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Queer and Now: The Queer Signifier at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

In his 1995 essay, "Theorizing a Queer Theatre: Buddies in Bad Times," Robert Wallace suggests that Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is an "imaginative construction" whose "theatrical subjectivity," like its mandate, is not fixed, but has been constantly evolving since the company began to produce work in 1979 (137). Wallace goes on to argue that Buddies underwent a "literal and figurative reconstruction of [its] theatrical subjectivity" (138) when the company renovated and moved into its current home at the Alexander Street Theatre Project in 1994 and changed its mandate to nominate itself a "queer theatre." Using Wallace's essay as a point of departure, I examine the interim decade at Buddies to chart the shifting meaning of the term queer as it has been employed to define the company's mandate from 1994 to the present.

Dans un article qui remonte à 1995, intitulé « Theorizing a Queer Theatre: Buddies in Bad Times », Robert Wallace fait valoir que Buddies in Bad Times Theatre est une « construction imaginaire » dont la « subjectivité théâtrale », tout comme son mandat, n'est pas fixe mais en constante évolution depuis la fondation de la compagnie en 1979 (137). Selon Wallace, Buddies a connu une « reconfiguration littérale et figurative de sa subjectivité théâtrale » (138) au moment même où la compagnie connaissait une refonte et qu'elle emménageait ses nouveaux locaux au Alexander Street Theatre Project en 1994. En effet, c'est à cette époque qu'elle a revu son mandat et qu'elle s'est imposée comme étiquette celle de « théâtre queer *». En se servant de l'article de Wallace comme point de départ, Halferty jette un regard sur la décennie qui s'est écoulée depuis ces évènements et retrace l'évolution sémantique du terme* queer *tel qu'il a été employé pour définir le mandat de la compagnie [Buddies in Bad Times] depuis 1994.*

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("Theorizing" 137). Wallace goes on to argue that "Buddies" underwent a "literal and figurative reconstruction of [its] theatrical subjectivity" (138) when the company renovated and moved into its current home at the Alexander Street Theatre Project in 1994,[1] and changed its mandate to nominate itself a "queer theatre."[2] Using Wallace's essay as a point of departure, I examine the interim decade at Buddies to chart the shifting meaning of the term queer as it has been employed to define the company's mandate from 1994 to the present. I organize this discussion of the queer signifier at Buddies into three sections. The first, called "Radically Queer," examines queer as it was defined and employed under the artistic directorship of Sky Gilbert from the late 1980s, when the company first started to employ the word queer to describe its "QueerCulture"[3] festival, until 1997, when Gilbert resigned as artistic director. In "Radically Queer," I contextualize the invocation of queer at Buddies as part of the broader resignification of the term and suggest that it was used by the company to critique the stability of "gay," "lesbian," and "straight" identities, as well as the "professional theatre experience" ("Mission Statement"). In the second section, called "Inclusively Queer," I examine what queer meant and how it functioned in the theatre's mandate from 1997 to 2004, under the artistic direction of Sarah Stanley and David Oiye, consecutively.[4] Here I argue that queer was de-radicalized and used as a rubric to interpolate and represent stable constructions of "gay" and "lesbian" identity and "community." In this section I examine some of Buddies's marketing materials and position the discussion of the company's more amicable deployment of queer in terms of the financial pressures that attended its move into the Alexander Street Theatre Project and in terms of the broader demise of radically queer political organizing (that which was focused on critiquing "gay' and "lesbian" identities) in Canada generally. In the third and final section, called "Sexually/Aesthetically Queer," I explore the queer signifier in Buddies's new mandate, which changed in April 2004, under the continued artistic direction of David Oiye and under Artistic Producer, Jim LeFrancois. In this section I argue that the current definition invokes aspects of the two previous mandates: it uses queer as a rhetorical and linguistic strategy to represent stable, but diverse, conceptions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) identity, similar to the mandate from 1997 to 2004; and to articulate an anti-normative aesthetic for the company, a strategy akin to Gilbert's. I contend that Buddies's current bifurcated definition of queer is of interest because it appeals to and

celebrates stable conceptions of marginalized sexual identities, while it also de-sexualizes queer to articulate it as an aesthetic that is "different, outside the mainstream, challenging in both content and form" ("Mandate"). In this section I also outline Buddies's 2004-2005 season, and briefly read three of its performances in relation to the company's new mandate: Daniel MacIvor's *Cul-de-sac*, Darren O'Donnell's *A Suicide-Site Guide to the City*, and Ann Holloway's *Kingstonia Dialect Perverso*.

