

# Reporting from the Post-Margins

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## Goals and Objectives

“Postmarginal: Cultural Diversity as Theatrical Practice” consisted of a professional development workshop with actors and directors, and a public symposium, “Beyond Representation” organized by Modern Times Stage Company in April 2017. The titles, “Postmarginal” and “Beyond Representation,” were always aspirational. They were intended, not to describe a current state, but to move beyond what the organizers saw as a current stasis in the practices and discourses of cultural diversity on Canadian stages. The company hoped to move towards the creation of a rehearsal space in which artists could challenge the boundaries and silos of theatrical practice. The perhaps overworked phrase “culturally diverse” was interpreted broadly, to include Indigenous and immigrant communities, communities of colour, audible minority communities, transgender and gender-fluid communities, and Deaf and disabled-identified communities.

The organizers saw the workshop and symposium as opportunities to move the discussion of diversity in the theatre forward, to start asking new questions, and to begin to initiate new practices. Over the last decade or more there have been seemingly endless panels, discussions, online debates, and other fora on diversity in Canadian theatre. During this time there have been many flashpoints—accusations, usually justified, about the lack of representation of “minoritized,” including racialized groups on our main stages, and uneven efforts to redress

these issues; debacles around white-washing, cross-cultural casting and questions of cultural “authenticity;” inquiries and issues around the representation of gender and sexuality on Canadian stages, boards of directors, artistic directorates, and critical complements; emerging interventions around the so-called accommodation and representation of disabled-identified communities; and discussions of the relative value of culturally *specific* work—where the creative team has no need to explain itself to others, particularly those from the dominant culture—as opposed to *cross-cultural* or *intercultural* work, involving complex and often difficult or painful negotiations across various kinds of difference.

Much of this discussion has been grounded in issues concerning casting, with the ownership of identity positions, and with racist stereotypes, tokenism, and creative control. In proposing the title of the symposium, “Beyond Representation,” the organizers wanted to move beyond discussions that seemed to have become stagnated or deadlocked, and to start with the simple assumption that diversity is a Good Thing. As the symposium’s keynote speaker, Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, puts it in her 2011 article in *Canadian Theatre Review*, “Let’s save some time: diversity is good. We should have some. Next time we talk, can we continue the conversation from there instead of starting from scratch every time?”

We wanted to continue the conversation by asking not whether, but *how* diversity might be practiced in the creation process in studios and rehearsal halls in Canada. We wanted, that is, to move “beyond representation,” beyond questions about who represented whom on Canadian stages, and beyond questions having to do with stereotypes, authenticity, and ownership—important as these questions remain—to ask *what it might mean*, in Canadian rehearsal halls, simply to *practice* rather than tolerate or even encourage difference.

What we hoped to arrive at was a deepened understanding of the work that is happening in studios and rehearsal halls when the question of cultural identity is taken as a practice, what people do rather than who they are; when the “markers” of identity are not taken as barriers (according to the dictates of Euro-American theatrical traditions) but as the very basis of the creative process. We hoped to advance a more precise theatrical vocabulary that could be taken up in training, educational, and professional contexts alike; a vocabulary that centralizes this work and takes stock of its status as a “postmarginal” practice, which continues to transform the Canadian theatrical landscape. New vocabularies that issue from the work, from processes and practices, are critical if we hope to move the conversation beyond the discourse of inclusionism and tolerance toward an articulation of what is possible in the studio. The objectives of *Postmarginal*, in short, were to provide participants with viable, hands-on strategies for how to *do the work* of diversity, broadly understood, as a practice. The objectives of this report are to assess how successfully the event did so, and to try to put these vocabularies and strategies into wider circulation.

## **Workshop**

The “Subject and Creation: The Intercultural Rehearsal Hall” workshop, led by Modern Times Artistic Director Soheil Parsa and Montreal-based accent coach Kent Waters, was held at Artscape Youngplace and Aluna Theatre Studio, April 1, 2, 8, and 9 from 10am to 2pm. Two directors (Roshan Ahmadvand and Aaron Jan), and seven actors from various cultural communities (Simon Casanova, Adriana Lavinia Salinas Díaz, Roshanak Jaber, Ahmed Salah

Moneka, Azeem Nanthoo, Melanie Santos, and Peter Van Wart), explored how their different cultural backgrounds could be a source of inspiration in rehearsal. Focusing on a single text, participants explored some of the ways in which their cultural differences—including “non-standard” accents—could be treated, not as obstacles, but as productive tools in rehearsal halls exploring intrinsic spatial, emotional, and corporeal approaches to work with text. Shelley Liebembuk and Maxime Robin observed and documented the process.

Parsa began the workshop with some opening remarks about diversity and how it inspires him to draw on the ethnic-cultural background of performers in the creative process, moving past the conception that ethnic-cultural identity markers are somehow a barrier to work in Canadian theatre. Parsa explained the choice of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* as the working text for the workshop based on a shared familiarity with the play among participants and its dramaturgy, comprised of a series of scenes in which the characters and situations are seemingly “stateless.” The structure of the workshop would be comprised of a series of one-and-a-half hour sessions in which Ahmadvand and Jan would alternate as directors, trying different methodologies with the seven actors as Parsa offered side-coaching.

During these sessions, the following methodologies, strategies, and discoveries emerged as directors worked with the premise that a diverse group of actors with different native languages and ethnic-cultural backgrounds was an asset to the creative process rather than an impediment:

- *Lead with physical improvisations and allow the text to follow*

Ahmadvand began with flocking exercises (in which a group of actors mirror the controlled movement of successive leaders, moving as one), in order to establish attention and focus on collective, non-verbal movement. He encouraged a shift in attention to individualized gestures and physicality allowing that to evolve the collective movement, requiring, in turn, a double-focus on the group and the individual. Improvisations based on group “clumping” and individual points of departure allowed the actors to gradually release inhibitions and work together playfully. An actor introduced melody, layering in elements of choral song and call-and-response to the physical improvisations.

Ahmadvand then began to introduce circumstances that very loosely held thematic ties to the text: a search for something, watching and waiting. He then encouraged the actors to introduce excerpts from the text – lines, phrases, words. From the side, Parsa emphasized that actors should speak in any language they chose but to make the intentions and gestures very clear; actors were to proceed as though they understood each other. Moments of discovery—and comedy—emerged from these efforts to communicate across linguistic differences and from the surprising points of shared understanding they reached. In the efforts to make intentions clear, a new gestural and relational vocabulary emerged that offered the director a rich array of compositional possibilities to tell the story of the play. Gestural intentionality became the basis of understanding among the actors speaking in different languages. Parsa observes that clarity of speech increases with clarity of intention: accents are not an obstacle when actors are clear about their thoughts, and know what they are saying.

- *Focus on the spaces between the text and what is unsaid*

Jan began with a discussion of the text but asked the actors for their thoughts on what is unsaid in the text. Actors identified the unspoken preoccupations of the characters, the implied repetitions in actions, gestures, and behaviours; the shadows of loneliness and need for companionship; the lingering threat of violence. Jan then guided the actors through a reading of the text in the round, facing each other. They placed their attention on the echo-effect and reverberations of words differently spoken in the mouths of each actor even as they spoke collectively. The effect amplified the absurdity of the text as a single speaker and auditor was diffused into the many.

