also help mitigate part of the gender issue related to the new play selection process, which Emily Glassberg Sands revealed in her groundbreaking 2009 study, noting that there is an

[510] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.
[511] Patrick Healy, "Staging a Sisterhood," *New York Times*, 31 January 2013, http://theater.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/theater/female-directors-more-prominent-in-new-york.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed 1 June 2013).

overall lower acceptance rate for new works by women.[512] Thus, Yee, as a male playwright, stands a greater chance of having his new plays produced. However, we must also consider Yee and Aquino's status as Asian-Canadians, an aspect of identity politics that may further complicate their reception or acceptance rate. This element in mind, then, it seems logical that the pair's work not only looks at voices from a particular Asian-Canadian perspective; rather, through their work and their common understanding of life within these multiple, complicated identities the pair seek to subvert traditional assumptions and portrayals of gender as well as race and ethnicity. Plays like *paperSERIES*, which is a series of six vignettes that are all connected by the theme of paper and importance of love, consider ethnic diversity, certainly, but also look at that ethnic diversity from a variety of perspectives – male, female, Chinese, South Asian, Indian, waiters, orphans, and taxi-driving doctors – and how those perspectives are connected. Moreover, Aquino and Yee's longstanding collaboration has allowed the two to grow artistically together, each artist's work influencing the other's. Aquino notes that "even David's aesthetic as a playwright on the page has been very much influenced by how I direct. He rarely puts in stage directions and if he does they're impossible stage directions. You know, but that's the only way I like working."[513] As a result, Aquino and Yee's collaboration crosses many boundaries in both content and form. Between the two of them – Aquino as Filipina-Canadian who has lived in the Philippines, US and Canada, Yee as Chinese/Scottish Happa Canadian – they experience living between and

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[512] Emily Glassberg Sands, "Opening the Curtain on Playwright Gender: An Integrated Economic Analysis of Discrimination in American Theatre" (master's thesis, Princeton University, April 2009), http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/theater/Openingthecurtain.pdf (accessed 15 May 2012).

[513] Aquino, Interview.

among multiple identities on a regular basis, thus their collaboration and their work are rooted in and naturally explore that liminal, borderland existence."[514]

Beyond Yee, Aquino also surrounds herself with a diverse artistic support team. As frequent dramaturg Ric Knowles notes, one of Aquino's directorial strengths lies in the fact that she "surrounds herself with excellent people in all of the creative roles and allows them to do their work. And then she pushes and tweaks."[515] Aquino has, for instance, worked with many of the same creative team members for multiple years and in many permutations, thus establishing a level of trust and familiarity essential to strong community and collaboration. Scenic designer Camellia Koo, for instance, frequently designs Aquino's productions. Just this year, Koo designed the fascinating set (the home for the family was literally contained in a shipping container, thus communicating the peripheral and transitory experience of, in this instance, an Asian American family struggling to find their place in American culture) for *Ching Chong Chinaman* as well as for *carried away on the crest of a wave* and *Sister Mary's a Dyke?!*, the two shows Aquino directed immediately following *Chinaman.* During part of one of the days during which I observed rehearsal for *Ching Chong Chinaman*, Koo was in the room, as my rehearsal observations coincided with the first days the actors were working on the container-house set itself. In watching Koo and Aquino interact, it was clear that they had a definite working vocabulary and system, as their discussion often included inside laughs and at times it seemed that one did not even need to complete a sentence before the other knew what she was saying. Supporting Aquino's focus on collaboration and the

[514] The term "happa" is originally a Hawaiian term that means "part" or "mixed," and it has been utilized by mixed race people, particularly Asian Pacific Islanders, to describe their mixed racial and ethnic status. Yee consistently uses this term in identifying himself.

[515] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.

encouragement of diverse artists within that collaboration, an interview published shortly before the opening of *carried away on the crest of a wave* cites Aquino as saying, "the way I work with my lighting designer and my set and costume designer is highly collaborative. We look at the piece beyond what the play needs in terms of entrances and exits, we're looking at it from a metaphorical and psychological point of view. The set isn't a literal interpretation."[516] Moreover, Aquino is reputed to work well with designers in that she provides them with a sense of the atmosphere and world she would like to create but then allows them their leeway to create that world.[517] Although a necessary and arguably a typical strategy of collaborative working for most directors, Aquino's collaboration with these artists takes on additional significance, for the collaboration not only supports her productions artistically and professionally but also open doors for other Asian Canadian artists to gain access to new plays, venues, and networking opportunities.

Transitioning, or the "In-betweens"

In terms of her directorial aesthetic, Aquino is also very much known for her transitions, and in both our interview as well as additional conversations about Aquino's work, her carefully staged and imaginative transitions are often mentioned – another sub-theme related to her directorial work and style. In fact, her attention to transitional moments in plays – the "borders" between scenes – emerged quite early in her directorial development, as she became known as the "transition queen" during her production of *Mother Tongue* at Guelph University. The script for *Mother Tongue* includes minimal, if any, direction for transitions between scenes; thus, the transitional moments became "the

[516] Christopher Jones, "A Wave Breaks on Tarragon Stage," *TO Live with Culture*, 23 April 2013, http://www.livewithculture.ca/theatre/a-wave-breaks-on-tarragon-stage/ (accessed 27 June 2013).

[517] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.

playground" for Aquino to "tell the in-between of the scenes."[518] Aquino's language here is particularly fascinating in her reference to the "*in-between* of the scenes," a reference which shows her attention to not only the play text in its entirety but also the interstitial spaces, the "in-between" moments which post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha identifies as offering the potential to "initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."[519] Thus, both in practice and in theory, these transitions, or as Aquino puts it the "in-between of the scenes," offer great possibility and connect to the multiple ways Aquino inhabits and is attentive to borderlands.

Throughout my exploration of Nina's work, the importance of these transitions to her artistic work and directorial philosophy continued to arise. In multiple news articles and interviews, Aquino and her critics point to her use of transitions to capture the story and atmosphere of a play. When prompted to reveal her "favourite" part of a play in a recent interview, Aquino responded with,

> The transitions. Those will always be the most favourite parts of any play that I am working on. And transitions are always something I look out for when I go see a play. I don't know why or what is it about the idea of transitions that fascinate me. But it does and it's important to me. It's like…how a piano player turns the pages of the music sheet without having to stop playing the piano. I want my scenes to never stop moving. And I revel in figuring those moments out.[520]

Movement

Within Aquino's statement on transitions, particularly her desire for her scenes "to never stop moving" as they go through the "in-between" or borders between scenes,

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[518] Aquino, Interview.

[519] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

[520] Leslie Barcza, "10 Questions with Nina Lee Aquino," *barczablog*, 6 April 2013, http://barczablog.com/2013/04/06/10forninaleeaquino/ (accessed 6 June 2013).

is yet another element, or sub-theme, of her directing that frequently emerges in discussions of her work: the importance of movement and physicality. She uses movement throughout her productions but she is particularly attentive to transitions so as to fluidly move from one and into the next, continuing and overlapping the scene's physical action. To accomplish this, Aquino regularly uses a choreographer and, more recently, a "movement designer; a term that has emerged over the past 10 years in the Toronto theatre scene, the movement designer is a member of the creative team whose work is distinct from choreographing dance or stylized movement and instead works with the director to establish a movement vocabulary and a production's physicality – much in the same way that the director works with other designers.[521] In fact, according to Ric Knowles, Aquino is "one of a handful" of artists in Canada and beyond who have created and are popularizing the incorporation of this specifically-delineated position – yet another way that the importance of transitions and artistic innovation are manifested in Aquino's work.[522]

The importance of physical movement to Aquino is due in large part to her natural directorial instincts; however, one might also read it as an extension of her borderlands consciousness through which she recognizes the import of truly seeing people and their bodies in all of their capacities. Additionally, her focus on movement and using movement to continue the story and action through the transition could also draw from

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[521] Knowles is careful to point out that this position is distinct from a choreographer in that the movement designer is attentive to the overall movement needs of the production in regard to movement: "It can mean developing a movement vocabulary for a show that can be drawn on around central concepts, ideas or motifs as they recur; it can mean working with actors on expressive movement in particular sequences within the show; it can mean simply working with actors on finding their characters specific movement or gestural vocabulary." Knowles, Personal email, 28 June 2013.

[522] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.

her exposure to and awareness of more traditional forms of Asian drama, many of which are also focused on telling story through movement. One of Aquino's directing projects, *Singkil*, was rooted in and inspired by the traditional Filipino dance form of singkil, for instance. Moreover, throughout *Ching Chong Chinaman* rehearsals, Aquino was clearly focused on the movement and positioning of the actor's bodies in space. Beginning from the characters' opening pose in which they created a still image of a "standard" American family photo and moving to a surreal/fantasy waltz between the mother and the family's mysterious Chinese visitor, who they mistakenly called "Ching Chong,"Aquino was very focused and precise about honing these physical moments and dance moments, wanting them to be correct and focusing on the visual flow of the stage.

Rhythm and Music

The discussion of this sub-theme of transitions and movement is also tied in large part to Aquino's strong sense of rhythm and musicality. In talking with Aquino, I was often struck by the musicality to her speaking voice (perhaps reminiscent of her time spent as a musical theatre actor), and multiple times within our interview, the concept of music as related to her directing, particularly when selecting texts, arose. In fact, when asked to describe her directorial aesthetic, Aquino instinctually and immediately linked movement to music, noting that her direction is

> …movement-based. Some would say very, there's a musicality to my direction. There's a rhythm, there's a cadence. It's very physical. I don't think anybody's ever accused me of directing talking heads…Like, even when I read scripts, I often say that, you know, I know the project is mine when I can hear the music in the words. When I hear the music and I know the rhythm, even if it's a new script and it's in its roughest shape, I look for that rhythm. And when I can somehow

> catch it, I know it's a project for me. If it's something that I can conduct to the stage, then it's the right kind of play for my kind of aesthetic.[523]

Knowles further supports this statement, noting Aquino is "extremely good with music and sound, 'hears' shows in terms of their rhythms and melodies and tempos," and multiple critical reviews and interviews with Nina Lee Aquino as well as David Yee make mention of this "musicality" of the production – predominately as heard within the text itself but also physically as seen through the pacing and movement on stage.[524] Throughout *Ching Chong Chinaman* rehearsals, Aquino would encourage the actors to pick up the pace, ensure their transitional movements were "crispy," and joke that she could "do a fiesta" between two scenes (which had just utilized an over-the-top fiesta dance as part of the action) and therefore needed to tighten the pace. Moreover, the use of music itself was key in these moments. During *Ching Chong Chinaman* Aquino dedicated a significant amount of her own personal time after rehearsal to talk with the sound designer about how the sounds – familiar themes from American sit coms – would subtly change and become more extreme and distorted as the show progressed, thus reinforcing aurally the style and tone of the play.

Aquino's focus on movement, rhythm and musicality within her productions all support the sub-theme of transitions within Aquino's work and their artistic and theoretical import to her narrative. Within this conception of the transition, we see yet again the reflection of shifting borders – in performance, nothing separates the scenes definitively but we, as audience with the help of Aquino as director, transition fluidly

[523] Aquino, Interview.
[524] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.

between scenes, tying one moment to the next. While a traditional directorial focus, for Aquino this focus on transitions is particularly pertinent in light of the multiple worlds that she inhabits herself and her recognition of the importance of diversity as well as finding connections, or the moments of "in-between", among diverse people.

Negotiating Directorial Power, or "On Her Feet"

Within the rehearsal hall and in working with actors, many of these sub-themes, particularly the idea of opening doors and offering a support system, also become evident as Aquino works within the director's role to negotiate power and power structures within the room. It should be noted that she routinely works with artists, from actors to playwrights to designers, of diverse backgrounds; thus, within the rehearsal hall, she likely does not deal with issues of hegemonic racism as encountered from the dominant group as frequently as she does in her dealings as an artistic director.[525] I do not mean to imply that it does not occur at all within the rehearsal hall, but presumably complications specifically related to Aquino's visible minority status are somewhat mitigated by the diverse group that already inhabits that space. However, in the rehearsal space and in working with actors, Aquino allows the actors discover moments on their own, therein opening the door for them to find agency and investment within the creative process. For instance, when one *Ching Chong Chinaman* actor asked if he could try performing a moment while standing rather than the originally blocked seated positions, Aquino's response was a quick and definite, "Yes!" Moreover, she followed that response with an

[525] In our interview, for example, Aquino noted that when she as a leader and artistic director sits on meetings for the theatres at large, she often looks around and thinks, "Hmm, you guys are all old, white men." Thus, it is more likely that in those contexts she experiences greater friction with issues of age as coupled with race, gender and physical status.

announcement to the entire cast, saying "Now's the time to do these little adjustments, so just do it and if I see something we'll stop." These words then gave the actors the freedom to try new things and experiment, a sense of agency that was particularly important at this stage in the process, for they had just been introduced to the set itself and therefore needed to feel they could explore and try new things so as to get more accustomed to the set and its intricacies (which were many, as their "home" was constructed out of a steel freight container, certainly a nontraditional set piece). In the rehearsal following the announcement, the ensemble did stop several times to fix a moment; however, even in those moments Aquino would encourage the actors to "play around with it" and would brainstorm with the actors – often injecting her own brand of wry humor, accompanied by a smile – how to solve a perceived sticking point in the play. Her actors also recognize and appreciate this inclusive approach. For instance, John Ng, who played the father in *Ching Chong Chinaman*, recalled that on the first day the *Ching Chong Chinaman* cast used the set (also my first day of rehearsal observations), Aquino huddled the actors together and

> began her address by encouraging us to use the available opportunity to live and breathe in the space, to make it our home, and to "keep playing" and allow ourselves to make new discoveries even as we are adjusting to the physical surroundings. Most directors by this point of the process are ready to push the panic button if their pre-set markers for where the actors' level of readiness should be have not been met. I have yet to see Nina sweat. And I feel safe because of her open line of communication, unwavering from Day One, and her strong commitment to provide us with the room and time to grow at our own pace, to watch us as we lose ourselves *in the forest* and still maintain the composure while we stagger and struggle to find a way out, secure in the knowledge that she is there to guide us to an alternative solution.[526]

[526] John Ng, "No Offense, None Taken," *The Charlebois Post*, 10 March 2013, http://www.charpo-canada.com/2013/03/sunday-feature-john-ng-on-ching-chong.html (accessed 2 May 2013).

Aquino's encouragement of her actors to trust their instincts, try new things and experiment in rehearsal is admittedly somewhat complicated by the fact that she is also often on her feet, moving into the performance space to talk with an actor or adjust a set piece herself. During my rehearsal observations of *Ching Chong Chinaman,* on nearly every page of my copious rehearsal notes, I noted at least once – and more often twice – that Aquino was "on her feet" or "up and talking to an actor" on stage. Moreover, when giving notes at the end of a scene or longer run-through, Aquino regularly joined her actors on the set, positioning herself at the set's kitchen table and casually eating snacks (most of which were carefully packaged in small Ziploc baggies) while she offered her feedback and discussed the work with the actors. While some might read these moments as invasions of the actors' space or dictatorial moments in which the director provides specific line readings for the actors to mimic – both actions that limit the actors' individual power and artistic agency – it seemed to me that these "on her feet" moments occur for two reasons. First, they are a reflection of Aquino's own actor training and experience, for as articulated previously she has and continues to act herself (if only occasionally); thus, the moments during which she moves into the performance space are instinctual and organic, instilled in her by her own past experience and training. Second, because Aquino works from and lives in a perspective that recognizes diversity and honors the marginalized voices that are often silenced by individuals in positions of power, these "on her feet" moments also served to destabilize the hierarchical position of The Director and the divide that is created when the director simply remains in her chair in the audience, offering feedback from afar. Thus, while Aquino is the recognized leader of the production and her vision the unifying factor, this strategy serves to create a

sense of community and equity in the rehearsal hall, an atmosphere that is particularly important for those who have been marginalized and whose perspectives have been ignored on a larger socio-political level.

Ultimately, Nina Lee Aquino's "kind" of doing and directing of theatre is one that not only inhabits borderlands but revels in and expands on the blurriness of those borders, for in the borders – what Victor Turner would call the liminal spaces that are "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" – change, reflection, subversion is possible.[527] To this end, Nina Lee Aquino poetically states, in both form and content:

> My kind of theatre has the ability to
> change;
> move;
> shift;
> fuck up expectations, turn preconceived notions on its side; quash assumptions
> destroy and build;
> heal or open wounds (in order to heal);
> engage and alienate at the same time;
> illuminate, enlighten;
> confront;
> and strengthen.[528]

[527] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 97.

[528] Leslie Barcza, "10 Questions with Nina Lee Aquino," barczablog, 6 April 2013, http://barczablog.com/2013/04/06/10forninaleeaquino/ (accessed 6 June 2013). The poetic and unique visual form of Aquino's response, which in reading the remainder of the interview one can infer was completed virtually rather than verbally, has been maintained here, for I find its nontraditional, poetic visual structure a further demonstration of Aquino's propensity/desire to push the limits of expression and artistic form and content.

carried away on the crest of a wave: A Case Study

While the vast majority of Nina Lee Aquino's directorial works deal in some way with diversity and identities related to diversity (particularly racial and ethnic diversity), within her own oeuvre certain productions stand out as indicative of her "typical" directorial approach and aesthetic. In particular, throughout our interview conversation (as well as in conversations with other Canadian theatre artists), Aquino's collaborations with playwright David Yee rise frequently to the surface as "representative" of her work, and Nina also points to those productions as most true to her directorial vision and approach: "David and I have our own kind of personal collaboration on projects…And you know, we're kind of like the Robert Chafe/Jillian Keiley [who are discussed in Chapter 6], Daniel Brooks/Daniel MacIvor or, you know, that kind of team. So there's Nina Lee Aquino and David Yee."[529]

Although I did not see *carried away on the crest of a wave* in rehearsal, the play is a useful focus here for several reasons.[530] First, it is not only an Aquino/Yee collaboration but also a new work, which is an area that Aquino is drawn toward and excels in, reveling in the ways new works change and shift – yet another trait of the borderland mentality. Second, the production, due to its story's origins and inspirations, very much incorporates and depicts the Asian Canadian experience (as well as the global connections across cultures, which seems particularly apt and prescient in this transnational, increasingly globalized world). Third, the production was part of Tarragon Theatre's main stage season, and Tarragon's position as a prominent alternative-turned-

[529] Aquino, Interview.

[530] For simplicity, throughout the rest of the chapter, the play will be referred to as simply *carried away*.

mainstream theatre is significant, for many of these companies feature but a few token racially/ethnically-oriented productions. Not only that but Nina Lee Aquino's position as director for *carried away* marked the first time an Asian-Canadian woman directed on the Tarragon stage. Fourth, according to most critics and established Canadian theatre artists who are familiar with Aquino and Yee's work, *carried away* demonstrated a maturity in the Aquino/Yee collaboration/partnership, which makes it apt as a point of analysis for Aquino's most current directorial work and aesthetic.[531]

Written as part of Yee's 2012-2013 playwriting residency at Tarragon, *carried away* looks at the effect of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that occurred as a result of an earthquake off the coast of Indonesia. The tsunami struck 11 countries in South East Asia, from Indonesia and Malaysia to Thailand and India, and killed over 150,000 people with its power. Based on interviews with survivors (albeit loosely, by admission of the playwright) and research into media portrayals of the event, the play is structured as a series of vignettes that tell the stories of survivors, connecting them across time, space, and geography, and probes the question, "What happens when the events that tie us together are the same that tear us apart?"[532]

[531] Yvette Nolan, a prominent First Nations playwright/director/dramaturg and a respected mentor and advocate for Yee and Aquino, particularly noted the growth of the collaboration and called *carried away* "Nina's most mature work yet." (Yvette Nolan, Personal email, 26 June 2013)

[532] Tarragon Theatre website, http://tarragontheatre.com/season/1213/carried-away-on-the-crest-of-a-wave/ (accessed 24 June 2013).

Figure 9. Ash Knight and Kawa Ada as the priest and the assessor in *carried away*. Photo by Cylla von Tidemann. Courtesy Tarragon Theatre.

The play is not grounded in a traditional linear narrative, an immediate subversion of the traditional well-made play. Each vignette stands on its own, with many of the stories reflecting each other through variations on common themes or topics, eerie echoes of dialogue from previous scenes, or set pieces that are used in one story but transform into something else in the next. The play opens with a female scientist (played by Vietnamese-Canadian Mayko Nguyen) who eagerly and briskly introduces the audience to the International Earth Rotation and Reference Systems Service, an organization intended to "observe" and serve as "record keepers of the big picture."[533] Although her speech is filled with scientific jargon, her intention is to actively publicize the information, for by sharing her scientific information, she argues, "maybe we stand a

[533] David Yee, *carried away on the crest of a wave*, archival video, Tarragon Theatre, May 2013.

chance after all."[534] From there, the story moves to a mythic tale of two Chinese brothers, named only Runner and Swimmer (indicative of their respective talents), who are trying to save their sinking home. Throughout their tale are references to Chinese folklore and stories of how the world began, and as Swimmer dives away to save the world in a stylized transitional movement sequence – "I'll be right back" – Runner calls out that he does not want to be alone, thus touching on the darker side of the overall theme of connection. The rest of the vignettes then span the globe (and even time, as indicated by one particularly fantastic scene in which a Japanese man is falling down a hole that is "four-and-a-half or five years deep" following the loss of his daughter) – a DJ in urban Toronto wants to play his (horribly inappropriate) "Tsunami Song" in an attempt to heal through laughter; a Catholic priest and his followers seek confirmation from a Muslim anthropologist of the divinity of a statue that survived "the event"; a lonely man rescues and returns a young girl, who lost her parents in the tsunami, to her uncle; a Thai woman from Vancouver is confronted with the knowledge that her memory had been erased during the event and caused her to believe she was a prostitute; an FBI agent confronts a desperate mother from Salt Lake City who replaced her child, lost in the tsunami, with another; a guilt-ridden meteorologist who misread the tsunami data encounters a Burmese man who reveals that following the tsunami he began to look at people, "really look at them" and began to see the possibilities in "help[ing] our brothers and sisters if we just looked at one another, if we just cared what one another truly

[534] Ibid.

needs," thus leaving the audience with the play's poignant message: "we are all connected."[535]

Water also infuses the story – thematically and literally – as the set, designed by Camellia Koo, features a pool of water through which the actors frequently splash and translucent screens that, when hit with the right light (designed by Michelle Ramsay) look and, as water pours from the grid overhead, function as water falls. These screens also function as hazy mirrors. At various times throughout the play, Aquino stages actors behind them, their blurry outlines reminding us of characters we may have or will see in other scenes and visually reinforcing the theme of interconnectedness, or borders that only vaguely separate one survivor's story from the others.

Figure 10. Richard Zeppieri, as the guilt-ridden scientist who did not warn people of the impending tsunami, begs for forgiveness from the stranger (John Ng) while the company watches in the final scene of *carried away*. Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann. Courtesy Tarragon Theatre.

[535] Ibid.

As previously noted, several prominent Canadian theatre artists recognized *carried away* as a mark of the maturing relationship between Aquino and Yee. First Nations director and playwright Yvette Nolan, for instance, noted that *carried away* was Nina's "most mature work yet" and posited that her "ongoing relationship with David Yee no doubt contributes to her growth as a director."[536] Several Toronto critics hailed the show as "a crazily ambitious new play" that is "spellbinding and captivating and glorious and theatre at its very best."[537] Others commented on the effective ways that Aquino's direction served to "link together" the stories through music (with sound design by Michelle Bensimmon) and physical transitions.[538] Overall, however, the critical response was rather mixed, with the vast majority of the negative criticism or questions raised centering around Yee's "uneven" script, which many critics felt needed some trimming in length and firmer connections between stories as well as consistency of style.[539]

Admittedly, in my own experience of watching the play, there were several stories that did not feel quite as compelling to me as others. For instance, the scene directly following intermission was a visually stunning and passionately acted sex scene between an Asian escort and a white man searching for fulfillment after he lost his wife in the tsunami, and it was powerful in that it turned notions of the subservient woman and

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[536] Yvette Nolan, Personal email, 26 June 2013.

[537] Martin Morrow, "Tsunami tale gets carried away on a wave of perversity," *Globe and Mail*, 25 April 2013; Stuart Monro, "Carried away on the crest of a wave," *The Charlebois Post*, 26 April 2013, http://www.charpo-canada.com/2013/04/review-toronto-carried-away-on-crest-of.html (accessed 15 June 2013).

[538] Keith Bennie, "Carried away on the crest of a wave rises at Tarragon," *BlogTO.com*, 26 April 2013, http://www.blogto.com/theatre/2013/04/carried_away_on_the_crest_of_a_wave_rises_at_tarragon/ (accessed 30 June 2013).

[539] Robert Crew, "Review: Carried away on the crest of a wave," *Toronto Star*, 26 April 2013, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/2013/04/25/carried_away_on_the_crest_of_a_wave_review.html (accessed 30 June 2013).

victimized prostitute on its head by featuring a strong, powerful woman in contrast to a lost white man. However, I felt it lacked some of the empathy and deep characterization that many of the other vignettes included. While I can understand some critics' confusion in the mixture of storytelling styles – from the mythic story of the Runner and Swimmer brothers to the surreal fantasy of the Japanese man falling through a hole in the sky to the more realistic (and thoroughly heart wrenching) scene between the young girl who had lost her parents in the tsunami and her grumpy rescuer, who we also learn is an orphan – I would argue that, particularly in light of the themes of "the borderland" and "diversity" that so infuse Aquino's narrative and work, this grab bag of theatrical styles was precisely the intention of Yee and Aquino. To return again to Anzaldua's writings from *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa argues that in writing from/about the border experience "the different stages in embodying the story are neither clearly demarcated nor sequential nor linear – they overlap, shift back and forth, take place simultaneously."[540] Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* itself embodies this mode of borderland storytelling, including autobiographical writing, poetry, myth, nonfiction, and storytelling to convey and create its *mestiza* consciousness. Thus, by writing (Yee) and staging (Aquino) the stories in multiple styles and across time and space, *carried away* expressed the borderland experience of Asian-Canadians, an experience that is not linear but overlaps spatially, temporarily, and stylistically – therein challenging traditional notions of narrative structure and style.

[540] Gloria Anzaldúa, "Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: A Creative Process, in *How We Work*, eds. Marla Morris, Mary Doll, and William Pinar (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 247.

In addition to featuring the interconnected, intercultural Asian experience on stage as well as structural and stylistic diversity, *carried away* also provided Aquino with an opportunity to open doors for Asian-Canadian artists and populate her stage with diversity on multiple levels. The cast of seven was comprised of five men, one woman and one girl from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Admittedly, most were of Asian descent; however, their specific ethnicities varied widely. Mayko Nguyen, for instance, is a Vietnamese-Canadian actress, and John Ng, who also acted in *Ching Chong Chinaman*, is of Chinese descent; meanwhile, Richard Zeppieri plays all of the play's white roles (and in a fascinating yet subtle commentary, all of the white roles were men), and Kawa Ada was born in Afghanistan and educated in the United States. Beyond racial diversity, Aquino also cast generational diversity, as her soon-to-be first grade daughter, Eponine Lee, was also a member of the cast and received rave reviews for her honesty and innocence in performance.[541] Thus, *carried away* provided an opportunity for Aquino to not only get her own proverbial foot in the door at one of Toronto's larger alternative-turned-mainstream theatres but she also introduced Tarragon audiences to a diverse cast of faces that they would not normally see on mainstream stages. In many ways, in fact, Aquino's diverse casting served as a reversal of the typical casting demographics on Toronto stages, which may include one or perhaps two actors of color in a production; however, *carried away* featured only one recognizably white actor, therein challenging and visually subverting audience's assumptions of traditional casting.

[541] In fact, *carried away* was a bit of a family affair, for not only did Aquino direct and her daughter play a role in the ensemble but Aquino's husband Richard Lee, an accomplished actor, stage combatant, and sound designer, was also in the ensemble.

Figure 11. Eponine Lee and John Ng as the orphan and her rescuer in *carried away*. Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann. Courtesy Tarragon Theatre.

Also, the fact that this ensemble of seven actors played over twenty different roles, many of various ethnicities, further reinforced Aquino's vision of diversity, which hinges upon the idea that "we are all multifaceted creatures" of multiple intersecting and connected identities. As a feminist with a background and interest in intersectionality, I found the play and Aquino's staging of these fluid identities and characters beautiful and striking; however, in watching the production, I also was surprised to realize how many different Asian identities were encompassed by the play (Thai, Chinese, Burmese, Indian, etc.) as well as how those identities then overlapped with other identity structures. These overlapping and multiply intersecting identities became particularly apparent, for instance, in the vignette during which the Catholic priest seeks affirmation that his church's statue was divinely spared from being lost in the tsunami. The Catholic priest

was dismayed to find that the evaluator sent by the Vatican was Muslim, and despite the evaluator's credentials, the priest continued to ask, "There was no Catholic available? Or even a Hindu?"[542] To which the Muslim responds, "We are all brothers" and "We are men, just men."[543] Further complicating this exchange is the visual component of the scene, for the Catholic priest was played by a man of color (Ash Knight), as was the Muslim (Kawa Ada). In this way, Aquino, through her directorial choices, problematizes the audience's assumptions and constructions of religious as well racial and ethnic identity. As a viewer, I even wondered how the scene would have changed if a woman of color had played the Muslim role. These are the questions raised by Yee's play and made clear in Aquino's clever and fluid staging.

Aquino's signature movement- and musically-based transitions further help illuminate the connections between diverse people and stories throughout *carried away*. In the final moments of the play, the Burmese character (John Ng) urges the guilt-ridden meteorologist (Richard Zeppieri) to "consider that this is a story that might be true because we are all connected, and we are, none of us, alone."[544] Throughout the play, there is never a moment of complete blackout between vignettes; rather, Aquino uses her transitions to emphasize further the play's theme of human interconnectedness. While the lights may shift, drawing attention from one point on the stage to the next, the characters featured in the previous story often overlap with those entering for the next, and although the stories may be geographically or stylistically divergent, Aquino finds a way to connect these moments of in-between. As the Catholic priest kneels to pray at the

[542] David Yee, *carried away on the crest of a wave*, archival video, Tarragon Theatre, May 2013.
[543] Ibid.
[544] Ibid.

statue, for example, the music segues into the pop song "Don't Go Chasing Waterfalls," a thematic reminder of the priest's extreme faith in the face of disaster and an atmospheric introduction to the setting for the Toronto DJ, who then enters the stage and uses the statue as a coat rack, while the priest exits. In this way, Aquino uses her transitional moments to connect one story to the next, physically, thematically, and atmospherically.

And how does gender play within *carried away*? As a director and person, Aquino admits her first association of identity is with race or ethnicity. Thus, gender and other identities become, in most moments, secondary. *Carried away* is also not a feminist play in that neither gender nor an activist gender politics is its primary focus. That is not to say, however, that there are not moments in which gender identity and gendered power dynamics are also highlighted in *carried away*. A female scientist, for instance, begins the show, placing a woman in a position of power, as a scientist and the sole narrator in that moment, visually and thematically. Beyond the scientist, several other moments in the play further demonstrate a re-thinking of women's power in situations in which they would otherwise be marginalized. Directly following intermission, a female Asian escort is depicted in a scene with a white man, and while one would initially assume the man, as a white man who has presumably purchased the woman's time and body, would be in power, as the scene unfolds, the calm-headed woman has control of the situation. Her carefully selected words have great power against the rambling babble of the man, particularly as she asserts that "my time is precious; don't waste it."[545] Moreover, one of the most powerful and human moments of the play is when the young orphaned girl, rescued by what can only be a described as a

[545] David Yee, *carried away on the crest of a wave*, archival video, Tarragon Theatre, May 2013.

grumpy, lonely man (also, as it turns out, an orphan), is reunited with her uncle and before leaving, returns to connect on a physical, human level with the man as she gives him a grateful and empathetic hug. Perhaps this balance of identities – gendered and otherwise – is what makes Aquino and Yee's collaboration so vibrant and effective, as both bring to the partnership and the production their own perspectives that serve to diversify their own creation process as well as the final theatrical product.

As Eleanor Ty points out in her text on Asian narratives in North America, Aquino and Yee and other Asian Canadian theatre artists are members of what the Canadian government considers the "visible minority" but paradoxically their work has, until recently, remained invisible, relegated to the margins and given minority status. Thus, plays like *carried away* actively help to render the work of the "visible minority" more visible, literally, bringing Asian Canadian stories to Toronto's mainstream theatre companies. Through *carried away* as well as their other collaborations, Aquino and Yee demonstrate – as part of the main stage season at a prominent alternative-turned-mainstream Toronto theatre, no less – their attempt to help more traditionally entrenched companies and theatre goers "open their ears to new frequencies of storytelling and put those storytellers at the forefront."[546] Through its structure, casting, and staging, *carried away* works in many ways to demonstrate both Aquino's directorial aesthetics and the themes of diversity, opening doors, and the potentiality provided by the borderland experience that so infuse her personal and professional narrative.

[546] Catherine Hernandez, "The State of Theatre," *BlogTO,* 10 January 2007, http://www.blogto.com/theatre/2007/01/the_state_of_theatre_catherine_hernandez/ (accessed 20 June 2013).

On Intersecting and Influencing Identities

As demonstrated through not only her personal narrative but also *carried away* itself, Nina Lee Aquino is arguably the most cognizant of the directors included in this study of the multiple identities that shape her work and influence her experiences. Perhaps more importantly, she is also aware of the complications and conflicting natures of those multiple identities. In our interview, she candidly noted that, for her, race typically comes first (just as we saw in her experience when she played Annie as a child), for race makes her, per Canadian rhetoric, a "visible minority:"

> I think first and foremost people identify me more as a culturally diverse artist. Right? Like, they see my color of the skin first before even my gender. So I will always be Filipino more so than woman. That will always be first in the title; that's what I notice. And then my age is last. So it's like a Filipino, woman, young…So I guess for me what's more important, what's closest to my heart in terms of issues that I fight for is diversity. And in terms of that, yes, it's race first at the top of my list and then, you know, whatever else – like sexuality, gender, you know, whatever falls under. It's because *I'm* that, I'm living that.[547]
> However, race is a complicated issue.