My purpose in this essay is not to privilege one artistic director's tenure, approach, definition or deployment of queer over another; rather, my aim is to contextualize and then briefly examine the changing signification and deployment of the queer signifier in this particular theatrical context. Underpinning this discussion is a desire to demonstrate how queer's slippery signification continues to enable a wide range of meanings to be negotiated, making it politically and aesthetically valuable on the one hand, and potentially problematic on the other.

Radically Queer

Queer has been used as a term to describe homosexual men since the early part of the twentieth century ("Queer");[5] however, in the mid-to-late-1980s the term began to be redeployed as part of a utopian political project that sought to constitute and position a fluid, sexual subjectivity outside of the "heteronormative" discourses of masculine/feminine gender and homo/heterosexuality. Scholarly engagement with poststructuralist theory during the early 1970s and 1980s set the stage for this re-articulation of queer, as well as its subsequent critique of "straight," "gay," and "lesbian" identity and the discourses that position these subjectivities as stable, "essential," and/or abiding. "The preference for 'queer' [over 'lesbian' or 'gay']," writes Michael Warner, "represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (xxvi). With its seeming ability to side-step the problems of minority-based politics through a more general stance against the normal, queer's allure was far reaching. Artists, activists, and academics alike (and those who are all three), were excited and seduced by the possibilities that queer as a mutable and polysemic signifier could realize for theatre and performance, for scholarship, and for political action and coalition building at the sexual margins. Queer represented a new, broad-based approach to resistance against an array of heteronormative discourses.

In academic and activist circles, queer's mutability seemed to satisfy the difficulties that had been experienced and articulated under the rubric of "identity politics"[6] in the early 1980s, a critique that was most forcefully expressed within feminism and gay liberation by women and men of colour. At this time, and in reaction to concerns about racism, sexism, and the limits of identity, a number of scholars advocated for what was ostensibly a poststructural engagement with sexuality. Steven Seidman, for example, suggested that a "postmodern" "rethinking [of] identity and politics" (106) could facilitate the "creation of social spaces that encourage[d] the proliferation of pleasures, desires, voices, interest, modes of individuation and democratization" (106). According to Seidman, this movement toward a "postmodern rethinking" of identity and politics should be thought of in relation to the evolution of the "left-wing of new social movements," and that its impetus had its "immediate social origin in recent developments in the gay culture" (106).

> In the reaction by people of colour, third-world-identified gays, poor and working class gays, and sex rebels to the ethnic/essentialist model of identity and community that achieved dominance in the lesbian and gay cultures of the 1970s, I locate the social basis for a rethinking of identity and politics. (106)

Through this "rethinking," it was (perhaps naively, perhaps not) hoped that a diverse range of subjects could empower and express themselves and their differences through queerness. As Thomas Yingling suggested:

> This word [queer] works so well because it appropriates a former badge of shame and because it suggests that it is not our business or duty to appear acceptable, that there is something inassimilable in nonheterosexuality and only its queerness—its difference—can define it. (114)

A diverse array of differences, which were silenced within discourses of gay and lesbian liberation and feminism, were to be given voice in and through "queer." In "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," Teresa de Lauretis suggested that "queer theory" represents a way to emphasize the differences implicit in the phrase "lesbian and gay." For de Lauretis, "'Queer theory' conveys a double

emphasis—on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences" (de Lauretis iv). In a similarly positive and deconstructive manner, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cited queer's efficacy in negotiating sexuality, race, and postcolonial nationality:

> […] a lot of the most exciting recent work [being done] around 'queer' spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example. Intellectuals and artists of color whose self-definition includes 'queer'—I think of an Isaac Julien, a Gloria Anzaldúa, a Richard Fung—are using the leverage of 'queer' to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state. (Sedgwick 8-9)

Queer's lack of definitional value positioned it as a method to address and satisfy (at least theoretically) the various problems and complexities that had been experienced in gay and lesbian organizing in the 1970s and 1980s by performing a broad-based deconstruction of identity generally, and sexual identity specifically.