Jan then asked the actors to find a space in the room where they felt the most vulnerable and to speak the text placing an emphasis on the silences. Actors were encouraged to read the text with the silences—emphasized by an observer in the room reading out the stage directions for [*silence*—and were instructed to take as long as they wanted, moving beyond the impatience, self-consciousness, or discomfort of “taking too long.” The actors then began a physical exploration of the silence in the space, of “the dead around the text,” making it alive by examining the unspoken. Actors were asked to articulate this unspoken in the form of a repeatable movement, then a second movement, then a third, creating a sequence. Jan then guided them through a fluctuating scale of intention and gestures, moving from 100% to a gradual diminishment by percentages.

The movement sequences were then brought into a circle, which the actors moved across or invaded, retracting in their collisions with each other or finding different ways of using their gestures in their encounters with another. Parsa remarked on the physical motifs emerging from this exercise that could come and go in performance as a means of conveying the ways in which the characters struggle with the circumstances of the play.

- *Allow linguistic differences and the efforts to communicate to be a creative point of departure.*

Working from physical improvisations and weaving into them text in their native languages (Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, Swahili) and English, the actors used elements of repetition in the play as sites where characters were seeking clarification in pronunciation, or trying to make themselves understood. Inadvertently, the “accent problem” became a source of comedy here, as the characters shared their individualized ways of pronouncing and articulating words. This playful interchange between *how* one speaks and how that speech becomes attached to repeated physical gestures and movement sequences elicited the musicality and rhythm of the lines, a key aspect of Beckett’s writing. In the efforts to communicate and make themselves understood through physical gesture and sonic play, language and communication became abstracted, conceptual and, in turn, the working material for new aesthetic possibilities with respect to composition, stage images, blocking, and kinesthetic relationships.

This abstracted communication would be interrupted, now and again, by a “stock gesture,” such as a thumbs-up, which became very comedic by virtue not only of how literal it seemed in contrast to the conceptual language emerging; in this context, these seemingly universal gestures became very unstable, a reminder of the vastly different meanings they can carry in different

cultural contexts. In this movement between the literal and the abstracted, Ahmadvand would clap his hands and call out a cultural “mode” or style in which the actors would have to improvise, such as Italian opera or Bollywood, and with another clap of the hand, drop it. In these moments of inhabiting a cultural “style,” actors would rely on gibberish and movement. The idea here is not to recreate the cultural form in an exacting or specific way, but to use it as an “ecstatic tool” to introduce unexpected frames and create new physical vocabularies. Such an exercise raises a host of questions about how to introduce specific cultural traditions and ceremonial practices without cultural appropriation. It further asks how new physical vocabularies might emerge from a practice of drawing on but not actually staging specific cultural practices. At bottom, the risks and explorations undertaken in these sessions sought to use the markers of linguistic and cultural difference as creative elements to retain rather than diminish or erase altogether. The corporeal experience of distinct cultural practices, in these exercises and within the context of an exploratory and safe intercultural space, becomes the means of unearthing new vocabularies rather than reproducing “traditional” forms.

### Accent Work

Kent Waters led actors through an accent workshop for English-language theatre that includes culturally diverse actors whose native language is not English. For Waters, the emphasis lies in intelligibility and comprehension: “What needs to be fixed for comprehension?” We don’t, Water says, want to lose intelligibility. Waters typically works one-on-one with actors in one-hour tutorials that focus on key issues. Actors then train on their own for a few weeks to make the strategies and techniques more visceral.

Waters led the actors through a way of thinking about language in terms of segmental units—comprised of consonant and vowel sounds—and rhythmic elements. What is the music of English and how does this music change in different geographical areas where English is spoken? Waters then introduced the concept of the “prosody pyramid,” which has actors break speech into short thought-groups that then identifies one focus word, which has a stressed syllable and, within that word, a peak vowel. This approach to language as a prosody pyramid offers a way of increasing comprehension and intelligibility – an approach that can be seen as complementary to Parsa’s emphasis on clarity of intention: as Parsa observed, “accents are not an obstacle when actors know what they are saying.” Waters encouraged actors to work with specific words and phrases from scenes and how to intone them. Word stress, and changes in tone, can help to convey intention clearly.

## **Symposium**

### ***Keynote***

The “Beyond Representation” symposium kicked off on Sunday evening, April 9<sup>th</sup> with an opening reception and a stirring keynote by emcee, playwright, agitator, administrator, mentor and editor Donna-Michelle St. Bernard. St. Bernard addressed those who want, for whatever reason (and she outlined several possible reasons) to evolve an inclusive and culturally diverse theatrical practice, bracketing off those who wished to do so for purely commercial or cynical reasons, and being careful to define “culture” to include “ethnic, deaf, queer, hip-hop, weird circus folk,” and all manner of other cultural formations. She was clear that there are no firm or singular best practices—“there are no rules”—but she nevertheless laid out some explicit

personal guidelines, while encouraging everyone to develop and grow their own practices in an ever-evolving terrain.

- *How would it shape your practice if you were centre of the universe?*

Beginning with the maxim that “people get better when they understand that they’re valuable,” she encouraged everyone to consider how it would shape their practice if they were, or weren’t, the centre of the universe, the standard by which everything else is judged. What opportunities and responsibilities would those positions entail? “I would have to know that I am not the most oppressed person in the room,” she said. “If I were at the centre, I’d have to turn around and see who’s standing behind me.” “I would have to know who is embattled *because of me*.”

- *Accept that a symbol does not need your permission to have meaning.*

Addressing symbols, images, and cultural formations she urged us not to assume, as creators, that ours mean the same for everyone, and not to imagine that we can restrict or control the meaning of an image. “Accept that a [cultural] symbol does not need your permission to have meaning,” she contended. “You can’t restrict its meaning.” “What if the things you assumed to be understood by everyone just weren’t?” But she also addressed the other side of this question, speaking as an audience member: “If I don’t know what [your symbols and images] mean, that’s on me. It’s not your job to teach me. If you see it as your job to translate your stuff to ‘normal’ people you are alienating yourself from yourself.” What makes working across cultural difference both productive and challenging, then, is that “Your experience of the world is not my experience of the world,” and meaning is up for grabs (or negotiation). “Don’t say, ‘no, that’s not what that means.’”

- *Do not ask people to perform their authenticity or to speak for their community*

St. Bernard also addressed the vexed question of authenticity, or more precisely the demand that people *perform* their authenticity. “The performance of authenticity is more common than authenticity,” she said. “And the performance of authenticity is the act of stepping into what is expected. It is crushing, and you should never do it.” Related to this question, moreover, is the question of performances as representatives of singular identities: “Sometimes because we are broken up into our pieces and asked to stand for one or another part of ourselves [speaking as a woman, speaking as a person of colour, speaking as a member of the queer community, and so on] we forget that we are our whole selves at all times, that our adjectives are not interchangeable, they are constantly cumulative.” And no one individual should be required to speak for, or represent, a community.

- *Ask “who is or isn’t in the work? Am I being fair to those least like me?”*

St. Bernard outlined the questions that she asks of her own practice: “what the hell’s going on here, and what’s that have to do with me?” (in that order). “Where are you in the work? Where am I? Who isn’t here?” As a playwright and creator of characters she further asks, “who of these characters is least like me? Have I been unkind, or unfair, or have I made assumptions?” “[I] have caused these people to exist. For what?”