Although some breakthroughs have and are beginning to occur more regularly, on a larger scale, Asian-Canadians continue to struggle for recognition by the mainstream theatre culture and to have their stories regularly told on stages across the country.[548] At the International Summit on Directing in the Performing Arts in June 2013, David Yee noted that rarely does he see his face reflected on the stages of Stratford or Shaw unless it is in a role specifically designated as Asian.[549] Moreover, under the umbrella of Asian-Canadian theatre, the distinctions between ethnicities run the risk of becoming conflated

[547] Aquino, Interview.

[548] One instance of this advancement is the success of *Kim's Convenience* at Soulpepper Theatre, which resulted in a re-staging and its scheduled 2013 appearance as part of the National Arts Center English Theatre series, programmed by Jillian Keiley.

[549] David Yee, "And the Actor? Missing in action, absent without leave, dead or alive?" Panel, International Summit on Directing in the Performing Arts, Toronto, ON, 18 June 2013.

and elided. At fu-Gen, for example, Aquino was working on "Asian-Canadian" plays and specific about creating a community of artistic support and opening doors for Asian-Canadian work; however, within those Asian-Canadian plays, which often come from a specific Asian community (Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Chinese, etc.), actors of various descents often play *across* ethnic lines. For example, in Aquino's production of *Banana Boys*, which is about Canadian Born Chinese (CBCs), only one of her cast was a Canadian Born Chinese, and the others were from Hong Kong, Korea, and of mixed race. Thus, while the production was providing opportunities for Asian-Canadian actors to gain professional experience and to tell their own stories, what did it mean that only one cast member was a CBC? Could this casting measure also be read as potentially perpetuating the notion held by some members of the dominant society that all Asians are or at least look the same? This complicated nature of racial and ethnic identification then presents multiple challenges to directors like Aquino: do you attempt to make your programming appealing to all audiences and search for a "universal" theme to which all viewers, regardless of ethnic heritage, can grasp? How do you, as a director interested in creating more opportunities for artists and stories of diversity, create those opportunities but remain true to authentic identities?

Indeed, the borderland is complicated, as Anzaldúa often and poetically articulates in her text and as Aquino would likely agree. Performatively, perhaps the project begins with bringing the larger (Asian-Canadian) community's stories to the fore and then trying to point to the ways that the sub-categories[550] are distinct yet also are

[550] I hate to use the term "sub" as it makes these ethnicities seem lesser, as if part of some sort of racial hierarchy. Ah, the complicated nature of language!

connected. As cultural critic and theorist Henry Giroux argues, identity politics must "be elaborated within, rather than against a politics of solidarity"; thus, the larger Asian-Canadian experience seems an apt place to start.[551] To this end, Aquino stated in a 2005 interview conducted in conjunction with *The Banana Boys*:

> I hate the word 'universal.' I think it's the lamest, most boring word in the universe. When I'm being interviewed – now for *Banana Boys* – I never say, 'This story everybody can relate to.' I'm tired of that. I always say, 'No, this is about five Chinese Asian-Canadian boys here to tell *their* story, and you *listen*." I don't want to '*find things in common*.' I find that really unimaginative. Why? We both have hair, we both have eyes, nose, ears – but what creates drama, what creates conflict, the basic elements of dramaturgy, is difference. It's friction, and a spark happens. You don't create anything by rubbing one ice cube on another ice cube; you just get wet. But get two negative-positive elements and you make sparks; it's colourful; it can be dangerous. It engages you. You think, you fight, you argue.[552]

Thus, for Aquino, it seems that to recognize difference while also encouraging engagement with all forms of diversity is key. As a result, what seems to be a somewhat conflicting statement, actually speaks to the complicated, continual negotiation of identity of which Homi Bhabha writes: "the borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be *consensual as conflictual*; they may *confound* our definitions of tradition and modernity; *realign* the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and *challenge* normative expectations of development and progress."[553]

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[551] Henry Giroux, *Border Crossing: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 174.

[552] Nina Lee Aquino, qtd in Ric Knowles, "Between There and Home: An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (Winter 2006): 81.

[553] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2. Emphasis mine.

On Canadian-ness

Of course, these questions of identity, particularly the discussion of racial and ethnic identity, that Aquino and her directorial work raise are also very much tied up in constructions of Canadian-ness, a further complication of identity. As a nation with an official policy of multiculturalism, it would seem that Canada has a responsibility and willingness to represent its increasingly diverse population in its art and on its stages, and after all, Asian-Canadians and Asian-Canadian theatre *is* Canadian. As playwright and fu-GEN's newly inaugurated artistic director Marjorie Chan writes in the preface to Aquino's ground-breaking anthologies of Asian-Canadian plays: "We are artists, actors, playwrights, storytellers and Canadians. Our goal, our task at hand, is to simply tell our stories as Canadians. As Canadians these are not the exotic stories of another land, but ours. We tell them from ourselves, from our own experiences, and from our own impulses…these impulses remain unique from an Asian-Canadian point of view."[554] Aquino echoes this statement, putting it simply that no matter what project she undertakes she, as a Filipino-Canadian woman, "carries [her] community on her back."[555]

For Aquino, who got her official Canadian citizenship "a couple of years ago," her definition and perspective of Canada and Canadian-ness is connected to the nation's diversity.[556] When asked to describe what it means to be Canadian and to articulate how her work fits within Canadian theatre, Aquino did not wrestle with supplying a definition of Canadian-ness as much as the other directors (or many of my Canadian colleagues) did. Instead, she nodded knowingly, paused, and then provided a definition that very

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[554] Marjorie Chan, "Preface," *Love + RelASIANships*, vol.2, ed. Nina Lee Aquino (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009), iv.
[555] Aquino, Interview.
[556] Ibid.

much came from her perspective as an artist from a diverse background. She pointed specifically to her production of David Yee's *paperSERIES* as exemplifying Canadian-ness, recalling

> [when] people that have come out of *paperSERIES* the one comment that they make is, 'Oh it's very quintessentially Canadian.' Which is like, 'Oh, what does that mean?' And what *does* that mean? You know, as *paperSERIES* is, it's six vignettes. Fragments of lives, right? Shone onto the stage. Which very much kind of, I guess, encompasses Canadian life, which is a lot of things. But if anything, like Canada is made up of a bunch of fragments that are connected by a…all sorts of things. You know, so the mosaic so to speak.

In this statement, Aquino, like the other directors, still raises the question of what it means to be "quintessentially Canadian" and does not have an absolute answer, as demonstrated by her inclusion of phrases such as "kind of," "I guess," and "a lot of things." However, because of her background and identity as a Filipino-Canadian, she is quick to recognize the diversity – the "fragments" – that come together to make up contemporary Canada, and she employs the image of the multicultural Canadian mosaic. While there may not be a single definitive answer to the question "what does it mean to be Canadian?," for Aquino, diversity and multiculturalism provides a place to begin conceptualizing and describing what it means to be a Canadian citizen and artist.

On Feminism and Gender

While Aquino's racial and ethnic identifications come first, she also inhabits the identity of "woman" and identifies as "feminist." However, in keeping with the fluid nature of diversity and identity to which Aquino ascribes and her work reflects, she questions what a feminist status truly implies: "Would I be a feminist? Because I really feel like the definition of feminist is so—it shifts from one person to another, from one

feminist to another. So I get confused honestly as to like, 'Oh so that's what it means now'."[557] Instead of applying a specific "feminist" designation then, within the next breath, Aquino notes that she's "proud to be a female artist" and "that being a woman artist is one of the badges that [she] wear[s]."[558]

Thus, in addition to the complications related to racial identity in Canada, we see confusion surface yet again surrounding the contemporary definition and conceptualization of "feminist." However, two key points arise from and must be noted as part of Aquino's narrative surrounding feminism. First, she admits to being cautious when using the word so as not to use it incorrectly: "I rarely bust out the word 'feminist' because I don't want to misuse it. *(laugh)* Yeah, I'm very careful about what that means." Second, Aquino seems to try to distance herself from strictly categorized or aggressively political versions of feminism, particularly averse to women who assume masculine, aggressive behavior because they just want to have greater power. This in mind, then, it seems that Aquino has found ways to negotiate and find her own power. Like Anzaldua's *la mestiza* consciousness that developed for Anzaldúa in direct response to her life in the physical and theoretical borderlands of the US/Mexican/Chicano cultures, Aquino also inhabits such borderlands; Anzaldúa posits that her *la mestiza* "shifts out of habitual formations" and moves toward "divergent thinking characterized by a movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes."[559] This "whole perspective" and sense of greater inclusion perhaps also feeds into Aquino's human-centered, broad conception of "feminists" and

[557] Aquino, Interview.
[558] Ibid.
[559] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute's Press, 1987 & 2007) 101.

"feminism." However, she is also, in the words of collaborator and mentor Ric Knowles, "very aware of her position as a short, female, Filipina, and the ways in which she has to struggle to maintain authority as a director in certain rehearsal situations working with sometimes senior white male actors."[560] This in mind, it seems the most effective way for her to do work with (rather than against) these identities is for her to recognize them and then include them, for with inclusion comes power and respect. As observed by Knowles, Aquino readily and willingly "listens to everybody on everything and draws on everyone's insights, but she makes the decisions, and everyone works within her contextualizing vision for the piece."[561]

Perhaps what is most interesting and potentially forward-thinking (particularly within what some might argue is a "post-racial" or "post-feminist" or "post-post" society) about Nina Lee Aquino is her resistance to labels overall. Although she has spent her career immersed in and dedicated to bringing Asian-Canadian and other diverse voices and stories to the stage, she continues to resist and challenge the overall concept of labeling people or groups or herself. In a 2005 interview with Ric Knowles and published in *Canadian Theatre Review*, Aquino boldly states, "We're still placed in those categories [of identity and ethnicity]. What's changed is artists not giving a shit about it anymore. I don't care how I'm labeled."[562] However, this resistance to labeling is complicated by Aquino's admission in the same interview that the relationship and role of Filipino-Canadian theatre company Carlos Bulosan is "very important..[because the company] exists because of the need for a community to express itself. It acts like a

[560] Ric Knowles, Personal email, 27 June 2013.
[561] Ibid.
[562] Nina Lee Aquino, qtd in Ric Knowles, "Between There and Home: An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (Winter 2006): 76

bridge between home there and home here."[563] Aquino recognizes the need for these communities and their current attempts to reach "everyone in the community" – of all generations.

Instead, perhaps it is more accurate to consider Aquino and her work as not trying to simply display diverse voices but instead trying to show the connections (not to be confused with the universality, which would imply a removal of individual difference) between people regardless of identities and labels – much like the theme that weaves through *carried away*. In her words, "I think I'm more of an individualist…that, you know, each and every person having its own strengths and weaknesses; it's up to you to make the choice to use that and to carve your own path."[564] This sentiment also connects to Aquino's conception of and response to feminism; in fact, in these words Aquino echoes the sentiments of many of the women directors included in this study, essentially stating that we as a culture need to move beyond seeing these identity categories such as gender and race as strictly defined categories and we need to start seeing the art for art's sake and respecting the work of artists as artists.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Gloria Anzaldúa argues that "because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures."[565] Almost in response to Anzaldua's urgings, Nina Lee Aquino is part of and is arguably spearheading a growing Asian-Canadian theatre movement that "more often

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[563] Nina Lee Aquino, qtd in Ric Knowles, "Between There and Home: An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino," *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (Winter 2006): 77.

[564] Aquino, Interview.

[565] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute's Press, 1987 & 2007), 102.

and more productively tends to destabilize rather than reify identity politics."[566] Perhaps then for Aquino and these artists it is not so much about identity as it is, to borrow Karen Shimakawa's distinction, about "identification," which implies a continual, dynamic negotiation of power and identity rather than an "identity in some static or exclusionary sense."[567] In fact, Aquino's poetically rendered description (she is a playwright, after all) of contemporary Canadian society speaks to this shifting, dynamic, negotiated process of identification:

> Canada is made up of a bunch of fragments that are connected by a…all sorts of things. You know, so the mosaic so to speak. Mosaic is misleading to me because it's permanent, and it's unmovable. Like, if you have the grout, that's like [*mimes digging something out of something quite sticky or hard*]. But I think for me, if anything, Canada is made up of fragments, wonderful fragments. It's laid on a body of water and there's different materials keeping it together, whether it's thread or wire or whatever. But it's constantly doing this [*does shifting and wave like gesture with her hands*]. If I were to give an image of Canada or a map of Canada, that's what it is…When you look very far, it's like, "Oh, yeah! That's Canada." And when you look close, it's just different materials. It's different things holding together. So yeah, so that, to me, is [Canada]. And that, I think, is what describes the work that I like doing. It's never just that one thing.[568]

Neither Aquino nor her work is ever "just one thing," for she, like the flexible mosaic she describes, is attempting through her artistic work to blur the borders that separate identities as well as separate ethnic and mainstream theatre. As a director, she revels in bringing new voices to the stage and, like those who offered her support in key moments of her artistic development, she strives to open doors for other artists from diverse backgrounds. The John Hirsch Prize selection committee described Aquino as "literally changing the face of Canadian theatre by nurturing diversity amongst the

[566] Nina Lee Aquino and Ric Knowles, "Introduction," in *Asian Canadian Theatre* (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2011), x.
[567] Karen Shimakawa, "Enunciating Asian Canadian Drama," in *Asian Canadian Theatre*, eds. Nina Lee Aquino and Ric Knowles (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2011), 1.
[568] Aquino, Interview.

country's new storytellers in our urban centres. Her work is bold, physical, yet playwright centered."[569] On multiple levels, her works and directorial approaches speak to a sense of inclusion, celebrate diversity, and recognize the possibility that lies within the borderlands. While Aquino might experience life in what Anzaldúa would call the borderlands, she does not *dwell* on the details of identity or the limits of the borders; rather, Nina Lee Aquino moves forward, pushing, shifting, challenging, and blurring the borders so that her experience as a short, young, Filipino-Canadian woman and the stories of others like – or not like – her can find their way onto the Canadian stage, thus allowing these diverse perspectives and individuals, to borrow and adapt Anzaldua's phrasing, "the freedom to carve and chisel [and perform] my own face."[570]

[569] John Hirsch Prize Selection Committee, qtd in "Directors Nina Lee Aquino and Frederic Dubois win John Hirsch Prizes," Canada Council for the Arts, 2008, http://www.canadacouncil.ca/news/releases/2008/kg128486895181044930.htm (accessed 2 September 2012).

[570] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* third edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987 & 2007), 44.

CHAPTER 6: MAKING PEOPLE "FEEL SHINY" – JILLIAN KEILEY, COMMUNITY, KALIDEOGRAPHY, AND *UNDER WRAPS*

"I don't have observers in my rehearsals." With these words, Jillian Keiley – a tall woman with sparkling blue eyes and a ready, hearty laugh – greeted and welcomed me to a rehearsal space housed in the labyrinthine maze of corridors beneath the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, where Keiley was in rehearsals for her production of Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*. As a researcher used to sitting in an unobtrusive corner of the rehearsal hall while observing directors at work, I was initially surprised by Keiley's insistence that I join her and her cast in their daily warm-up exercises. However, I quickly learned that this sense of inclusion and ensemble participation is a key element to Jillian Keiley's directorial and personal philosophy. In fact, throughout my interactions with and observations of Keiley, the predominant theme that emerged was "community" and the importance of creating and supporting community is a theme that seems to infuse all aspects of Keiley's work – on stage, in rehearsal, and in life.

Keiley made her name in Newfoundland by founding the theatre company Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland (located in St. John's, the province's capital and largest city) with David Somers, Geoff Seymour, Kelly Jones, and Gian Fazey Koven in 1995.[571] Shortly after the company's founding, Keiley earned a reputation and became renowned beyond Newfoundland's borders for the precise mode of directorial choreography she

[571] In a jovial manner typical of Keiley, she has admitted that the company's name, Artistic Fraud, was initially created as a bit of a sarcastic joke, calling upon the perceived backwater status of Newfoundland. In a *Calgary Herald* article Keiley confesses, "It's a terrible name, I know. We keep threatening to change it. We want to. Try to get money from a bank for a sponsorship with the name Artistic Fraud." (Stephen Hunt, "Race, human ties are picture perfect," *Calgary Herald*, 13 June 2012, F3.) However, the name has stuck and the company has become known for what J. Kelly Nestruck of the *Globe and Mail* (April 2009), called its "relentlessly inventive" work.

developed and employed in Artistic Fraud productions: Kalideography (pronounced "collide-ography"), a "mathematically based choreography and directing system [designed to] produce very specific movement and sound instances on stage."[572] At this point in her career Keiley admits a reluctance to employing the term – because, with a laugh and a humble shake of her head, she claims to find it "obnoxious" and it is, according Keiley, "just a system, like any directing system."[573] However, Keiley's Kalideography, an innovative and now codified directorial technique that combines precise rhythms and blocking to create striking visual images, has earned a name for itself and has garnered the 42 year-old Keiley significant accolades and critical attention.

As an artist working within the Newfoundland culture and largely outside of the mainstream (at least initially), Keiley's intent was not necessarily to explode upon the national theatre scene but rather to do innovative and interesting work within her community. As Keiley argues, "I went to school on the mainland so that I could come back [to Newfoundland] and work with those guys. So I would be qualified to work with them."[574] Newfoundland theatre scholar and historian Michael Devine further supports Keiley's Newfoundland rootedness, citing her as an example of "an artist firmly grounded in her own culture, determined to integrate that culture with outside influences, and…to carry the resonance of her culture far and wide."[575] Moreover, because of her innovative staging techniques and strikingly theatrical, precise and ensemble-based visual

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[572] Jillian Keiley and Robert Chafe, "An Introduction to Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland," *Theatre Research in Canada* 21.1-2 (2005): 105. Kaliedography will be discussed in more detail in the section of this chapter dedicated to exploring Keiley's specific directorial techniques.

[573] Jillian Keiley, Interview by author, Ottawa, ON, 22 November 2012.

[574] Ibid.

[575] Michael Devine, "Keileydography: The Symphonic Theatre of Jillian Keiley," *Canadian Theatre Review* 128 (2006), 35-36.

compositions, Keiley has entered the national and international stage, bringing Newfoundland – a province that, because of its eastern location and tenuous cultural relationship with the nation at large, historically has existed on the periphery – to the attention of the larger Canadian public via Artistic Fraud and her directorial innovation of Kalideography. This national recognition was further solidified in 2012 when Keiley was named the new artistic director of the English Theatre Company of the National Arts Centre (NAC) in Ottawa, a position that arguably is central to Canada's national performance culture.

In addition to Keiley's accolades which alone justify her inclusion in this study, within the broader conversation of theatre across Canada, Newfoundland, the island of the easternmost province of the nation, is rarely mentioned, and within that scholarship there is little discussion of diversity in regard to gender or other factors of identity. As Linda Burnett notes in her introduction to *Theatre in Atlantic Canada*, "Work from and about women and people of colour also presented a challenge [in creating an edited collection of essays from diverse voices in Atlantic Canada]. Much less has been published by women or on the work of women than has been published by men or on the work of men in the area of theatre in Atlantic Canada."[576] Burton goes on to admit that what particularly shocked her in compiling essays for her text was not the lack of scholarly attention to "the work of minority theatre artists, but [that] the work of most theatre artists from around the [Atlantic] region …has received little or no attention from

[576] Linda Burnett, "Introduction," *Theatre in Atlantic Canada*, *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*, vol. 16 (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2010) xii. It is also interesting to note here that Burnett's text is dedicated to the larger region of "Atlantic Canada" which includes Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick in addition to Newfoundland. Thus, while Burnett's anthology does illuminate theatrical practices of the eastern region of Canada, specific attention is rarely paid to Newfoundland on its own.

scholars."[577] Thus, it seems apt that further scholarly attention be paid to Keiley, her directorial work, unique aesthetic and technique and, by extension, the Newfoundland creative arena.

While Keiley, like the other directors, is an artistic director in addition to being a director, it seems that, particularly in regard to Artistic Fraud, Keiley and her directorial vision speaks for the company, rather than the other way around, as seems to be the case with the other directors such as Kelly Thornton, whose directorial work is always viewed under the auspices of Nightwood Theatre.[578] In most cases, Keiley is discussed first and Artistic Fraud is discussed second, thus affirming that Keiley's work has shaped the company. Denyse Lynde, for instance, in a 2003 essay published in *Canadian Theatre Review*, explores Artistic Fraud's production of *Icycle,* and as part of her critique of the production, Lynde notes that "it is how Keiley stages this story that is striking and it is pure Artistic Fraud."[579] Granted, the title of Lynde's article refers to Artistic Fraud itself; however, in this phrase Lynde not only mentions Keiley first but the majority of the rest of the article's text focuses on Keiley and her directorial aesthetic, thus demonstrating Keiley's influential presence and implying that her artistic vision has been foundational in bringing attention to the company itself.[580] In light of Keiley's presence and

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[577] Burnett, xiii.

[578] Although Keiley has, at the writing of this chapter, left her position as artistic director of Artistic Fraud to become the artistic director of the English Theatre Company at the NAC, this shift is so new that it is difficult to determine at this point how her individual directorial vision will influence the NAC's English Canadian Theatre Company's reputation overall. Thus, this particular discussion of Keiley's directorial stamp and innovation is specifically related to Artistic Fraud, as Keiley spent nearly 17 years as Artistic Fraud's artistic director.

[579] Denise Lynde, "*Icycle*: New Languages: Newfoundland's Artistic Fraud Creates New Languages for Theatre, New Languages for Icebergs," *Theatre in Atlantic Canada, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 16 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2010), 101.

[580] It should be noted that since Keiley has assumed the role of artistic director at the National Arts Centre, Artistic Fraud continues to do work in this same style, under the artistic direction of Keiley's

directorial contribution, a statement by Gordon Jones, who cast Keiley as Helena – the "painted maypole" – in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* while she was a student, seems particularly apt, as Jones notes that Keiley's "directorial stamp is blazoned on her productions as plainly as a Nike logo."[581] Indeed, Keiley's "directorial stamp" is impossible to miss, as its primary focus – both in rehearsal and on stage – is on the power of numbers, the power of the ensemble, and, the summation of these elements, the power of the *community*. Thus, through Kalideography, her ensemble-based work, and Newfoundland roots, Keiley is dedicated to representing and re-thinking community dynamics and in so doing is challenging the traditional Canadian theatrical and socio-political status quo on multiple levels.

To consider the ways that community in all of its forms is manifested in Keiley's work, this chapter is structured in several parts. I begin by documenting Keiley's background and general artistic oeuvre, specifically considering her roots within her Newfoundland community and the ways that that geographic community shaped her work. Then, drawing predominately from our one-on-one interview and supplemented by my rehearsal observations, critical reviews, and comments from Keiley's collaborators, I examine her directorial techniques and aesthetic, with a particular focus on the ways that "community" in many forms emerges and is encouraged within her artistic work and directorial working methods. Within this exploration of Keiley's directorial methods, her breakout production of *Under Wraps* (1995) is used as an

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collaborator Robert Chafe. However it does seem indicative that Kalideography remains linked to Keiley first and the company second. Part of this connection is probably also due in large part to the length of time she spent at the helm of Artistic Fraud, serving as its artistic director from 1995-2012.

[581] Gordon Jones, "The Hirsch Conundrum," *Performing Arts and Entertainment in Canada* 33, vol. 4 (Summer 2002): 31.

exemplar of Keiley's "typical" directorial work and will be examined to see how Keiley's community-focused directorial techniques function in performance as a way to challenge and subvert traditional performance formats. Finally, I will consider all of these things in light of gender, nationality, and other identity constructions as a way to ascertain how Keiley's work as well as her experience as a woman director in Canada relates to the larger socio-political and artistic status quo in Canada.

Geographic Community: Newfoundland Theatre and Performance

The first element of "community" that emerges in Jillian Keiley's narrative – both as part of our interview and in considering her oeuvre of work – is her Newfoundland roots and her connection to the Newfoundland community. Perhaps indicative of her regional rootedness, when I asked Keiley the first question of the interview –"How did things start?" – and requested that she "tell me a little about growing up" and her "evolution as a director," her story began with the words: "Well, I'm from Newfoundland."[582] While all of the directors featured in this study are presumably linked to and shaped by their surrounding cultural context, Keiley was the only one who called upon her province and region specifically to *begin* her narrative, an instinctual response that, to me as listener and researcher, demonstrated the importance of place and specifically the Newfoundland community to Keiley's background, development, and artistic mission.

Newfoundland is the easternmost province of Canada, and while the province is generally called "Newfoundland," legally the province is "Newfoundland and Labrador,"

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[582] Keiley, Interview.

as the province proper includes the mainland area of Labrador as well the island of Newfoundland.[583] However, Labrador remains sparsely populated, leaving Newfoundland as the primary focus of discussion and the location of the provincial capital, St. John's. Newfoundland's relationship with the larger Canadian nation has long been contentious and difficult, and Newfoundland's history is one of isolation, geographically and ideologically. Newfoundland's location at Canada's far eastern edge and its status as an island province are two geographical factors that physically separate and put it at the edge of the larger Canadian national consciousness. Moreover, Newfoundland is a relatively recent addition to the Canadian Confederation, having passed the referendum to join the confederation in only 1949 and, perhaps indicative of its uncertain relationship with the rest of Canada, passed that referendum by only a slim margin.[584] Heather Jones, writing in 1997 about the Newfoundland theatre and cultural scene, observes that historically Newfoundland's geographic isolation and "cultural distinctiveness" creates an "isolation unique to this island" such that Newfoundland "sometimes confidently, sometimes self-deprecatingly maintains a love/hate relationship with its idea of 'the rest of Canada,' usually meaning Ontario's soi-disant status as the economic, cultural and intellectual bedrock of the country."[585] Further exacerbating this

[583] Newfoundland was the tenth province admitted to the Canadian Confederation in March 1949 and was originally simply called "Newfoundland," although the term referred to both the island of Newfoundland and the mainland portion of Labrador. In 2001, the government changed the name of the province to officially include Labrador; however, generally the Canadian population often refers to the province as simply "Newfoundland."

[584] From 1934 to 1949, Newfoundland had been ruled by a Commission of Government appointed by Great Britain. The vote to join the Canadian confederation occurred on July 22, 1949, and passed with 52.3 percent voting to join Canada and 47.7 percent voting to return to pre-1934 parliamentary democracy (but not affiliated with Britain). (See Melvin Baker, "The Tenth Province: Newfoundland Joins Canada, 1949," *Horizons* 10.111 (1987): 2641-2667.)

[585] Heather Jones, "Riding Tide Theatre and/in the Newfoundland Cultural Scene," *Canadian Theatre Review* 93 (winter 1997): 38.

division was the fact that, on the mainland, perceptions of "dumb Newfies" persisted, fed by this physical isolation and the subsequent jokes made about the provincial naiveté of the east coasters so far removed from the urban landscapes of Toronto, Montreal and even Ottawa.[586] According to Keiley who grew up amid these cultural moments, "The place was a bit of a joke. And in the context of the rest of the country and even in the States, that it was this backwater…You know, we kind of bought in and went along with it culturally. You know, square rolling pins and stuff like that. Mugs with handles on the inside."[587] Thus, particularly from the time of confederation to the cultural revolution of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the relationship between Newfoundlanders and the rest of Canada was fraught with tension, and Jillian Keiley grew up within and was surrounded by this tension: "I'm from Newfoundland. There was not a great deal of professional theatre there when I was growing up. There was some, but it was very—in an infancy and in a great struggle—at a very problematic time there. Poverty…kind of struck by insecurity and struck by poverty. All of that."[588]

However, during the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, perspectives and attitudes in Newfoundland began to change. Rather than accepting, perpetuating, and taking on the disparaging attitudes of the larger Canadian culture, the "Newfies" opted to bolster, support, and reclaim their own culture and identity. Instead of trying to avoid or shake off the mantle of "otherness," Newfoundlanders of this time period chose to

[586] In many ways "Newfie" jokes are the equivalent of "Pollack" jokes. While these jokes are abundant, one brief example might be as follows: "Did you hear about the war between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia [both Maritime provinces]? Newfies were lobbing hand grenades; the Nova Scotians were pulling the pins and throwing them back." In a consideration of Canadian regional humor and disparagement, the only other province that receives similarly harsh treatment is the Quebecois.

[587] Keiley, Interview.

[588] Ibid.

embrace their heritage and status as cultural outsiders. Keiley recalled that Newfoundland cultural revolution "where we started getting fierce about our identity in the world and stopped being ashamed of it and stopped letting people, you know, call us 'dumb Newfies' and stopped, you know, there was a whole backlash against the word 'Newfie.'…So I grew up in this time where we had just started to get fierce about not being mainlanders, basically."[589] Essentially, the Newfoundland community embraced their position at the edge of the country and began to cultivate a rich and, to borrow Keiley's frequent phrase, "fierce" Newfoundland-centric cultural life. As Michael Devine argues in his dissertation on Newfoundland theatre, a key part of this cultural revolution and, even today, a "continuing feature of Newfoundland culture is its identification with Strangeness and its consistent self-definition through a filter of otherness."[590]

Art and culture was a key part of this revolution, and as a result, Newfoundlanders found great pride and investment in their artists and their artists' work. As Kathryn Bindon, a CFA ("Come From Away," a term commonly used to refer to individuals who are not indigenous to Newfoundland) who moved to Newfoundland in 1991 as principal of Sir Wilfred Grenfell College of Memorial University, observed with pleasant surprise, there was "a comfort in their culture that makes music and poetry and art an essential part of what Newfoundlanders do on Saturday night, and what they enjoy seeing others do

[589] Keiley, Interview.

[590] Michael Devine, "Necessary Evils: Strangers, Outsiders, and Outports in Newfoundland Drama" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2007), ii.

without artifice or embarrassment."[591] This ideology and value system is furthered in an examination of Newfoundland theatre history as well as perpetuated in Keiley's work, which, although visually theatrical in the physical images she creates using her actors bodies, usually is reliant on just that – her actors' bodies – and therefore features minimal traditional set pieces. Thus, Keiley's work, while visually stunning, displays a lack of artifice in a manner similar to Bindon's observation and this lack of artifice is an essential part of her connection to her geographical/regional community. In fact, Keiley's acceptance speech for the 2004 Siminovitch Prize began by recognizing the importance of the award for not just Keiley herself but for her community: "This honour means so much to me and to my community."[592]

While the outsider status of Newfoundlanders within the larger context of the nation may have fueled Newfoundlanders' desire to bolster their culture, it is interesting to note that community-focused performance has long been part of the Newfoundland theatrical tradition and would likely have been something Jillian Keiley saw and learned about during her youth. As John Chelsey Skinner discussed, the origins of Newfoundland performance can be traced back to "community concerts," theatrical events similar to variety shows which combined songs, scenes, dialogues and recitation. As described by Skinner and Michael Devine, these community concerts were historically held at a local church and used to raise funds for a local cause – be it the

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[591] Kathryn Bindon, "Cod's Gift to the Soul of the Academic Administrator…or Coming to Newfoundland to Discover that Making Art and Theatre are Still Acceptable Activities and Respected Sources of learning at SOME Universities," *Art Journal* 53, vol. 3 (Autumn 1994): 34.

[592] Jillian Keiley, Siminovitch Acceptance, 26 October 2004, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winners_directors04.shtml (accessed 5 May 2013).

church or another cause.[593] As Devine notes, these community concerts were "indisputably local," for while they often incorporated material from other locations (primarily Britain or Ireland) they generally altered the text or subject matter to directly reflect the local Newfoundland community.[594]

While these community concerts demonstrate an early affinity to localizing stories and rooting them in the local Newfoundland community, more traditionally theatrical ventures presented by emerging Newfoundland theatre companies also reflected a similar focus, telling stories by, of and about Newfoundlanders. Thus, the Newfoundland cultural resurgence was largely supported by the emergence of several professional theatre companies in Newfoundland – the Mummer's Troupe (1972-1982), Codco (1973-1976), and, a bit later, Rising Tide Theatre (1978-current). These companies then paved the way for contemporary companies such as Keiley's Artistic Fraud and are the community-centered foundation that informs Keiley's work. All focused on collective collaboration and fostering "home grown" Newfoundland work, but all also gained recognition beyond Newfoundland borders, thus assisting in the reclamation and legitimization of Newfoundland culture, heritage and stories.

The Mummer's Troupe was perhaps the first widely recognized Newfoundland theatre company and arguably remains the first Newfoundland theatre company recognized by the mainland as "typifying" the collective, community-oriented

[593] Devine draws on Skinner's 1984 dissertation which looks specifically at the evolution and Newfoundland-ness of these community concerts. The concerts were hosted by an announcer, or "chairman," who was from the sponsoring organization and served to introduce the events and speak directly to the audience (in a manner similar to Augusto Boal's forum theatre's joker). For Skinner's complete historical analysis of these concerts see: Skinner, John Chelsey."Drama in Newfoundland Society: The Community Concert." Dissertation. Michigan State University, 1984.

[594] Michael Devine, "Cultural Evolution in Newfoundland Theatre: The Rise of the Gros Morne Theatre Festival," *Theatre Research in Canada* 25, vol. 1-2 (2004): 68.

Newfoundland theatre. Many scholarly articles have been written about the Mummer's work, and it was a company doggedly focused on creating theatre by and for the community. The Mummer's worked predominately in a mode of collective creation, and, as artistic director Chris Brookes noted in a July 9, 1975, *Toronto Star* interview, "Theatre in Newfoundland is moving away from art-as-art to specific social usefulness. We're very community-development oriented. It's living in Newfoundland, where you're always engaged in a social-cultural emergence. You have to be. You've got to show people themselves before they forget who they are."[595] As scholar and Newfoundland critic Terry Goldie notes, the Mummer's "must be seen as…the first company to devote itself to providing professional productions on Newfoundland subjects, performed by Newfoundlanders."[596] The Troupe is perhaps best known for its annual performance of the *Traditional Newfoundland Mummers Play* every December (from 1972-1982), but it gained national fame for its production of *They Club Seals, Don't They?*, which was first produced in St. John's and then toured nationally in spring of 1978.