The need to develop theoretical and political strategies and forms of resistance that cut across the "identity-constituting [and] identity-fracturing discourses" of sex, race, class, and gender was augmented by the advent of the AIDS crisis in North America. Thinking of HIV/AIDS on both the somatic level and in relation to the complexities of negotiating identity, Yingling (queerly) suggested "that [AIDS] is itself deeply not-identical, never quite the same, appearing under different guises, none of which is a disguise, following circuitous routes into visibility and action. It is the disease that announces the end of identity" (15). On a more (indeed the most) practical level, the epidemic forced lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and "straights" to work together. In the face of government inaction, AIDS activists were forced to advocate for the diverse populations of gay men, sex workers, intravenous drug users, health workers, and hemophiliacs who had contracted HIV/AIDS, as well as those who were affected indirectly by the disease.[7] In this theoretical, political, social, sexual, and epidemiological context, queer acquired new meaning(s) and was rede-

ployed in a variety of ways by diverse cultural agents towards new and often radical ends.

Buddies first actively employed queer in 1989, when the company reorganized "Four-Play,"[8] its annual festival of plays by two gay men and two lesbians, into the "QueerCulture" festival. Buddies had been describing itself as a company dedicated to the promotion of gay and lesbian theatre since the mid-1980s (Wallace, "Theorizing" 143). Not surprisingly, the company first invoked queer as a means to rally a demonstration of diversity, in both artistic and queer communities, and as a strategy to garner visibility following an instance of rejection. After the 1988 Four-Play festival did not garner funding from the Canada Council (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 143), the company was faced with the dilemma of how to proceed the following year. It decided the best strategy forward was to organize a larger festival, in which Four-Play would be a primary event, and to call it "QueerCulture." QueerCulture was a city-wide festival that included theatre, performance, visual arts, music, dance, whatever "celebrate[d] aspects of queer life" (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 148). It was sponsored by a number of gay and lesbian organizations, including the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, and the Inside Out Collective, which hosts Toronto's annual Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival (Wallace, "Theorizing"144).[9] With QueerCulture, Buddies used queer to make a political statement, exploiting the term's status as a gender-neutral, oppositional, and open-ended signifier under which the company could organize a variety of events, performed by and for diverse communities.

By 1992, Gilbert was employing queer as the primary linguistic signifier to describe the artists and work that Buddies was presenting and producing.[10] In a letter to government funding organizations, Gilbert states: "For a long time I have been searching for a sense of QUEER [*sic*] Theatre which encompasse[s] lesbian and gay issues as well as radical art. I think we are creating this art, and these artists, at Buddies" (qtd. in Wallace, "Theorizing" 147). The progression away from "lesbian and gay" and toward using queer to signify a sexually-radical aesthetic becomes still clearer in Gilbert's "Artistic Director's Message" in the 1993 "QueerCulture Guide," in which he states:

> Let's talk about Queer, *because it doesn't always mean gay or lesbian*. It means sexual, radical, from another culture, non-linear, redefining form as well as content. [...] What has been happening at

> Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in the last two years has been the definition of an aesthetic, as people learn that one doesn't have to be gay or lesbian to get involved, when people learn that queer theatre has as its common denominator a unique relationship with the audience—you come into the theatre assured of who you are and what you believe, but you leave the theatre all shook up. We are not into explaining comfortable, politically correct moral lessons here. We are, in contrast, at Buddies, providing a space and more importantly [an] environment where radical, sexual work can be developed ... If I was a nicer sweeter guy, I'd call Buddies in Bad Times a "lesbian and gay theatre for all people." But I'm not that nice. I'm an orgiastic poet and a drag queen, and I feel compelled to call something queer what it is. (qtd. in Wallace, "Theorizing" 147-48, my emphasis)

Gilbert employed queer to refer to much more than just the sexual fringes; it interpolated other marginalized subjects who, regardless of their sexual orientation or practices, were interested in the development of radical art. He invoked queer as a means to define the company and its aesthetic, in a general sense, against mainstream theatre and culture—which could include parts of the gay and lesbian community. He used queer to represent a "sexual," "radical," and a clearly political aesthetic that did not always speak to issues of lesbian and gay identity or community.

Buddies's adoption of a queer political aesthetic and its rejection of the assimilationist politics of gay and lesbian liberation and liberal feminism reflected the views held by contemporary activist groups such as Queer Nation,[11] which had established chapters in many North American cities, including Toronto.[12] Modeled after the group founded in New York in April 1990, Queer Nation Toronto, founded in the fall of 1990, was a confrontational group of "queer nationals" who organized a number of kiss-ins, rallies, and poster campaigns, with slogans such as "Queers are here, get used to it" and "Gays bash back" (Warner 259). Similar to Queer Nation Toronto, Buddies enacted its own critique of essentialist understandings of sex and sexuality through its oppositional and critical stance against heteronormative discourses, which could include lesbian and gay politics that promoted tolerance and equality through the acquisition of civil rights and by fostering "gay and

lesbian community." As a queer theatre, Buddies was not interested in being a "nice" "gay and lesbian theatre"; rather, it was interested in producing "radical sexual work," regardless of the sexual orientation or gender identification of the people producing that work.[13]

As president of Buddies's Board of Directors from 1986 until 1995,[14] Sue Golding played an important role in the company's queer nomination and practice. Golding's politics were resolutely queer, and during her tenure she encouraged programming and events that were open, participatory, non-exclusive, and sexual.[15] In the summer of 1994, Golding, Gilbert, the Buddies's staff, and Board of Directors gathered to plan for the move into their new space at 12 Alexander Street. According to Gilbert, at this meeting:

> [Sue] made us redefine the mandate of the company. We wanted to make it perfectly clear—and Sue wanted to make sure that we didn't compromise—that [despite moving into the new and more central space] we were still a queer, sexual place, a place where dykes and fags could work and party together. (*Ejaculations* 232)

As Buddies was poised to move into a newly renovated theatre, Golding wanted queer to be the central tenet of the new mandate and to ensure that it was the principal signifier of the company's theatrical subjectivity. Under Golding and Gilbert, Buddies's mandate read:

> Buddies in Bad Times is an artist-run, non-profit, queer theatre company committed to the development of radical new Canadian work. As a pro-sexual company, we celebrate difference, and challenge the professional theatre experience by blurring and reinventing boundaries between: artistic disciplines, performer and audience, lesbian and gay, queer and straight, male and female, good and bad. We do this by: producing new work of artists and companies and providing them with tools, support and independence; producing the work of founding artistic director Sky Gilbert; providing a coherent developmental framework for artists and audiences to explore new work; advancing freedom of expression. ("Mission Statement")

Under this mandate, Buddies's theatrical subjectivity was queer and conspicuously *not* gay and lesbian. I would like to suggest that the company's mandate was queer not only because it called itself "queer," but because it was principally focused on what it *does,* not what it *is,* or *whom* it serves. At this time a queer theoretical/political critique was primarily focused on problems of "being," attempting to simultaneously resist and emphasize the trouble of being by highlighting the performative nature of sex, gender, and identity, and to resist the reification of a stable sexual identity by constantly reinventing and re-positioning itself through discontinuous and subversive acts and utterances. Similarly, in this mandate, queer positions the company as "an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (Barry and Jagose, qtd. in Sullivan 43).