- *Accept the criticism, fix your mistakes, and try to do better.*

As a theatre-maker speaking to other theatre-makers, St. Bernard spoke anecdotally out of her own practice, with every story, she said, being a story about her own imperfection. She did not hesitate to discuss the difficulties of cross-cultural practice, and indeed focused much of her attention on the ways in which working this way frequently incurs wrath, backlash, and criticism. But perhaps her strongest message was that this feedback needs to be taken as productive, and as a reason to move forward, try again, and fail more productively. “Sit there and take it, then fix it and do better.” “To try once and fail is not enough,” she urged. “We each need to take a role in advancing our community’s collective practice. Let’s be bold, but let’s also look over our shoulder to see who’s behind us, with the understanding that we may not be the authority in this particular situation.” “Be bold, and make mistakes, but never be careless. I shouldn’t take risks for you,” she argued.

- *You can’t get permission from a culture, but you have to ask. Everything is a negotiation.*

And she admonished, crucially, addressing the issue of cultural appropriation directly, that “it is not possible to get permission from a culture, [but] that said, you still have to ask.” “Everything is a collaboration, everything is a negotiation, everything is an accommodation. [And] for every accommodation I have received, I feel compelled to look over my shoulder and see what I can offer.”

## ***Directing Across Difference***

This panel, chaired by Jivesh Parasram, was concerned with “practicing difference,” exploring techniques for how directors working with actors, dramaturges, and designers can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the presence of people of different cultures, abilities, backgrounds, training, and traditions in the rehearsal hall and studio, and in performance. The panelists were Jill Carter, Karin Randoja, Guillermo Verdecchia, and Soheil Parsa, a last-minute substitute for Ravi Jain, who was unable to attend, but sent in comments.

### Diversity, Difference, Dissonance

The panel began with Parasram, parsing the etymology and meanings of the term “difference,” considering its resonances with setting apart, distinguishing one thing from another, and its resonances with dissonance, which led some of the panelists to reflect on the encouragement, discouragement, or management of difference, conflict, and competing cosmologies in the rehearsal hall. Verdecchia insisted on the difference between diversity and difference, the former being about our so-called “togetherness,” and the presence of a fundamental sameness across differences that are seen as interesting, but not essential. Difference, however, he saw as working across difficulty and encountering those productive places where we *don’t* see one another as fundamentally the same, where disjunction, dissonance, and disagreement are valued. Randoja, on the other hand, agreeing that “we are all equally different,” asserted that, more importantly for her, “we are all equally the same.” “Diversity and difference are wonderful, and can teach and illuminate so much,” she argued. “But they should never set us apart.”

- *Be open and share. It doesn't have to be about conflict*

Parasram pushed the discussion toward those moments in rehearsals when decisions must be made about what to do with the presence of different ideologies or cosmologies in the room, and, more specifically, what to do when these issue in conflict. Parsa argued that he welcomes such moments, moments when one's assumptions are challenged. "As long," he said, "as it's about the work. Not individual egos." Carter agreed: "I find it interesting to hear all the conflicting world views," she argued, citing conflicting European and Indigenous creation stories. "We don't have to fight about the truth; all creation stories touch upon the truth of human genesis and meaning, and more importantly, in light of this discussion, all creation stories are valuable because they communicate a profound truth about their adherents. It doesn't have to be about conflict. We're open and we share. We don't have to be afraid."

- *Defer to people who know more than you do*

Verdecchia, discussing his production of Sunil Kuruvilla's *Rice Boy*, talked about deferring to those in the company with greater knowledge of the cultural context or, in the case of *Rice Boy*, even to a cultural consultant. "I'd defer to people who know better than I do, which seems the only sensible thing to do." He also talked about his current project of writing an adaptation of *The Conference of the Birds*, by Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar. "I'm working across radically different worldviews," he said: his own "secular, European, materialist, skeptical" one, as opposed to the mystical Sufi poem that is his source, and that works towards the annihilation of the soul in God. "I can do that," he says, "because I'm working closely with Soheil [Parsa] and because for years my Persian, Sufi friends have been teaching me about Sufism." Nevertheless, he says, pointing to the limits of incorporative interculturalism, "the piece will fall inside a western theatre tradition."

- *If there's conflict, show it*

An audience member asked how much of the conflict, negotiation, and tension that might occur during the process is shown to the audience, to which all of the respondent's replied, with Randoja, "if there's conflict, show it." She used the example of *This is the Point*, on which she worked with playwright/performer Tony Diamanti, who himself contributed to the discussion. Diamanti, who has cerebral palsy, has limited movement and is non-verbal, and Randoja attributed to this the fact that "the regular theatre timing wasn't there, but something else more interesting was happening." Parasram pushed this towards actually looking for and encouraging difference within the community that the theatre serves, noting that there's often more diversity than is generally acknowledged, while Verdecchia tied the discussion to the value of productively not meeting audience expectations for closure, or conflict resolution.

- *Implicate the audience*

Randoja extended this to the also productive practice of *implicating* the audience in the issues and histories that the work deals with, particularly in the case of a show such as Indigenous playwright Cliff Cardinal's *Huff*, which she directed. *Huff*, she suggested, directly addressed its

settler audiences' empathetic wish to be "helpful" as an attitude that is potentially complicit in the colonial project. It refused, that is, to let its audience off the hook.

### The Director's Power

Parasram asked about the problem of power, and how negotiations across difference could happen when power in the rehearsal hall is distributed unequally.

- *You need somebody to stop the discussion*

Parsa acknowledged that, as a director, he is in a position of power insofar as he chooses the piece and drives the vision, and that collaboration happens after that. As Verdecchia says, "we rely on the director for some parameters, but I rely on my collaborators to bring *their* parameters into the room." He promoted a vision of the director as mediator rather than gatekeeper. But given the tendency for negotiation to take the form of endless and sometimes circular talk, all agreed that, as Randoja put it, "you need somebody to stop the discussion." "You are the power that leads, she said, but you are also nothing—just a conduit for the energies in the room." And Carter added that there are times when she is quite comfortable holding the power if she is entrusted with it, but that she is also comfortable with handing power over to people she trusts. Trust is essential, and when there is trust the power relationships, she said, are "fluid."

- *Take down the cartographers*

Parsa suggested that a director's necessary months of pre-rehearsal preparation meant that the director provided the "map" that rehearsal processes used as initial guides, but sometimes discarded. Parsa used mapping metaphorically, to suggest the director's role in providing a sense of direction; Parasram, however, citing the Irish response to early colonization by the English, reminded us that sometimes the best move is to "take down the cartographers" and allow the group to find its own routes and destinations.

### Strategies

Several strategies surfaced over the course of the panel directed at opening the space for negotiations across difference.

- *Plunge yourself into deep time, where conciliation across difference might begin*

One of these had to do with attempting to operate outside of the specificities of time and place. Parsa stated his preference for timelessness and placelessness as mediations across difference because no-one's specificities are at play, and concern for representational consistency is obviated. In a timeless, placeless setting, a Colombian mother can without cognitive friction have an Asian son. What he calls the "myth" of a play occurs in mythical time, outside of the specificities of any single cultural or historical context (which is more appropriate for culturally specific work). Carter seemed to concur, in spite of operating out of a specifically Indigenous (Anishinaabe) position: "I'm obliged to plunge myself into deep time, ceremonial time," she said, "where all times are one and where conciliation across difference might begin."

- *Any kind of cross-cultural work needs to be long, and slow, and patient*

Verdecchia and Carter steered the discussion of time to the material realities of Canadian theatre. “Any kind of cross-cultural work needs to be long, and slow, and patient,” Verdecchia argued, suggesting that arts funders need to consider the fact that working across difference can’t easily be addressed in a 4-week rehearsal process.