Just one year following the creation of the Mummer's Troupe, another now-legendary professional theatre company emerged in St. John's: Codco (which was a shortened, catchier version of "Cod Company," a playful reference to Newfoundland's primary economic industry: cod fisheries). This group of collectively-oriented performers returned, much like Jillian Keiley, to Newfoundland from Toronto and brought their success with them to Newfoundland. Although Codco was only in existence as a theatre company from 1973-1976, it made a mark on Newfoundland

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[595] Qtd in Diane Bessai, "The Regionalism of Canadian Drama," *Canadian Literature* 85 (Summer 1980): 7.

[596] Terry Goldie, "Newfoundland," in *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions* (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1985), 97.

theatre and theatre artists. As Keiley reflects, "This was a culture that had grown up so a part of the collective; they were part of the collective movement but fiercely independent of the mainland collective movement…Yeah, it was fierce. And there was alcohol…and great, great poverty. And it was – like, I look back at it now and I can see it for what it was, but at the time it was just a whirlwind of despair…All this time, Codco was happening, and there was this emergence of my culture which was stuff to be proud of."[597] Although a small mention, Keiley's inclusion of Codco as part of her narrative speaks to the company's importance in establishing and spreading Newfoundland-based culture and performance in a positive light and on a national scale.[598]

A third community-based company that emerged in St. John's during this same time frame was Rising Tide Theatre. Formed by ex-Mummer's Troupe members, Rising Tide followed to some extent in the Mummer's and Codco's community-based, collective creation footsteps and worked to challenge "the 'establishment' assumption that art had to come from somewhere else," with that "somewhere else" being typically beyond the Newfoundland borders. Eventually, during the 1980s, Rising Tide transitioned from collectively created works to more scripted works; however, it remains that this company contributed to the Newfoundland cultural renaissance and helped pave the way for Jillian Keiley and her own community-based work.

In addition to these professional companies, several amateur companies (the equivalent of the American "community theatre") came into existence during this era of

[597] Keiley, Interview.

[598] Codco as a theater company ended its work in 1976; however, following the company's theatrical dissolution, the artists moved to the small screen and are now perhaps better known as a Newfoundland-based sketch comedy series that ran on the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) from 1987-1992.

cultural renaissance. For instance, Theatre Newfoundland Labrador (TNL), a company that continues to exist today and with whom Jillian Keiley has worked, particularly early in her directorial career, emerged in 1981. Initially, according to Michael Devine, TNL "veer[ed] back and forth between professional and non-professional status," and more recently, it too has gained professional status in the Newfoundland theatre community.[599] While Mummers, Codco, and many of these early professional companies have closed during the intervening years, others such as Rising Tide Theatre and the Resource Center for the Arts have and continue to appear, with the most important for this study being Keiley's own Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland, begun in 1994. This surrounding cultural, theatrical context shaped Jillian Keiley's own focus on creating and supporting community within her artistic and directorial work, and thus we see perhaps why the theme of "community" often surfaces and finds its way into Keiley's narrative.

Supporting and Giving Back to Newfie Culture: Jillian Keiley's Background

Keiley spent most of her life in Newfoundland. Born to Mary and Peter Keiley, Jillian Keiley grew up in The Goulds, a suburb of St. John's (although mainlanders might question the viability of a town the size of St. John's – with a population just under 200,000 as of 2006 census – of having a suburb), located just to the west of the city centre. Thus, the Newfoundland that surrounded Keiley during the formative years of her childhood was a culture and community in transition. In fact, Keiley recalls this time as being particularly "savage" for her Newfoundland community. Moreover, her recollections of this time are filled with descriptors that evoke images of a great cultural

[599] Michael Devine, "Cultural Evolution in Newfoundland Theatre: The Rise of the Gros Morne Theatre Festival," *Theatre Research in Canada* 25, vol. 1-2 (2004): 73.

battle; during the course of our interview, I was struck by the frequency with which Keiley described this cultural moment in Newfoundland as a “war,” as “fierce” or “crazy,” or as a source of “trauma” for the community.[600] This Newfoundland “fierce”-ness, however, perhaps cultivated a further sense of and willingness for risk-taking in Jillian Keiley – a sub-theme that emerges, much like “community,” from Keiley’s narrative – for she was not only influenced by the cultural fight for Newfoundland recognition that surrounded her as she grew up but she also proved herself a “fierce” Newfoundlander as well, one who has been and continues to be willing to take artistic risks as a way to better her geographical and artistic communities.

For instance, as a young student, Keiley boldly began to seek out opportunities to direct. Although she did act and thought about being an actor, this thought lingered for Keiley all of “five or six minutes” before she quickly sought out a directorial role. One summer, after she had been cast as Helena in the local university’s amateur summer theatre production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Keiley approached the director Dr. Gordon Jones:

> I said, half in jest, "Hows about letting me direct the show" and he said "No." And then he picked up his big set of theatre keys and he brought me downstairs to the dressing room. And he unlocked the room and he said, "This can be your pit, work with the actors down here." I remember staring at him like he’d just given me a million dollars. "What?" He said, "Go do it." I was Gordon’s assistant director on the Summer Shakespeares then for six years.[601]

[600] Keiley, Interview.

[601] It should also be noted that Dr. Jones was of British background, which created, according to Keiley and other accounts, a hostility against him in the St. John’s community as it was trying to foster homegrown talent. Keiley and Jones, however, remained good friends over the years, with Jones even giving Keiley away at her wedding to Don Ellis in 2009 (for which their guests performed a surprise flash mob to “Higher and Higher”). Jillian Keiley, Siminovitch Acceptance, 26 October 2004, http://www.siminovitchprize.com/winners_directors04.shtml (accessed 5 May 2013)

While some young women might bow to the hierarchy of the director-performer relationship or might be reticent to ask to be considered for something she had, at that time, little formal training to tackle, Keiley took the risk and initiative to seek out opportunities, and this willingness to take risks and create opportunity for herself is something that continues to infuse and emerge from Keiley's narrative throughout her background and career.

Bolstered by the support from her parents and a desire to help strengthen the emerging theatre in her community, Keiley took the risk to leave Newfoundland and attend theatre school on the mainland at York University in 2004.[602] When she returned to St. John's following her graduation from the York BFA program in theatre (which, in the minds of many mainland artists, was a risk in and of itself for Newfoundland did not offer the same professional artistic opportunities as Toronto), Keiley found herself embroiled in the cultural controversy between the staunchly proud, native Newfoundland companies (largely the collectives such as discussed earlier in this chapter) and the perceived "outside" influences of the Canadian mainland and, by extension, the larger influences of Britain and America. Keiley recalls that there was great animosity between the Newfoundland-based groups and the university CFAs:

> Because they came in from England and the States and said, "These people are savages. These people don't need stage managers. These people don't know how to keep a prompt book. These people share a dressing room." Like, and they were insisting that the definition of theatre was Tennessee Williams and Shakespeare, and the locals, the professional theatre companies were insisting that theatre is the voice of the people. And they were completely at odds. Completely

[602] In her Siminovitch acceptance speech, Keiley recalls her mother's urgings to become a school teacher and her father's simple yet affirmative "hms" in response to her desire to go to theatre school. She opted to "listen" to her father and her mother acquiesced. Since then, her mother has staunchly supported Keiley's endeavors, even helping sew the rehearsal sheet (a cloth that measures 40 feet by 60 feet and was composed of donated sheets from the local hospital) for *Under Wraps* (1995).

> at odds. So, because I grew up under the kind of tutelage of the university professors, I was not embraced, let's say. I ended up being embraced later.[603]

Thus, although Keiley initially went away so as to gain the skills necessary to help support her Newfoundland community and be considered qualified to work within their ranks, her efforts were complicated and resisted by the very community she wanted to support. To some extent, this response could be read as a post-colonial reaction to outside forces, for Canada, as a post-colonial nation and one that, as discussed in Chapter 2, has historically been artistically reliant on British and American imports, has a tenuous and complicated relationship to these perceived colonial forces. However, within the moments of cultural re-building in Newfoundland, the post-colonial reaction was further complicated by Newfoundland's outsider status to the larger nation of Canada itself. As Michael Devine notes, the Newfoundland, and specifically St. John's, theatre community is "tightly knit, marked by generational divisions with respect to training and theatrical structure and forever brimming with passionate debate and colourful inventive" and, as a result, the community "teems with talent and yet demonstrates a manifest insecurity."[604] As a young director returning to help her community, Keiley then was forced to negotiate these complications, many of which were associated with issues of identity. Keiley recalls

> People were so fiercely passionate about their thing. And I was just a kid; I mean, I was 24 years old…And so I came back, and one of my mentors was having a baby. And she wanted me to direct the show with these guys in it. To do a remounted show that had to go on tour. And I went in to do the remount, and they sat (*laughs*), they sat in the room, and one of them was rolling a joint. They sat in the room, and I came in. They sat in the room, and as soon as I came in, they sat back, closed their books. I was a kid. I was like literally 24 years old, and I was

[603] Keiley, Interview.
[604] Michael Devine, "Keileydography," *Canadian Theatre Review* 128 (Fall 2006): 32.

> like, *(in simple tones as if talking to a child)* "Ok, let's start with blocking." (*laughs loudly*) *So* stupid, so stupid! I was so stupid. And I was like, "Let's start with blocking." And they picked up their conversation and they walked out. Like, they would not, they would *not.* It was that kind of *really* [complicated situation and response]…..you know, and that was the mildest day. But, again, now I see it. And it's okay. Like now I can…if I saw a young girl in the same situation, I'd go, "I have some good advice for you." (*laughs*) Absolutely. You know, I can totally see it for what it was, and they can totally see how angry they were. Um, and that I was the *representative* of something, not me, like I meant something.[605]

In addition to capturing the tumultuous situation surrounding the Newfoundland theatrical revolution, the risks Keiley – even as a Newfoundlander herself – was forced to take in entering this tumultuous theatrical arena, and the community's resistance to those perceived to be outside of the community, Keiley's anecdote here speaks to several elements of identity, specifically gender and age (two sub-themes that arise not only in Keiley's narrative but are often echoed in other women directors' narratives). While a young male director who had been educated on the mainland would also have likely met the same resistance as Keiley did, these older male actors' responses to Keiley may have further complicated because not only was she educated via the mainland curricula but she also was a woman and a *young* woman. Keiley herself seems to recognize this aspect as well, for multiple times within this story she emphasizes that she was "a kid," reinforcing the impact age as well as gender and her perceived outsider (or traitor?) status played in that interaction. Particularly within a Newfoundland culture historically dominated by a fishing economy, an industry that was historically masculine-oriented and male-dominated but has in recent years experienced a decline in necessity and economy (which thus produces what scholar Dona Davis calls a "gender antagonism"), the introduction of

[605] Keiley, Interview. Emphasis hers.

a young, educated woman director would arguably have been off-putting for these more traditional male actors.[606]

Perhaps drawing from her "fierce" Newfoundland roots, Keiley continued to persevere, taking artistic risks and experimenting with new ways to stage and tell stories for her Newfoundland community. Each summer during her undergraduate career, Keiley would return to St. John's to assist her mentor and former director Gordon Jones with his summer Shakespeare productions, and upon her graduation from York with a BFA in theatre in 1994, she joined the staff of the St. John's Resource Center for the Arts (RCA) as an artistic associate and an assistant animateur, where she worked for eight years.[607] However, this position proved somewhat problematic, as Keiley's perceived status as mainland-influenced outsider, or "Other," (perhaps also coupled with her youthful appearance and even her gender) prevented full acceptance of her work and artistic vision:

> It was so crazy. It was so crazy. When it got really crazy and people were like calling public meetings to (*laughs*)—I mean, I don't really talk about it because it was so bizarre. And everybody who was there remembers it happening, but nobody can kind of believe it happened.…We weren't being invited in…Like I was allowed to file things [while working as an assistant at the theatre], but when I was putting my shows in the theatre there was— …And there was public meetings held all the time. It was so crazy. So crazy. But it was the result of poverty. And not just money poverty, but poverty of resources, poverty of just alienation, of people feeling like they had been left out so their small piece of the pie they were going to keep. And so when I came in as an associate under the woman who was my mentor, who rode both [the professional and amateur

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[606] Dona Davis, "When Men Became 'Women;' Gender Antagonism and the Changing Sexual Geography of Work in Newfoundland," *Sex Roles* 29, vol. 7/8 (October 1993): 458.

[607] Instead of an artistic director, the RCA has an artistic animateur: "The idea is that the Board of Directors operates like an artistic director and the Animateur then works to shape their directives. The Animateur is a theatre facilitator; she or he solicits scripts and coordinates open auditions, but does not necessarily direct the mainstage plays. This arrangement omits the controlling presence of an artistic director." (Danine Farquharson, "RCA Theatre Company," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage,* Memorial University of Newfoundland , http://www.heritage.nf.ca/arts/rca.html (accessed 1 July 2013).

> theatre] groups, she had me in, but there would be a fight about—I don't know, I remember one time there was a fight about, oh the artistic director had done something. I can't even remember. It was so— it happened so often. And every couple of months it felt it there was a public meeting because this was also— the company didn't have an artistic director, it had an artistic animateur. The artistic direction had to come from the community. So people would submit, then whoever wanted to be on the reading committee would be on it, and then it would be selection committee drawn out of the reading committee and the reading committee would have to pitch their pieces. That would be how they would get in…It had to be collective."[608]

In these words, Keiley speaks to the complicated nature that can also accompany the work of a collective and a community, a complication that seems to have influenced her own take on creating community in the rehearsal hall. Additionally, these issues of class and poverty – the surrounding socio-political environment of Newfoundlanders as a whole – further complicated the experience of all Newfoundlanders, providing a telling reminder of the impact invisible inequalities of identity like class can play on an individual and community. [609] Moreover, her outsider status and the struggle Keiley experienced as a young artist presumably further shaped her desire to create an effective and positive working environment, a functioning community, in her rehearsal hall, for as Keiley notes "the kind of terrorism of the whole thing was the best thing that ever happened to me. It really was."[610]

Fueled by these experiences, Keiley – in yet another way that the theme of "risk" and "risktaking" is manifested in her work and narrative – set out on her own, determined

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[608] Keiley, Interview.

[609] In our interview, Keiley often commented about the class distinctions and poverty that existed in Newfoundland during this era, and that in mind, it may be interesting to note that the founding of Artistic Fraud happened shortly after the1992 cod moratorium, a period of time that found Newfoundland's economy struggling and, as a result, its people's self-esteem lagging. Thus, the national recognition of Keiley and her work via Artistic Fraud served to increase national recognition and bolster community spirit.

[610] Keiley, Interview.

to bring her vision of theatre and creative spirit to the St. John's theatre community. Her first major production following her return to St. John's was a production she had developed as part of her senior year program at York called *In Your Dreams, Freud*, which Keiley dusted off for production in St. John's in 1994. Described by Gordon Jones as a "zany" production, *In Your Dreams, Freud* was an "absurdist musical comedy, blending Dr. Seuss, Freudian psychiatry and classical mythology, featuring a singing and dancing Greek chorus, a game-show host, randy university students with their Aristotelian professor, and a theatrical facilitator demonstrating that incest screws up your DNA. It was quite an opening statement."[611] Although *In Your Dreams, Freud* was originally created while Keiley was at school at York and occurred quite early in her career, its eclectic mix of theatrical styles, striking visual images, and incorporation of a large chorus were elements that were already infusing her creative vision and would eventually emerge further as part of Keiley's distinctive directorial vision, which has since been heralded as "theatrically flamboyant" and demonstrating a "radical imagination."[612]

However, it is essential to note here that Keiley's intention in stepping out on her own to create these works and eventually her own company was not to compete with the other companies and her Newfoundland theatre colleagues. Rather, Keiley "was trying to build" and further her community's cultural and artistic life – precisely what she had gone away to gain the skills to do.[613] While Keiley is very much rooted in her Newfoundland background and dedicated to producing and furthering the stories of her

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[611] Gordon Jones, "The Hirsch Conundrum," *Performing Arts and Entertainment in Canada* 33, vol. 4 (Summer 2002): 29.
[612] Ibid.
[613] Keiley, Interview.

community, she also presented a very distinct directorial style and offered a significant contribution to the developing Newfoundland theatre scene. In fact, Michael Devine notes that Keiley "directs differently than any Newfoundlander has ever directed before," a style that was not always accepted by the more traditional Newfoundland artists; however, as Keiley notes, over time, these growing pains and tensions abated: "Oh, it wasn't absolutely. No, it took a long time…I was embraced later but it took a long time. There were wars. There were wars that were fought. And I was really – had a hard time. But now I understand it and I understand what they were fighting against."[614] Once Keiley began to garner national recognition for her work and the St. John's theatre community saw Keiley's dedication to producing work rooted in Newfoundland rather than imported European or mainland products, they became just as fiercely proud of Keiley as they had been opposed to her. Now, her direction and artistic work is celebrated and respected by her Newfoundland community – "we all ended up being really good friends"[615] – as it not only has served to cultivate further theatrical development in Newfoundland and by Newfoundlanders but also bring national attention and respect to the now-bustling theatre community.

Following the production of *In Your Dreams Freud,* Keiley continued to produce her own work and, in her way, support the artistic community of St. John's by founding a new St. John's-based theatre company, Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland, in 1995. A risky venture in light of the antagonism Keiley experienced from some of the other Newfoundland theatre artists, Keiley bluntly states, in a voice tinged with humor and a

[614] Ibid.
[615] Ibid.

gleeful smile on her lips, "I ended up starting my own company. (*laughs*) Fuck that! Yeah. I mean, we started our own company, totally again Pollyanna. It wasn't in rebellion to anything. It really was just like, 'Well, I guess I'd like to do my show anyway.' It wasn't a rebellion."[616] Shortly thereafter, Robert Chafe joined the team at Artistic Fraud and Keiley and Chafe quickly became collaborators, for both Keiley and Chafe were Newfoundland natives and dedicated to supporting and bringing attention to their communities through their artistic work. Interestingly, however, although Keiley and Chafe grew up near each other on the outskirts of St. John's, they did not, due to the fact the community was staunchly divided between the Catholic (Keiley) and Protestant (Chafe) traditions, know each other until later in life, and until their first collaboration, they had been only acquaintances.[617] As Chafe relates, their now-legendary collaboration began when he "banged into Jillian Keiley at a Christmas party. Then but a mere acquaintance, Jill was ranting about some fantastic idea of dropping sixty square feet of polyester over a twenty person chorus," an idea that would be the inspiration for their first production, *Under Wraps*.[618] With this interaction, Chafe was infused by Keiley's creative energy and, perhaps due to his shared Newfoundland roots, willing to take artistic risks; thus, a long-standing artistic partnership was born.

Since then, Keiley and Chafe have been regular collaborators and partners, with Keiley serving as the company's primary director and longstanding artistic director and

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[616] Keiley, Interview.

[617] Jillian Keiley, Siminovitch Acceptance Speech, 26 October 2004.

[618] Jillian Keiley and Robert Chafe, "An Introduction of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland," *Theatre Research in Canada* 26, vol. 1-2 (2005): 110.

Chafe, largely known as a playwright and actor, as artistic associate.[619] Under Keiley and Chafe's leadership, the company was intended to explore 'the theatrical possibilities of high precision in large choral groups" and, as the Artistic Fraud website pithily puts it, create "big edgy theatre from the edge of a big country."[620] Artistic Fraud has since been recognized as one of three "highly innovative theatre groups that experiment with form" in the Maritimes and its work, led by Keiley, has not only conveyed the Newfoundland and St. John's community stories but also served to bring increased attention and pride to the local community.[621] Together, Keiley and Chafe have created over thirteen productions under the auspices of Artistic Fraud.

It is interesting to note here that Keiley, much like Collier and Aquino, regularly collaborates with a man. Although there is no evidence that this partnership is anything more than two like-minded and, particularly in this case, similarly-located artists coming together (as is the case for both Collier and Aquino), it remains an intriguing point that these directors' collaborative connections are to men. However, within this partnership, Keiley (again, like Collier and Aquino) is and has been consistently and routinely identified as the director, with Chafe's text forming the structure and supporting what Keiley jokingly calls her "frivolous notions" – which resulted in many renowned productions such as *Under Wraps: A Spoke Opera* (1997, discussed as the individual production case study within this chapter), *Fear of Flight* (2005, a play that featured monologues written by eight different Canadian playwrights, including Chafe, Judith

[619] Since Keiley's appointment to the artistic directorship of the NAC, Chafe has become the artistic director of Artistic Fraud.
[620] Artistic Fraud, "About Us," Website, http://www.artisticfraud.com/Artistic_Fraud/About_Us/About_Us.html (accessed 18 June 2013).
[621] The other two groups are Nova Scotia's Zuppa Circus and New Brunswick's Moncton-Sable.

Thompson, Marie Clements, and Daniel MacIvor, was set aboard a plane en route from Newfoundland to British Columbia, and centered around the larger life fears that emerge as passengers relate their fears of flying), and *Tempting Providence* (2007, a play by Chafe about Newfoundland nurse Myra Bennett who served communities on Newfoundland's severe northern shore during the 1920s). Through those and other productions, the vast majority of which were created within the Keiley-Chafe collaborative relationship, the development of Keiley's mathematically- and musically-based choreography/directing technique, Kalideography, emerged and gained national recognition. Paula Citron of *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, described Keiley's work on *Tempting Providence* as follows: "Director Jillian Keiley inscribes her signature immediately. The set comprises a table, a tablecloth, and four chairs. In a series of imaginative reconfigurations, these six objects are transformed into all the props needed for the play. A couple of upturned chairs become the ship on which Bennett sails from England, and later they're her bed with Angus. The table cloth becomes her wedding dress. Fastened over two chairs, the material is a baby's cradle. The overturned table is a sleigh. We see backpacks, ovens, stretchers, and a host of other clever objects appear before our eyes, all created by the cast with synchronized, rhythmic precision. In fact, Keiley's stylized direction is meticulously timed and choreographed."[622]

Kalideography Explained – A Musically and Mathematically-oriented Directing Method

Although reluctant to use the term now because of its seeming pretentiousness and cheesy (but unintended) connection to her own name, Keiley describes

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[622] Paula Citron, "An eventful life, simply presented," *Globe and Mail,* 7 April 2007.

Kalideography as a directing system in which the director creates "a movement and harmony structure that allows great synchronicity on stage with large choruses."[623] She goes on to explain that Kalideography is "a way to look at a whole script. Instead of looking at it flat like you're looking at it linearly, you're looking at it harmonically. You're looking at it linearly, harmonically, and rhythmically" as a way to "link" the movement and choreography to the music and ultimately create moments of synchronicity on stage. As an example, Keiley points to a moment in her production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in which the ensemble, clad in colorful costumes, would be moving to specific locations on stage and, on a very specific cue and moment, would stop and "lock" into place, suddenly and synchronously creating a color-coded image of the crown of thorns on the stage, a living stained glass window. These synchronous moments, then, can happen at any point and in any format. During the course of our lunchtime interview, for example, Keiley paused, surveyed the room, and explained:

> We'd be all in here [the café] like this and then suddenly everybody will put their cup down. And you [as audience] don't know, you can't feel why that happened. And that's what's surprising to the audience when I do [Kalideography] work. It's because the audience can't tell what it is, but they don't know that they [the actors] are looking for the cue of that door hitting there. So while we're talking, everybody does that slant, and the audience is aware that suddenly that happened. And of course that has to happen on this line and that door has to slam on this one. So this has to happen right on that word and then the music cue picks up right there. It's easier to do with music, but you can do it in any number of cueing systems.[624]

[623] Keiley, Interview.
[624] Ibid.

In essence, Kalideography is a precise system of movement harmonics that is "like symphonic music but created with an actor's speaking voice, natural movement, technical elements, and blocking."[625]

The term "Kalideography" itself emerged out of the company's desire to have a single term to use to refer to Keiley's directorial/choreographic innovation in grant applications and other publicity materials. As Artistic Fraud and Keiley's visual and rhythmic system of direction gained greater attention, a member of the Artistic Fraud board of directors encouraged Keiley and the board to create a specific, single name to the system, as it was difficult to encapsulate within the limited confines of a grant application. At the time, Keiley was directing the aforementioned *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and the board member told Keiley that she needed to call the technique Kalideography because it was like choreographing and directing for a kaleidoscope. Keiley agreed because the style and its synchronous moments were very reminiscent of a kaleidoscope: "It's like spinning colors. Lock. And then the lock, the lock is when the magic happens."[626] Of course, over the years other mythologies have emerged in regard to how Keiley's directorial technique earned its name. Some, like Michael Devine, pithily call it "Keileydography" after the director herself, although much to her chagrin; others stem from the actors who worked with Keiley and Chafe early in the process. The duo revealed that "the cast did joke during rehearsal that the process was called Kalideography not because of the kaleidoscope effect, but because they kept 'kaliding'

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[625] "Workshop: Kalideography – A Masterclass with Jillian Keiley, The New Groundswell Festival Masterclass Series," *The TAPA Blog – Toronto's Performing Arts Industry Blog*, posted 20 October 2011, http://torontotheatre.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/workshop-kalideography-%E2%80%A8a-masterclass-with-jillian-keiley-the-new-groundswell-festival-masterclass-series/ (accessed 1 June 2013).

[626] Keiley, Interview.

into each other."[627] However, term or no, Kalideography remains one of Keiley's major directorial methodological contributions to Canadian theatre, and similar to Anne Bogart's Viewpoints, emphasizes the ways that actors' bodies can, particularly as an ensemble, create a strikingly powerful visual image on stage.

Whether she employs the term Kalideography or not, however, Keiley confesses that "it's the principle of everything" she does, and although it was not readily apparent in the rehearsals I observed for *Metamorphoses*, several of its tenets were subtly at work in Keiley's staging of the Zimmerman piece, particularly Keiley's attention to physical movements and arrangements on stage. For instance, Keiley, as part of Kalideography, carefully sketches out the precise movements in visual charts and grids. As Keiley and Chafe revealed in a 2004 presentation at the University of Toronto, for each production conceived with Kalideography, they – well, Keiley actually, as all of the examples of these diagrams are attributed to Keiley specifically as the author – devise a unique method of scripting the interwoven music, movement, and text. For instance, in *The Cheat*, a one-time-only production that featured an ensemble of 82 actors and was performed as part of the St. John's Sound Symposium in 1996, Keiley utilized a form of musical notation, complete with musical notes, clefs, and score. Although only performed once, *The Cheat* is one of the "best examples of the theory of Kalideography," as it was structured around Bach's Fugue in G Minor and it allowed Keiley to combine a precise series of movements to the musical notation and rhythm: "For example, one actor is instructed on beat 4 of bar 42 to extend his left hand and drop the pen he is holding.

[627] Jillian Keiley and Robert Chafe, "An Introduction of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland," *Theatre Research in Canada* 26, vol. 1-2 (2005): 112.

The actor standing stage left of the first actor is instructed on beat 3 to hold out his hand and on beat 4 to grab the incoming pen. This way the choreography of action is detailed in a series of interlocking pieces, as many complementary or harmonizing actions as there are actors on stage."[628] Meanwhile, Keiley's notation for *Signals* (2001) took the form of a flow chart, and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1998) appeared as a grid diagram with labeled quadrants.[629] In her essay on Keiley's production of *Icycle* (2001), Denyse Lynde observes Keiley's division of the play into "Schedules," or smaller divisions in the performance text:

> If Keiley stops to adjust something, the company must start at the beginning of a 'Schedule,' a word that Keiley uses to describe the many sections in the performance text. In 'Schedule 8, Column One' of the script, for example, there is a character list. The middle column is dedicated to form, and the final or right hand column, to content. Characters one to seven designate actors. The actors in Schedule 8 who play Emma and Jack also manipulate the puppet, fly the birds, and become townspeople. Only one actor plays a single role, namely Bryan Hennessy, playing Kiernan.[630]

As Keiley and Chafe joke, these charts cause the "scripts" for Artistic Fraud productions to "look like the devil's own hieroglyphics"; however, they provide a visual structure on the page to accompany and support the visual structures being created on stage, therein also reinforcing Keiley's own directorial focus on visual composition, or what one actor calls the "kinesthetic topography" of the play.[631] While these "schedules" (or the other aforementioned visual charting systems) were not used in the rehearsals I observed for

[628] Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland, "Past Productions – *The Cheat,"* http://www.artisticfraud.com/Artistic_Fraud/Past_Productions/Pages/The_Cheat.html (accessed 1 June 2013).

[629] Jillian Keiley and Robert Chafe, "An Introduction of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland," *Theatre Research in Canada* 26, vol. 1-2 (2005): 105-106.

[630] Denyse Lynde, "*Icycle*: New Languages. Newfoundland's Artistic Fraud Creates New Languages for Theatre, New Languages for Icebergs," *Theatre in Atlantic Canada, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 16 (Toronto: Playwrights Press Canada, 2010), 101.

[631] Jillian Keiley and Robert Chafe, "An Introduction of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland," *Theatre Research in Canada* 26, vol.1-2 (2005): 108; Brubaker, Interview.

Metamorphoses, the production did embody this same notion of precise actor movement as well as actors playing multiple roles and performing in multiple capacities, thus reinforcing the notion that Kalideography undergirds and informs all of Keiley's work.

In addition to this very precise way of notating the script, it is perhaps useful to mention that music, a discipline which in and of itself is very precise in its notation and assigned rhythms, plays a large role within the form of Kalideography and Keiley's work at large. For several of her productions, including *Metamorphoses* and *Under Wraps*, she collaborates with a composer and, in some instances, even has created musical instruments specifically for that production. *Metamorphoses*, for instance, featured "Aquarians," designed by composer Jonathon Monro, which were similar to large xylophones but also had strings that could be bowed to make sustained violin/viola sounds and were played by the actors to underscore the entire production. Moreover, as a person, Keiley is very musically inclined. One of her frequent collaborators noted that Keiley "always has music around," and in fact she not only uses music to underscore some of her warm up rituals but when I joined Keiley and several other women from the production team for dinner at her Ottawa home, she had music playing and would quickly change it if it did not contribute to the atmosphere of the conversation. These things in mind, it seems logical that Kalideography be musically- and rhythmically-based, as it seems part of Keiley's natural artistic inspirations

While *Under Wraps, Fear of Flight, Tempting Providence* and the other productions mentioned above are shows that particularly garnered attention for Keiley's direction, her directorial oeuvre as a whole is routinely hailed for its creativity, striking

visual images and innovation in form by both critics and fellow artists.[632] Newfoundland director Danielle Irvine (whose own directorial work tends toward traditional psychological realism and with whom Keiley has collaborated in the capacities of producer and assistant director) called Keiley's work overall "incredibly creative, heart-stopping, overpowering and sense-filling."[633] Further, Newfoundland theatre scholar Denyse Lynde says that Keiley "always seems to be pushing all the boundaries" and Lynde's statement is echoed by still others, including St. John's critic and university director Gordon Jones who posits that Keiley is "constantly testing performance modes and theatrical boundaries."[634] However, it is not only her directorial innovation for which Keiley is recognized, as Sandy Gow, artistic director of semi-professional c2c theatre in St. John's, posits, Keiley "brings a vision to shows about Newfoundland that make them important to us but meaningful to everyone," and upon Keiley's acceptance of the artistic director position for the NAC, Toronto-based critic Richard Ouzounian observed that she possesses a "perfect combination of artistic vision and homestyle wisdom."[635] By creating Artistic Fraud and bringing Kalideography to national attention, Keiley not only fueled the Newfoundland cultural renaissance but also, by bringing attention to Newfoundland stories and artists, helped bolster the struggling Newfoundland economy and associated class disparity between Newfoundland and the rest of the country.

[632] A representative listing and timeline of Jillian Keiley's many works and career highlights can be found in Appendix G.

[633] Qtd in Gordon Jones, "The Hirsch Conundrum," *Performing Arts and Entertainment in Canada* 33.4 (Summer 2002): 29

[634] Denyse Lynde, "*Icycle*: New Languages: Newfoundland's Artistic Fraud Creates New Languages for Theatre, New Languages for Icebergs," *Theatre in Atlantic Canada, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English,* vol. 16 (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2010), 101; Gordon Jones, "The Hirsch Conundrum," *Performing Arts and Entertainment in Canada* 33, vol. 4 (Summer 2002): 29

[635] Patrick Langston, "Jillian Keiley named artistic director of NAC English theatre," *Ottawa Citizen*, 28 March 2012 Richard Ouzounian, "NAC gets new director," *Toronto Star*, 28 March 2012.

Directorial Methods, Strategies, and Aesthetic

As noted earlier, the theme of "community" runs through Jillian Keiley's narrative, and within that larger theme, several sub-themes emerge. The first of those is that sense of community as related to her geographical community of Newfoundland; beyond that geographical community, however, Jillian Keiley's focus on community also extends to the stage and rehearsal room, or what I and other theatre artists would term a sense of "ensemble." This sense of ensemble, another form of community, and Keiley's emphasis on creating ensemble in rehearsal and performance, in fact, stems from and is connected to her geographical community, particularly Keiley's early experiences as a young theatre artist in St. John's. In our interview, Keiley openly noted that because of the "kind of non-tolerance, non-healthy artistic environment [that she experienced early in her career]…because of that, I do everything I can in the room to make a very healthy, you know, collaboration. And it has to be healthy. If there's tension in the room I do my best to grate away to get rid of it. Right away. Address it."[636] Beginning with the strategies and approaches Keiley employs in the rehearsal space to create and foster a sense of an artistic community or ensemble, this section considers Keiley's directorial aesthetics and strategies in the rehearsal room and on stage. In association with the larger theme of "community" that ties together many elements of Keiley's narrative, Keiley, through her work in the rehearsal room and her directorial approaches, troubles the hierarchical director-actor paradigm by building community in the rehearsal space through multiple collaborative strategies as well as constructing visions of diverse communities on the public forum of the stage.

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[636] Keiley, Interview.