Under Gilbert, Buddies nominated and performed "itself" as a queer theatre through a mandate and dramaturgical approach that focused on fluidity. Gilbert expanded on the tenets of this mandate in a 1996 article in *Canadian Theatre Review* called "Dramaturgy for Radical Theatre." In this article, he positions the theatre against other professional theatre companies by asserting that Buddies is "artist-run" and "queer"—which, in this article, he defines as "pro-sexual," "to make it clear that all pro-sexual people of any sexual persuasion will find Buddies's work provocative"—and that the company does not think art needs to "redeem" or "have a moral purpose" (25-26). Gilbert contends that Buddies is unlike other professional theatre companies because it actively involves its audience and does not rely simply on traditional plot, character, dialogue, and theme to make plays. In contrast, Gilbert argues that the company opens up possibilities by producing plays that are "made of many elements, including plot, theme, character, dialogue, poetry, image, movement, and music" (26).[16] Gilbert also suggests that the company "blurr[ed] and reinvent[ed] boundaries" ("Mission Statement") through its "opportunity[-]without[-]interference" ("Dramaturgy" 25) approach to dramaturgy. This approach to dramaturgy, according to Gilbert, is differentiated by its "festivals of small productions, as opposed to workshops and to readings" ("Dramaturgy" 25). Gilbert argues that this type of approach "is completely responsive, not paternalistic […]. [It] help[s] the playwrights do what they want with their work, [it] help[s] them to refine their vision" ("Dramaturgy" 27). Artist centred, Buddies's dramaturgy included whatever the artists needed to achieve their vision, which resulted in longer development processes, and a dramaturgical process that was either "hands-off" or exercised "in-depth editorial attention"

("Dramaturgy" 27), according to the playwright's desire. Furthermore, this approach was "not afraid of the singularity of vision" and thus "encourag[ed] writer/directors and director/creators" to make their work without the input of others (27). Gilbert thus invokes queer not only in relation to the "pro-sexual" nature of the company, but because of the company's continual reinvention of its artistic approach to facilitate the "development of radical new Canadian work." In its mandate and through its dramaturgical process, Gilbert defined Buddies similarly to the way that David Halperin defines queer: "oppositionally and relationally but not necessarily substantively, not as positivity but as a positionality, not as a thing, but as a resistance to the norm" (66).

Buddies's movement into 12 Alexander Street precipitated a series of pressures that made a confrontational, queer critique of gay and lesbian identity untenable. The most significant—but certainly not the singular—pressure was the financial liability of renovating and running the Alexander Street Theatre Project. Like Toronto's older "alternative theatres,"[17] when Buddies acquired real-estate it was forced to change its challenging, political, and radically queer paradigm into one that amicably marketed itself, kept production costs low, solicited private and corporate sponsorship, and, most significantly in this context, made broad appeals to the gay and lesbian community. As the company history that, at the time of this writing, is published on its website states: "The move to 12 Alexander was visionary and vision exacts a price. 1997 was the year designated to keeping the dream alive. Sarah Stanley was appointed as Sky Gilbert's successor in April and Gwen Bartleman was appointed General Manager in July" ("About Us").

The life and death language used in the company history is not without justification. In April 1995, after going over budget renovating the theatre at 12 Alexander Street and coming under budget on fundraising, the company began to run a deficit (Crew). In February 1997, the City of Toronto recognized the company's desperate financial situation by converting a $90,000 loan into a grant. With this news, Gilbert felt comfortable enough in the theatre's financial stability to resign (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 269) and to turn Buddies and its mandate over to new artistic director, Sarah Stanley.

Queerly Inclusive

As the new artistic director, Sarah Stanley needed to make drastic changes to the company's personnel structure, development programmes, and marketing strategies in order to, literally, "keep

the dream alive." Stanley, with the help of Board President, Sonja Mills, and General Manager, Gwen Bartleman, put the company on the most logical path: cost-effective programming intended to appeal to as wide a section of the lesbian, gay, and broader community as possible.