- *All the rules have to be set aside to accommodate different bodies*

Carter added other frameworks imposed by granting agencies, rehearsal spaces, accessibility issues, theatre agreements, and funding. Citing working with 90-year-old Guna and Rappahannock actor Gloria Miguel in ways that echoed Randoja on working with artists with disabilities, she argued that all the rules have to be set aside to accommodate different bodies, bodies that can’t access the provided spaces or that can’t be expected to work 8-hour days six days a week for four weeks.

- *Listen, share, be curious, be suspicious of yourself, engage in “deep collaboration”*

Each of the panelists commented in different ways about the need for what Verdecchia called “deep collaboration,” listening, curiosity, and “suspicion of oneself.” Ravi Jain, who had to withdraw from the panel at the last minute, submitted a written piece reflecting on the Greek theatre as “a sound instrument,” and on its tendency to stage women, children, and others; he talked about deep listening, about democracy’s concern with “how you listen”—along with theatre’s concern to make the invisible visible and eliminate the barriers, making sure that everyone has a voice. Randoja concurred. Citing the need for profound curiosity when working across difference, she argued that “my job is to *see*—what, or who, is in front of me, and how I can draw on that.” Carter emphasized the importance of generously sharing our stories—“what our mothers taught us”—as a way of letting one another know who we are. Verdecchia advanced deep collaboration as a way of addressing any director’s limitations in terms of engaging with cultural and theatrical forms with which they are not and can never be sufficiently familiar. He also cautioned that directors need to be deeply suspicious of themselves, their processes, their taken-for-granted. “It is possible,” he argued, “that we’re just repeating the biases that we’ve internalized through our training, our practice, and our culture.”

## ***Beyond Accents***

This panel, chaired by Marjorie Chan, focused on the various languages of the theatre, on translation, on acting with accents, on signing, and on supertitles in order to explore techniques by which linguistic differences (interpreted broadly) can be used as tools for the creation of new theatrical forms. The panelists were Samreem Aziz, Cynthia Ashperger, Julia Lenardon, and Shelley Liebembuk.

Chan began the panel with a series of questions that emerged from her own practice over the years and from each panellist’s position paper shared in advance of the symposium conversation: How should plays that are written in English, but feature characters living in a different country and speaking in a language other than English, handle the dialogue? What are theatre schools

doing to prepare students for a diverse marketplace? What role does “titling”—whether it be surtitling, super-titling, or “dynamic titling,” as designer and Aluna-Theatre’s artistic producer Trevor Schweltnus calls it—have in an increasingly culturally diverse theatre community? What about performers with natural accents? Where is there space in Canadian theatre for works that do not feature English or French at all?

- *Move beyond the myth of “standard pronunciation”*

Ashperger addressed the challenges faced by “audible minorities,” which she defines as “people who speak English with a discernable foreign accent,” and who, she feels, are rarely included in conversations about diversity. These audible “markers” often consign performers to “self-portraiture,” rarely allowing them to perform in roles that do not correspond with their “accented” identity position. Pointing to the ways in which English has become a *lingua franca* the world over, and the cultural plurality of Canada, Ashperger insisted that “standard pronunciation” in English (generally understood as “un-accented speech”) is an abstract phenomenon. Conservative theatrical conventions support the status-quo of standard English pronunciation and sound. How, Ashperger asks, might Canadian theatres engage a multiplicity of English pronunciations that better reflect this reality and its far-reaching socio-political implications?

Accent coach Julia Lenardon complemented this view in her discussion of her work, which emphasizes not “accent reduction” but clarification. Lenardon challenged the view that actors must get rid of their accent, which she feels is an indelible part of who they are; rather, she feels actors must be empowered to embrace their accents. “Clarification” does not refer to a universal notion or standard but is a fluid term based on how the actor speaks. As an example, Lenardon referred to her work with a Moroccan stand-up comedian, whose process of “clarification” constituted a focus on intonation, pitch, and rhythm. Accents, Lenardon insisted, can be empowering rather than restrictive.

- *Explore the spaces between culturally-specific knowledges for creative possibility*

In her discussion of *cas9*, a production that Samreen Aziz, a Deaf artist, performed in, Aziz spoke about the conditions that privilege “hearing theatre” and that often result in repeated instances of cultural appropriation when a hearing actor is chosen for a deaf role. *cas9*, directed by Peter Cockett, was a rare exception: it de-centred “hearing privilege” by integrating Deaf and hearing artists. Aziz noted the importance of changing perceptions about the presence of interpreters. They are not there for the Deaf performers, that is, to make the work accessible to Deaf performers. Rather, interpreters are for people who do not share the same language; they are there for everyone who does not use sign language. Rather than seeing the meeting of hearing and Deaf cultures as an impasse, *cas9* sought ways of bridging that difference. Aziz noted that as a director, Cockett worked as an ally of Deaf culture, and viewed Deafness as a quality rather than a disability. During the rehearsal process, “if something became a barrier or a hindrance,” she added, “it wasn’t about being Deaf or an inability to do something; it was approached as a challenge to the theatre production itself.” When theatres engage in these kinds of approaches, and actively work towards methods of bridging difference with mutual respect, only then, Aziz insisted, will we have a theatre that is open, accessible, and diverse. From the audience, Cockett

reflected on the spaces between culturally-specific knowledges as exciting creative territory. During the rehearsal process for *cas9*, the best work in the show emerged from the debates that arose in those space in between. In Cockett's view, the encounters *between* culturally distinct ways of working are opportunities that open up creative possibilities for the stage.

- *Move beyond language as a problem to language as a possibility and allow moments of "short-circuiting" to give way to new theatrical forms.*

From her position as a dramaturg working in multilingual theatre, Liebembuk shared her interests in theatre for code-switchers, who are constantly moving between languages and cultures. Her work focuses on ways of working that invite performer-creators on the basis of the multiple fluencies, languages, and cultural knowledges they can contribute to the creative process. How, she asks, can we invite other ways for the body to speak? Liebembuk shared her observations documenting the Postmarginal workshop, "Subject and Creation." In her view, the workshop's invitation to actors to engage with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in any language they spoke, in gibberish, and in different physical vocabularies, undermined expectations about the fluencies in which we are working. Liebembuk noted the inevitable moments of short-circuiting in the multilingual rehearsal process, which produce exciting moments of tension that allow a rethinking of theatrical form and offer different ways of working. After a rehearsal process such as this, Liebembuk argued, the playtext could be performed in English, but the final production could integrate the layers of multilingualism and physical vocabularies that have been internalized by performers.

- *Embrace moments of incomprehensibility*

Liebembuk asked how a multilingual theatre might invite audiences to navigate the challenges of comprehension alongside performers. Can we play with comprehension and the inability to understand on stage? When we begin to talk about languages and accents, Liebembuk insisted, we forget about what the theatre space can be: "it's not supposed to be one-to-one, is it? For me, it's far more interesting when it isn't and when it forces me to think in a way I wasn't anticipating, when it forces me to realize what I do understand and what I don't."

In response to an audience member's question about the possibilities of surtitling for a more diverse range of languages on stage, Aziz spoke about *cas9*'s movement between dynamic surtitling and voice-over translation of a signed scene, which shaped the scenographic space in innovative ways. Cockett added that while their goal was to make the show equally accessible to a hearing and to a Deaf audience, their intention was not to make the performance understandable to everyone at every moment: "Everyone was in this position of trying to reach across this language divide to try to understand. In some moments, there was a bombardment of surtitles so that you couldn't possibly understand; at other times, the actors were talking over each other so you could only understand a certain amount of their words. So, we created a certain amount of linguistic confusion in those moments, which represented the gap between cultures." Aziz noted that Deaf people don't have surtitles when they go about their daily lives, go the movies, etc., so to place audiences in spaces of incomprehension was a way of approximating that experience.