Creating Ensemble

As one might interpret from the description of Kalideography, the technique itself is very much rooted in a sense of ensemble. The striking moments of synchronicity and powerful visual images in Keiley's productions come not from technological incorporations such as those employed by Kim Collier or from large, intricate sets such as one might see on many Broadway stages but from the ways that human bodies and voices create simple but powerfully theatrical images. Keiley tends to direct productions that feature large casts (such as *The Cheat,* which included over 80 actors, or *Fear of Flight,* which featured an ensemble of 30 actors) as well as productions that involve significant choral, unison elements (such as the unison movement featured in *Fear of Flight* or the sung choral dialogue in *Under Wraps*).[637] In all of these instances, a strong sense of ensemble and unity is required. Moreover, in contrast to the intricate and precise choral movements involved in Keiley's productions, her works often feature very minimal and simple sets, from a group of chairs to a bare stage where the actors create the set pieces covered by a large white sheet. This trait is particularly apparent in Artistic Fraud productions such as *Fear of Flight*, for which the set consisted simply of a white cloth to symbolize the airplane aisle and chairs that could be configured as needed (see Figure 1), but it also holds true for productions Keiley directs for other companies, such as *Tempting Providence,* which she originally directed for Theatre Newfoundland Labrador. In an article published in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, Keiley described the set

[637] Keiley credits her interest in ensemble casts and choral work to her time at York University and her work with the late professor, Anatol Scholosser, who "really opened [her] eyes to choral and group work in cultural traditions around the world." ("Jillian Keiley receives Canada's richest annual theatre award for 'startlingly original' stage talent," Y-file: York's daily internal electronic newsletter, December 2004, http://www.yorku.ca/alumni/alumnimatters/dec-04/story3.html, accessed 22 June 2013.)

for *Tempting Providence*, saying, "It was made with the intention to tour it to seniors' homes and then it became a hit with the hip kids…The set is basically what you could put in a bag and wheel into a seniors' home's common room. We don't have any props…so much of what I do is about invention, the actors and the audience inventing."[638] Thus, the ensemble of actors and their bodies create the physical and vocal theatricality of Keiley's work in uncanny, unexpected and innovative ways, creating what actor and *Metamorphoses* assistant director Christine Brubaker describes as Keiley's vision for the "kinesthetic topography" of a piece.[639] In fact, from the first moments of production, Keiley seems to have this visual image, or kinesthetic topography, of the ensemble on stage in mind. As Brubaker recalled, during the first read-through of *Metamorphoses* at the NAC, Keiley began by explaining her "visual entry point to the story" and showing the actors the early physical "set ups and staging" for the production.[640] Moreover, my rehearsal observations of *Metamorphoses* further demonstrated Keiley's interest in creating powerful and precise visual images with the actors' bodies. In one instance, the character Erysichthon is so consumed by hunger that he becomes a glutton, physically growing so large that he ultimately consumes himself, and in Keiley's production, she used not one but three actors – one playing the central character and two who sneak under his billowing robes to make him physically appear larger and then play his right and left hands – to create the illusion of size and gluttonous growth. Clearly, Keiley's directorial aesthetic and eye tend toward creating striking visual images on stage, but it is important

[638] Kevin Prokosh, "Local theatre group inspired director," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 Nov 2007.
[639] Christine Brubaker, Interview by author, Skype, 5 April 2013.
[640] Brubaker, Interview.

to note that those visual images are highly dependent upon the bodies that comprise her ensemble of actors.

Figure 12. Photo from *Fear of Flight* at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (where it was originally devised with Grenfell College students in collaboration with Keiley and Chafe), 2005. Courtesy Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland.

Precision within Ensemble

Within discussions and analysis of Kalideography and Keiley's use of the ensemble, or her community of actors, a sub-theme that emerges is the importance of precision to the work. As Keiley notes, the moments during which the kaleidoscope physically "locks" into place is when the "magic" happens; however, those "lock" moments naturally require a great deal of precision and control – both on the part of the director and actors. As one actor commented, the precision and high physical demands of these shows can be "mind-numbing" due to the emphasis on the technical components of the combined rhythm, music, and movement, which often require the actors to count carefully as well as to act, sing, and move. "And she [Keiley] would be like, 'Ok, 1 2 3 4 5, 1 2 3 4 5…" And just – it only works when everyone is doing it all together. [And

we'd do it] over and over and over and over and over again."[641] Moreover, for many actors, this precision is doubly difficult, as it does not fall into the traditionally accepted tradition of psychological acting in which actors often work from pure instinct. This precision then proves problematic, for some critics, audience members, and even other artists question if Keiley's technique is *too* precise, leaving little to no room for actor interpretation: "Actors become cogs and gears in a high-powered performance machine."[642]

Keiley is, however, very much aware of these criticisms. As part of our interview, she specifically noted that some have considered her work "cold" because of its physical precision and focus on visual images rather than actors' emoting: "Some people find that the precision is too irritating…So that's something. Something I'm working on. So I don't know. Some people come out of my shows and they're weeping."[643] While some question Keiley's specificity, control, and precision within her direction, specifically Kalideography, it is also quite reminiscent of Anne Bogart's discussion of violence and blocking in *A Director Prepares* in which she links precision with the potential for freedom. Bogart writes, "I like to think of staging, of blocking, as a vehicle in which the actors can move and grow. Paradoxically, it is the restrictions, the precision, the exactitude, that allows for the possibility of freedom. The form becomes a container in which the actor can find endless variations and interpretive freedom."[644] In fact, within what Bogart would call the "container" of Kalideography's precise rhythms

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[641] Brubaker, Interview.

[642] Gordon Jones, "The Hirsch Conundrum," *Performing Arts and Entertainment in Canada* 33, vol. 4 (Summer 2002): 30.

[643] Keiley Interview.

[644] Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 46.

and movements, Keiley similarly argues that her actors have great freedom: "You can ask my actors; they're pretty free. Just like they're limited to the words that are on the page, they're limited to where they are on the stage. They just need to find a naturalistic way to do it. Which gives you some very interesting performances. Because they need to find 'why am I walking there?' And I go, 'Figure that out. Or I can help you. We'll work together and figure out why you're walking there, but I need you there so that this line up happens.'…I'm saying, 'You are moving. Why are you doing it? Excellent question. *Why* are you doing it? So can you, can you now move?'"[645] Thus, much like Bogart, Keiley feels she is providing the framework – albeit very specific and controlled – and the actors can then find their motivation. In fact, Keiley's approach to Kalideography echoes Anne Bogart's notion that it is "the performers' task to fill the chance movements with all those experiences that are relevant to them, their personas, or their characters."[646] While this strategy is somewhat different from that of other directors, who are more psychologically-driven and focused on cultivating and drawing from actors' impulses, Keiley finds that it works for her and her even-keeled, non-hierarchical leadership style – and perhaps this very precision accounts for the reason she is so careful to cultivate and encourage a strong ensemble within her rehearsal space.

Valuing the Individual within the Ensemble

In her book, *Conversations with Anne,* Anne Bogart describes Julie Taymor as "an impressive persona striding across the globe, making huge demands on herself and others. And those demands pay off mightily with audiences and collaborators," and in

[645] Keiley, Interview.

[646] Eelka Lampe, "From the Battle to the Gift: The Directing of Anne Bogart," *TDR* 36:1 (Spring 1992): 39.

many ways, Jillian Keiley – although often compared to male visionary directors such as Peter Brook – very much fits Bogart's description of Taymor, for the precision involved with the ensemble-based movements of Kalideography inevitably demands significant amounts of focus and physical energy from her collaborators – primarily the actors but also other collaborators such as Chafe and Keiley's frequent music collaborators, Jonathon Monro and Petrina Bromley.[647] However, many individuals who have worked with Keiley note that, despite the detail-oriented, demanding nature of her productions, she is still able to create an environment in which all ensemble members are supported and encouraged – so much so, in fact, that it becomes easy to do the intricate and often repetitive work that her directing style demands. To this end, another subtheme that arises throughout Keiley's narrative and observations of her directorial practices (as well as the consideration of her ensemble-community) is that of value, specifically recognizing and valuing her actors as individual people, what Keiley referred to frequently during our interview as making people "feel shiny."

For Keiley and the precision so often required of her productions, her ensemble becomes a key, as the actors' group moments can make or break a production. However, it is not simply the actors as a group that is essential to Keiley's directorial approach; it is the actors on an individual level and making those actors feel individually valued and recognized. As Keiley states,

> You need everybody. You need *everybody*. And that's one of the things, when I'm talking about choruses, that's so important is that you don't, you should never make your chorus bigger than it needs to be for the sake of having the bodies on stage. You actually need to go, "Okay, I need you because. I need you because."

[647] Anne Bogart, "Julie Taymor," in *Conversations with Anne* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012),125.

> So that if a chorus member isn't there it actually hurts the production.
>
> ER: So there's a hole that they're filling?
>
> Yeah, or that they've created. They've created this space so if you're doing *A Christmas Carol* and you need the people on the street, everybody needs to be there. And if Billy Churchill calls in and says, "I broke my ankle," I actually need to find a replacement for Billy Churchill. Even though he's just one of the guys next to the lamp post. He's *not* just one of the guys next to the lamp post. He's the guy next to the lamp post who is the guy who brings the turkey. Or he's the guy next to the lamp post who takes the hat off the kid or something. Like, what it is that he does that's special, that adds to the scene. We cannot do it without him. And then actors feel that value and they get shiny. [648]

Thus, Keiley is interested in not only the collective ensemble, or the broader community of actors, but also the individual actor – an approach that speaks to a rather postmodern feminist theory that recognizes the importance of the individual and cultivating one's agency, autonomy, and self-determination, as articulated by feminist scholars such as Teresa de Lauretis, who argues that self-determination allows for a re-writing of cultural assumptions in which "not Woman but women are represented and addressed as subjects" rather than objects.[649]

Further supporting this sub-theme of recognizing and valuing the individuals within the ensemble, I found that, in both my interview and informal interactions with Keiley, she spoke frequently and passionately about collaboration and creating a welcoming space in which each individual was recognized – no matter his/her role. For instance, during the time I spent with her, she readily and enthusiastically introduced me to all those associated with her in the room – on the day of our interview in November 2012 it was to Sarah Stanley, the NAC artistic associate, and Eric Coates, the new artistic

[648] Keiley Interview.

[649] Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 10.

director of Ottawa's Great Canadian Theatre Company; during my rehearsal visits, it was to each of the actors as well as her composer Jonathon Monro, stage managers, and the scene shop crew. For Keiley, it is not only the *actors* who are valued as part of the rehearsal and production process, it is *everyone* in the creative community and ensemble:

> [Ensemble] is really important to me. That includes the stage management, tech, whoever is there. All of them. It's harder to get producers; it's harder to get them to, you know, do the ensemble games, but when they do, it adds something so special. So you *really* feel like you're a team, you know?...You can't do it without the cadets. You can have all the generals you want, but – well, really, just one (*laughs*). But like in a chess board, each pawn is essential. I don't like to use that analogy because then I use the word "pawn" and it seem lesser. But, ok, play it without the pawns; you're screwed. (*laughs*)[650]

These words – including her admission that there *is* "just one" leader as well as her hesitancy surrounding the use of "pawn" – demonstrate that Keiley is well aware of power structures and hierarchy in the rehearsal space, and she negotiates them carefully within the rehearsal space in hopes of creating an effective ensemble. A calm, thoughtful leader, she encourages her actors to have agency in the rehearsal space, rarely getting up from her seat and demonstrating for the actor what she would like him/her to do. Instead, she sits back (typically on an ergonomic chair whose seat is a yoga ball) and offers suggestions, providing direction and a clear sense of the tenor of the scene but also allowing her actors, her community, to make their own decisions within the framework she has provided. In the words of one actor who has worked with her on several productions, while she is interested in finding the truthful core of the moment, "she does really, really rely on her actors to make those decisions. She's not a 'do it like this' director at all. She never gets up across that table and demonstrates how she wants them

[650] Keiley, Interview.

to do it."[651] During rehearsals for *Metamorphoses*, for instance, one of the younger actors struggled to find a believable energy in a scene for which he was supposed to be drowning, desperately calling for his love. Keiley noted this following a run through of the scene, and instead of telling the young actor how he should play it, she offered various metaphors to him to help him understand his plight – eventually offering that it felt like someone was sitting on him, which resulted in his request that, as an exercise, several other physically larger and stronger actors lay on top of him so that he would have to struggle physically in a similar manner. In this way, then, the actor came to the discovery on his own, without Keiley providing a specific or dictatorial line reading. In other instances, when Keiley noted moments that she did not perceive to be fully truthful, she would also ask her assistant director (who also had significant acting experience) to work with the actor and find other ways (always with a plural) to come at the scene; however, Keiley herself never leapt to her feet to show the actor how to do something or to provide a line reading. In these instances, we see how Keiley, within the stylized, highly physical and rhythmically precise elements of Kalideography, also pushes her actors to find and ground their characters in truth and believability but allows them to have their own individual, creative voices.

Presumably this desire to create ensemble and value the individuals within the ensemble stems in large part from Keiley's own background and struggle to be recognized in Newfoundland as a young artist, and as her young assistant stage manager for *Metamorphoses* was quick to note during a casual conversation, "Jill is always willing

[651] Brubaker, Interview.

to give people a chance."[652] In addition to a young assistant stage manager who Jillian brought with her to the NAC having worked with him while he was still in school, a look at her *Metamorphoses* cast reveals a diverse group – some of whom had collaborated with Keiley in the past, such as Petrina Bromley, some whom Keiley had instructed as part of her work at the National Theatre School, such as Ishaun Davé, and still others who had never worked with Keiley until *Metamorphoses*. Regardless of their previous association with her, it was clear in their interactions that they were all engaged and willing to participate, offering thoughts and suggestions as well as asking questions to ensure they were on the right track with the character and often-flowery language in the play. In return, Keiley also was willing to stop and entertain actor questions and discussion. For instance, during my rehearsal observation, one of the actors paused in the middle of the scene to ask a question about how Keiley wanted the text to be performed, as the actor felt she was making the text sound too lofty. Although on a tight schedule, and with three rehearsal rooms working (one for Keiley's staging, one used for character work with assistant director Christine Brubaker, and another for musical work with composer Jonathon Monro) Keiley took the time to pause, think carefully and engage with that actor as well as the entire ensemble about the question at hand in order to ensure the actor was not only recognized but the entire ensemble was on the same page.

Taking Risks and Leaps of Faith

Along these same themes of building ensemble and valuing ensemble members, Keiley, also in a reflection of the theme of "risk taking," often talks about taking leaps of faith in her work. Perhaps more importantly, she often attributes her ability to take those

[652] *Metamorphoses* Assistant Stage Manager, informal conversation.

directorial leaps of faith, those artistic risks, to the support and willingness of her fellow artists and collaborators. In her acceptance speech for the 2004 Siminovitch prize, for example, Keiley humorously outlines some of the extreme ideas she has pitched to her actors, creative teams and funding organization – for instance, "Um, yeah, what would you say if we replaced all the text in Chekhov's *Seagull* with instruments from a string quartet, and had the actors speak their interpretations of the lines which would then be imitated tonally by an violin or a cello, and then eventually replace the actor's voice, demonstrating the music in meaning behind language" (as she did in Artistic Fraud's production of *Chekhov Variations* in 2002).[653] However, while these are seemingly off-the-wall, outrageous, or, as Keiley would say, "crazy/insane" ideas, these productions have come to fruition. Keiley, however, is quick to note that not only have the artists been willing to take leaps of faith for her and her artistic ideas but they also have been integral for her perpetuity as an artist and directorial visionary: "All of these artists I've met have set the parameters for future projects - questions they ask become answers in the next season."[654] Thus, by humbly offering the credit to her performers, she continues to recognize and further her actors' investment and this sense of ensemble, recognizing that all are necessary to the creative process.

Ritual in Building Ensemble

To further encourage this sense of ensemble and the recognition of the individual's importance to the whole, Keiley – again, much like Anne Bogart – begins each rehearsal with a ritual, another sub-theme that emerges within Keiley's narrative and

[653] Jillian Keiley, Siminovitch Award Acceptance Speech, 26 October 2004.
[654] Ibid.

is associated with the overall theme of community or ensemble. In this case, the ritual is a warm-up that includes both physical and emotional exercises, both of which contribute to creating a sense of ensemble and solidifying community. In rehearsal, the cast begins with what Keiley calls the "Acknowledgement" – which are exercises that ask the cast to connect to each other, acknowledging their presence in the space and in preparation for rehearsal. The exercises Keiley uses here vary from day to day, and throughout the process she introduces new exercises while also returning to (and often building on) those previously performed. When I observed Keiley's rehearsal for *Metamorphoses*, for instance, I as well as composer, stage management team and, later in the week, Keiley's artistic associate Sarah Stanley participated in the warm-up as well.[655] We began with exercises such as "You and I Both," an exercise in which one person moves to the center of the circle and approaches another ensemble member, offering a statement that begins with "You and I both…" The person in the center then completes the statement with something he thinks that the person to whom he is speaking shares with him. "You and I both like to ride our bikes for long distances" might be one such statement. If the person to whom the actor in the center is speaking agrees with this statement, she takes the center, allowing the first performer to return to the circle. The new person in the center then approaches another ensemble member and so on. It is important to note that none of these acknowledgement exercises includes rules that might make someone "out," thus reinforcing the sense of ensemble and inclusivity in the rehearsal hall. Moreover, the importance of these acknowledgement rituals was demonstrated by the actors, for on one

[655] One of the stage managers even mentioned that she thought some of the production team – like Sarah Stanley – would voluntarily come into Keiley's rehearsals specifically to participate in the warm-up and connect with the group.

occasion Keiley suggested cutting the acknowledgements short for the day in order to sooner attend to the day's busy schedule. However, several of the actors responded quite passionately about this change, advocating for a full (or nearly full) acknowledgement session, and Keiley agreed, placing the actors' requests and perceived need for this ensemble-based ritual ahead of the day's schedule.

Keiley is also careful to tailor the warm up ritual to the needs of that particular ensemble and production. For instance, in *Metamorphoses* rehearsals, following the physical warm ups each day, a designated actor would share a recent dream, as Keiley saw *Metamorphoses* as highly connected to dreams and the transformative qualities of dreams, and another would share a current news story that he/she felt shed light or connected in some way to one of the myths being told in the play. As stated in the program notes, the intention for the sharing of these stories was to "connect the myths of *Metamorphoses* to our daily lives and remind ourselves that these stories are mirrored in the here and now."[656] What emerged from this warm up ritual then was a group mythology, a collection of personal and public stories that the actors brought to the table, giving them agency and input into the interpretation process. Moreover, during my rehearsal visit, Keiley entered rehearsal one day and announced to the actors that she had had an idea, asking them how they would feel about sharing some of the stories they had discovered as part of the program notes with the hope that sharing the stories with the audience would help the viewers better connect to and find the contemporary echoes of the myths. In this discussion, Keiley left the decision to share the stories entirely to the

[656] "Modern Day Myths," *Prelude* and *Metamorphoses* program, National Arts Centre, Winter 2013, 4.

actors, asking them for their input and ultimately putting it to an ensemble vote. In this way, Keiley created an opportunity for the actors to have agency in the creative decisions and final presentation of an element of the production, thus mitigating some of the traditional, hierarchical perceptions of a director who would simply mandate such an activity. Further, decisions regarding such things as the program notes are but small elements of the overall production process, and by asking the actors to not only decide what would go in them but also offer their own insights into the play cultivates a further investment and sense of agency for them, making them not simply "cogs in the wheel" of Keiley's direction but active agents in the creation process.

Play within the Ensemble

Another sub-theme associated with this creation of ensemble through ritual is an emphasis on bringing play and humor into the rehearsal space. Throughout our interview, Keiley was quick to laugh and has a ready, broad smile, and the same was true in the rehearsal room; despite her busy schedule as the new artistic director of the English-Theatre NAC and being in the midst of selecting her first NAC season (which meant that she regularly went from the morning rehearsal to a lunch meeting and then directly back to rehearsal – often not actually having proper time to eat lunch), Keiley always entered the room with a smile and a calm but jovial confidence. Moreover, while a way to encourage ensemble, Keiley's group warm-up rituals also often included an activity that left the ensemble with a smile on their faces. For example, one morning the final segment of the warm up involved rope skipping. Keiley and her assistant stage manager twirled – thus showing her own investment and participation in the warm-up but

allowing her to lead and set the tone, a mark of her leadership style – and the rest of the cast (and myself) ran into the giant jump rope in pairs, one from each side of the room, and, together, accomplished a particular task such as “high fiving” or, a more difficult task, grabbing hands and pulling the other through the rope. Although this exercise prompted great laughs from the cast, it was interesting to note that these laughs often emerged when the task did not work quite right, thus mitigating any guilt or anxiety about getting it “right” but focusing more on the group effort to accomplish the task. In many ways, then, these warm ups and their associated sense of play are representative of the skills required for Kalideography and Keiley’s directing techniques in that they require hard work, precision and ensemble but can also be accomplished with good humor fun and cooperation. As assistant director Christine Brubaker noted, “She talks about that, right? Inviting play into the space…It’s a way of learning how people play together, making them play, making them do something hard. Something outside of their safety zone. So all this skipping [rope] stuff. Pushing them, physically pushing them.”[657] And that physical yet fun challenge then seems to translate into the ensemble’s increased willingness to go the distance, so to speak, for Keiley and the physically-demanding type of artistic work she requires.

In testament to the nature of the positive bond created within these playful warm ups, the actor with whom I was paired for the “skip rope” warm-up made it a point to say and hug me goodbye at the end of my rehearsal visit. In fact, he confessed that he had left rehearsal the day before and realized he was not sure I would be there the following day and wanted to be sure that he could say goodbye – and he specifically thanked me for

[657] Brubaker, Interview.

"skipping rope" with him. Meanwhile, several of the other cast members hugged me goodbye and were insistent that I return to see the show in production. While these bonds and requests may have been due in part to the personalities in the room, I did not experience this same connection with the other casts that I observed. Thus, the environment Keiley fosters in the rehearsal hall creates a particularly strong sense of ensemble and community.

Self-reflexive Leadership of the Ensemble

At this juncture, it should also be noted that while Keiley encourages and fosters this sense of ensemble and calm, non-hierarchical environment in the rehearsal hall, she also very clearly retains and negotiates her status as leader in the room. This negotiation of power is typical for any director; however, for women who helm theatrical productions, navigating and establishing power dynamics within the rehearsal hall can be a particularly complex venture, as existing social and cultural structures and traditional gendered expectations can sometimes complicate or even impede the woman director's role as the production's leader. Keiley, however, presents herself as very grounded and sure of her role within the rehearsal room. While Keiley does encourage actors to make their own choices, they also clearly look to her as the leader, often checking in and asking "is that what you want there?" and the overall atmosphere of the rehearsal hall is one of great calm and confidence, an atmosphere largely created and maintained by Keiley's demeanor. As one actor who worked with Keiley on *Fear of Flight* noted, despite the intricacy of the production and its experimental nature, the cast "never saw her lose it.

Ever…She would always be a calm leader regardless of how freaked out she was."[658] This overriding sense of serenity seems to stem in large part from the fact that Keiley is quite self-aware and reflexive. Perhaps due to her status as a Newfoundlander and the aforementioned tendency for Newfoundlanders to be hyper-aware of and to embrace their outsider demarcation, Keiley also seems to be very self-aware – of herself, her reputation, and her process. In fact, as part of our interview, several times she commented she could "see it all now," referring to the reasons why she experienced the reaction she did from other Newfoundland theatre artists when she returned to St. John's from the mainland; thus, another sub-theme that emerges in regard to Keiley's work and directorial approach is a distinct element of self-reflexivity.

While some directors confess to not being sure what they are doing in the rehearsal hall or why, relying predominately on their creative instincts, Keiley looks carefully and critically at her work and is very intentional – a trait that connects in many ways to the carefully planned, precise nature of Kalideography itself – in the implementation of her directorial approaches and ideas. As a leader, she is thoughtful and intensely focused, always surveying the scene and processing it before putting it out to the ensemble. Certainly, in rehearsal, she will respond with her initial reading or interpretation such as "David, I'm missing your images and meaning on that section" or noting that a particular moment read as "too Harry Potter," meaning it was too reminiscent of an action that would appear in a Harry Potter movie and therefore would distract the audience from the action of the play; however, she watches each moment in rehearsal carefully and with great focus, her eyes often narrowing slightly as she thinks

[658] Brubaker, Interview.

about and critically reads each moment. As her *Metamorphoses* assistant director observed, Keiley is "always in process" and is constantly thinking about and reflecting on what needs to happen to serve the show itself: "It's all still awake, it's all still alive, it's all still ready to receive it later – so it's not like, 'Well, we'll get that when we come back to it later.'"[659] Because of this self-reflexivity, Keiley also is open and willing to change – even if at the last minute. As part of the *Metamorphoses* process, for instance, the NAC artistic associate Sarah Stanley sat in on a technical rehearsal and approached Keiley following the rehearsal, communicating some uncertainty about the world of the play and where the play was happening. Keiley, in her characteristic manner, considered this feedback carefully, and within only a day or two of opening, changed the opening moments of the play significantly to more clearly root it in a more specific, contemporary context.[660] Thus, as part of this reflexive nature, Keiley is also not afraid to let go of her original ideas to better serve the needs of the production and the text.

Interestingly, Keiley also finds a way to balance this thoughtful consideration and reflexivity with her willingness to take risks and experiment artistically. Particularly early in the development of Kalideography, Keiley and her collaborators readily admit that their productions were risky and experimental. In a recent radio interview on CBC during which Keiley, Chafe, and Petrina Bromley discussed the 2013 re-staging of *Under Wraps*, Keiley admitted, with a characteristic laugh, that when the production premiered

[659] Brubaker, Interview.

[660] As a result of this adjustment, the play opened with the actors, clad in white robes and towels, entering the set throughout the audience's arrival and utilizing the set in the manner reminiscent of a luxury spa. This adjustment then provided a concrete location and setting while also speaking to Keiley's organizing metaphor for the production which focused on places of transformation.

in 1997 it was a "huge experiment."[661] While this careful reflexivity seems diametrically opposed to the perceived spontaneity of risk-taking, it is perhaps *because of* Keiley's reflexive, thoughtful directorial nature that this risk-taking is possible. Case in point: When faced with making the last minute change to the *Metamorphoses* staging, Keiley, as she processed the idea before inflicting it upon her cast, approached her assistant director and asked for her input: "I remember at one point her saying to me, 'Do you think we can get away with changing this, Christine?' And I said, 'You can get…this cast is so calm. They will take anything from you. They do not feel traumatized or freaked. They are ready to do this show in any way. So you have prepared them well, so you can absolutely throw things at them.'"[662] As her assistant director's comments indicate, because of Keiley's calm demeanor, self-reflexive leadership, and careful negotiation of the power structures at play in the rehearsal hall, she is able to create a space in which her performance community, her ensemble, is willing to invest in and support her artistic risk-taking.

Over the course of her career, Keiley has been touted as a director whose imagination soars (or who "likes to fly, in a metaphorical sense"[663]) and, by creating a space in rehearsal and performance that encourages a sense of community, ensemble, and artistic risk, has become known for her visually stunning and physically innovative productions. While her productions may not feature traditional psychological realism at the fore, Keiley still requires that her actors commit to the production and convey their truth. Moreover, within this artistic vision and imagination, Keiley is a calm, caring and

[661] "Artistic Fraud: Under Wraps," *On the Go with Ted Blades*, CBC Radio, 3 May 2013.
[662] Brubaker, Interview.
[663] Michael Devine, "Keileydography," *Canadian Theatre Review* 128 (Fall 2006): 35.

humble leader, sitting back and orchestrating (sometimes literally, as often her focus is on the musical and musicality of the production both aurally and physically) the production as the actors bring to it what truth they have. When it comes down to it, though, Keiley's is a theatre of "old fashioned theatricality," filled with large ensemble casts, physical storytelling and kinesthetic topography, musical underscoring, and theatrical magic – all of which contribute to what Michael Devine calls her "theatre of wonder."[664]

Under Wraps: A Case Study

Although Keiley notes that Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* was a play included within the "common canon" that she would be "likely" to direct and she has directed extant scripts such as *Honk!, Jesus Christ Superstar, A Midsummer Night's Dream* and others, much of the work for which she became most renowned were not only collaborations with playwright Robert Chafe but also new works in which Kalideography featured prominently. Of these works, the production perhaps most indicative of her directorial approach and methods – and one that first brought Keiley's "theatre of wonder" and Kalideography into the national spotlight – is *Under Wraps*, which was first produced in 1997 and, by many accounts, served as Keiley and Artistic Fraud's break-out production, for it resulted in not only a sold out run in St. John's but also a national tour to Halifax, Calgary, Banff, and Vancouver.

In May 2013, *Under Wraps* was re-written and re-staged; however, Keiley and Chafe are quick to point out that the 2013 version was not simply a "re-mounting," as the

[664] Ibid. Although it should be noted that while technology does not form the core of her artistic work, she does use technology often in rehearsal. With her script on an iPad, she takes immediate notes and quickly flips from one page to the next. Moreover, during technical rehearsals for *Metamorphoses*, she and her assistant director Skyped across the expansive NAC theatre, discussing sight lines and making communal notes.

performance underwent revision in text, music, and staging. While I did not see Keiley's production or re-staging of *Under Wraps* in rehearsal due to travel and scheduling conflicts, Keiley frequently pointed to the production during our interview and discussions as an exemplar of her work, directorial aesthetic, and rehearsal strategies.[665] Writing as recently as 2006, Michael Devine, too, holds *Under Wraps* up as an exemplar of not only Keiley's work but also top notch Canadian theatrical output: "a production so mesmerizing that it remains…on my list of the most significant Canadian theatre productions of the past fifteen years."[666] Thus, it seems apt that it serves as the case-study-within-a-case-study for this examination of Keiley's directorial approaches and strategies. Moreover, *Under Wraps* demonstrates not only Keiley's community focus but also the ways her work politically and artistically innovates and energizes Canadian theatre at large.

Subtitled *A Spoke Opera*, *Under Wraps* was the first major collaboration between Keiley and Chafe (and also included regular Artistic Fraud actor and composer Petrina Bromley), and it evolved from Keiley's vision of a production in which the chorus – hidden largely under a sheet that would transform to physically create various set pieces throughout the play – would speak or sing the protagonist's inner monologue. From this seed of an idea, *Under Wraps* was born and the idea further developed, with the intention ultimately being "to compose a ninety minute *a capella* opera with naturally spoken text"

[665] Although I was not able to see the production of *Under Wraps*, I did see video of several scenes and production photos as well as gained an understanding of the play and its plot through numerous published and recorded interviews with Chafe, Keiley, and Bromley. At this juncture, the full script is unpublished.

[666] Michael Devine, "Keileydography The Symphonic Theater of Jillian Keiley," *Canadian Theatre Review* 128 (Fall 2006): 31.

and then "integrate our timing system with text, grid blocking, music, lighting, and a full chorus."[667] No small task, but a task right up Keiley's alley.

These basic building blocks in place, Chafe then created *Under Wraps'* central story: a tale of unrequited love between two men, Mark, a furniture store employee, and David, Mark's love interest. According to Chafe, "One thing that myself and Jill really connected over when we first started to hang out was we both had these huge, melodramatic youthful stories about undying love we felt for people, and those people didn't know we were alive. We used to laugh so much about it, and share stories about that."[668] However, unlike Keiley's original pitch to Chafe in which a young woman was the protagonist, once Chafe, who is openly gay, started working on the script, the story quickly took an autobiographical turn and became a "boy meets boy" story. Full of innuendo and humor, the doomed love story becomes complicated by the fact that Mark tries to get David a job at the furniture store; Mark ends up getting fired, so Mark concocts a plan to see David again by going back to the furniture store. The rest of the play follows the ups and downs of their friendship (and Mark's unrequited love and frequently-dashed hopes). The play is clever with the moments of choral interjection and response to the protagonist's actions providing witty banter – such as a moment in which Mark, in the store under the pretense of purchasing a bed, asks David to go to coffee. As David accepts, the chorus exclaims "Our first date!" in the background. David then asks, "What do you think of this?" to which Mark and the chorus reply-sing, "I think it's great!" David responds skeptically, "Really?" and the chorus pops up to whisper, "He's

[667] Jillian Keiley and Robert Chafe, "An Introduction of Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland," *Theatre Research in Canada* 26, vol. 1-2 (2005): 110.

[668] Elling Lien, "Under Wraps," *The Scope*, 2 May 2013, http://thescope.ca/onstage/under-wraps (accessed 19 June 2013).

talking about the bed!"[669] However, despite these playful moments and the overall humor of the text, it is perhaps not so much the text as the play's themes, messages, and innovative staging that make *Under Wraps* particularly remarkable and innovative.

While *Under Wraps* is ostensibly a play about not simply unrequited love but *gay* unrequited love, it is significant that Keiley directed it and that it stands as one of her standout, legacy productions for several reasons. First, portraying a gay story on the stage in 1997, eight years before the passage of the Civil Marriage Act in Canada in 2005, was arguably a risky political venture. Moreover, because the play, per Keiley's community-centered nature and leanings, was created and performed in Newfoundland, a community still wrestling with its cultural identity and presumably rooted in the masculine-oriented fishing industry, the choice to offer a depiction of love between two men pushes against traditional assumptions and expectations of gender and heteronormative relationships. As Chafe reflects, "As we took it on tour, people were saying, 'This is really brave, to have this 20-person show, a gay love story from Newfoundland.'"[670] However, it remained Keiley and Chafe's intention to treat the men's story in *Under Wraps* as any love story, placing the emphasis on the story and its import to humanity at large. After all, according to Chafe, the story only "happened to be gay."[671] Whatever the play's intention or explicitly gay message, the production not only performed in St. John's to sold out houses but it also toured nationally, thus ostensibly functioning as a display of Keiley and Artistic Fraud's support for gay rights while also potentially encouraging

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[669] "Artistic Fraud: Under Wraps," *On the Go with Ted Blade*, CBC Radio, 3 May 2013
[670] Tara Bradbury, "Under Wraps uncovered at LSPU Hall tonight," *The Telegram*, 8 May 2013.
[671] "Artistic Fraud: Under Wraps," *On the Go with Ted Blade*, CBC Radio, 3 May 2013.

discussion about an emerging issue within the Canadian cultural scene as the country moved toward the 2005 passage of the Civil Marriage Act.