- *Don't leave your self at the door*

For Liebembuk, one of the more interesting aspects of multilingual theatre is how it can trouble the “representational expectations” that attend particular cultural positions. Complementing Lenardon’s remarks about empowering actors on the basis of their cultural distinctiveness rather than seeking to eliminate those “accented” features, Liebembuk is not interested in colour-blind casting practices that celebrate diversity but ultimately erase difference. Rather, she is interested in theatre that honours the cultural specificities of what performers bring into the rehearsal process. This way of working breaks from that tradition of “leave your self at the door.” For Aziz, as a culturally Deaf person, ASL is something one embodies from the moment one comes into the world and acquires the language: “There is facial language, there is visual grammar, there are time and tense markers that are shown on the face. These are elements that are embedded in you. We have a different structure in terms of subject, verb, and object. These are elements that determine how a playtext gets translated. An English phrase doesn’t necessarily translate into ASL in a one-to-one relation; one has to keep in mind different cultural experiences.” Chan observed that Aziz’s remarks offered an interesting parallel to the discussion of accents and cultural specificity: as intensely embodied and culturally-specific, it’s not a language from which one could separate oneself, somehow step outside of, or be expected to.

### ***The Critical Difference***

In this session, chaired by Harvey Young, theatre critics and one scholar/practitioner asked “how can theatre critics find inspiration from theatrical practices that emerge from diverse cultures (interpreted broadly)? How can they learn to watch culturally specific and intercultural shows with new eyes, welcoming difference beyond clichés about tolerance, tokenism, representation, and universalism? Have the professional practices of the Euro-American theatre tradition limited our understandings of what ‘good theatre’ is or can be? What is the critical practice of difference?” The panelists were Ric Knowles, Carly Maga, J. Kelly Nestruck, and Glenn Sumi.

- *Educate yourself*

To everyone’s surprise, the session began with three theatre critics, Nestruck (*The Globe and Mail*), Sumi (*Now Magazine*) and Maga (*Toronto Star*) each independently apologizing for reviews that they had written in the past that Nestruck characterized as (culturally) “ignorant.” This led all three to propose various ways of educating oneself. Nestruck talked about the educational role of doing interviews, writing features, and getting to know the companies he was reviewing. He had even gone to the extreme of returning to school to do a part-time Master’s degree to try to fill in gaps in his knowledge.

- *Train yourself to be more open*

He talked about the need to do research about what one is entering into, and to “train yourself to be more open,” believing that artistic choices *are* choices rather than necessarily failures.

- *See what’s being done elsewhere in the world*

Sumi talked about the need to see theatre from other countries in order to learn a certain openness to different performance styles, and to re-examine those things that we take for granted. Nestruck concurred, citing such traditional wisdoms as “show, don’t tell” as being fundamentally Eurocentric and acknowledging that various culturally-specific story-telling traditions can be very powerful in performance. “There are a lot of things I’ve had to unlearn,” he said.

- *Refrain from telling minoritized communities what shows they should be doing*

Panelist Ric Knowles read from Yvette Nolan’s book, *Medicine Shows* about reviews of *Death of a Chief*, the Native Earth Performing Arts adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, in which non-Native reviewers, assuming a knowledge and authority that was not theirs, lectured the company on what shows were or were not relevant to “native issues.”

- *Contextualize appropriately: not all “brown plays” are the same*

Knowles also read from a blog by Marjorie Chan in which she chastised reviewers for reviewing Afghan Canadian Kawa Ada’s epic, imagistic, and episodic work spanning decades and borders, *The Wanderers*, in the context of Ins Choy’s one-room naturalistic family comedy, *Kim’s Convenience*, presumably because they are both “ethnic plays.” “I have a growing concern,” she wrote, “with the ease with which reviewers dismiss a culturally-diverse piece of theatre, seemingly because it didn’t meet their own expectations of what they knew or what they desired to see onstage.... Asking a culturally specific story to be told through a specific lens is asking for that culture to be placed in a box of your own understanding.” The panelists, acknowledging the difficulty of “researching a culture,” nevertheless cited the benefits of getting to know the work and mandates of the presenting companies, developing relationships over time, and paying attention to the materials made available to them as ways of thickening their understanding of the work and the appropriate contexts within which it should be discussed.

- *Be publicly challenged, take it, and learn from it*

Carly Maga talked about the training, development, and mentoring of theatre critics, and also, echoing keynote speaker Donna Michelle St. Bernard, talked about the need to learn from one’s critics: “be publicly challenged, and take it,” she argued. But she also discussed the need to be open to forms and symbols outside of a European tradition, to draw on informed sources.

- *It’s not the company’s responsibility to inform you*

But Maga also argued that it is not the responsibility of the artists or theatre companies to inform critics about what they’re doing: “Don’t assume that it’s not your own responsibility to find stuff out.” The consensus seemed to emerge that the responsibility for learning and disseminating culturally specific knowledges was a shared one among the companies, the media, and the public, one that should rely on a better developed culture of *exchange*.

- *Acknowledge your position and your limitations*

And beyond that, Maga noted, it is the responsibility of critics to acknowledge where they're coming from and what their limitations are. As one audience member argued, "positioning yourself is essential."

- *Promote diversity, don't just report it*

Another audience member asked whether the panelists saw it as their responsibility to *promote* diversity, to the degree, as another said, that "you need to help us diversify our audiences, to get different people to come and see our shows." The reviewers all indicated that, despite the imperatives to see certain "mainstream," rarely wildly diverse shows, they tried to carry out this responsibility to cover shows from all cultures, and as Sumi said, to try also to address the issue through layout, whenever possible featuring people from minoritized communities in order to make their work more visible. Knowles pointed out that the issue was not only about *what* shows they cover, but *how* they cover them. He recounted Jovanni Sy's observation that the Modern Times/Cahoots coproduction of *The Sheep and the Whale* had been widely praised for its diverse casting, but no critic noticed that a concurrent production of Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched* "represented a bold experiment in cross cultural casting" because it cast all white actors to play its exclusively middle-eastern roles. "In other words," Sy argued, "a predominantly 'white' cast portraying Arabs was so 'normal' that it didn't even merit comment."

- *Produce more long-form writing as cultural journalism*

The panelists agreed on the benefits of working beyond the review of a single show, producing features, previews, interviews, and essays that stage discussions of broader topics and move writing about theatre beyond the level of consumer reports into the realm of cultural journalism. The event ended with the wish that theatre, *and writing about theatre*, might thereby take its place as a key site for the negotiation of cultural—including cross-cultural—values.

### ***Intercultural and Activist Theatrical Practice***

As chair Spy Dénomme-Welch indicated, this session took a different form from the others, as four scholars—Yasmine Kandil, Diana Manole, Yana Meerezon, and Harvey Young, presented 20-minute papers, followed by questions and discussion.