The political ramifications of *Under Wraps* are and have not been lost on Keiley and Chafe. In fact, in a 2013 interview about re-staging *Under Wraps*, Keiley and Chafe revealed that, before undertaking the revision process, they discussed whether or not the play and its issues were still relevant for contemporary Canadian audiences 16 years after its original debut.[672] The two quickly agreed that the play still had messages to offer contemporary Canadian audience members and provided a relevant commentary on the current socio-political climate. Chafe, in particular, cited examples such as the suicide of 15-year-old Jamie Hubley in Ottawa in October 2011 due to teen bullying regarding his sexuality, which further convinced the collaborative team that the play merited a re-staging.[673] In the revision, however, the story becomes less about unrequited love or even gay unrequited love and more about a journey of self-discovery and finding "self-worth," a message that would appeal to audiences broadly as well as one of significant import to the feminist and LGBTQ community because it encourages agency and legitimizes gay stories in a public forum. Thus, although Keiley identifies as "feminist" in its broadest understanding of equality for all people regardless of gender and therefore does not visibly employ a feminist lens or a highly politicized feminism in her work, *Under Wraps* does serve a political function that can be connected to feminism, as it features a gay couple at the center of its narrative and, as queer feminist scholar Mimi Marinucci notes "there is an unmistakable sense of solidarity linking concern about

[672] Ibid.

[673] Elling Lien, "Under Wraps," *The Scope*, 2 May 2013, http://thescope.ca/onstage/under-wraps (accessed 1 June 2013).

women's issues and concern about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues" and "this solidarity seems to have more depth than the mere recognition that feminism must reflect the lives of women who identify as heterosexual as well as those who do not."[674] However, advocating for gay rights is not the single political aim of the production; rather, it is part of the larger whole which, in addition to addressing a gay love story, serves to destabilize and push the limits of theatrical staging and traditional visual composition ala Kalideography.

While Keiley's name receives billing as the director and Chafe is identified as the playwright, *Under Wraps* is very much a collaborative venture – thus demonstrating Keiley's interest in creating community through her work. Collaboration, as we have seen in the discussion of Keiley's directorial strategies, is a key component of the way Keiley builds and fosters a sense of community and equitable power relations within the rehearsal hall; thus, it follows that *Under Wraps* also represents that collaborative, community-centered creative approach. The collaborators – Keiley as the director and visionary of the production, Chafe as the playwright and an actor (in the original production he played the protagonist Mark and in the 2013 re-staging he is part of the chorus), and Petrina Bromley as the musical composer (and chorus member in the 2013 re-staging) – are also quick to point to the necessity of each other's work within the creation and implementation of *Under Wraps*. Keiley, for instance, notes that each collaborator "lent" their talent to create the world of the play; Keiley conveyed the desired "mood" of the piece to composer Petrina Bromley, who would then, as Bromley puts it, "turn that into something that could be sung" as part of the soundscape and

[674] Mimi Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2010), 106.

constant underscoring of the play.[675] While Keiley retains the primary leadership role as director, she readily and often publicly recognizes that she has a "huge respect for these guys as artists and people who can pull it off…I say, 'Can you do this?' and they actually can. It's actually even better than what I've asked."[676] Moreover, all three collaborators are Newfoundland natives, further supporting the theme of community in a geographic, regional sense in association with Keiley's work.

In addition to this reinforcement of the theme of "community" as part of *Under Wraps'* creation process, several other aspects of the production demonstrate the themes and sub-themes previously explored in regard to Keiley's directorial aesthetic and techniques. First, *Under Wraps* was a production that utilized Keiley's signature Kalideography, complete with its sense of the actor ensemble and the required precision of movement and style. For *Under Wraps*, Keiley implemented a grid on the stage floor and each of the eighteen members of the chorus (fourteen members, in the re-staging) then were instructed to reach certain points on the grid at specific times to create objects and images with their bodies, all while covered with a 40 x 60 foot sheet *and* singing and vocally underscoring the piece. As members of the chorus for the 2013 re-staging, both Chafe and Bromley candidly note how difficult this precise movement and multi-tasking element can be – especially under the cover of a sheet – but within the next breath, they comment that the sense of community and ensemble created through the method and in the rehearsal space serves to mitigate the difficulty posed by the technique. In an interview with the St. John's *Telegram*, Chafe admitted, "I always knew how hard it was,

[675] "Artistic Fraud: Under Wraps," *On the Go with Ted Blade*, CBC Radio, 3 May 2013.
[676] Ibid.

but now I truly get a picture of how hard it is and how tremendously focused and patient and dedicated you have to be of this process, and how trusting you have to be, because it's a crazy idea to be under a sheet and to be playing someone's chair"; however, "it gives (the show) this kind of communal storytelling feel, which we [and arguably Keiley as a director] always go for in our work. This show is a real great example of when it works, it's really beautiful."[677]

Fig. 13. Robert Chafe and Stephen Cochrane drive in a car created by the ensemble's bodies in *Under Wraps* (2000). Courtesy Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland.

In addition to the use of the precise Kalideography that has been so foundational to Keiley's directorial work and contributions, *Under Wraps* also embodies the sub-

[677] Tara Bradbury, "Under Wraps uncovered at LSPU Hall tonight," *The Telegram*, 8 May 2013.

theme of "risk" and "risk-taking" that emerges within Keiley's narrative and directorial work. In discussing the 2013 re-staging, Keiley admitted with a laugh that, particularly in its first incarnation, *Under Wraps* was a "huge experiment," and because Artistic Fraud was located outside of the boundary of the accepted mainstream (not only in its status as a small, emerging company but also in its geographical location and Keiley's non-traditional, visually-based staging methods), the larger funding bodies and agencies also perceived *Under Wraps* to be a risk. To this end, Keiley recalls

> We wrote this beautiful application to the Canada Council and explained how this show went. And they said no… They said, "Look, we don't think that you have the resources to pull this off." To which we created a poster for the show that said, "Artistic Fraud Newfoundland presents The Show That Canada Council Said Couldn't Be Done." It was our headline… Face it, we couldn't do it! Actually, if I was on a jury now, I'd be like, "Sixteen actors, professional show, you want to cover your actors in a sheet, you're doing a new method that has music and so everybody's singing and it's acapella and the actors can't see?" (*laughs*) There's a lot of things at play there, a lot of things that can go wrong. I mean, it is a miracle that the show worked.[678]

Despite discouragement from the established theater community, Keiley and Artistic Fraud continued in the quest to stage *Under Wraps* – even though the show's innovative and nontraditional production elements (such as a 40 x 60 foot white sheet) provided several other unexpected challenges – challenges that are perhaps inevitable in such non-traditional, risky artistic ventures. For instance, Keiley created a rehearsal sheet, which was sown by her mother and made from cotton bed sheets donated by the local hospital (another way that community and community-centered collaboration infused and influenced her work). However, she did not account for the weight of the cotton, which turned out to be "completely debilitating because, you know, it wouldn't slide off of

[678] Keiley, Interview.

anyone. It just stuck to the people. And it, the cotton stuck to itself."[679] However, in true artistic risk-taking form, Keiley and her company persevered, eventually receiving a new sheet that was created out of a material called simply, "wedding dress liner." Although the team celebrated the new and significantly lighter material, this sheet presented challenges of its own:

> [When it was placed over the actors] it was a spray of sparks and shocks and static. (*laughing*) Everything was sticking. We were like, "Oh my god, it totally doesn't work. The f-ing thing doesn't work." And we were so upset because we'd worked so hard and then we had all this confidence that, "Ok, if the cotton one doesn't work, the polyester one will work. Because it's slidey." But of course it was full of static…And one of the chorus members said, "Why don't we put a sheet of Bounce in it?" And we said, "Okay." We ran to the drug store and got a sheet of Bounce and rubbed the Bounce on the sheet, and it became this beautiful fluid thing…And we built it. And what we did was every actor had on each leg and each shoulder a tag of Bounce. Safety pinned to their costume so that they eliminated static as they walked. And in fact, it's a key element to the show, and if we didn't use Bounce, the sheet wouldn't work as well. Because the Bounce has this effect (*makes a gesture with hands just above shoulders, hovering*) on the fabric. So the static comes in and it actually reverses so that when the actors [move underneath, the fabric moves away] – it's so beautiful. I'm so happy to go back to this. It's one of my favorite stories, it still is one of my favorite shows. But as the actors are moving through the sheet, it actually lifts around them. Just because of the Bounce. It's a true story.[680]

Beyond being a humorous, behind-the-scenes look at *Under Wraps* (and perhaps the best "war story" I heard as part of this research project), this anecdote reveals and reinforces several sub-themes of Keiley's narrative. In addition to the experimental, risk-taking nature of the piece and its production process as demonstrated by the challenge of the sheet and Keiley's continued perseverance in the face of risk, Keiley also alludes to the fact that the actors' input helped solve the creative crisis of the static-y sheet, further documentation of her willingness to encourage ensemble and actor input within the

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[679] Ibid.
[680] Keiley, Interview.

rehearsal hall. Moreover, this moment also demonstrates Keiley's directorial focus and self-reflexive nature, a flexibility and adaptability that seems to be essential if one is to achieve one's artistic vision in these experimental modes. As a result, by the time Keiley and her creative team returned to the production 16 years later for the 2013 re-staging they came to it, to borrow Keiley's words, "having solved a lot of the problems."[681]

Figure 14. Ron Klappholtz and Greg Gale at a dance club, with club sound and lighting created by ensemble (2013). Photo by Peter Bromley. Courtesy Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland.

In many ways, then, *Under Wraps,* as representative of Keiley's work, demonstrates the ways that Keiley has made her mark and established her reputation as a visionary director within the Canadian theatre scene. Chafe noted of the 2013 re-staging of *Under Wraps* that *"*the visual element of this show is some of Jill's best work. It's so clever and cheeky and funny and out there and just beautiful to look at."[682] With Keiley

[681] "Artistic Fraud: Under Wraps," *On the Go with Ted Blade*, CBC Radio, 3 May 2013.
[682] Elling Lien, "Under Wraps," *The Scope*, 2 May 2013, http://thescope.ca/onstage/under-wraps (accessed 1 June 2013).

at the helm, productions such as *Under Wraps* provide an innovative alternative to more traditional staging practices and expectations through its precision and unique method of using a tightly-knit ensemble of actors' bodies to form striking visual images, thus pushing against and expanding the limits of artistic expression and directorial method in Canada.

Fig. 15. Ron Klappholz in a forest created by ensemble in *Under Wraps* (2013). Photo by Peter Bromley. Courtesy Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland.

On Intersecting and Influencing Identities

Certainly, Keiley is a visionary Canadian director who has received significant recognition for her work. But how does Keiley's role as a *woman* director influence and shape her work? Does her gender matter when considering her work as a professional artist? Throughout my discussion of Keiley's career trajectory and her directing methods, I have touched on several gender- and identity-related elements that have impacted her experience and work directorially, such as her early interactions as a young

woman director returning to her Newfoundland community from the mainland as well as the ways that productions such as *Under Wraps* might be viewed as political as well as artistic vehicles. However, are there other aspects of gender and identity that have shaped Keiley's work and experience?

When discussing directors, it is common to attempt to link the director in question to others in the field as a means of comparison. Thus, it is interesting to note (particularly in this consideration of gender identity and its influence on Keiley's work) that when linked to other directors, Keiley is often associated with visionary directors who are men. For instance, throughout Michael Devine's *Canadian Theatre Review* article, he frequently equates Keiley's work with prominent directors such as Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and Robert Lepage, and these connections occur several times throughout the essay, thus placing Keiley in the midst of a male-dominated history and directorial context. While I presume Devine did not intend to make a gendered commentary with these associations, for a careful feminist researcher and reader, the fact that Keiley's work is placed in conversation with predominately male directors raises questions about how we as theatre artists classify women's work. Does placing Keiley's work in direct conversation with Wilson and Lepage legitimize her work in a different way than it would if her work was put into conversation with the equally visionary Julie Taymor or Anne Bogart (connections that I made earlier in this chapter)? Or perhaps this tendency to associate women's work with male exemplars is a comment on the continuing phallocentric nature of the directing profession. While these questions may be nearly impossible to answer definitively within the course of this study (or within the field at large), it is important to note and be critically aware of the ways in which

Keiley's work – as well as the work of other women directors of her reputation and caliber, like those included in this study – is contextualized in the profession.

On Feminism and Gender

Much like Collier, Keiley is reticent and reluctant to adhere to a specific or narrowly defined sense of "feminism." While she acknowledges that gender disparity and discrimination does exist in Canadian theatre, Keiley also observes that her work does not generally follow a politicized feminist trajectory. In Keiley's words, "I do identify as a feminist. But only in so far as I'm like a human being. You know? I'm not a feminist director or like my work is not political generally. It's story and some types of stories are political…I find it a difficult question to answer."[683] Perhaps Keiley, similar to Collier, is another of Aoife Monks' "new breed" of women directors who do not view their work as explicitly engaging in feminist politics or issues; rather, they are interested in working and being recognized as professional directors and artists – an identity in and of itself. This desire seems common for professional women directors, in fact, for as Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow recognize in their introduction to *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*, "many women directors want to be studied based not on their gender but on their artistic talent and achievements."[684] While this desire is understandable (particularly in what some call a "post-feminist" moment during which issues of gender theoretically are not as significant as they have been previously), I also agree with Fliotsos and Vierow who argue that attention to women directors continues to be necessary, for women directors' work remains undervalued and under-

[683] Keiley, Interview.

[684] Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow, "Introduction," *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century*, eds. Fliotsos and Vierow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 1.

researched. Even more importantly, as Monks and her colleagues note, there are other ways to consider these "feminist strands" that are woven subtly and imperceptibly (even to the director herself at times) into women directors' work.[685] After all, as feminist standpoint theorists such as Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding would argue, a woman's experience as a woman is socially constructed because of her role as a woman, thus her experience as a woman naturally and inherently influences and shapes her work and view of the world – whether she fully realizes it or not.

To that end, Keiley argued as part of our discussion of feminism for a more expansive view of feminism, not a view that makes assumptions or feels compelled to categorize women into "types" of feminists. Along these lines, Keiley commented that when individuals attempt to classify women as ascribing to particular types or to tenets of particular waves of feminism they "think [they're] being a feminist. And in fact [they're] not. [They're] being the opposite of a feminist [by] boxing us" into pre-determined categories.[686] As a result, yet another aspect that emerges in Keiley's work particularly in regard to gender is a more broadly construed feminism, one that considers individuals as humans rather than specifically in relation to gender. Keiley, for instance, is interested in caring for actors as people, saying that "everybody's still got to have that [recognition and value]. And that's not just the psychology of an actor. I think that's true of

[685] As a director, I, for instance, do not always recognize the feminist attributes of or influences on my directorial work. While I do actively and publicly identify as a feminist, I admit that I do not always explicitly or specifically choose projects for their feminist messages or intents; conversely, I also recognize that, as a feminist, I do view any and every text with a feminist eye, whether I intend to or not. Thus, my feminist identification and standpoint inevitably impacts my artistic work and directorial strategies, as I am always looking for ways to heighten and further recognize the voices of women and other marginalized perspectives.

[686] Keiley, Interview.

everybody. That's true for humanity."[687] While Keiley here is specifically referring to her work with large choruses, her mention of "everybody's got to have that" and "that's true for humanity" speaks to her awareness of the individual beyond the context of the production. While not explicitly gendered, other actions undertaken by Keiley demonstrate an understanding not only of her actors' lives as people beyond the rehearsal space but also their social-political roles. For instance, when Keiley asked actor Christine Brubaker to come to Newfoundland to perform as part of *Fear of Flight* Brubaker had recently given birth and brought her seven week old baby with her. Keiley did not bat an eye at this addition to the creative ensemble; rather, Keiley's mother, who lives in St. John's, took care of Brubaker's baby while she was in rehearsal. Meanwhile, Brubaker noted that other women directors had not been so supportive, with one rescinding her offer of a role because Brubaker revealed she was pregnant and telling Brubaker it was "too much of a risk" to cast her while pregnant. In contrast, Brubaker noted that Keiley was willing to "step in and if I said I thought I could do it, she said 'I think you can do it.'"[688] In this way, Keiley offers her actors agency, recognizing their life beyond the rehearsal room and in so doing further extending the theme of "community" that emerges in her work and "build[ing] up an image of community that articulates both individual and collective identities."[689]

In light of this broad understanding of feminism, is Keiley then directing "as if gender matters"? Although her work does not typically include explicitly feminist issues in regard to content, it does push against traditional notions of the mainstream in structure

[687] Ibid.
[688] Brubaker, Interview.
[689] Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Gender," *Signs* 24.1 (Autumn 1998): 9.

and form. She is interested in the process of creating theatre – and, a direct extension of that, creating community – and as a result her artistic and innovative contributions lie predominately in the realm of new artistic forms (and recognizing artistic stories and works from communities beyond the mainstream Toronto).   In 2008, Jill Dolan wrote an essay in which she reflected on her and other feminists' critique of Wendy Wasserstein. Although Dolan and others had spent years "assigning her to the ranks of the co-opted and the assimilated, to the liberalism of those who sell out to established systems like the meritocracy of mainstream American theatre without trying to challenge or change them," Dolan also realized that Wasserstein's position *in* the mainstream also held merit and "helped, rather than hindered, certain feminist progress."[690]

While the work itself is focused on form and style, Keiley's working *methods* could be seen as somewhat "feminist," particularly her focus on community and creating a sense of ensemble. Certainly, it is not the same sort of ensemble as the early highly politicized feminist collectives who advocated for a complete elimination of hierarchy, but Keiley's focus on community – both her geographical community and her artistic community/ensemble – does lend itself to a more non-hierarchical way of working. This non-hierarchical way of working has been advocated by many scholars as a more "feminist" way of work, as it avoids or at least subverts the normative power structures associated with patriarchal culture.[691] Moreover, the desire to recognize the individual within the collective, when read through a feminist lens, reflects Sandra Harding, Nancy

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[690] Jill Dolan, ""Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular: Reviewing Wendy Wasserstein," *Theatre Journal* 60 (2008): 434.

[691] Beth Watkins, "The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education," *Theatre Topics* 15, vol. 2 (September 2005): 186. Watkins does not focus specifically on non-hierarchical direction but very much alludes to it throughout her article with phrases such as "decentering authority."

Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins and other feminist standpoint theorists' desire to recognize that each individual's position and standpoint is shaped by the surrounding context and identity factors; thus, the same approaches cannot be utilized (or will not be applicable) to all individuals, even those ostensibly within the same social, political, or cultural group.

Canadian-ness

And what of Canadian-ness and Canadian identity? How do Keiley and her work politically shape the Canadian theatrical scene? First, Keiley's deep roots in Newfoundland theatre speak to some extent to the importance of recognizing the diversity of Canadian regionalism, and her theatrical innovations in staging have garnered national attention, thus challenging the notion that innovation and new work emerges only and predominately from Toronto. Additionally, Keiley's new position as the artistic director of the English Theatre at the National Arts Centre provides her with a public and arguably political platform through which to actively shape Canadian notions and performances of Canadian identity. In her role as the National Arts Centre English Theatre's artistic director, Keiley is tasked with the responsibility of speaking to, for and with the *national* theatre scene, a unique duty which allows her to program (and potentially shape) theatrical representations of Canadian-ness. This responsibility in mind, Keiley's announcement of her first fully programmed season at the NAC's English Theatre was met with great anticipation and excitement. Her 2013-2014 season, announced in April 2013, is entitled "All Together Now" and features a diverse array of Canadian plays that come from regions across the country so as to present a picture of

theatre happening across the nation. Keiley's choice to bring in these regionally-based shows seems to follow more closely the recommendations for a National Theatre included in the 1951 Massey Report, which stated that "a National Theatre should consist not in an elaborate structure built in Ottawa or elsewhere, but rather in a company or companies of players who would present the living drama in even the more remote communities of Canada."[692] Ironically, the National Arts Centre did result in a large (albeit unassuming in its brown, boxy exterior) structure in Ottawa which, at least in recent years, largely programmed shows in an effort to get the proverbial "butts in seats." However, with Keiley's leadership, there seems to be a shift in this mandate, and while Keiley is bringing these regionally based productions *into* Ottawa rather than "present[ing] the living drama in even the more remote communities of Canada," her focus is on encouraging theatrical development within the regional communities, a vision closely connected to the overarching theme of "community" that consistently runs through her personal and professional narrative.[693]

In addition to bringing in these regional productions, those staged at the NAC will draw from a company of actors who themselves represent diverse regions and backgrounds, and the NAC productions have been selected with the intention of highlighting the talents of the actors, rather than plugging the actors into pre-selected shows. An article in the *Ottawa Citizen* cites Keiley as stating that this strategy is intended to "spotlight their individual and communal talents" and to "feature the human

[692] Canada. "The Theatre." *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences.* Report (Massey Report). Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951.
[693] Ibid.

more than the literature."[694] In this way, we also see the sub-theme of valuing the individual within the ensemble at work in yet another capacity, thus reinforcing its importance to Keiley and her directorial approach.

Keiley's focus on the power of the community – both the geographic community and the artistic community or ensemble – emerges as the major theme under which her artistic work and experiences seem to organize. Her unique and innovative "directorial stamp" is impossible to miss, as its primary focus – both in rehearsal and on stage – is on power of numbers – literally featuring a precise musically-and rhythmically-based staging method in her invention of Kalideography; the power of the ensemble – recognizing both the group's work and valuing the individual as the individual within the group; and the power of the community. Moreover, Jillian Keiley and her work serve to destabilize the traditional Canadian narratives that had traditionally delegitimized and marginalized Newfoundland theatre. Thus, in artistic form and approach, Keiley is challenging the traditional Canadian theatrical and socio-political status quo on multiple levels. Moreover, she is doing it as a woman, which, while she does not profess overtly political feminist intentions, does still serve to further upend and subvert traditional notions of directorial authority simply by her presence as a woman in the upper echelons of Canadian professional theatre. In many ways, Keiley as a director and as a person builds and creates a community around her that embraces risk taking, play, ensemble, artistic vision, and innovation, and in her new position at the National Arts Centre, she

[694] Patrick Langston, "NAC English Theatre Season in 2013-2014 to feature Andy Jones in Tartuffe, Sound of Music for the family," *Ottawa Citizen,* 2 April 2013, (http://www.ottawacitizen.com/entertainment/English+Theatre+Season+2013+feature+Andy+Jones+Tartuffe+Sound+Music+family/8183158/story.html#ixzz2PPhzbcM7, accessed 15 April 2013).

will now be able to take that to a larger, national level. Who wouldn't want to be part of a community like that?

CHAPTER 7: A CONCLUSION

Throughout this process, more than one actor, stage manager, composer, or designer has asked me, "Why are you, an American, studying Canadian theatre?" In fact, partway through a rehearsal break during technical rehearsals for Kelly Thornton's *The Penelopiad,* Thornton's assistant director, a young woman just beginning to make her mark on the Toronto theatre scene – approached me and asked with great curiosity for more information about my dissertation project. Happy to oblige (after all, who doesn't want to share their research?), I described the project and the directors with whom I had spent time and about whom I was writing. As I listed the director's names, a look of surprise and awe washed across the young woman's face. She leaned across the seat that separated us and said, with a knowing nod, "Those women are *powerhouses* here."[695]

All four of the directors featured here are major figures in Canadian theatre, and as a result of their innovative, thought-provoking work, they have been recognized both regionally and nationally by prestigious awards, coveted positions of leadership, and critical acclaim. Within this group of women, two are Siminovitch Prize winners for direction (Kim Collier and Jillian Keiley) and another was a Siminovitch finalist (Kelly Thornton);[696] two have been awarded the John Hirsch Prize for Emerging Directors (Keiley and Nina Lee Aquino); all have been nominated for and won regional awards for excellence in direction, from the Jessies in Vancouver to the Bettys in Calgary to the

[695] Personal conversation, January 2013.

[696] During the lifetime of the Siminovitch Prize, only four prizes total went to directors (as the Prize rotated yearly from director to designer to playwright), so this study contains half of the Siminovitch directing award winners in its pages.

Doras in Toronto.[697] Moreover, each of them has offered significant artistic contributions and innovations, and their work and presence as women directors in the upper echelons of Canadian professional theatre has paved the way for other women directors to follow suit, thus (we hope) improving upon the disheartening statistics reported by the 1982 Fraticelli and 2006 Burton reports which quantitatively chronicled the status of women in Canadian theatre. Throughout the course of this study, I was fortunate to be able to spend time with, observe, and get to know four established and respected Canadian women directors – essentially I was rubbing elbows with (and in some instances having home-cooked dinner with) some of the most highly regarded women directors in Canada, which is a humbling yet exhilarating experience.

Although each chapter in this study has intentionally focused on an individual director – documenting her background and oeuvre, considering her directorial practices and aesthetics, and examining her response to issues of gender and identity – this final chapter brings the directors and their stories into conversation with and in relation to each other. In this final chapter, I look across the cases to explore the common (and occasionally divergent) themes that emerged among all four directors' interviews and observations. Generally speaking, these themes fall into six major areas: the importance of community, form and content of their artistic works, methods of directorial leadership and collaboration, perceptions of feminism, influence of gender and other identities, and perceptions of Canadian-ness. By looking at these areas, I hope to be able to provide a better sense of how all of these directors' works relate to each other as well as how these

[697] All of these awards are similar to the American Tony Awards but are granted regionally: the Jessie Richardson Awards (Vancouver), the Betty Mitchell Awards (Calgary), and the Dora Mavor Moore Awards (Toronto). Toronto's Dora Awards are perhaps the closest in prestige to the Tonys, as Toronto is arguably the center of English Canadian theatre and boasts a vibrant theatre scene.

directors, through their work and directorial philosophies, are working to change the face of Canadian theatre.

Importance of Community

In all of these directors' narratives, the idea of community – their awareness of the specific community from which their work springs as well as the importance of fostering community – emerged as a prominent and common theme. Admittedly, the specific community (or communities) varied between directors. Jillian Keiley and Kim Collier's work is strongly rooted in their geographical and regional communities of Newfoundland and British Columbia, respectively, while Kelly Thornton and Nina Lee Aquino's work focuses more on including and advocating for social and cultural communities of women and multi/intercultural groups. Additionally, this notion of "community" and speaking to one's community seems to extend to aesthetic or theoretical communities, which also differ among the directors but continue to further the theme and importance of community in motivating their artistic projects. Kim Collier's work, for instance, seems to intend to inspire an intellectual, philosophical community that values art as art, whereas Nina Lee Aquino's work intends to create a colorful community that places diversity in all its forms at its center. For all of the directors, this sense of community and its importance is also manifested in the rehearsal hall, as every director included in this study professes an interest in and dedication to creating a sense of ensemble or equity in the rehearsal hall – the theatrical form of "community."

Of course, as professional directors who make their living in the professional theatre arena, these women also naturally are interested in reaching audiences and gaining the most exposure possible for their work. We see that interest demonstrated by

the professional moves these directors have made over the course of their careers. Most recently, for example, the positions assumed by Keiley, becoming artistic director of the English Theatre company at the National Arts Centre, and Aquino, becoming the co-artistic director of Toronto's Factory Theatre, show that their work and reputations are being recognized beyond their immediate community and within a larger, more public (and in Keiley's case, national) context. Both are also significant placements in that they reach broader audiences than their previous artistic directorships had; moreover, because of this greater prominence, they are arguably better able to advocate and gain wider recognition for their specific communities. Keiley's programming for the 2013-2014 English Theatre NAC season, for instance, specifically highlights regionally-based productions, among them one from Newfoundland-based Artistic Fraud. Meanwhile, the Factory 2013-2014 season under Aquino and Nigel Shawn Williams' leadership features works by Canadian playwrights of diverse backgrounds such as Priscilla Uppal and Daniel MacIvor as well as a co-production with Obsidian Theatre as the season kick off.[698] Additionally, Collier's position as first an artistic associate (2010-2011) and now resident artist (2012-current) with Canadian Stage in Toronto marks an expansion of her career that, similar to Keiley and Aquino, allows her to bring her British Columbia community and British Columbia sensibilities to Toronto. In fact, Collier's Vancouver-based *Tear the Curtain!* opened the 2012-2013 Canadian Stage season, bringing a British Columbia story to the Toronto audiences. Thus, the importance of "community" to these

[698] Canadian poet/novelist/playwright Priscilla Uppal is of South Asian descent and Sikh heritage, while Daniel MacIvor is a prominent queer solo performer and playwright. The Obsidian Theatre is a company dedicated to cultural diversity, specifically focusing on the work of black Canadian playwrights and artists.

artists continues to feed and influence their work even as they further and expand their professional careers.

Although Thornton is perhaps the only director whose community specifically focuses on gender, there are arguably feminist connections and feminist theoretical influences that relate to this common focus on community and the directors' unified recognition of its importance. Feminist standpoint theorists Donna Haraway and Nancy Hartsock posit that certain social and cultural positionalities, or standpoints, provide individuals like women and other marginalized subjects with a particular and "situated knowledge" that provides a certain epistemological authority and agency for the individual.[699] These situated knowledges then allow for a more authoritative view on a particular social, cultural or political situation or identity. In the case of these directors, each has been shaped by her particular community (or communities), and, through her artistic work, is attempting to bring that community to the larger public and artistic consciousness. Thus, by recognizing the importance of their respective communities, these women are also recognizing and articulating their own situated knowledge as members of those communities, and by advocating for and supporting these communities, these women directors are, albeit subtly and perhaps subconsciously, reflecting and embodying feminist theoretical discourse.

Innovation in Artistic Form and Content

Many directors – including most in this study – are loathe to pinpoint their "typical" kind of work. For a director who works on a variety of shows and who is

[699] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (Fall 1988): 575-599.

interested in continually challenging and stretching her artistic impulses, it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to identity artistic patterns and "types" of shows they are known for. As Kim Collier states, that question is "better answered by someone else."[700] This study is one attempt to be that "someone else" and to answer that question of how these women's works can be characterized. In considering the directors' interviews and my rehearsal observations, a second theme that emerged among the directors was a common interest in artistic innovation, both in form and content. (In part, the aforementioned theme of "community" also shapes and is connected to the form and content of these women directors' works, for often their artistic work is inspired by their desire to create and relate to their community; however, their artistic interests and natural affinities also significantly drive their work.) All of the women included in this study share a desire to push the artistic envelope, so to speak, and expand traditional conceptions and expectations of "mainstream" Canadian theatre. They share a willingness to experiment and take risks artistically, and it could be argued that their perspective and position as women, historically marginalized subjects within traditionally patriarchal structures, provides them the vision to see beyond traditional theatrical structures and the position, as inhabitants of Victor Turner's liminal space of "pure possibility" to push against and experiment with theatrical form and content.[701]

While all these directors share an interest and skill in creating innovative and groundbreaking artistic work, the ways and methods of their innovations are quite divergent. As Arthur Bartow notes in the Foreword to the recently released second

[700] Collier, Interview.
[701] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969), 97.

volume of *The Director's Voice*, "No one has yet codified a comprehensive set of principles, a framework of exercises or theories, to identify and train a director as those developed for the actor. Therefore, each directorial awakening is unique."[702] Each of these women has journeyed along a different path into directing, and their work in both form and content reflects those journeys, which informed and cultivated their different directorial styles and aesthetics. Thus, each employs a slightly different approach to their artistic work and, to borrow from Bartow, "awaken" the text on the stage. Kim Collier's innovation, for instance, lies in experimenting with form and genre, bringing together the mediums of film and live theatre within a single performance space as she did in *Tear the Curtain!* and experimenting with the ways that other forms of technology inform and interact with the experience of live performance. Moreover, Collier's dedication to "total theatre," or theatre that takes the performance beyond the confines of the stage itself and employs all aspects of the performance space to create a complete, almost immersive performance experience, further demonstrates her expansive artistic vision and directorial contribution, which manifests largely as experimentation in new forms of creating live theatre. Although her primary focus appears to be experimentations in theatrical form, Collier's work also exhibits innovation in content, for her interest in experimenting with technology and the "mash up" of multiple performative mediums has often lent itself to plays that consider scientific concepts or historical figures such as the Stanley Theatre in *Tear the Curtain!* or Eadweard Muybridge in *Studies in Motion*. In this way then, Collier could also be seen as "mashing up" or bringing together multiple generic forms by

[702] Arthur Bartow, "Foreword," in *The Director's Voice* vol. 2, ed. Jason Loewith (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), viii.

dramatizing and theatrically-rethinking fact-based stories and themes. Admittedly, Collier's work does not overtly engage with feminist issues or obviously employ feminist staging strategies; however, the visual and technological/multi-media focus of her work does move it beyond the realm of realistic, domestic dramas or "kitchen sink" realism, a directorial strategy that some scholars argue is feminist in that it opposes a strictly realist tradition that has long placed women in marginal and oppressive roles. Scholars such as Elin Diamond and Sue-Ellen Case have argued that realism is "deadly" for women, reinforcing patriarchal perceptions and characterizations of women.[703] Jeanie Forte posits that realism is "always an inscription of the dominant order" and, as a result, is not "useful for feminists interested in the subversion of a patriarchal social structure."[704] Instead, Diamond advocates for anti-realist performance modes, deeming them more efficacious for feminist intentions than "hegemonic" realism which "offers the illusion of lived experience, even as it marks off only one version of that experience," usually male.[705] Therefore, a more feminist approach would break from these reinforcing paradigms and, as suggested by Diamond, move into a more anti-realist mode in form and/or content. Overall, however, Collier's artistic mark seems to be this innovation of form, featuring physically large, visually oriented, worlds often infused with and influenced by technology and multi-media elements.

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[703] Sue-Ellen Case, "Towards a Butch/Femme Aesthetic," in Lynda Hart, *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 297.

[704] Jeanie Forte, "Realism, Narrative, and Feminist Playwriting: A Problem of Reception," *Modern Drama* 32:1 (1989): 116.

[705] Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminism," *TDR* 32:1 (Spring 1988): 87.