#### The Ethics of Applied Theatre

Drawing on her own experience as a participant and an observer, Yasmine Kandil focused on applied theatre which presents the personal stories of non-professionals, usually refugees, immigrants, or victims of trauma. She made a series of concrete recommendations:

- *Place the tellers in powerful positions*
- *Provide the appropriate context for the stories, including information on the author-subjects and where they are coming from*

- *Make sufficient support available for participants (e.g. checking in at the beginning of each day and checking out at the end; making counselling services available)*
- *Define the purpose of the project in advance and outline the steps to be taken, and coordinate these with the participants' needs*
- *Create a safe space (to talk, or pause). Constitute the company as a support network*
- *Make the invisible visible (so that all are aware of what they're talking about)*
- *Raise awareness (letting everyone know that it is a delicate process)*
- *Choose a creative team in culturally appropriate and culturally informed ways*

### Intercultural Translation

Yana Meerzon, recounting her experience of translating Nikolai Gogol's *The Marriage* into English for the purposes of a student's directing project, outlined some principles for what she called "relational translation" across cultures and histories:

- *Translate rhythms, design, and structure rather than words. The rhythm is the relationship between form and content*
- *Recognize the dramatic text, not as a literary object, but as a sound score and a scoring of characters' actions*
- *Keep the original's visceral and somatic potential intact*
- *Recreate the complexities of the original*
- *Engage in translation as a collaborative practice*
- *Find equivalencies in speech and line length, punctuation, and structure*

### Resignifying Multilingualism in Accented Canadian Theatre

Using Nada Humsi's *I Am Dakhel Faraj* as a case study, Diana Manole spoke about untranslated multilingualism on stage, discussing intercultural theatre as a border space. She argued that "foreign," non-standard accents can be a means of simultaneously acknowledging, negotiating, and integrating difference on stage and among audiences, but she preferred, rather, to allow actors to use their untranslated first languages rather than requiring them to speak in accents. Several principles can be abstracted from her analysis of Humsi's work:

- *Do not simply sprinkle untranslated words or phrases from non-dominant languages throughout a predominantly dominant-language show; rather, allow them to carry full and necessary meaning*

- *Rather than asking actors to speak in accented English, have them speak in their untranslated “mother tongue,” including, when applicable, ASL*
- *Displace dominant-culture languages (in this case English) from their superior positions of understanding and control*
- *Allow the visceral nature of untranslated, unaccented speech to have its full affective impact on audiences*
- *Don’t use surtitles*

### ***Gender Fluidity and Theatrical Practice***

This session, chaired by Brendan Healy, was organized as a community discussion by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA), asking how performance award categories might better acknowledge artistic practices that move beyond the gender binaries of “Outstanding Performance-Female” and “Outstanding Performance-Male.” Using Toronto’s Dora Mavor Moore Awards as the conversation starter, panelists Sze-Yang Ade-Lam, Alec Butler, and Gein Wong set out to unpack the practice of gender fluidity and equality beyond issues of representation and identity politics. The symposium organizers’ goal was to ask what new aesthetic and political possibilities are generated for directors, designers, and actors in rehearsal and performance when they treat gender fluidity as a creative opportunity, and how critics and juries might take such opportunities and possibilities into account.

The panel began with an account by trans panelist Ade-Lam of the initial denial of their right to be nominated in both male and female categories at the Dora Mavor Moore Awards. They concluded the statement with this proposal to “white gate keepers”:

- *“I want gender non-conforming people and trans people to be able to register their art in the ways that suit them. I want the art of queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of colour, of varying body types, ability, and class backgrounds to be honoured, awarded, in the way they/we want to be awarded, and I want a commitment to an implementation plan for change.”*

Healy invited the panelists to explore the intersections of gender fluidity, trans, queer, and two-spirit issues in the broader context of racialization, class, culture, and other identity categories, and to propose ways of working that might address the broader, systemic problems of theatrical practice. The processes recommended included:

- *Work from a place of non-hierarchy (Butler)*
- *Never make assumptions based on gender, and create a space that is open to change (Ade-Lam)*

- *Spread out the leadership (Wong)*
- *Switch gender roles (Wong)*
- *Privilege a performer's spirit over their (gendered) physicality (Healy)*

Suggestions emerging from the audience included:

- *Constituting all governing institutions to include representatives of a broadly diverse society*
- *Consider access as a resource*

The session was dominated by heartfelt testimonials to the difficulties encountered by trans, gender-queer, and racialized artists working within a trans-phobic, patriarchal, white-supremacist, and racist culture and industry. Ade-Lam, together with fellow panelists Butler, Wong, and many audience members—perhaps because they had come out for the TAPA community consultation and had not attended earlier sessions at the symposium—focused on the drawbacks of an awards system and larger industry that reified problematic gender binaries and systemic barriers faced by marginalized artists, rather than on gender fluidity as a potentially positive tool in the rehearsal hall and in performance.

## Reflections and Recommendations

Taken as a whole, Postmarginal was a successful first step in discussing and modelling a renewed theatrical practice in which diversity, broadly understood and deeply engaged in studios, rehearsal halls, and theatres, could provide new creative opportunities rather than barriers. But it was only a first step.

The organizers observed an overall gravitational pull towards a familiar dialogue on identity politics throughout the symposium, perhaps most strongly in the panels on theatre criticism and gender fluidity. We believe that there is still room for more productive discussions on the role of these two latter themes in a creative space. How does a critic's fluency in culturally-diverse performance figure in the creation of new spectator-performer relationships that can enable the inclusion of difference? How can gender-fluid performances serve to expose the public to new non-binary interpretations of gender-normalized drama? A more focused and faithful adherence to these guiding questions might elicit a more fecund discussion in future events. Moreover, the session engaging theatre criticism, by attempting to address *criticism* as a practice seemed to move away from the work of *artists* that the rest of the symposium was concerned with, and might have been a topic better saved for its own conference. The session on Gender Fluidity and Theatrical Practice, moreover, suffered from competing agendas: those of the organizers, and those of the partner, TAPA, whose focus was on awards categorization and whose purpose was community consultation. As a result, the session succeeded in airing grievances, but never actually approached the issue of how gender fluidity might be used to provide new creative possibilities and opportunities in the rehearsal hall.

Other reflections follow:

- *In practical terms, how does the practice of cultural difference unfold in the rehearsal room?*

The symposium workshop, led by Soheil Parsa, was a discreet event that took place across two weekends, available only to those who had pre-registered as participants. Based on the responses of symposium participants, it became clear that a tighter integration of the workshop and symposium discussions would have produced a shared language of examples and practical touchstones for those gathered. Alternating between round-table discussions and workshop sessions would have allowed participations to witness—or participate in—first-hand, embodied examples of this practice at work. In future, a movement between practice-based work and roundtable discussions would be a very productive way to advance the conversation.

- *The “elephant in the room:” Realism*

During the question and answer period for the “Beyond Accents” panel, an audience-member raised the question as to why no one had, as yet, addressed the “elephant in the room,” namely, realism, alluding to the ways in which its representational apparatus is, in many ways, responsible for the historical exclusion and marginalization of minoritized and racialized identities.

Addressing the historical problems of realism head-on might have made for a very productive panel subject. But we would proceed cautiously with this subject in future for several reasons: realism has become a common critical target as an aesthetic form that naturalizes the ideological worldview of the white, male, heterosexual subject and estranges those who do not fit into this normative social order. But such critiques risk creating a hierarchy of aesthetic forms between the so-called “mainstream” and conventional versus the radical and avant-garde, leading critics to dismiss “popular” theatre as politically vacuous and sending us on a perennial search for the innovative and the “new.” These theoretical and political hierarchies potentially dismiss the efforts of so-called minoritized and racialized identities who want to participate in and, indeed, feel deservedly the right to participate in realism’s aesthetic terms and who struggle with visibility in “the mainstream.” These critiques also overlook the important critical work of thinkers such as Jill Dolan, Elin Diamond, Roberta Barker and Kim Solga, and Ramón Rivera-Servera, who have, in recent decades, invited us to look closely at realism as a form that is more slippery and unstable than we may think. With these cautions in mind, future discussions about the perils and potentials of realism are certainly worth pursuing.

To what extent, for example, do Canadian audiences already have a predetermined set of expectations of what constitutes a “real” moment as they take their seats before a play begins. If an audience member can suspend disbelief while looking at a kitchen whose walls are obviously created by 4’x8’ flats, why can they not be expected to suspend disbelief while watching a family played by actors with different accents? The audience member will ultimately take the lead from the artists on what to understand as indicators of reality, so we have the power as

artists to allow realism as a representational technology to shift in order to find new ways of representing new Canadian cultural realities.

- *Is it premature to discuss cultural difference as a practice?*

When the discussion of cultural difference regularly turns to questions of representation, casting, authenticity, and inclusion, how to steer participants away from that somewhat “familiar” territory without policing the conversation or forcing it into directions that, for some, might feel premature? To some, initiating conversations about the “practice” of difference in the rehearsal hall may smack of a particular kind of privilege that operates in a naive bubble from the oppressive political regimes that continue to regulate and ostracize those who do not “fit” within the normative status-quo, suggesting that discussions of representation and cultural appropriation remain as urgent as ever. But the shift in attention toward the *practice* of cultural difference does not dismiss the political realities that continue to constrain and shape the work, as Donna-Michelle St. Bernard’s keynote powerfully addressed. As the panel discussions summarized here reveal, panelists moved between a discussion of their artistic practices and the political stakes of those practices. Reflecting on the conversations the symposium generated, the organizers remain hopeful that a shift in attention toward how the work of cultural difference gets done in rehearsal halls and studios offers a path forward from the deadlocked discourse of identity politics. But these new critical directions should not—and cannot—leave the political circumstances that shape those politics at the periphery of our attention.

- *Cultural appropriation vs cultural inspiration*

Part of the current quagmire of discourse and practice around cultural diversity stems from the various understandings of cultural appropriation and what defines its limits, particularly in a creative process. If the postmarginal rehearsal hall explores the space between cultures as a means to find new performance vocabularies, how can we understand and negotiate a code of respect that allows us to function freely as creators in the rehearsal hall, with the understanding that potential conflict or psychological hurt can be addressed in an open conversation, in the same way that physical risk for an actor can be mitigated through certain mutually established “ground rules”. The rehearsal hall is an imaginary world in which the removal of societal masks and taboos is often at the basis of creating interesting and provocative work, and does not imply that the explorations will end up unfiltered or without context in a final product. The actor’s work, moreover, is always appropriative, insofar as it involves assuming the identity of an other. How can this work be engaged in ways that are respectful and humble before difference while still engaging audiences with provocative and unfamiliar forms, ideas, and representations in ways that are neither voyeuristic nor objectifying?

#### Organizational recommendations

The planners also reflected on the organizational lessons learned in staging Postmarginal as an intervention into the practices and discourses of culturally diverse performances. What follows are recommendations based on their experience that might help organizers of future conferences, symposia, and consultations.

- *treat the event as you would a major theatre production, with the appropriate planning and preparation, including technical arrangements and scheduled tech time*
- *make panel chairs fully aware of the objectives of each panel and take a hands-on approach to shape their strategy in the panels*
- *in a discussion of diversity-as-practice, prioritize panels and panelists that will elicit the most information in this regard; i.e. those actively/engaged in such practices*
- *encourage a mix of panelists and attendees from across disciplines, backgrounds, and ages, in part by marketing the event through multiple channels that can reach diverse audiences (e.g. both academic and partner networks and social media promotion)*
- *encourage consistency of format across all panels by communicating with panel chairs as a group as well as individually. If possible, an in-person gathering of all panel chairs to discuss over-riding objectives as a group would be beneficial and promote chair “buy-in”*
- *encourage all chairs and panelists to attend as much of the event as possible, in order to build through-lines and points of reference throughout the conference, with each session building on the sessions that precede it*
- *include a performative element and/or demonstration as an early part of symposium programming as a useful reference point and perspective when discussing diversity-as-practice*
- *when organizing ASL Interpretation, a long lead time (3 months) and realistic budget is necessary. Cahoots Theatre's DATT (Deaf Artists & Theatre's Toolkit is an excellent resource - <http://cahoots.ca/datt/>)*
- *arrange for high-quality video archive of all events, and make them broadly available. When considering sound recording, opt for sensitive area mics to record audience questions and comments as opposed to wireless handheld mics, to allow for an easier and more spontaneous audience interaction.*
- *organize for live tweeting and encourage it from participants throughout the event*
- *keep delegate tickets on sale until the last day before the event to maximize attendance over the duration of the activities*
- *avoid engaging partners in the organization of the event or parts of it that may have conflicting agendas in order not to lose control of your own agenda*

- *keep the agenda focused, in this case, on theatrical practice. Some felt that the inclusion of a panel on the critical practice of difference diverted attention away from the organizers' main focus*

## **APPENDIX A: Symposium Panelists**

### ***Directing Across Difference***

**Jivesh Parasram** (Chair) is a multidisciplinary artist, facilitator, and cultural worker. He is the founding Artistic Producer at Pandemic Theatre ([www.pandemictheatre.ca](http://www.pandemictheatre.ca)), Associate Artistic Producer at Theatre Passe Muraille, and a core member of The Wrecking Ball. He was part of the 2016 Cultural Leaders Lab with the TAC and Banff Centre.

**Jill Carter** (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) is a Toronto-based theatre practitioner and scholar. She has worked as a performer, director, dramaturg, and acting instructor. Currently, she is Assistant Professor with the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies; Indigenous Studies; and the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto.

**Soheil Parsa**, artistic director of Modern Time Stage Company, is an award-winning director, actor, writer, dramaturg, choreographer, and coach whose professional theatre career spans 32 years and two continents.

**Karin Randoja** is a director, actor, teacher, and singer/composer working mostly in devised performance. Award nominations include Dora Awards, The Capital Circle Critic's Award and the Prix Rideau. Her work has been seen in Australia, Denmark, India, Italy, France, England, Japan, and Mozambique. She is also a teacher/director at Humber College.

**Guillermo Verdecchia** is a multiple-award-winning writer, director, dramaturge, and translator. He is currently working on an adaptation of *The Conference of the Birds* with Soheil Parsa.

### ***Beyond Accents***

**Marjorie Chan** (Chair) is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Toronto, working as playwright, librettist, dramaturge, and director. Her works for the stage have been performed in the United States, Scotland, Hong Kong, Russia, and across Canada. Marjorie is Artistic Director of Cahoots Theatre since 2013, where her focus has been on artist incubation and development, community arts access as well as advocacy for a broadening inclusivity in theatre for artists and audiences alike. [www.cahoots.ca](http://www.cahoots.ca)

**Cynthia Ashperger** has worked as a theatre director, writer, actor, and producer for the last thirty years. She teaches Acting at Ryerson School of Performance where she is also the Director of the Acting Program. The question of language and identity is the main theme of her satirical *Tongue Play* with an upcoming production at Parados Festival at Ryerson in June.