In contrast, Kelly Thornton does profess an interest in psychological dramas based in realistic techniques; however, Thornton's work is also quite eclectic in form and content, running the gamut from realistic dramas such as *Between the Sheets* to more fantastic, epic, and stylized productions such as *The Penelopiad*. While this diversity in style and form demonstrates Thornton's directorial depth, flexibility, and imagination, it also reveals that Thornton's major contribution or innovation lies largely in the content of her work. Certainly productions such as *The Penelopiad* do challenge traditional notions of style in their imaginative and visually stunning stylistic staging; however, in considering Thornton's oeuvre, what is most striking is that, of the directors included here, the content of Thornton's plays is most explicitly political and women-centered. Because Thornton runs and regularly directs under the auspices of Nightwood Theatre, one might expect her productions to be more feminist in their content. However, in addition to the feminist, women-centered nature of her work, many of the plays Thornton directs feature politically and socially relevant material and themes that directly respond to the social and cultural status quo and women's issues as discussed in Chapter 2. *Between the Sheets*, for instance, delves into issues of marital infidelity, infertility, divorce, work-life balance, and aging, while *The Penelopiad* reveals issues of the representation of women in classical literature, class privilege, and violence against women during times of war. Admittedly these plays do not always present an entirely positive picture of women (as is discussed in Chapter 4 in regard to *The Penelopiad*), but Thornton is committed to considering and performing women "in all directions," an artistically risky and political choice but one that further speaks to her artistic contribution to conversations about the status of women within Canada.

If Thornton's work in content and form speaks to a community of women, Filipino-Canadian director Nina Lee Aquino's work expands that project to tackle issues of diversity and bring new, diverse voices to the Canadian stage. Known for her focus on movement, musicality, and transitional moments, Aquino's work often contains a sense of magical realism: "I'm definitely not "kitchen sink" or naturalist. There's a magic realism, I think. I've heard people say that about my stuff."[706] Moreover, many of her productions, particularly those done in collaboration with playwright David Yee, feature fragmented, non-linear narratives and non-realistic styles (such as *the lady in the red dress*'s film noir and graphic novel style). Thus, Aquino's directorial innovations in terms of form do challenge theatrical norms and traditional realistic structures; however, what is perhaps most innovative and unique about Aquino's directorial work is her focus on diversity. This diversity manifests itself visually in her colorful casting choices but is particularly apparent in the content of her productions, as they often feature themes related to racial/ethnic and other diverse identities such as sexuality, religion, class and gender. Since January 2013 alone, Aquino has directed *Ching Chong Chinaman*, which considered the Chinese-American experience and pressures of assimilation, *carried away on the crest of a wave*, which looked at the stories of survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and included characters from a diverse array of Asian backgrounds and locations, and *Sister Mary's a Dyke?!*, which was performed by a woman of color and considered the process of coming out as a teenager in a Catholic school. Through these plays – two of three which are new, previously unproduced works – we see Aquino's interest in diversity and bringing new, diverse perspectives to the stage, which is

[706] Aquino, Interview.

undoubtedly a notable and necessary intervention on the traditionally "whitewashed" Canadian stage.

Finally, with her focus on music and precise choreography and the subsequent creation of Kalideography, Jillian Keiley offers a unique style and form of staging that has not before been seen in Canada.[707] As J. Kelly Nestruck of *The Globe and Mail* has observed, "unorthodox staging is Keiley's forte."[708] Much like Anne Bogart and Viewpoints in the United States, Keiley and Kalideography have provided Canadian artists with a new way of not only creating work and visual images on stage but also examining and working with a text: "instead of looking at it flat like you're looking at it linearly, you're looking at it harmonically. And you're looking at it like linearly, harmonically, and rhythmically…[and when] you plot it out you've got a score to work with."[709] Keiley's interest and skill in imagining striking visual images – all typically created with minimal set and great reliance on the actors' bodies – garnered attention for her as a director on a national scale as well as for her Newfoundland community. Thus, while the introduction of a new directing technique and form of staging theatre might be considered one of Keiley's most notable achievements, her strong connection to her Newfoundland heritage also informs and makes her work notable. During her work as director and artistic director for Artistic Fraud, for instance, many of Keiley's works prominently featured Newfoundland narratives or themes. *Tempting Providence*, a

[707] It is interesting to note here that Keiley and Aquino both share a particular interest in music; however, the way they use the music in their pieces is somewhat different, as Keiley tends to create, with the help of a musical composer/collaborator, musical scores, while Aquino's musical taste reflects how she hears the dialogue lift from the page and a more eclectic use of music to aid in her trademark transitions.

[708] J Kelly Nestruck, "Newfoundland's Jillian Keiley taking the helm of the NAC English Theater," *Globe and Mail*, 29 March 2012.

[709] Keiley, Interview.

collaboration with playwright Robert Chafe, told the story of a nurse who served rural communities off the rugged northern coast of Newfoundland during the 1920s, and even *Fear of Flight* which looks more broadly at themes related to, as the title indicates, fears associated with flying, begins (or, one might say, is rooted in) Newfoundland.[710] Much like the visionary Collier, Keiley's work is much more interested in artistic style, form, and regional content than it is in addressing any form of gender politics or feminist intent; however, Keiley's innovation in form and style serves to destabilize traditional assumptions of staging and dramatic realism, and in content, her interest in supporting regionally-specific stories and artists also serves to subvert the often Toronto-centric nature of English-Canadian theatre.

Overall, with the exception of Kelly Thornton, most of these directors are not typically engaging overtly with feminist issues or challenging the status quo for women in regard to artistic content. However, they are, by and large, breaking with traditional notions of realist form and theatrical structure. While the use of realism is a contested area in regard to feminist theatre scholarship, many scholars have argued that anti-realistic styles such as Brecht (as in Elin Diamond's "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism") and others (such as Sue-Ellen Case and Jill Dolan's *Feminist Spectator as Critic*) serve to disrupt and subvert the "prescriptive" nature of realism which "reifies the dominant culture's inscription of traditional power relations

[710] *Tempting Providence*, in addition to its Newfoundland-specific story, also features Keiley's signature directorial style. As one reviewer describes, "In less than 90 minutes, with a tablecloth that almost magically transforms itself from a baby to a wedding dress to a rowboat as their only prop, they tell Myra's story. Along the way, they slowly and inexorably bring to life the entire stretch of Newfoundland shoreline she came to call home, including the people she learned to love in a lifetime of service to them." (John Colbourn, "Tempting Providence impressive," *Sun Media*, 7 April 2007.).

between genders and classes."[711] Thus, Collier and Keiley's interest in innovating artistic form and their employment of a directorial aesthetic that, while still organic and actor-centered, moves away from canonical domestic dramas and traditional "kitchen sink" realism could be considered feminist interventions in the Canadian theatrical expectation. Moreover, Aquino's work that often employs elements of magical realism (or "magical feminism") similarly pushes back against the rigidity of a strictly realistic structure, and while her work is also not explicitly feminist in terms of content, by focusing on telling more diverse stories on stage Aquino is displaying a feminist approach, one influenced by contemporary theories of intersectionality and feminist transnational thought, both of which recognize the web of identities and network of political, social and economic forces that influence individuals' lives.

Perhaps another unifying and potentially "feminist" element that links these women's artistic works and aesthetics is a common interest in creating striking or surprising visual images that are often based on the use and incorporation of actors' bodies. Collier emerged from the physically-based alternative theatre movement of British Columbia and her works (such as *Studies in Motion*) often incorporate highly physical moments that emphasize the actor's bodies. Even *Tear the Curtain!* highlighted the dichotomy between the live bodies and the filmed bodies of the actors in its mash up of performance styles. Meanwhile Thornton's staging of *The Penelopiad*, in which the bodies of the actors created the sailing ship and the issue of the ownership of women's bodies, similarly placed significant focus on the bodies of the actors to both create the

[711] Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic 2nd edition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988/2012), 84. In more recent writings, Dolan has reconsidered her hard stance against realism, but her argument remains central for other feminist scholars who find realism to be a limiting style for feminist expression.

world of the play but also to broach more thematic social issues, and Aquino's incorporation of diverse faces and bodies on stage as well as her movement-centered approach and often stylized transitional moments also highlights the power and the meaning of bodies – particularly colorful bodies – on stage. Further, Keiley's Kalideography, with her use of minimal props and focus on the actors' bodies creating the world of the play, further accentuates the images created by the body and the powerful messages that can be conveyed through movement and physical, visual images. While perhaps not entirely indicative of a feminist or even women-centered intention, it is interesting to consider these women directors' common use of and focus on the body on stage in light of the wealth of feminist scholarship and discourse by scholars such as Laura Mulvey, Rebecca Schneider, and Alicia Arrizon surrounding the body as well as the importance of the body in performance. Admittedly, male artists such as Jerzy Grotowski and Joseph Chaikin also have displayed interest in the use of bodies onstage; however, as Rebecca Schneider argues in her foundational work *The Explicit Body in Performance*, "the explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts, and gestural signatures of gender, race, class age, sexuality – all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege. The body made explicit has become the mise en scène for a variety of feminist artists."[712] Therefore, although these women directors are not all explicitly feminist in their work, perhaps their use of movement and reliance on actors' bodies to create visual images is a subtle or subconscious way of demonstrating their support and

[712] Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

recognition of, to borrow a Butlerian phrase, "bodies that matter" and as a way of offering not only artistic innovation but also a form of performative agency.[713]

Methods of Directorial Leadership

As directors, these women are all naturally and inherently, by nature of the directorial role, leaders, and as leaders, they have each developed their own methods of directorial leadership that become particularly evident when observing them work in the rehearsal hall. Admittedly, there is minimal scholarship surrounding directors' rehearsal practices, so this study then tackles the impossibility of documenting those practices as a part of tracing each director's leadership and directorial style; a further complication within this task is the fact that many of the directors noted that rehearsal approaches often vary from show to show or that they do not always contemplate every moment of their own rehearsal methods. This lack of attention to (or reluctance to specify) rehearsal practices is, however, not uncommon. As Helen Manfull notes in regard to the British women directors included in her study, "Although I invariably asked a very direct question such as, 'Could you tell me about your rehearsal process?' very few of the directors could do that. They would start with the very best of intentions, usually after a deep sigh and a muttered, 'What *do* I do?' under their breath."[714]

While Helen Manfull writes in *Taking Stage: Women Directors on Directing,* her study of British women directors, that "none of the directors like to have visitors in their rehearsal rooms," citing it as a private space where actors must be allowed to be vulnerable and encouraged to take undocumented risks, I did not find that to be true with

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[713] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[714] Helen Manfull, *Taking Stage: Women Directors on Directing* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999), 61.

any of these Canadian women directors.[715] When initially posed with participating in the study, Nina Lee Aquino responded within five minutes, stating, “Yes, certainly. Anything I can do,” while Kim Collier’s response began “Very good – happy to participate.”[716] Admittedly, some were difficult to get in touch with, as they are very busy women, so in several instances I anxiously awaited responses to arrange rehearsal visits and interviews. However, once we were in touch, all of them were more than willing to participate in the study and, more importantly, to open their rehearsal rooms to me. While this difference between Manfull’s British directors and my Canadian directors could be due in part to many things – their individual personalities, distinctions of nationality and expectations for standard rehearsal practices, an evolving sense of feminism between Manfull’s 1999 study and my research, conducted 13 years later – it does also seem significant that I met with no resistance to my presence in the rehearsal halls. In fact, three of the four were quick to invite me to return for further rehearsals, and as a result (as well as fortuitous scheduling), I was able to observe Thornton and Aquino in rehearsal for two different productions as well as to extend my observations of Keiley by an additional day.

In considering the women’s own accounts of their rehearsal and directorial practices as well as my own observations of them at work in rehearsal, I found another theme that commonly arose was their understanding and negotiation of these directorial leadership roles. For all of the women, this discussion of directorial leadership also, interestingly, seemed to connect to the theme of “community,” as all professed a definite desire to create sense of community – in theatrical terms, “ensemble” – within the

[715] Helen Manfull, *Taking Stage: Women Directors on Directing* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999), 61.

[716] Nina Lee Aquino, personal email, 2 July 2012; Kim Collier, personal email, 2 July 2012.

rehearsal space. Within that intention to create an sense of ensemble, several sub-themes that relate and contribute to developing a sense of ensemble surfaced, specifically an emphasis on collaboration, an actor-centered philosophy, the use of humor, and the cultivation of a rehearsal hall atmosphere that was particular to each director and her way of working and what I term the "atmosphere of leadership."

Collaboration

While the four featured directors may not, like Manfull's directors, always be aware of all they do in the rehearsal space, all of the directors included in this study do profess an interest in collaboration. Theatre is an inherently collaborative medium, and it seems that recent directing texts such as Robert Knopf's *The Director as Collaborator* (2005), Rob Roznowski and Kirk Domer's *Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Directors and Designers* (2009) emphasize the need for collaboration – not only between director and designers but also between director and actors. That focus on collaboration stands in stark contrast to other, more "traditional" modes of directing in which, to borrow the words of feminist scholar Amanda Hale, "the director controls and manipulates his actors and the writer puts words in their mouths." [717] Hale contrasts this "traditional," hierarchical model of direction to what she deems a more "feminist" mode of "direction:" collective creation, a mode in which, Hale argues, "the power of decision-making is balanced out as far as possible among the group to allow fuller participation."[718] While the four directors included in this study do not necessarily claim their focus on collaboration to be "feminist" in intent, it remains interesting that all four

[717] Amanda Hale, "A Dialectical Drama of Facts and Fiction on the Feminist Fringe," in Rhea Tregabov, ed., *Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1987), 82.
[718] Ibid.

profess a definite interest in creating an ensemble that holds collaboration in high esteem. Three of the four directors – Collier, Aquino, and Keiley – all regularly collaborate with the same partner(s), for example. For Collier, those collaborators have historically been the other founding members of the Electric Company Theatre, specifically playwright Kevin Kerr and actor Jonathon Young. For Aquino, her frequent collaborator is playwright David Yee, although she also regularly works with the same team of designers, particularly set designer Cameilla Koo. For Keiley, her most frequent collaborator is playwright Robert Chafe, although she also often collaborates with several composers, typically Petrina Bromley or Jonathon Monro. To be clear, none of them is participating in "collective creation" in its purest sense, although Collier and the Electric Company's beginnings were very much rooted in that idea and therefore she might be positioned somewhat closer to the collective approach on a continuum of collective-collaborative-traditional directors. Also, all three of the directors also work outside of their regular collaborative/creative partnerships and in those situations continue to profess and demonstrate an interest in collaboration and working together with designers, actors, and playwrights (when applicable).

Although Kelly Thornton does not seem to have a regular collaborator in the same way that the other directors do, she professes a similar interest in collaboration, and instead of a playwright-director artistic partnership, Thornton's collaborative partners could be considered the many young women artists she brings into her creative process. Each time I observed Thornton's work, for example, she had several other women in the room, typically (but not always) younger artists for whom Thornton's mentorship could be useful and educational. Further, part of Thornton's vision as Nightwood's artistic

director has included mentorship programs and opportunities for young women theatre artists, thus Thornton also regularly works with collaborative partners, simply in a slightly different format than the other directors.

In addition to regular collaborative artistic partnerships, each of these directors also strives to create a sense of community, ensemble, and collaboration in the rehearsal space and in working with her actors. Jillian Keiley, for instance, asserts, “I do everything I can in the room to make a very healthy, you know, collaboration,” including starting rehearsal with group warm-ups and addressing tension or conflict immediately.[719] Kim Collier comments that despite her long-standing relationship with her Electric Company collaborators, she does all she can to ensure that “the room isn’t like that [closed gesture], it’s like this [open gesture]” and although she may discuss aspects of the production with her collaborators outside of the rehearsal space, she ensures that those same notes are shared in the rehearsal space in the presence of the entire company because “ I think it’s really important that everybody hears those things so they don’t think that someone is exempt, or they haven’t heard what the journey is. That they’re also on it.”[720] While Aquino primarily used the word “collaboration” during our interview in conjunction with her work with David Yee, in the rehearsal hall, she demonstrates an interest in ensemble and collaboration in that she encourages her actors to “play” and often responds to an actor’s question about what to do in a particular moment with an emphatic “let’s try it,” both actions which encourage a sense of investment and foster collaboration in the rehearsal hall. Finally, Kelly Thornton claims

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[719] Keiley, Interview.
[720] Collier, Interview.

and models her directorial strategy to be “to lead from the center,” and she goes on to say that she’s “a very non-hierarchical leader. And I think, as a director, I’m a very non-hierarchical director.”[721] In fact, generally speaking, I would classify all of these directors, particularly in light of their interest in creating a culture of collaboration in the rehearsal hall, as non-hierarchical, collaborative leaders. Although the directors may not credit this non-hierarchical, highly collaborative structure to their feminist affiliation, there are feminist scholars who would characterize this form of equitable leadership as a more feminist approach in that it eschews a top-down form of leadership which is commonly associated with traditional patriarchal systems of authority. In her article on “The Feminist Director in Rehearsal,” Beth Watkins routinely describes the feminist director as one “intent on decentering authority” in the rehearsal space, an intention that manifests itself for Watkins in ways that allow her to share power with her students.[722] Moreover, feminist scholar and educator bell hooks argues in *Teaching to Transgress*, a feminist exploration of pedagogical power structures, that in the classroom, a place traditionally based on hierarchical power relations, every individual’s voice should be heard, “their presence recognized and valued.”[723] Thus, this model of non-hierarchical, collaborative directorial leadership could be considered a feminist endeavor.

Of course, within this discussion, one also needs to note that while these directors certainly foster and support a sense of non-hierarchical collaboration, the director still remains in a position of power, for she is charged with unifying and coordinating all

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[721] Thornton, Interview.

[722] Beth Watkins, “The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education,” *Theatre Topics* 15, vol. 2 (September 2005): 186, 194.

[723] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 185.

elements of the production. That in mind, while these directors support and demonstrate in rehearsal collaborative impulses and intentions, the actors inevitably look to the directors to ensure that what they are doing on stage is, as stated at least once in every rehearsal I observed (as well as in my own rehearsals), "what you want." Certainly, the directors find ways to negotiate and decentralize their power, whether it be by asking actors to take charge of portions of the warm-ups (Keiley) or encouraging them to experiment (Aquino and Thornton) or asking for their input on a particular scene (Collier), but the fact remains that even within the collaborative environment the women directors still are recognized as the leaders – a complicated position, to be sure.

Actor-Centered

A large part of these directors' focus on creating a rehearsal environment that fosters equitable and effective collaboration also seems to be related to another sub-theme of creating ensemble: an actor-centered sense of direction.   To some extent, this element was also addressed in the previous discussion of collaboration, but it bears singling out and specific mention, as it appears to be an integral component within the collaborative, non-hierarchal environment advocated by these directors. In their own ways, the four directors all seek to provide the actors with agency and to encourage the actors' investment in the production. However, while all of the directors' narratives and many of their rehearsal methods speak to the actor-centered nature of their work, how these directors interact with the actors and encourage their input varies dramatically among the directors. Thornton, for instance, is quick to leap to her feet, brimming with energy (particularly when the actor's choice has surprised or inspired a further discovery into the scene), and move into the performance space to move and work with the actors on and

around the set. In contrast, Keiley tends to sit back and quietly but carefully watch the actors' work, offering her comments from her seat or, on occasion (usually during a break) by approaching the actor to talk quietly. Aquino and Collier are similarly focused on the actors from their seat, but both also often are on their feet and enter the performance space to discuss notes or brainstorm solutions with actors.

The directors featured in this study profess and demonstrate a dedication to actor-centered collaboration, and while this collaborative, ensemble-based approach can be read as a feminist or woman-centered impulse, as implied by Hale's statement celebrating collective creation, I also feel compelled to problematize that reading by noting that the collaborative impulse might also be read as the natural evolution of the directorial role, or a movement toward a more collaborative environment regardless of the gender of the director. To this end, as part of my observations of Nina Lee Aquino, I was able to observe her work as an actor under the direction of Nigel Shawn Williams at the Factory Theatre, and Williams' directorial style was very much in keeping with this collaborative directorial approach. Much like Thornton, he was on his feet and entering the playing space to work with the actors, but also, like Collier and Keiley, willing to sit back, watch, and then push the actors to find the psychological realism and depth themselves. Having observed Nigel's work in addition to these women directors' work, it thus seems possible that these collaborative, actor-centered strategies reflect an indecipherable combination of these "typically" feminist, non-hierarchical approaches and a more contemporary, postmodern, and collaborative turn in directing methods.

Use of humor

Another common sub-theme that emerges within the directors' desire to create a sense of community or ensemble within the rehearsal space is their use of humor and playfulness. This sub-theme was particularly apparent in the directorial work of Thornton and Keiley, for Thornton frequently cracks jokes and inspires great laughter by her extremely dramatic commentary, and Keiley, as part of her daily warm-ups, often includes a very playful activity such as group skip rope which encourages the ensemble to engage in moments of silly playfulness before moving into the precision of her often movement-based work. While not as obviously as Thornton or Keiley, Aquino and Collier also incorporated moments of levity and joking, most often, in the case of Aquino, taking the form of slightly sarcastic, self-deprecating, and mischievous one-liners. While I cannot definitively say that this use of humor is a "feminist" or gendered approach (as Nigel Shawn Williams similarly utilized humor in his rehearsals for *Every Letter Counts* and I have worked with several hilarious men directors, too), there has been some recent discussion in feminist circles and the popular press about feminists' use of humor. Women such as the American Tina Fey and Sarah Silverman as well as the British Caitlin Moran seem to be using humor as a form of feminist rhetoric. As a 2012 article in *Slate* pointed out, "If you look at the vibrant, chattering feminist blogosphere, which most accurately captures the tenor of popular feminism, the funny, wry, and ironic are ascendant."[724] Again, it is difficult to accurately point to the truly "feminist" nature of this strategy in the rehearsal hall; however, the directors' use of humor does further

[724] Katie Roiphe, "The Mockery Feminists," *Slate*, 1 October 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/roiphe/2012/10/caitlin_moran_and_tina_fey_feminists_used_to_be_deadly_earnest_today_they_re_funny_sarcastic_and_ironic_what_happened_.html (accessed 30 June 2013).

work to create sense of ensemble and a positive rehearsal environment, as laughter offers emotional release and can break the tension of a particularly difficult or emotional moment that must be rehearsed multiple times over, and the fact that humor appeared in all four of their directorial strategies further speaks to their leadership skills and their attention to the actor-centered nature of their directorial approaches.

The "Atmosphere of Leadership"

When I visited each director in rehearsal, each woman responded to me differently and involved me in different capacities during my visit, which seems indicative of their particular working aesthetic and approach to creating and maintaining ensemble. Keiley told me within moments of greeting me in the rehearsal room that she "did not have observers" in her rehearsals, and she immediately involved me in warm up with the entire cast, which led to a sense of belonging in the ensemble, as actors expressed wishes to say goodbye and asked me to go out for drinks with them after rehearsal. Collier welcomed me warmly and introduced me to the cast immediately, ensuring they all knew who I was and why I was observing rehearsal, but she then left me to my own devices, focusing her energies on the production (as they should be). Thornton, in her exuberant fashion, forgot more than once to mention to her cast/crew I would be attending rehearsals, but once I arrived in the space, she was very welcoming, warm and inclusive, even asking me to sit in a certain area to detect sightline issues during *Between the Sheets* rehearsals and to share a personal story about my brother which offered some connection and insight to a particular moment in the play. This approach changed slightly, however, when I observed Thornton in technical rehearsals for *The Penelopiad*, for her attention was drawn in many different directions (as it so

often is during the tech period); moreover, by that time, we had corresponded significantly and I had spent time with her in an interview as well as in another rehearsal, so Thornton was presumably familiar enough with me during *The Penelopiad* that she allowed me to function independently, which to some degree shows her trust of the actor and willingness to let them "figure it out." Finally, Aquino was quick to respond and agree to the arrangements for rehearsal visits, even suggesting that I observe her work both as an actor/playwright (in *Every Letter Counts*) and a director (for *Ching Chong Chinaman*) so that I could have a deeper insight into her diverse work. For each visit, she was careful that she cleared them with the cast/crew before I arrived and ensure all were comfortable with having an outside observer; however, once she entered the room, she was all business and focused on the work, waving hello to me and then interacting with me predominately at the end of the day.

Through my experience in the rehearsal room as well as my observations of the directors, I discovered that each director's rehearsal space contained a very different yet very palpable energy or atmosphere – an atmosphere that is largely due to the director's leadership and particular directorial style and something I began to call the "atmosphere of leadership" in my field notes.[725] While this atmosphere, or what some might call an aura, is largely experiential and therefore difficult to describe entirely in concrete words, I will do my best to briefly characterize and describe here the "atmosphere of leadership" created by each director. Kim Collier's rehearsal space seems charged with an intellectual energy that almost seems to snap and crackle in the air. She has a way of

[725] In several informal discussions with actors and artists who have worked with several of these directors, I mentioned this varying "atmosphere of leadership" and attempted to describe my impressions of those directors' "atmospheres." In nearly every conversation, the actor or artist quickly agreed that this observation was accurate, albeit difficult to describe entirely in words.

inspiring deep, philosophical thought and discussion among her actors (and these philosophical leanings may have been due in part to the subject matter of *Tear the Curtain!* but because many of Collier's productions tackle similar weighty or scientific themes, I suspect this intellectual spark may be typical of her directorial approach), and there were many moments of deep, focused thought and calm that were infused by bursts of creative energy and "aha" moments, in which ideas flowed and were tried on stage. Kelly Thornton's rehearsal space could perhaps best be characterized as exuberant and boisterous. Thornton is very present and, as actors would say, "in the moment" during rehearsals, an element that sometimes allows things to nearly go over the top but still prevents it from going too far. This exuberance and energy seems to create a welcome space for risk-taking, allowing the actors to experiment within their full range of ability until they find the balance for the role and the production. Next, Nina Lee Aquino's rehearsal room is quieter but seems to possess an underlying energy or sense of possibility. Aquino also seems to create a sense of casualness in the rehearsal hall – as demonstrated by what seems to be a regular use of nicknames, particularly for Aquino by her director or creative team members – but the casual, laid back nature is balanced by a focus and forward-momentum toward a common goal. Finally, Jillian Keiley creates an exceedingly calm and "chill" rehearsal space; in fact, I am not sure I have ever experienced a rehearsal hall with quite the level of calm and reassured control as I did when visiting Keiley's *Metamorphoses* rehearsals. However, amid this calm, serene environment, there are, much like Collier, bursts of discovery and moments of genuine laughter, but all of those bursts are undergirded by a strong sense of thoughtfulness and diligence.

In all honesty, this “atmosphere of leadership” was entirely unexpected and a true discovery during the research process. I had assumed I would observe different types of leadership and methods of direction in the rehearsal halls, but I did not imagine the atmosphere of the room would be so clear in the case of all the directors or so different among them. This discovery also admittedly left me wondering how an observer might characterize the atmosphere of leadership in my own rehearsal space.

Perceptions of Feminism

Another theme to be considered among all four directors is their identifications with “feminism,” their perceptions of what “feminist” means, and how those elements may (or may not) influence their artistic work. As noted in Chapter 1, all four directors do identify as “feminists”; however, within that identification, there is some variance in how they conceive of and define “feminist” as well as how that feminist identification influences their work.

First, while all the directors do identify as “feminists,” most of them were quite reluctant to accept a politicized feminist stance, and all four expressed an explicit aversion to essentialist, separatist, or aggressive conceptions of feminism. Kim Collier recalled that she “grew up not needing to take a feminist stance” and argued that she has never wanted to get a job because she was a woman. “So the idea of taking collective action…I thought ‘Ugh! I don’t feel comfortable with that.’ We should make sure that there’s no discrimination…but I didn’t want there ever to be a policy in place that I got a job because I was a woman.”[726] Similarly, Jillian Keiley stated that she is “not a feminist director” because her “work is not political generally,” and in this statement I presume

[726] Collier, Interview.

that Keiley is referring to an explicitly feminist politics, for I would argue that her work is, to some degree, political in that some of her works (such as *Oil and Water* about rural Newfoundlanders first encountering a black man) do bring issues of race, tolerance, and understanding to the stage. Moreover, Keiley expressed a passionate concern about so-called feminists who seek to label women as certain types of feminists and effectively put those women into categorical "boxes," which, for Keiley, is the opposite of feminism.[727] Additionally, Aquino and Thornton both note that they do not wish to be part of a type of feminism that simply advocates that women should be just like men or places feminists in a separate, presumably elite, category. To borrow Thornton's concise phrasing, "If it's a private club, I don't really want to be a part of it." [728] While this type of exclusionary or separatist feminism is generally not popular in contemporary feminist circles, yet it seems that these woman have encountered and witnessed this type of feminism in action; as a result, they have rejected it, perhaps fearing that it would pigeon hole or limit their work to only "feminist" or "women's" stories.

To counteract the perceived use of feminism as an exclusionary device or separated cultural group, all of the directors advocated for a broader, humanist, non-essentialist conception of "feminism." Collier and Keiley seemed most aligned and focused on the overall human component of their feminist identifications. Keiley stated simply that she was a feminist "only in so far as I'm a human being," and Collier echoed her sentiment, saying "I'm just a person who does things, and I grew up in to the world, inheriting [the philosophy] 'You're a person in the world, you can do things and do

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[727] Keiley, Interview.
[728] Thornton, Interview.

whatever you want if you put your energy behind it.'"[729] As a feminist who works with, recognizes, and champions diversity, Aquino claimed to be an "individualist, as opposed to a feminist," a phrase which removes the specifically gendered connotation and instead supports Aquino's view that "each and every person [has her] own strengths and weaknesses, it's up to you to make the choice to use that and to carve your own path."[730] Even Kelly Thornton, the most politically and overtly feminist of the group, advocates for a wider feminist lens, saying that while feminism is at its core about equality, "I don't feel it's my job to just tell heroic stories about women. I feel it's my job to tell, to look at women in all directions. To look at our, how flawed we can be and, you know, how brave we can be."[731] The directors' reluctance to own the term "feminist" or "feminism" reflect feminist scholar Toril Moi's idea that, in our contemporary culture, "feminism" has become a contested phrase and therefore feminist theorists (and theorists more broadly) "need to rethink their most fundamental assumptions about language and meaning, the relation between language and power, language and human community, the body and the soul."[732] In fact, the directors' unanimous support of an expanded, more inclusive definition of "feminism" seems to indicate that there has been some sort of "rethinking" of feminist thought and discourse, as Moi urged.

Perhaps the directors' resistance to being labeled explicitly "feminist" and this desire to embrace a broad, non-essentialist version of "feminism" (or, more accurately, feminismS) stem from these women's awareness of their place within an increasingly

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[729] Keiley, Interview; Collier, Interview.
[730] Aquino, Interview.
[731] Thornton, Interview.
[732] Toril Moi, "'I Am Not a Feminist, But…': How Feminism Became the F-Word," *PMLA* 121, vol. 5 (October 2006): 1735.

global world in which identities shift and intersect, consuming and sliding over, between and through traditional and geographical boundaries. A world in which one kind or a single type of feminism is not sufficient. During our interview Thornton talked at length about women in third world countries and how she would like to expand Nightwood's productions to include a play from such a perspective, as she often grapples with how to confront and "deal with third world problems in the first world theatre," a query which speaks to Thornton's awareness of and interest in performatively exploring these sorts of global feminist politics.[733] Thus, this echoes words uttered in Andrea Hariston's essay included in *Upstaging Big Daddy* in which she wrestles with the complexity of multiple identities and feminisms:

> No, I am not in search of a women's aesthetic. I don't want to take on all of them wild and crazy girls, who got so much to say and do and be, and reduce us all to our common state of gender oppression...What I am straining and aching after is a language for the almost unspeakable (in the tongues I know), almost unfathomable, and certainly contradictory diversity that is my experience of the world…How am I supposed to ignore the enormous range and variety of the billions of women now living all over this nebulous planet…? How am I supposed to squeeze them all, or anybody all, into *an* aesthetic?"[734]

The directors' responses seem to also grapple with the problematic nature of "squeezing them all, or anybody all, into *an* aesthetic" or into *a* feminism. Moreover, their reluctance to identify as feminists in a highly politicized, public manner also may speak to a fear that, by doing so, they and their work will be ghettoized or labeled as strictly "feminist," a label that would limit the scope and impact of their work. However the fact remains that they *do* identify in some capacity as feminists, and by nature of their

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[733] Thornton, Interview.

[734] Andrea Hairston, "'I Wanna Be Great!': How to Rescue the Spirit in the Wasteland of Fame," in *Upstaging Big Daddy,* eds. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 236.

position as women and as feminists, these perspectives do influence their work. Perhaps these women are, as articulated by Aoife Monks, representatives of a "new breed" of women directors whose work is "not consciously feminist" and "more focused on representing the 'human' and the 'universal' in performance."[735] While this focus may not be wholly or traditionally "feminist," it still can be seen as connected to feminism in the way that it questions traditional structures of power and subverts expectations of traditional theatrical performance or art.

Experience of Gender and Identiti(es)

In addition to discussions of "feminism" and "feminist" direction, another theme that arose throughout the interviews – and one very closely related to discussions of "feminism" – was that of the directors' experiences as related to gender and other intersecting identities such as race, class, etc. All of the women recognized that gender does play a role in some capacity for them and their experience in the professional theatre world. Kim Collier, for instance, noted that "when I did become a director, when I started having a leadership role, I did discover that there were things—that I did feel things that I think were different because I was a woman. And then I went, 'Hmmm,'" and each of the directors had a story (or more) about a moment in time when they were treated differently – if only subtly such as the male designers avoiding eye contact or male actors being resistant to direction – because of their gender.[736] Commonly, these gendered interactions seemed to occur in situations when the men with whom the women

[735] Aoife Monks, "Predicting the Past: Histories and Futures in the Work of Women Directors," in *Feminist Futures?: Theatre, Performance, Theory,* eds. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 89.

[736] Collier, interview.

were interacting were older men who were presumably entrenched in older models of men directors and a more hierarchical, masculine "style" of direction.