**Julia Lenardon** is a professional Voice/Speech/Dialect coach for film/tv and theatre. Theatre: Broadway: voice coach for *Matilda the Musical* at the Shubert Theatre; Off Broadway: English Clarification coach for Gad Elmaleh at Carnegie Hall. Film/TV includes: Dialect coach for *Cardinal*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Brooklyn*, and *On the Road*. Teaching: The American Academy of Dramatic Art, The National Theatre School of Canada, The Banff-Citadel Professional Theatre Program.

**Shelley Liebembuk** is a theatre scholar and dramaturge. She is conducting research on multilingual dramaturgy in Canadian-Latinx performance as a 2017 postdoctoral fellow funded by the Canadian Consortium on Performance and Politics in the Americas. She holds a PhD from the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies.

**Samreen Aziz** is a community artist whose recent acting credits include *MURDER U* for Cream Productions (2014), and Peter Cockett's *CAS9: Redesign a Human*, a probing look into genetic manipulation and the ethical implications of preserving Deaf culture."

## ***The Critical Difference***

**Harvey Young (Chair)** is Chair of the Department of Theatre and Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. His research on the performance and experience of race has been widely published in academic journals, profiled in *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and cited in *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. The former editor of *Theatre Journal*, Harvey has published seven books on theatre and performance.

**Ric Knowles** has worked as a director and dramaturge in Canada for over 30 years, most recently with Modern Times, Factory, Cahoots, the MT Space, the Red Snow Collective/Aluna Theatre, the Chocolate Woman Collective, and Article 11/NAC. Ric is Professor Emeritus of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph and the award-winning author and editor of 20 books on theatre and performance, including *Theatre and Interculturalism*, *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*, *Performing Indigeneity*, and *Performing the Intercultural City*.

**Carly Maga** is a theatre critic for the *Toronto Star*, and has covered Toronto theatre since 2010. She has a Bachelor of Journalism from Ryerson University and a Master of Theatre and Performance Studies from York University. She also serves as a board member for the Canadian Theatre Critics Association.

**J. Kelly Nestruck**, a two-time winner of the Nathan Cohen Award for Excellence in Critical Writing, has been the theatre critic at *The Globe and Mail* since 2008. He has also previously

held positions at the *National Post* and *The Guardian*, and was a guest critic at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* in 2013.

**Glenn Sumi** is Associate Entertainment Editor at *NOW Magazine*, where he assigns, edits and contributes to the film and stage sections. For three years, he was a weekly contributor to CTV News Channel's arts coverage. He's a member of the Toronto Theatre Critics Association and the Toronto Film Critics Association.

## ***Intercultural and Activist Theatrical Practice***

**Spy Dénommé-Welch** (Chair) is a writer, composer, and scholar of mixed Indigenous descent. He is Assistant Professor at Brock University, and has an active research/creative portfolio. He co-created the Dora-nominated opera, *Giiwedin*, and is now completing his second opera with collaborator Catherine Magowan.

**Diana Manole** is a Romanian-Canadian writer, translator, theatre director, and scholar. She has published nine books (poems, short fiction, plays), as well as peer-reviewed articles/chapters on exilic, multicultural, and postcolonial theatre, the performance of national identity, directing, and transcultural adaptation. Her article, "Accented Actors: From Stage to Stages via a Convenience Store" (*Theatre Research in Canada*, 2015), pioneered the study of foreign/immigrant accents in theatre and performance.

**Yana Meerzon** teaches for University of Ottawa, Department of Theatre. Her research interests and publications include theatre of exile and migration; cultural and interdisciplinary studies; and Russian drama and theatre. Her recent publications include *Performing Exile—Performing Self, History/Memory/Performance* and *The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov*.

**Yasmine Kandil** is Assistant Professor at Brock University's Department of Dramatic Arts. Her areas of research are in Theatre for Development with people who are marginalized, the ethics of applied theatre practice, and testimonial theatre in post-revolution Egypt.

**Harvey Young** (see above, under Critical Practice)

## ***Gender Fluidity and Theatrical Practice***

**Brendan Healy** (Chair) is a Toronto-based director. His shows have garnered multiple Dora Mavor Moore Awards and he is a recipient of the Ken McDougall and the Pauline McGibbon awards for directing. Between 2009 and 2015 he was Artistic Director of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Brendan is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, where he is also a regular instructor.

**Sze-Yang Ade-Lam** is a queer asian dancer, martial artist, storyteller and community developer. Sze-Yang shares stories through movement for self love and empowerment, as an independent artist, and as part of ILL NANA/DiverseCity Dance Company. Sze-Yang is committed to

creating more accessible dance education and performance opportunities for communities underrepresented in the arts.

**Alec Butler** is a non-binary activist, awarded the Toronto Community Foundations “Vital Person Award” in 2006 for their leadership in the community. They have presented over 300 workshops as a policy analysis and workshop facilitator with the Trans Access Project at the 519. An award-winning playwright and filmmaker, their play *Black Friday* was a finalist for the Governor General’s Award. Alec is the author of the plays *Shakedown*, *Claposis*, *Medusa Rising*, and two one-person shows, *Hardcore Memories* and *Ruff Paradise*, performing as a “dyke punk iconoclast” in the 1990’s and as a Two-Spirit trans man in 2005.

**Gein Wong** is an interdisciplinary director and artist of First Nations and Asian descent who is Two-Spirited and Queer. She sits on the Board of Directors of the Toronto Arts Council and is a member of the inaugural TAC Cultural Leaders Lab.

## **APPENDIX B: Symposium Organizers and Sponsors**

### SYMPOSIUM CO-CHAIRS

**Natalie Alvarez** is Associate Professor in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock University. Her performance studies scholarship on cultural difference and political performance has been published widely in international journals and essay collections and she is currently at work on three forthcoming books: *Immersions in Cultural Difference: Tourism, War, Performance* (in press; U of Michigan Press); *Theatre & War* (Palgrave Macmillan); and the co-edited collection *Sustainable Tools for Precarious Times: Performance Actions in the Americas* (Palgrave Macmillan).

**Ric Knowles** (see above, under Critical Practice)

### FOR POSTMARGINAL

Producers Sue Balint and Peter Farbridge

ASL Interpreters Kimberly Banks, Anna Lee

Opening and Closing Reception Catering Les Louises, [leslouises.com](http://leslouises.com)

Videographer Juan Pablo Pinto

Volunteers (Theatre Ontario’s Youth Advisory Committee)

Jason Carlos, Lara De Vries, Julia Hunter, Davinder Malhi, Sophie Mercer, Norah Paton, Laura Phillipps, Alex Rand

### FOR THE MODERN TIMES STAGE COMPANY

Artistic Director Soheil Parsa

Co-Artistic Director Peter Farbridge

Head of Administration Gia Nahmens

Director of Development Banafsheh Taherian  
Board of Directors  
President Christine Moynihan  
Treasurer Richard Shimoda  
Members Lili Nabavi, Charles C. Smith, Gale Zoe Garnett

#### SYMPOSIUM PARTNERS

Major Funder  
Canada Council for the Arts

Opening Reception Sponsors  
*Canadian Theatre Review* and *Modern Drama*

Keynote Sponsor  
Canadian Coalition for Performing and Politics and SSHRC

Major Partners  
Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT)  
Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts  
Native Earth Performing Arts  
Theatre Ontario  
Artscape

Partners  
*Theatre Research in Canada (TRIC)*  
Aluna Theatre  
Canadian Actors' Equity Association (CAEA)  
The Graduate Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies (University of Toronto)

Closing Reception Sponsor  
Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario (CPAMO)