Related to this notion of a broader sense of feminism, it is important to note the women point to other identities *in addition to gender* that are at play within and shape their experiences. For Nina Lee Aquino, race and ethnicity comes first, likely because it's the first identity marker others see when meeting Aquino; however, Aquino, particularly as a director with experience in and great dedication to bringing diversity to the typically homogeneously white Toronto stages, quickly goes on to note the other identifications that shape her work such as age and gender, indicating that these intersections are always within her field of artistic and professional vision.

All four women's responses demonstrated an acute awareness of and attention to multiple, intersecting identities, and all four women pointed to other factors of identity that served to complicate (or in some instances mitigate) these negative gender interactions or assumptions. Age was perhaps the first sub-theme to emerge within discussions of intersecting identities. At some point in their narratives, all four women specifically mentioned or alluded to interactions based on age. Jillian Keiley, for example, recalled her experience as a young woman director, recently returned to Newfoundland from the mainland, and the resistance she experienced from older male actors in response to her youthful enthusiasm. As this example indicates, generally youth and youthfulness was perceived within these interactions as a negative factor, resulting in tension or questioning of the director's power or knowledgebase. Youth was often equated with inexperience, which then created a skepticism that compounded or perhaps even overshadowed the issue of gender. However, Kim Collier also observed, "I don't

think it happens as much anymore because I think I've gotten to a point where as a director I think people are starting—that I've come to a point where there is, there is respect in the room. Like you're more of a known quantity."[737] Collier was not the only director to note that aging (and the experience as well as professional reputation that presumably accompanies aging) seemed to mitigate some of those negative interactions – an interesting statement on a subtle yet powerful identity marker. Of course, this observation then also begs the question of how older women directors are perceived in the field, for as Toni Calasanti and Kathleen Slevin note women are treated differently when they reach "a certain age" but little scholarship and attention has been paid to issues related to women and aging.[738]

Other intersecting identities, specifically race and class, also emerged as part of the director's narratives; however, these identities were only specifically mentioned in two directors' narratives. Per her visible identification as a Filipino-Canadian, Nina Lee Aquino's narrative very much centered around the impact and influence of race. Aquino notes that when she interacts with other theatre professionals "they see my color of the skin first before even my gender. Like, so I will always be like a Filipino more so than woman"; therefore, for Aquino, race and issues of cultural diversity become "more important" and are "closest to [her] heart…it's race first at the top of my list and then, you know, whatever else – like sexuality, gender, you know whatever falls under. It's because *I'm* that, I'm living that. Yeah, and so the obstacles that *I* face are mostly

[737] Collier, Interview.

[738] Toni Calasanti and Kathleen Slevin, *Age Matters: Re-aligning Feminist Thinking* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

affected because I'm Filipino."[739] Clearly, Aquino's narrative, experience, and directorial work has been significantly influenced by her racial and ethnic identity, but she as well as Thornton and Collier make no mention of class. Jillian Keiley, on the other hand, did focus quite specifically and emphatically on the ramifications of the lagging Newfoundland economy and the poverty that affected her community throughout her youth and early years as a director. As part of the economic difficulties that faced her community, there was also great "insecurity" and "there was a lot of alcohol. And great, great poverty."[740] However, while Keiley's narrative was the only one to address specifically the often invisible identity marker of class, and it is important to note that Keiley did have the means to afford to go to the mainland to attend university, which may indicate a further distinction of class within that state of poverty.

Several other identity categories went almost entirely unremarked within these director's narratives, and while their absence means that I am not able to comment or analyze their influence on the directors' experience, they are worth noting, however, for they could (and should) be addressed in future studies of this ilk. First is physical appearance. In our discussion of Nina Lee Aquino's awareness of her positionality and intersecting identities, Ric Knowles noted that "she is very aware of her position as a short, female, Filipina," and while Aquino herself did not mention her height as part of her narrative, I do find it an important element to highlight, as physical appearance – particularly height, for a shorter woman may be perceived as more childlike and, per the previous discussion of age, as having less authority or experience – could also prompt

[739] Aquino, Interview.
[740] Keiley, Interview.

certain reactions to women directors working in professional theatre. Additionally, none of the women specifically spoke to issues of sexuality in their narratives, an omission through which one may infer that issues of sexuality have not impacted these women's professional experiences. As it turns out, all four directors are in heterosexual partnerships and have children; however, it would be interesting to include a lesbian or queer director in future studies.[741]

Perceptions of Canadian-ness

In addition to questions of gender, feminism, and artistic innovation, this study also set out to consider perceptions and influences of Canadian national identity. As a post-colonial nation with a powerful southern neighbor, Canada has a long history of a confused and uncertain national identity. Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan once said that "Canada is the only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity,"[742] and political scientist Stephen Brooks notes that "there is no more Canadian pastime than reflecting on what it means to be a Canadian. Unlike the French, the English, the Chinese, the Russians, and the Americans…Canadians have long obsessed over what it is in their values and beliefs that makes them distinctive, that sets them apart from others."[743] Sociologist Edward Grabb further extends this discussion, observing that Canadians "are notorious for wondering about who and what we are, and

[741] It is also worth noting that all four women are mothers of daughters. While merely a coincidence, it is interesting to consider as these women and their work are paving the way for their daughters' futures and they are modeling ways to not only negotiate social power structures but also balance a busy career and personal life.

[742] Qtd. in "Culture and National Identity," The Fraser Institute, October 1999, http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/forum/1998/august/identity.html (accessed 2 April 2013).

[743] Stephen Brooks, "Canadian Political Culture," *Canadian Politics*, eds. James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagnon (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2009), 45.

inevitably seem to define our own identity by comparing ourselves with Americans. More than a few observers have suggested that, in fact, Canadian identity is very difficult to describe or explain, except as a negative. In other words, whatever Canadians are, the one certainty is that they are not Americans."[744] Finally, Canadian actor Christopher Plummer, in an interview with Theatre Museum Canada spoke to this issue of Canadian-ness, particularly in regard to his work as an artist, and his ultimate judgment was that Canadians "are sort of chameleons. We don't know quite who we are. Always been the case – particularly on the English side."[745] Because of its geographical size, topographic variation, and regional distinctions, a single unified vision of Canada or Canadian-ness becomes difficult to articulate. In light of this long and colorful commentary surrounding the somewhat vague and ambiguous Canadian national identity, part of my discussion with these women directors – all of whom have been recognized on a national level and who represent various regions of the nation – queried their perceptions of Canadian-ness and how their work might fit within the Canadian milieu.

On the whole, the directors' responses very much echoed the initial statements included here, essentially stating that articulating Canadian-ness or Canadian national identity is difficult, nebulous, and rather unknown. In beginning to answer the question of Canadian-ness, many of the directors "hemmed and hawed," as my mother would say, taking some time before beginning to wrestle with the answer, and on occasion muttering, "What *is* Canadian?" Kelly Thornton admitted that "it's hard" to point to Canada's distinctive identity, going on to compare it to America, saying, "Why, I

[744] Qtd in "Culture and National Identity," The Fraser Institute, http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/forum/1998/august/identity.html (accessed 12 December 2012).

[745] Christopher Plummer, Interview with Theater Museum Canada, Video interview, 16 September 2009.

certainly feel the difference when I drive across the border and go into the States and I go, 'Oh!' We're kind of the same. We live right next door to each other but there's a radical difference. And I don't know what it is. It's like, there's a….And I don't even know if I can put my finger on it exactly."[746] In fact, both Thornton and Collier include comparisons and references to America in their discussions of Canadian-ness, but particularly in regard to characterizing Canadian art and theatre and where her work fits in, Collier admitted that "Canadian work looks very different in different places and with different artists. So I don't think that there is…I don't know that I can detect anything Canadian specifically."[747] There seemed to be more ready answers once the directors began articulating where their own work fit within Canadian theatre, though, and I found it fascinating that three of the directors – Collier, Thornton, and Keiley – referred to regional identity within discussions of Canadian national identity. Collier and Keiley in particular placed their region (or province, more specifically) in contrast to the larger whole, a response which arguably reinforces the importance of regionalism in the development of the nation and specifically for this study the arts, which scholars such as Diane Bessai have discussed in essays such as "Regionalism in Canadian Drama" and editions of the *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre* series. In addition to regionalism, Aquino brought to the fore the importance of multiculturalism and interculturalism with the Canadian construction of nationhood – a logical starting point for her work which is so focused on issues of diversity. Aquino cited an example from her career:

[746] Thornton, Interview.
[747] Collier, Interview.

> …if anything, people that have come out of *paperSERIES* [by David Yee, which Aquino directed for Cahoots Theatre in 2011], the one comment that they make is, 'Oh it's very quintessentially Canadian.' Which is like, 'Oh, what does that mean?' And what *does* that mean? You know, as the *paperSERIES* is, it's six vignettes. Fragments of lives, right? Shone onto the stage. Which very much kind of, I guess, encompasses Canadian life, which is a lot of things. But if anything, Canada is made up of a bunch of fragments that are connected by…all sorts of things. You know, so the mosaic so to speak.[748]

After several years of studying Canada and Canadian theatre, I would agree with these directors' statements that the Canadian national identity is difficult to pin down and describe in a definite sense. However, if art is indicative of a national culture and, by extension, national identity, then by looking at these women and their work and the contexts – regional and intercultural – in which they work, I have observed several elements that I would identify as rather Canadian. In fact, two of those elements were articulated by the women directors. First is the importance of regionalism as articulated and demonstrated by the work of Collier and Keiley.[749] Second is the importance of the Canadian cultural mosaic as articulated by Aquino and embodied by her work. While the official governmental policy of multiculturalism is not perfect, it does exist and set a precedent for appreciating, accepting, and considering diverse perspectives. To this end, I would also include Thornton's women-centered work under the rubric of discussing and performing diversity, as it also could be considered part of the many "cultures" of multiculturalism. Beyond these two elements, there are other things that often are cited as being typically Canadian, such as a wry, self-deprecating humor (which Thornton but none of the other directors specifically mention) and a stereotypical love of hockey.

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[748] Aquino, Interview.

[749] Interestingly both Collier and Keiley originally hail from the extreme edges of the country, and I would hypothesize that their position on the extreme edges further solidifies the importance of regional identity for them.

While these elements may be true to some extent (and are difficult to prove definitively), there is one further element that I would offer within this consideration of "Canadian-ness" and Canadian theatre that none of the directors stated explicitly but was demonstrated subtly through their work and comments: a quiet but perceptible pride in Canadian-created art and theatre and an interest in exploring, expanding, and taking that art in new, innovative, and different directions that speak to their audiences and, as Kim Collier put it, could even possibly "stand in conversation with something greater than the border."[750]

Implications (or, What did I learn?) and Suggestions for Future Research

Now that we have a better understanding of these women's directorial work and methods, what do we *do* with this information? First and foremost, continued attention should be paid to these women and their work. The plight of a contemporary historian is limiting and bounding the participants' work. Even as I compose this conclusion, these directors are in rehearsal for or planning more productions; they are still producing work and, as a result, are continuing to re-shape and re-examine who they are as artists as well as what kinds of work they do They are busy women and often move from directing project to directing project. Thus, to keep myself sane and the material manageable, I had to limit the study, ending with the 2012-2013 theatre season. This is an inevitable necessity, but for the researcher it can also be frustrating, for she constantly quests to include as much relevant data as possible but she is also unable (and frankly unwilling) to pause these women's active careers. Thus, these women are women to be watched, and they merit our continued artistic and scholarly attention.

[750] Collier, Interview.

Moreover, in the manner of Nina Lee Aquino and Kelly Thornton, young women directors should be encouraged and their careers supported. While women like Collier, Thornton, Aquino and Keiley have gained significant recognition for their directing and artistic innovation and therefore have paved a path for other women directors, statistically the number of women directors in Canada who direct in prominent, main stage, and/or "A houses" is less than their male counterparts, indicating that further work needs to be done in this area and a greater awareness of this discrepancy cultivated. Mentorship programs and assistant director positions, particularly with prominent and talented women like these four directors, can open doors for younger women directors, giving them opportunities not only to learn from more established artists but also to gain experience and connections working in more professional contexts and at larger theatres. Additionally, as Thornton particularly argued, getting more women into directorial positions is, to some degree, contingent upon having more women in positions of power within theatres, such as in the role of artistic director. Artistic directors shape a company and have great power to bring in more women's perspectives – both as directors and playwrights. Pointing to Jackie Maxwell, current artistic director of the Shaw Festival, as an example, Thornton noted that Maxwell "has changed the climate there. She's really….there's a lot more female playwrights that she'd dug out of, you know, the dusty boxes of history, theatre history, and gotten a lot more female directors there working for them. And that's because she's in the job that those female directors are working there. I truly believe. So everything will shift if you can get more [artistic directors]."[751] In addition to encouraging more women as directors, it is also important to cultivate the

[751] Thornton, Interview.

careers of women directors (and playwrights, although the focus of this study is on directors) of color. In considering women to include in this study, for instance, the majority of the women whose names rose to the surface and who are being recognized on a national level were white women, and as I plan for the expansion and continuation of this project, I do so with an eye toward incorporating First Nations and other directors of intercultural backgrounds. In my conversation with Nina Lee Aquino, she candidly discussed the tension between gender and diversity in programming a season, asking if it would be okay "for an artistic director to program a season of all women but they're all white? Versus programming a season of cultural diverse artists but not all of them are women. Like, do you know what I mean? Like, which is….[more important]?"[752] Aquino raises a valid point in that it is not only emerging women directors who need support and opportunity but also emerging women directors of color. To further cultivate and recognize the work of Canadian women directors, we need to expand the geographic borders of mainstream considerations of theatre and consider women directors from more diverse regions. As Collier and Keiley demonstrate, there are significant artistic innovations occurring by women directors in areas beyond the standard English-Canadian purview of Toronto, and those regional contributions ought to be recognized.

While this study has pointed to some significant elements that emerged through observations of their artistic products and processes as well as their individual narratives, it does not pretend to be comprehensive or the final word on Canadian women directors, and further study is needed in several areas. First, due to natural issues of scheduling and my own teaching/professional obligations, I was able to observe these women in

[752] Aquino, Interview.

rehearsal but only for several days; thus, I believe it would be useful to observe the directors for a full rehearsal period, from casting or the first table reading of the script to technical rehearsals and opening night, so as to gain an even more comprehensive sense of their directorial methods throughout the entire process.[753] Also, observing directors in rehearsal is, as Susan Cole states, "a delicate undertaking," for it can be "perceived as an intrusion upon, and even a repression of, the conditions necessary to rehearsal…But there is no other way to document the collaborative creation of rehearsal except to be present there."[754] While all of the directors were welcoming and very willing to open their rehearsals to me, at moments during this research process, I did experience the oddity of being an outside observer in the room, and on occasion I wondered if my presence was inhibiting or making the director and/or her actors self-conscious, even subconsciously. If, however, the researcher was able to spend an entire process with the director, this potential inhibition may be mitigated, as the researcher would be more likely considered regular member of the creative team. Although Jillian Keiley responded with "it's just more of the same" when I asked to observe her rehearsals for an additional day, I gained significant insights from my time, however limited, alongside each of the directors in rehearsal, and I believe it would be further illuminating to observe for an entire rehearsal process, as it would allow for a more intimate and comprehensive view of director's approach, the developmental implementation of her vision, and the evolution of the ensemble from beginning to end.

[753] As a director myself, I know that I employ slightly different strategies and exercises early in the process than I do later in the process; thus, it would be fascinating to see all aspects of these women's directorial processes.

[754] Susan Cole, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

Future studies and expansions of this research project also would benefit from the inclusion of more directors. Admittedly, there are women who have been left out of this study. For the sake of time and scope, this dissertation project required certain limitations, and while these four directors do represent some of the most prominent Canadian women directors – "powerhouses" – and they represent a variety of identities and artistic visions at work in their projects, there are undoubtedly other women directors who deserve to be included among their ranks. My intended expansion of this study, for instance, will include directors from the country's midsection: the prairies. As I and other scholars have documented in previous research, the experience of living in the prairies that spread across the middle of Canada between Toronto and British Columbia is very different and often marked by a sense of isolation and exposure.[755] However, nestled in that prairie landscape are several key Canadian theatre centres, particularly Calgary, Alberta, and Regina, Saskatchewan, and it would benefit this study's consideration of Canadian regionalism and the work of women directors across the country to include women directors from these locales. Similarly, an expanded study should include First Nations and aboriginal women directors, as the aboriginal Canadian experience is key not only to constructions of national identity but also to the growing intercultural theatre movement in Canada.[756]

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[755] For example, my presentation as part of a panel on Saskatchewan at the 2011 Canadian Association for Theatre Research (Fredericton, New Brunswick), called "Haunting the Northern Sky: Elements of Haunting, the Gothic, and Canadian National Identity in Connie Gault's *Sky*," considered the distinctive features of the prairie lifestyle and experience.

[756] The exclusion of aboriginal women directors in this study speaks in part to the number of aboriginal women directors (there are few) who have been nationally recognized or are directing professionally on Canadian main stages.

In addition to including women directors from additional regions and aboriginal backgrounds, a future study would also include the perspectives of lesbian and queer women directors. While the directors included in this study discussed issues related to gender, class, race, ethnicity, and age in regard to their work and directorial experiences in Canada, a significant strand of identity not addressed by any of the women was sexuality. As none of them presumably are lesbian or bi-sexual (as all have heterosexual partners with whom they have had children), the issue of sexuality did not arise in any interviews or discussions. Some productions such as *The Penelopiad*, which features an all-female cast, subtly probes issues of sexuality as women assume masculine roles within the context of the play and embodiments of gender become fluid and performative; however, none of the productions I observed placed sexuality as its focus, and sexuality did not appear as a particularly integral part of the directors' experiences, worldview, or artistic approaches. Thus, a subsequent study would strive to consider issues of sexuality and might include a director who does not fall within the heteronormative paradigm.

While not necessarily within the purview of my qualitative study, more quantitative studies similar to Fraticelli and Burton's earlier studies (1982 and 2006, respectively), which documented the numbers of women involved in various areas of professional Canadian theatre – including directors, would be useful to chart empirically the advancement and status of women in the profession. Also, in light of the publication and distribution of the Women Directors Catalogue (a joint project between Nightwood Theatre and the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres that emerged following Burton's 2006 study), additional quantitative studies may also prove beneficial to

determine the impact of Burton's study and the Catalogue on the current status of women directors in Canada.

Beyond these suggestions and inspirations for future and expanded research, on a more personal level, what did I – as a director, a researcher, an American, and a feminist – learn from this study? As a director I learned vast amounts about how directors work similarly yet differently and how each director possesses particular artistic aesthetics that drive and inspire them to create. I learned several new rehearsal exercises and saw how various rehearsal rooms and atmospheres are created, largely contingent on how the director sets the tone. As a researcher, I learned how illuminating and enjoyable it is to sit down and spend time with a live participant; conversely, I learned how difficult it can then be to step back and critically explore those individuals' stories once you know and respect that person. I have also learned that, particularly in qualitative research, studies shift and change from start to finish and one needs to embrace that flexibility, for that is the joy of qualitative research that explores "real life" phenomena, which in themselves are inherently dynamic and changing as the context changes around them. As an American, I learned that Canadian culture is remarkably similar yet different from our own, particularly in regard to race, but the country is so vast and complicated (particularly considering the distinct culture that the French-Canadian influence contributes) that it is difficult to point to a single, unified sense of Canadian-ness.[757]

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[757] For example, during the 2012-2013 season, Toronto's Canadian Stage produced David Mamet's *Race* (starring Jason Priestly of the 1990s television show "Beverly Hills 90210"). In response to the play, blogger Denise Balkissoon responded, "This is a Toronto blog, and here's my Toronto take on *Race:* America is weird…The literal black/white dichotomy of American race politics is always curious to me. It's not surprising that the Atlantic slave trade has such an enduring legacy on just about every single way Americans look at everything. But at the same time it seems strange that a play debuted in 2009 makes just an offhand mention of one immigrant, and barely flicks at the ever-changing, multifaceted view of race

However, there is also something appealing to that indescribable Canadian-ness, and I particularly enjoy riding on the TTC buses that Nina Lee Aquino strives to bring to the stage.[758] As a feminist, I have learned to be more self-reflexive of my own directorial intentions and methods, considering why I do certain things in the rehearsal hall and how that impacts the production's process as well as why I am drawn to or direct certain types and titles of plays. I have learned that the term "feminist" and "feminism" is still highly contested and problematic, as it conjures images of extreme feminist separatists or aggressively political and essentialist feminists or people interested only in women's issues, and while I continue to inhabit the feminist identity, I also find myself wishing that another term existed, one that is less historically charged and negatively connoted. I have also learned that I lean toward a third wave (although not post-feminist, as I do not believe that we live in a society that is *beyond* the need for feminism) feminist stance, as articulated by Jill Dolan, which essentially contends that while "many American feminist performance theorists and critics have historically looked to the outside or the margins for effective, socially critical theatre…perhaps it is now time to acknowledge the potential of looking inside as well, and to address feminism as a critique or value circulating within our most commercial theatres."[759] I have an expanded view of feminism (and feminismS) and am interested in the ways that identities beyond but yet related to gender influence one's work and experience and how those identities shift

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and ethnicity that is my Toronto-born view of the topic, and the world." Denise Balkissoon, "David Mamet's *Race* at Canadian Stage," *The Ethnic Aisle*, 12 April 2013, http://ethnicaisle.wordpress.com/2013/04/12/david-mamets-race-at-canadian-stage/ (accessed 1 July 2013).

[758] Aquino has been cited as saying that until theatre in Toronto looks like the inside of a TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) bus, her "job is not done." Lesley Ciarula Taylor, "Ghetto walls around immigrant theatre are crumbling," *Toronto Star*, 31 August 2009.

[759] Jill Dolan, "Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular: Reviewing Wendy Wasserstein," *Theatre Journal* 60 (2008): 434.

across borders. Although I am a feminist, I realize that my directing choices are not always reflective of that feminist intent, rather they provide an artistic challenge or pique an artistic interest; however, my feminist lens provides me a way of seeing the text and working in the rehearsal space that is attentive to and opens up doors for women and women's perspectives, if even subtly, within those texts, explicitly feminist or not.

Conclusion

All of these things in mind, I return now to one of the original questions that formed this study: *does* gender matter in the work of these professional Canadian women directors? Yes…and no. Yes, gender matters because these directors are women and identify as feminists – both positions that, whether actively politicized or not, inevitably shape and influence their lives, experiences, and directorial choices simply by nature of inhabiting those identities. In Collier's words, "I don't take a political position because I *am* that position. I am the position."[760] And no, for as all of the directors noted, gender is not the only factor or identity that fuels, inspires and shapes these women's directorial work or experiences. There are multiple intersecting identities at work and that should be considered within these women's lives and artistic approaches. Depending on the director and the multiple identities that she carries, certain identities may supersede her gender identity when it comes to shaping her work and experience. This is particularly apparent in the work and perspective of Nina Lee Aquino, who notes, in language that is strikingly similar to Collier's, that her Filipino identity often comes before any others, "It's because I *am* that. I'm living that."[761] To some extent, these multiple and often shifting identities

[760] Collier, Interview.
[761] Aquino, Interview.

may be why several of the women were particularly reticent to articulate a definitively feminist directorial stance, for other identity factors overlap with, rub up against, pull on, and connect to gender. Thus, while gender does matter, it is not the only thing or, more accurately, the only identity that matters.

Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement warn in *Upstaging Big Daddy* that "if the director doesn't think through where she stands politically, she is likely to wind up serving the interests of the dominant ideology, whether she intends to or not," and I would argue that these women directors do consider carefully and are highly aware of where they stand politically, as women and as artists, even if their work does not take an overtly political or activist approach.[762] In some ways, perhaps they do serve the dominant ideology in that in many cases their works are not directly addressing issues of gender and feminism; however, in other ways, they are pushing back against the dominant ideologies, for their artistic innovations and highly collaborative, non-hierarchal work in the rehearsal space allows them space and opportunities to subvert and re-imagine how power is wielded by directors. These women directors seem to be much more aware of other identities' influence on their work beyond that of gender, and I believe that this expanded recognition of multiple, intersecting identities represents a contemporary shift in feminist thinking and a broadening of feminist discourse. While some scholars and feminists might argue that we live in a "post-feminist" moment, I find the term "*post*-feminist" problematic in that it implies that feminism is no longer needed, and as many of the directors in this study noted, there are still gendered distinctions and

[762] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 6.

discriminations that occur and, therefore, feminism continues to be a useful and necessary tool for addressing those inequalities. However, much in the same way that theatre scholar Jill Dolan candidly revisited, revised and rearticulated her views on feminism in a 2008 article entitled "Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular: Reviewing Wendy Wasserstein," I believe that "as time has passed, the distinctions among the feminisms, as they work out in specific theatre and performance practices, do not seem to me as salient as I once thought," and there seems to be a movement toward a more inclusionary sense of feminism that considers gender in light of multiple identities as well as, particularly in the world of theatre and art, that considers women who work within the mainstream equally as important to advancing women's work and equality as those who profess a more feminist, politicized aesthetic.[763] Dolan further notes, "I also find lately that many would-be "downtown," materialist, feminist performance artists hold a lot in common with many so-called uptown, liberal feminist playwrights. Although they might employ different techniques and styles (and budgets) to address different topics in very different production contexts, their aspirations are similar and simple: to reach as wide an audience as possible with innovative, socially progressive theatre work."[764] While I would add "artistically progressive" to Dolan's description of innovative (feminist) theatre, I think she is on track and that her description here speaks to the work of these Canadian women directors. Some of them work in the mainstream and their plays include little explicitly "feminist" content; however, their artistic innovations in form (Keiley's movement-based Kalideography or Collier's integrations of film and

[763] Jill Dolan, "Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular: Reviewing Wendy Wasserstein," *Theatre Journal* 60 (2008): 433-457 – 435.
[764] Ibid.

technology into the live performance space) and, more broadly, their place *as* prominent directors who also are women serve to advance the "feminist" cause by getting women into positions of power and by producing new, artistically progressive theatre that challenges notions of "traditional" theatre in Canada. Others such as Kelly Thornton and Nina Lee Aquino work from more feminist or marginalized positions; therefore their work is imbued with a stronger sense of political advocacy and social action as they attempt to bring marginalized voices, perspectives, topics, and communities into the spotlight, thus speaking more closely to issues related to the socio-political status quo.

As Dolan posits, in today's society, "I believe that progressive feminists can no longer afford to disparage one another's work or split critical hairs about which forms, contexts, and contents do more radically activist work."[765] Thus, it is not so much about *how* feminist these women are; rather it is about *what* work they are doing and how those works – whether in form or content, artistic or social action-oriented – are challenging traditional notions and conceptions of performance and identity on Canadian stages. Of course, we can continue to draw from Donkin and Clement in their argument that "directing theater as if gender and race" and, I would add, other intersecting identities "matter is not different from good directing, but it begins with a certain awareness. A director has to believe that theater can change the way people think and how they see."[766] All of the directors included in this study seem very much driven to use theatre to change the way people think and how they see the world at large, challenging audiences through

[765] Jill Dolan, "Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular: Reviewing Wendy Wasserstein," *Theatre Journal* 60 (2008): 436.

[766] Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 8.

artistic innovations in form and content to rethink the ways that we tell and perform stories as well as how we look at people as human beings.

In 2010, Matthew Jocelyn, artistic director of Canadian Stage in Toronto, concluded his announcement of the upcoming Canadian Stage season – a season which included the Kim Collier-directed *Studies in Motion* on its main stage and featured Collier as a full-time artistic associate at Canadian Stage – with the words, "We are the stories we tell."[767] Since reading these words during my research, they have stuck with me. We are the stories we tell. In fact, these words seem particularly apt for a qualitative study of this ilk, for a major intention of my project has been to document, through the words and first hand experiences of the directors themselves, their journey to directing, the development of their artistic visions, and their experiences of identity as Canadian women directors. Much of my research has relied on the stories told by these women and, to a lesser degree, by those who have worked with them. Through their stories and narratives, these women have painted a picture of the current state of Canadian theatre – innovated by their artistic endeavors and creations and energized by their directorial presences. While their perspectives of "feminism" and experiences of gender as well as other intersecting identities vary, the combined stories of these women directors provide a window into the contemporary Canadian theatre scene and, by extension, Canadian artistic and cultural life. Although the numbers of women directors in Canada are not at parity with their male counterparts, the fact remains that they are producing innovative, thought-provoking work that challenges the Canadian artistic and social status quo, and

[767] Matthew Jocelyn, qtd in Richard Ouzounian, "Canadian Stage gets eclectic," *Toronto Star,* 17 March 2010.

they are being recognized for their work – a recognition and tradition of directorial excellence that can and presumably will open doors and create opportunities for other, younger generations of women directors to follow suit.

Although, as noted throughout this study and discussed previously in this chapter, the notion of "Canadian-ness" is ambiguous and difficult to define in its entirety, the work of these women directors – Kim Collier, Kelly Thornton, Nina Lee Aquino and Jillian Keiley – is serving to help shape, define, and re-define Canadian national identity by re-imaging and expanding the ways that Canadian stories are told on Canadian stages. If, as Matthew Jocelyn posits, we are the stories we tell, then the stories these women are telling display a sense of bravery, risk-taking, and artistic vision of which Canada should be very proud. These women have valuable stories for women, directors, and artists of all nationalities to hear, and they are stories well worth hearing.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE PARTICIPATION REQUEST

Dear [DIRECTOR]:

I am currently formulating plans for travel to Canada to conduct research contributing to my PhD dissertation and would very much like to meet and consult with you on this project.

The focus of my research is two-fold: First, I hope to interview women directors [and their collaborators] who are working professionally in Canada and producing innovative work as a way to gain insights into their working methods and aesthetic approaches. Second, I'm interested in learning about the ways that their role as a woman, feminist, and Canadian all may impact or influence their work or aesthetic approach.

During my research travel, I would very much like to meet with you to discuss your recent, current, and future work and, if possible, interview other collaborators.

I hope I can interest you in assisting with this project.

Best,
Emily Rollie

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Gender, Nationality and the Work of Canadian Women Theatre Directors
Informed Consent

This form requests your consent to participate in a research study (IRB Project #1203374) to explore the innovative work of Canadian women theatre directors and examine the role of gender and nationality within that directorial experience. This is an individual research project being conducted by Emily Rollie (researcher) as overseen by Dr. Cheryl Black and Dr. Jeni Hart (advisors).

Project description: This project involves interviews, archival data collection, and, when possible, observations that explore the status and experiences of professional women stage directors in Canada. The 60 to 120 minute interviews will focus on gaining an understanding of your experience as a director. While interviews comprise the core of the study, observations of a current project in rehearsal will provide further insight into your directorial methods and approaches; these observations will be conducted when possible and at your discretion. Upon the completion of the research process, you will also be invited to read the findings and discuss any concerns or correct any perceived misrepresentations.

Potential Benefits and Concerns: Findings of this project will form the core of the researcher's dissertation and will be incorporated into presentations and publication intended to advance scholarship surrounding gender, theatre directing, and Canadian theatre. Participation in this study may provide you, the participant, with greater insight into your directorial development or directorial approaches and philosophies. It will also provide you and your work with increased exposure in the academic community and possibly professional circles. The risks associated to this project are minimal and no greater than those encountered in journalistic interviews or your day to day interactions.

Confidentiality: Because this study intends to document the experiences of professional theatre artists, your name and identity will be included in the published results/dissertation. However, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions at any time, and any sensitive information regarding this project will be kept confidential according to legal and ethical guidelines. Research data will only be accessible to the researcher and will be kept on a password protected computer and password protected document in a locked office.

Audio recording: All interviews will be audio recorded, unless you prefer to have the interview conducted without recording. If you agree to have the interview recorded, you may request the recorder be stopped at any time—either to stop the interview completely or to continue the interview un-recorded. Further, due to geographical constraints, some interviews may be conducted via Skype. Interviews will be conducted in a secure location, and all aforementioned guidelines will also apply to Skype. Transcribed interview data will be kept by the researcher in a secure file for 7 years per IRB standard protocol.

Participation is Voluntary: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or you can freely withdraw from the project at any time without negative consequences at which time all data pertaining to you will be destroyed.

Questions: Please contact Emily Rollie (651-260-9406, earb79@mail.missouri.edu) or the project's faculty advisors Dr. Cheryl Black (573-882-2021, blackc@missouri.edu) or Dr. Jeni Hart (573-882-4225, hartjl@missouri.edu) with questions or concerns.

You may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board by telephone or email if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant.

483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-9585

E-Mail: umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu
Website: http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm

Please state verbally to the researcher that you understand this letter and agree to participate in the study. If you do not wish to be recorded, please inform the researcher at this time.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about growing up.
    - Where were you born, where did you grow up and where do you live now?
2. How did you get started in theatre?
    - What kind of training for directing did you have?
    - Who were/are your directing mentors/role models? Describe an experience with a mentor.
3. How would you describe your current work and projects?
    - How would you describe the work your company does?
    - How would you describe yourself as a director?
    - How would you describe the work that you do as a director?
    - How have others described the work that you do?
4. What does feminist/feminism mean to you?
    - How would you describe yourself as a feminist?
    - How, if at all, would you say your feminist identification influences your work or your projects?
5. What does being Canadian mean to you?
    - How would you describe Canadian theatre?
    - How would you describe yourself as a Canadian director?
    - How, if at all, would you say your national identity influences your work or your projects?
6. What production(s) would you say are more representative of your work and perspective?
    - What was the title of that production?
    - When did you direct that production?
    - Where did you stage that production?
    - How would you describe that production? Can you take me through your initial thoughts about casting, set, costumes, etc?
    - How did you select that production and/or approach?
    - Can you describe your rehearsal process for that production?
        - How did you structure the rehearsals?
        - What were your expectations of the actors and the rehearsal process?
    - Why does that production stand out?
    - What was the critical and audience response to that production?

7. What other elements are important to know about your experience and your work?
8. What advice would you offer other feminist directors in Canada?

APPENDIX D: KIM COLLIER – TIMELINE OF SELECTED WORKS AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1965	Born in Kitimat, BC
1969	Moved to Kamloops when 4 years old[768]
1983	College years 2 years at University of Victoria, followed by time off for travel and acting in Yukon
	Studied physical theatre at Mime Unlimited in Toronto
	Returned to school at Langara College, Professional Acting Training Program, Studio 58 in Vancouver
1994	Graduated from Studio 58 (where Collier met collaborators Kevin Kerr, Hudgins, and Young)
1996	Founded Electric Company Theatre
Sept. 1996	Directed (collaborative creation with Electric Company Theatre) *Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla* – at Vancouver Fringe (subsequent substantial revisions and expansion for Roundhouse Community Theatre, 1998, and tours throughout Canada as well as to Edinburgh, Scotland)[769]
Feb. 1997	Directed *Great Day for Up* at More Four Play at Studio 58[770]
May/June 1999	Directed *The Wake*, a site specific play on Granville Island

[768] From Peter Birnie's article in Van Sun (2 Nov. 2010) "More power comes to Electric Company Theatre." "You could say I was raised at Shuswap Lake because I spent all my weekends and summers there."

[769] *Brilliant!* considers the life and creative genius of Nikola Tesla, both how his genius scientifically innovated society and how his genius complicated and troubled his personal life. For a detailed discussion of the development of *Brilliant* and the Electric Company Theatre's collaborative process, see Michelle E. Kneale's MA Thesis, *The Electric Company Script Development Process: Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikola Tesla*, University of British Columbia, 2008 or Jessica Ruano's case study, "From the fringe to the mainstream: Case-study on the Success of an Electric Company Production, *Brilliant! The Blinding Enlightenment of Nikoka Tesla*," University of Ottawa, 2009.

[770] Deemed the "most successful of the new student works" in this festival, this play features a Beckettian clown character named Wound who is literally climbing the ladder of life.

Jan. 2000	Electric Company named as one of 21 up and coming artists in Vancouver
2000	*The Score*, a play staged as part of the Human Genome Organization's conference in Vancouver[771]
2000	Won outstanding director award for *The Score* as well as the Ray Michal Award for most promising new director
Mar. 2001	Awarded the Alcan Performing Arts Award ($50,000) and staged Jorge Amado's *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* with Carmen Aguirre of Vancouver Playhouse. Performed at the Vancouver East Cultural Center [772]
Jan. 2002	Directed *FLOP*[773] Performed at the Vancouver East Cultural Center
Mar. 2002	*The One that Got Away* (won Jessie Richardson Award for Outstanding Small Theatre Production; Collier won Larry Lillo Award for Outstanding Director. Performed at Vancouver's Jewish Community Center.
Jan. 2003	Directed *Unity (1918)* by Kevin Kerr. Performed at Western Canada Theatre Company in Kamloops[774]
Apr. 2003	Directed *The Fall,* set in a warehouse called The Factory at University of British Columbia's Finning Site[775]

[771] This play also won best production and best original play in the small theatre category at the Jessie Richardson awards in June 2000. *Dona Flora* is an adaptation of the novel by Jorge Amando and is about a Brazilian woman in the 1940s who is torn between the ghost of her passionate but unreliable first husband and her dedicated but lackluster current husband.

[772] This production "symbolized so much about what was to come across the city's theatre scene. It was rude and ribald, with non-stop nudity by one of the husbands, and at one point called on its audience to walk out of the Vancouver East Cultural Centre and cross the alley to WISE Hall….the launch of the site-specific form that swept the city." (Peter Birnie, Van Sun, "Vancouver theatre scene flew off the stage in the 'oh-ohs'" 31 Dec. 2009, D1.

[773] Although little is written about this production it has been described as "a project on the theme of failure."

[774] Winner of the Governor General's Prize for drama, Kerr's *Unity (1918)* is about the Spanish Flu epidemic that swept the world in 1918 and particularly focuses on how one Canadian town dealt with the fear of the Flu's arrival.

[775] Kevin Kerr said, "It's site-specific and semi-processional, fully physical and movement based but with plenty of compelling text. It all takes place in this enormous warehouse with big film sequences and extensive sound design – quite the spectacle!" (Peter Birnie, *Vancouver Sun*, "Arts: The Fall," 10 April 2003, C7).

May 2004	Directed *Storyeum*, a collaboration with Danny Guillame[776]
Mar. 2005	Collaborated as director with Hard Rubber Orchestra to create a multidisciplinary event that is funded by Alcan Performing Arts Award (Collier's production is "all about supporting the music. It won't be narrative driven and that's why it really excites me, because it will be an opportunity to play and explore off of the composition."[777])
Jan. 2006	Directed *Studies in Motion: The Hauntings of Eadweard Muybridge.*[778] Performed at UBC's Frederic Wood Theatre. (Revived in 2009 for Vancouver Playhouse and Festival Transameriques in Montreal; Nov. 2010 in Edmonton's Citadel Theatre and Toronto's Canadian Stage)
Mar. 2006	Directed *Brilliant*! Performed in Ottawa at National Arts Center
Mar. 2006	Collier's film *The Score* presented at Women in Film Festival (Vancouver)[779]
Apr. 2007	Collier gives directorial input to Vancouver Moving Theatre's *We're All in This Together – The Shadows Project: Addiction and Recovery*[780]
June 2007	Directed *The One that Got Away*[781] (co-production with The Only Animal for Magnetic North – staged in Vancouver at Jewish Community Center of Greater Vancouver Pool as "highly original site-specific work"[782])

[776] A form of "living history," this project takes audience from BC pre-history to first nations and Europeans to gold rushes and railroads to today.

[777] Peter Birnie, "Cutting edge jazz collective wins $60,000" *Vancouver Sun*, 2 March 2004, C2.

[778] *Studies in Motion* considers the work and life of Eadweard Muybridge, the inventor of the technology that made modern cinema and moving pictures possible.

[779] Based on the Electric Company play, *The Score*, this film version is a musical drama about a female geneticist who is in the process of isolating a cancer-causing gene while also dealing with her ticking biological clock and the fear that she may inherit Huntington's Disease.

[780] A large-scale collaborative project that incorporated input from a variety of artists, this project resulted in a giant shadow play about the roots of addiction.

[781] According to the The Only Animal theatre company website, *The One that Got Away* tells "the story of a girl with a fish where her heart should be, chasing her rapscallion grandfather into an afterlife reckoning with love and loss. This play-in-a-pool combines narrative, music and innovative water staging in a tale of submerged Jewish identity" (www.theonlyanimal.com).

[782] Peter Birnie, "Waking up for the Jessies: Playhouse Theatre Company leads award nominations," *Vancouver Sun,* 20 May 2009.

Sept. 2007	Directed *A Doll's House* at Chemainus Theatre Festival
July 2008	Directed *Titus Andronicus* at Bard on Beach ("best and bloodiest show of the summer"[783] and "cleverly conceived, brilliantly staged and as sharp as the tip of a bloody dagger"[784])
May 2008	Directed *No Exit* (produced at Nightwood Theatre in its 4x4 Female Directors' Series)
May 2009	Nominated for Jessie Richardson award for best direction (of Bard on the Beach's *Titus*)
July 2009	Azra, daughter (14), dies in fire with two cousins
2009	Directed *Studies in Motion* revival
Mar. 2010	Acted with Jonathon Young in *At Home with Dick and Jane*, at HIVE, an "envelope pushing mini festival" in Vancouver[785]
Sept./Oct. 2010	*Tear the Curtain!*, first performed at Arts Club Theatre's Stanley Theatre, Vancouver
Nov. 2010	Awarded the Siminovitch Prize for direction
Apr. 2010	Restaged *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Satre at San Francisco's ACT[786]
Sept. 2011	Directed *Red* by John Logan (Toronto's Canadian Stage in Nov. 2011; Edmonton's Citadel Theatre – Jan/Feb 2012)[787]
Jan. 2012	Directed *All the Way Home* by Tad Mosel, performed at Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre (audience members joined the actors on stage and on/around set)[788]

[783] Jerry Wasserman, "Jerry's Picks: Plays to catch this week," *The Province [Vancouver]*, 18 Sept. 2008, C13.

[784] Peter Birnie, "Bard on the Beach's Tempest sells out," *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 August 2008, D7.

[785] *At Home with Dick and Jane* is combined film and live performance during which audience members first watch a film of a male theatre director and a female theatre director who argue about the importance of their own work. Each has created a piece about Dick and Jane, and once the audience views their directorial rants, the audience moves into the live segment of the piece during which they essentially "film" the live action by looking through a viewfinder and on a dolly that rolls through the home of Dick and Jane.

[786] Collier's take on the classic play involved the actors entering the stage and then being sent to individual rooms in which they were filmed, their images projected on individual screens on stage. The only live actor on stage throughout the production was the bellhop, played by Jonathon Young.

[787] Collier's production about an eccentric artist and his apprentice featured large projections of artworks as part of the set and pre-, intermission, and post-show visual scenery.

Oct. 2012	Directed *Tear the Curtain!* re-staged for Canadian Stage, Toronto
Jan. 2013	Workshopped, co-directed *Helen Lawrence* at Banff[789]
Apr. 2013	Directed *Hamlet* at Bard on the Beach, Vancouver
Fall 2013	Directed *The Great Gatsby* at Theatre Calgary
March 2014	Co-directed *Helen Lawrence*, premiered at Canadian Stage before planned European tour

[788] *All the Way Home* is a play written by Tad Mosel and considers the way a widow with two children, her father and her husband's alcoholic brother deal with grief and loss. Collier's staging involved bringing the audience on stage and seating them within the set of the home, making them part of the action.

[789] Created in collaboration with writer Chris Haddock and co-director/photographer Stan Douglas, *Helen Lawrence* is a "cinematic stage production" that is set in 1940s Vancouver and tells the story of an American woman who arrives in Vancouver in search of her husband's killer. Much like *Tear the Curtain!* the city itself plays a major role in the story of this production: "It's through [the main character's] eyes we see this strange, unusual city … ruled by quaint morality rules, but still a place where people would regularly go to bootleggers, go gambling and visit prostitutes." (Douglas, qtd in J. Kelly Nestruck, "Stellar trio creating 'cinematic stage production' for Canadian Stage," *The Globe and Mail* (27 November 2012).)

APPENDIX E: KELLY THORNTON – TIMELINE OF SELECTED WORKS AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1965	Born in Brockville, Ontario
1974 (age 9)	Father transferred to Melbourne, AUS
1980 (age 15)	Family returned to Canada
College years	University of Western Ontario, transferred to Guelph
	Founded Bananafish Company
1991	Noted as a "talented young newcomer [who] plunged headlong into the Toronto theatre scene via Buddies in Bad Times' wild and crazy Rhubarb! Festival" in the *Toronto Star*[790]
Spring 1994	Graduated from Guelph
Dec. 1994	Co-writes *Going* (with Alex Poch-Godin; Poch-Godin directs)
1996	Thornton called "playwright/actor" in *Toronto Star* article because of performance in *Dog Poetry*, as part of *The Gathering: A Festival of Women's World's*
1997	Won the Alumnae Theatre Director's Award; directed *The Visit* (Durrenmatt) at the Alumnae Theatre
1998	Directed *This Hotel* (different version at Toronto Fringe)[791]
Feb. 1999	Directed *Epiphany (…Everything's Gone Soggy)* by Greg MacArthur at Rhubarb! Festival
1999	Interned at Canadian Stage and Factory Theatre (asst. director on *Outrageous* by Brad Fraser)
Feb. 2000	Directed *Jekyll* by Ruth Madoc-Jones and Erika Hennebury at Canadian dell'arte Studio[792]

[790] Robert Crew, "Through the Rhubarb! Peephole: Kelly Thornton heads this year's new play festival," *Toronto Star* (4 Feb 2001): D07.

[791] *This Hotel* is the story of a man who finds his wife in the arms of another and checks into a surreal hotel where he encounters different characters as he grapples with his life and emotions.

Apr. 2000	Appointed director of Rhubarb! Festival
Feb 2001	Director of Buddies' 23rd annual Rhubarb! Festival
May 2001	Directed *This Hotel*[793]
June 2001	Groundswell Festival – Thornton directs *Better Safe Than Sorry* by Les Vaches, *Shiksas Sit Shiva* by Catherine Hayos and Melinda Little[794]
Feb. 2002	Served as Rhubarb! Festival Director
2001-2002	First season as artistic director of Nightwood
Feb. 2002	Rhubarb! Festival Director @ Buddies[795]
May 2002	Nominated for outstanding direction Dora for *This Hotel*
Nov. 2002	Directed *The Danish Play* by Sonja Mills[796]
May 2002	Became director of Nightwood's Groundswell Festival & directed *The Butterfly Body* by Chan ("finding the new tribe that is Canadian" Crew) & *Blood* by Jean Yoon
Feb. 2003	*Finding Regina* by Shoshana Sperling at Nightwood (premiered at Globe Theater in Regina, 2002)[797]
2003	Initiated "Hysteria Festival" with Buddies, a multidisciplinary festival for women artists

[792] Although true in plot to the original Robert Louis Stevenson story, *Jekyll* featured women in the roles of Jekyll/Hyde and Jekyll's friend Utterson.

[793] *This Hotel* had 6 nominations for Toronto's Dora Mavor Moore awards, including outstanding direction.

[794] Because this festival features new plays, synopses of all the plays are not readily available. However, *Shiksas Sit Shiva* shows the experience of the women of the family during a Jewish shiva. With a cast largely of women, it looks at Rachel, a Jewish woman who feels passed over by her now-deceased father in favor of her brothers, her shiksa (non-Jewish) sister-in-law Joanne who is a stickler for shiva rules, two other sisters-in-law, and the woman who has long been Rachel's father's partner.

[795] Rhubarb Festival was started in 1979 and co-prodcued by Buddies and Nightwood until 1985 when Buddies took it over.

[796] Mills' *The Danish Play* is about Agnete Ottosen, a "poet, Danish Resistance worker, and survivor of Nazi prison camps. This courageous and uncompromising woman was determined to make her way in the world on her own terms no matter what the cost. Agnete Ottosen was the great aunt of playwright Sonja Mills. Mills was inspired to write the play after reading the diaries and poems Mills' mother had inherited from her sister." (Deborah James, *The Danish Play* study guide, Nightwood Theatre/National Arts Centre, Ottawa, September 2004.

[797] *Finding Regina* is about three friends who come together at a hospital in Regina, Saskatchewan, when another of their group has tried to commit suicide.

2004	Awarded Pauline McGibbon Award for excellence in direction
Feb-Mar. 2004	Directed *China Doll* at Nightwood Theatre[798]
2004	*The Danish Play* (dir. Thornton) tours to Aveny-Teatret in Copenhagen
June 2004	*The Danish Play* (dir. Thornton) tours to Magnetic North
Aug. 2004	Directed *Longfellow Falling* by Celia McBride at Groundswell Festival via Nightwood[799]
Mar. 2005	Honored along with producer Nathalie Bonjour honored at International Women's Day Breakfast by Honorable Sarmite D. Bulte, MP
Aug. 2005	Directed *Skim* by Mariko Tamaki at Groundswell Festival via Nightwood[800]
Nov. 2005	Directed *Bear with Me*, by Dianne Flacks (about queer motherhood), produced in association with Buddies in Bad Times
May 2006	Directed *Mathilde* by Veronique Olmi, trans. by Morwyn Brebner at Young Centre for the Performing Arts via Nightwood Theatre (1st performance in Young's second space – "its professional baptism")[801]
Summer 2006	Directed Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors* (in High Park)[802]
2007	Gave birth to a daughter, Chloe Babette Poch-Goldin
2007	*The Danish Play* (dir. Thornton) re-mounted in Toronto
June 2008	Awarded the YWCA Toronto Women of Distinction Award

[798] Written by Chinese-Canadian playwright Marjorie Chan, *China Doll* is a look at one young Chinese woman's first encounter with Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and the ways the play encourages her to see her increasing independence beyond the life others have planned for her.

[799] Although a synopsis is not readily available, this play is notable in that it was written by Yukon based playwright and filmmaker Celia McBride.

[800] Based on Tamaki's graphic novel, *Skim* is about an overweight, depressed, goth, Japanese-Canadian teenager who is trying to find/create space and recognition for herself within her family, high school, and world.

[801] A play about a middle aged, middle class woman who tires of her life and husband, seeking adventure and escape in the arms of a teenage boy.

[802] Thornton's husband, Alex Poch-Goldin, acted as one of the twins and the other was played by Kevin Hanchard, an African-Canadian actor, representing Thornton's interest in diversity.

Oct. 2008	Directed *Wild Dogs*, adapted from novel by Helen Humphreys and produced in association with the Canadian Stage Company[803]
Nov. 2009	Nightwood's 30th anniversary & 4x4 Festival of Women Directors, including Polly Stenham's *That Face* (dir. By Thornton)[804]
2010	Directed *The List* by Jennifer Tremblay via Nightwood[805]
Jan. 2012	Directed *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood via Nightwood
Mar. 2012	Directed *The Happy Woman* by Rose Cullis via Nightwood[806]
Sept. 2012	Directed *Between the Sheets* by Jordi Mand via Nightwood
Jan. 2013	Directed *The Penelopiad* (re-mount via Nightwood at Buddies in Bad Times)
Feb./Mar. 2013	Groundswell Festival – directed *Who Killed Snow White?* by Judith Thompson[807]

[803] Helen Humphreys describes the novel and play as follows: "Each evening at dusk, six people gather at the edge of the woods, calling their dogs to come back to them – dogs that have turned wild and vanished from their lives. Drawn together by need, the group forms their own small community—until violence strikes unexpectedly, forcing them to explore what they really mean to one another." (Helen Humphreys, personal website, http://www.hhumphreys.com/WildDogs.html (accessed 10 September 2012).)

[804] *That Face* looks at a crumbling family – daughter Mia is caught with drugs and sent home from boarding school, forcing her father to return home from business on Hong Kong, son Henry has dropped out of school and is taking care of their alcoholic mother.

[805] A one woman show, *The List* invites the audience into the kitchen of a woman who is struggling with guilt over the death (possibly murder?) of her best friend..

[806] *The Happy Woman* looks underneath the veneer of a perfect, normal, happy family. As described on the Nightwood Theatre website, "*The Happy Woman* is a darkly comic exploration of what happens when bliss gets in the way of truth and threatens to destroy the very foundation we rely on." (Nightwood Theatre, "The Happy Woman," http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net/index.php/whats_on/the_happy_woman (accessed 1 July 2013)).

[807] In development for a future staging on the Nightwood main stage, Thompson's new play looks at the rift between feminist and feminisms in contemporary culture and academia.

APPENDIX F: NINA LEE AQUINO – TIMELINE OF SELECTED WORKS AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1977	Born in Philippines
1983	Began acting career at age 6
1994	Participated in youth theatre group at Tarragon Theatre (her "first taste of Canadian theatre")
1995	Attended York University (1 year)
1996	Transferred to University of Guelph
Mar. 2000	Directed *Mother Tongue* by Betty Quan at University of Guelph
2000/2001	Entered MA program at University of Toronto
2002	Co-founded and became artistic director of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company
July 2002	*Love and RelASIANships*, fu-GEN's first performance, an evening of selections of Asian-Canadian plays
2003	Co-wrote (with Nadine Villasin) and acted in *Miss Orient(ed)* for Carlos Bulosan Theatre[808]
Sept. 2004	Directed *Banana Boys* by Leon Aureus[809] for fu-GEN in the company's professional debut performance
Oct. 2004	Married Richard Lee
2004	Received Ken McDougall Award for emerging directors
Apr. 2005	Acted in *Hongbu and Nolbu* for Theatre for Young People
Sept/Oct. 2005	Directed re-staging of *Banana Boys* for fu-GEN
2006	Founded UnderCurrents, workshops funded by Ontario Arts Council to help minority students ages 15-17 build theater skills

[808] *Miss Orient(ed)* was Carlos Bulosan's first professional, explicitly Filipino Canadian play and was performed at the Factory Studio Theatre. In 2005, it was staged at Montreal's Teesri Duniya Theatre.

[809] This play depicts a group of young men struggling to find identity as Chinese-Canadian. ("Banana boys" refers to the Chinese-Canadian situation, yellow on outside, white on inside.)

Sept. 2006	Directed *People Power* as part of SummerWorks Festival
2006 (early 2007)	Gave birth to daughter, Eponine
Jan. 2007	Directed *Singkil* by Catherine Hernandez [810] for fu-GEN
Apr/May 2007	Producer for Cross-Currents Festival[811]
June 2007	Co-directed with Ken Gass *Tough!* by George F. Walker at Factory Theatre[812]
2007	Nominated for Dora Award (outstanding direction) for *Singkil*
Apr. 2008	Directed *People Power* written and performed by Leon Aureus, Rose Cortez, Nicco Lorenzo Garcia, Christine Mangosing and Nadine Villasin at Carlos Bulosian Theatre[813]
2008	Awarded John Hirsch Prize for Emerging Directors
	Produced first anthology of Asian-Canadian drama
May 2008	Producer for Cross-Currents Festival[814]
Feb.2009	Directed *lady in the red dress* by David Yee for fu-GEN[815]
Sept. 2009	Became artistic director for Cahoots Theatre Company
Dec. 2009	Directed *The Making of St. Jerome* by Marie Beath Badian at Factory Theatre as part of New Works Festival[816]
Mar. 2010	Directed *The Monster Under the Bed* by Kevin Dyer for Theater for Young People
Oct. 2010	Directed *Invisible Girl* by Michele Rimi for Theater for Young People[817]

[810] "Singkil" refers to a type of traditional Filipino dance, and the play looks at the relationship between teenage Mimi, who lives in Toronto, and her recently deceased mother, who was a Singkil dancer.

[811] Held at Factory Theatre, Cross-Currents isa festival for artists of colour.

[812] Featuring a multi-ethnic cast in multiple roles, *Tough!* told the story of three troubled teens.

[813] This play tells the story of non-violent protests that led to 1986 overthrow of Philippines' dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Parts of the script are written in English, Filipino and Taglish, which mixes the two. As part of the production, Aquino had to stage her uncle Ninoy's assassination and funeral.

[814] Cross-Currents Festival included plays from playwrights such as Marjorie Chan, Simon Johnston, Anita Majumdar, Andrew Moodie and Rahul Varma.

[815] Yee's play – inspired by the gritty tone of graphic novels such as *Sin City* and which deals with the Chinese Exclusion tax and the head-tax (a racial immigration policy in place from 1885-1923) – would go on to be nominated for the Governor General's Prize for Drama.

[816] Inspired by the actual shooting of Filipino-Canadian boy by plainclothes police officer in 2004.

Mar. 2011	Directed *paperSERIES* by David Yee
May 2011	Directed *Brown Balls* by Bryon Abalos[818]
June 2011	Received Dora Award for Outstanding Direction for *paperSERIES*[819]
Mar. 2012	Became interim co-artistic director of Factory Theatre with Nigel Shawn Williams in wake of Ken Gass ousting scandal
	Directed *SIA* by Matthew McKenzie for Cahoots Theatre[820]
June 2012	*paperSERIES* at Magnetic North Theatre Festival
Jan/Feb. 2013	Wrote and acted in *Every Letter Counts*, an autobiographical play about her uncle, at Factory Theatre (dir. Nigel Shawn Williams)*
Feb. 2013	Aquino and Williams officially become co-artistic directors of Factory Theatre
Mar. 2013	Directed *Ching Chong Chinaman* by Lauren Yee for fun-Gen Asian Canadian Theatre Company
Apr. 2013	Directed *carried away on the crest of a wave* by David Yee for Tarragon Theatre
June 2013	Directed *Sister Mary's a Dyke?!* by Flerida Pena for Cahoots Theatre[821]
Mar. 2014	Directed *The Wanderers* by Kawa Ada for Buddies in Bad Times Theatre Company[822]

[817] Called "a preachy Mean Girls for the preteen set" by J. Kelly Nestruck, "A one-girl assault on social bullying," *Globe and Mail*, 16 October 2010, R 18.

[818] *Brown Balls* looks at stereotypes of Asian men in Western popular culture.

[819] Aquino's husband Richard Lee also won for *paperSERIES*'s sound design.

[820] This play is about a Canadian volunteer at a Liberian refugee camp who is held hostage and tortured for simply being a representative of Western culture. It also raises the issue of African boy soldiers, although the play itself was accused of being "heavy-handed" (Martin Morrow, *Globe and Mail*, "Kony and the birth of a new stereotype: The Ugly Canadian," 29 March 2012, R4).

[821] *Sister Mary* is a solo show about a young girl of color discovering her lesbian sexuality within the confines of a Catholic high school.

[822] According to the Buddies in Bad Times website, "a father and son escape the horrors of war in Afghanistan, only to be haunted by a mysterious presence that awakens the forces of devastation they thought they had left behind. In *The Wanderers*, Kawa Ada offers a rare Afghan-Canadian perspective on how the war in his homeland continues to ravage even those who now call Canada home."

APPENDIX G: JILLIAN KEILEY – TIMELINE OF SELECTED WORKS AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Aug. 1971	Born in St. John's, Newfoundland to Mary and Peter Keiley
Fall 1990	Attended York University
Summer 1991	Assistant Directed *Two Gentlemen of Verona* for MUN
Summer 1992	Assistant Directed *Romeo and Juliet* for MUN
Summer 1993	Assistant Directed *As You Like It* for MUN
Summer 1994	Assistant Directed *Much Ado About Nothing* for MUN
1993-1994	Wrote *In Your Dreams, Freud*
1994	Graduated with BFA from York University
	Returned to St. John's, Newfoundland
	Joined staff of Resource Centre for the Arts (RCA) as artistic associate and assistant animateur (on staff until 1999)
	Directed first production of *In Your Dreams, Freud*, and cast Robert Chafe, who became a longtime collaborator
1995	Directed *Julius Caesar* (modern-dress, gender blind)
1995	Founded Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland
1996	Awarded NLAC (Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council) Emerging Artist Award[823]
	Directed *The Cheat* (first production using Kalideography) at St. John's Sound Symposium

823 This award "recognizes new and undisputed talent…awarded to an emerging artist, group, or arts organization that has earned significant recognition for a piece of work or a generally out-sized impact on the scene." (NLAC.ca website) Chafe won the award in 1998.

Feb. 1997	Directed *Under Wraps* by Robert Chafe (18 person ensemble under large sheet – toured to Halifax, Calgary, Banff, Vancouver; solidified use of Kalideography)
1997	Named Artist to Watch, awarded John Hirsch Prize for Emerging Directors by Canada Council
July 1998	Directed *Midsummer Night's Dream* in black light in Bell Island's iron ore mine as part of The Place of First Light Festival
Oct. 1998	Directed *Empty Girl* by Robert Chafe (which featured actors mirroring other actors as live shadows/silhouettes on stage)
1998	Directed *Jesus Christ Superstar* (which featured multi-color smocks and Kalideography moments in which the colors "click" into a stained glass window visual image)
Feb. 1999	*Under Wraps: A Spoke Opera* (dir. Keiley) tours to Halifax
Jan. 2000	*Under Wraps: A Spoke Opera* (dir. Keiley) tours to Calgary's High Performance Rodeo, Vancouver's The Cultch & Whitehorse
May 2000	Directed *SchumannBrahmSchumann* by Barbara Nickel (performed in a maze)
July 2000	Directed *Signals*, an experimental multidisciplinary project by Robert Chafe, Petrina Bromley, and Keiley that looks at incorporating unrehearsed actors into a choreographed performance
Aug. 2001	Directed *Emoticons*, a piece about the differences between opera and Morse code (inspired by Verdi's *La Traviata*)
Dec. 2001	Directed *Hard Light*, adaptation of short stories by Newfoundland writer Michael Crummey (benefit at LSPU Hall)
2002	Directed *Chekhov Variations* (which re-imagines *The Seagull* to investigate music in language & each of 4 characters represented by instrument: Trigorin – bass; Irena – viola; Nina – violin; Treplev – cello)
2002	Directed *Tempting Providence* by Robert Chafe (produced by Theatre Newfoundland Labrador)

2002	Directed *Jack Five Oh* for Sheila's Bush, a theatre company in Newfoundland
Feb. 2002	Co-wrote & directed *Icycle* with Petrina Bromley (performed in Yukon in Feb. and St. John's in March)
June 2004	*Tempting Providence* by Robert Chafe (dir. Keiley) performs at Ottawa's National Arts Centre
Aug. 2004	Directed *Jack Five Oh* based on Newfoundland folktales
Nov 2004	Awarded Siminovitch Prize
Dec. 2004	Directed *The Pope and Princess Di* (about breast cancer issues)
	Tempting Providence (dir. Keiley) performs at Globe Theater in Regina, Saskatchewan
2005	Directed *Fear of Flight* debut, using student actors from Sir Wildfred Grenfell College and incorporating monologues from multiple Canadian playwrights on the themes of fear and flying
Oct. 2005	Directed *Sailor Boy* (one man show about author's stint in US Navy) in Calgary with Ghost River Theatre & Old Trout Puppet Workshop
2006	Awarded Betty Mitchell Award for Directing (*Sailor Boy*)[824]
Oct. 2006	Directed *Tilt* at Teatro Sotterraneo in Florence, Italy[825]
Nov. 2006	Co-directed *Director's Cut* (about the film industry in Canada) with Jim Millan at Crow's Theatre
Apr. 2007	Directed *Belly up* by Robert Chafe (idea conceived in 2001, video created in 2003, performed in Montreal in Feb. 2007, return to St John's in April 2007), one man show
July 2007	Directed *Ann and Sheamus*, chamber opera for children, at NAC

[824] Betty Mitchell Awards celebrate outstanding achievement in the Calgary professional theatre scene each season.

[825] This directing venture was part of a festival held in Florence, the Teatro della Limonaia, which considers the work of a particular city and then brings in top artists from that city Interestingly, in this year, it was focused on Toronto, but Newfoundlander Jillian Keiley was also brought on to represent more broadly English-Canadian theatre.

Fall 2007	Directed *Orpehus* at Cork Opera House in Ireland
Nov. 2007	Winnipeg debut of *Tempting Providence* (dir. Keiley)
2008	Guest directed *Metamorphoses* at Theatre @ York (University)
Jan. 2009	*Tempting Providence* (dir. Keiley) performed in Ottawa at Great Canadian Theatre Company
Apr. 2009	Directed *AfterImage* adapted by Robert Chafe at Harbourfront in Toronto (Artistic Fraud production)
May 2009	Directed *Fear of Flight,* performed at Factory Theatre
	Directed *Creon* at Memorial University's Sir Wilfred Grenfell College
June 2009	Awarded honorary doctorate from Memorial University
2009	Married partner, Don Ellis
Nov. 2009	*Tempting Providence* named best professional production in Ottawa's Capital Critics Circle Awards
Dec. 2009	Directed *Cabaret* at National Theatre School in Montreal
Jan. 2010	Named one of the Top 10 Canadian Theatre Artists of 2009 by John Kaplan of Toronto's *NOW* Magazine[826]
Feb. 2010	*Fear of Flight* (dir. Keiley) at The Cultch in Vancouver (part of the Vancouver Cultural Olympiad)
Mar. 2010	Directed *The Syringa Tree* by Pamela Gien at the Globe Theater in Regina (a one woman show about white girl growing up in South Africa surrounded by apartheid)
	Directed *AfterImage* (a production involving current on walls and floor and actors as conduits)
Nov. 2010	Directed *HONK!* At The Globe Theater in Regina, Saskatchewan (actors sang, danced and played instruments)

[826] Kaplan bemoaned the fact that Keiley rarely directed in Toronto but cited the "kinetic energy she draws from scripts and actors" as one of her great skills in addition to her striking visual compositions on stage.

Apr. 2011	Directed *Pox* by Gai Anderson at Tasmanian Theatre Company (about Lady Montague who pioneered vaccination in children against smallpox, Keiley used shadow puppets)
July 2011	Gave birth to daughter, Josie
Mar. 2012	Named in-coming artistic director of the English Theatre wing of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, replacing Peter Hinton[827]
Apr. 2012	Directed *Oil and Water* by Robert Chafe at Factory Theatre in Toronto (Artistic Fraud production, about Newfoundlanders who rescue an African-American man from an oil tanker wreck)
June 2012	*Oil and Water* by Robert Chafe (dir. Keiley) at Magnetic North Festival in Calgary (same time as NLA's *Paper Series* by David Yee)
Aug. 2012	Directed *Tartuffe* by Moliere, adapted ("Newfoundland style") by and starring Andy Jones
Jan/Feb. 2013	Directed *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman at NAC, Keiley's debut production as the artistic director of the NAC
May 2013	Directed re-staging/revision of *Under Wraps*, performed at LPSU Hall in St. John's in collaboration with National Arts Centre
Oct/Nov. 2013	Directed *Tartuffe* adapted by Andy Jones at NAC in Ottawa
May 2014	Directed re-staging of Artistic Fraud's *Oil and Water* by Robert Chafe, performed at NAC

[827] Peter Coates of Ontario's Blyth Festival also became the new artistic director of Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa – a proverbial sea of change in the Ottawa theatre scene.

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VITA

Originally from northern Minnesota, 17 miles south of the Canadian border, Emily Rollie received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Saint Olaf College, and spent several years teaching high school English and drama in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area. In 2006, she received her Master of Arts degree in Theatre Production with an emphasis on directing from Central Washington University. At Central, she directed many new plays as part of the annual student-run new play festival as well as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* which toured throughout the state and for which Emily was awarded a certificate of merit in directing from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. A dedicated artist-scholar, her research focuses on directing, feminist and women's theatre, and contemporary Canadian theatre, and her work has been published in *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Theatre Annual*, and *Theatre Survey*.

Emily is also a working theatre artist and director. She has acted and directed for theatres around the country, including Tacoma Actors Guild, Broadway Center for the Performing Arts, Tacoma Little Theatre, Paradise Theatre, Theatre Reaching Young People in Schools, and others. Since 2010, she has served as the artistic director for Independent Actors Theatre, a purposefully nomadic theatre company dedicated to performing new, cutting edge plays in non-traditional, site-specific, and site-suggestive venues. She also served as the associate director for the Troubling Violence Performance Project, a troupe that inspires communication surrounding issues of domestic and intimate partner violence through performance.