Buddies's mandate was changed under Stanley's artistic direction in 1997. But since the company's mandate was not changed by the next artistic director, David Oiye, until April 2004, Buddies's mandate remained constant from 1997 to 2004:

> Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is a Canadian, not-for-profit, professional queer theatre company dedicated to the promotion of lesbian and gay theatrical expression, and to creating an environment that supports the development of Queer Canadian Culture. As a company, we celebrate difference and question assumptions. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is committed to theatrical excellence, which it strives for through its play development programmes, strong volunteer base, youth initiative, and ever increasing wealth of Canadian Queer Talent. ("Mandate 2002-2003")

There are a number of important concepts about queer that can be gleaned from this mandate. First, it is not used as a tool to critique essentialist conceptions of sexual subjectivity; rather, it functions as an umbrella term employed broadly to embrace the gay and lesbian community. This mandate stands in stark juxtaposition to Buddies's mandate under Gilbert: instead of "challenge[ing] the professional theatre experience by blurring and reinventing boundaries" ("Mission Statement"), this mandate belies a desire to define concepts such as "Canadian," "theatrical excellence," "professional theatre," "gay," "lesbian," "queer," and to work profitably within these defined boundaries. Second, like queer, "Canadian" is called upon as another term of inclusion that defined the company. Under Gilbert, Canadian was used more in reference to the national status of the work being produced; within this mandate Canadian is used to define queer culture, uniting lesbians and gays in all areas of the country and situating Buddies at the centre of this (theatrical) community.[18] In this mandate, queer continues to be one of the primary features of the company's theatrical subjectivity; however, the ways in which the term is defined and deployed changed, becoming a symbol of inclusion, rather than a tool for critique.

In a 1997 interview, Sarah Stanley stated: "What keeps me awake at night is money. We are looking for angels, for supporters who can come on board for the long term. And we want to open ourselves up to the community at large" (Bennett). These sentiments are evident in her two-season tenure (1997-98 and 1998-99), which is marked by fiscally conscious artistic decisions and by attempts to attract new audiences. In Stanley's first season she cut several productions, mounted a number of co-productions, and rented the theatre to a number of other companies in an obvious effort to cut costs, increase audience numbers, and augment revenue. She opened her first season with Brad Fraser's *Martin Yesterday* and followed this by presenting two plays: Diane Flacks's *Random Acts*[19] and *Baal* by Rose Cullis.[20] By programming co-productions, presenting plays in association with other theatre companies, and renting out the theatre, Stanley was able to share costs and to capitalize on the theatre's space in order to earn much-needed revenue.[21] During her tenure she also remounted successful productions from the past, namely Robin Fulford's *Steel Kiss*, coupling it with the play's sequel, *Gulag*.

Stanley's strategy for increasing revenue and keeping Buddies's doors open included friendly appeals to the lesbian and gay community. Her desire to amicably court the community is made explicit in the two season brochures published during her tenure. The brochure tagline of her inaugural season reads: "Toward a new lesbian and gay vision" ("Toward" see figure 1 below). This statement, which figures squarely on the front of the brochure, announces a "new" approach and "vision" for the theatre that is not predicated upon "queerness" (indeed the term is not to be found anywhere in the brochure) but upon a stable and forward looking "lesbian and gay vision." Similarly in the *1998-99 Season Brochure*, Stanley's Artistic Director's message attempts to attract the lesbian and gay community:

> Our community is celebrated for its cultural, political, social and athletic prowess. We are lauded for our ability to get things done. And, to top it all off, we are irrefutably tenacious! Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is no exception. We take enormous Lesbian and Gay Pride in celebrating our 20th birthday amid a large, dynamic and diverse community. This year we ask you to join us in strengthening our common and uncommon experience as a growing community. We beseech you to get involved in the discus-

sion. We challenge you to help infuse our twenties with passion and promise. ("A Message from the Artistic Director")

Figure 1 Programme Design by Lucinda Wallace.

In this message, Stanley situates and celebrates gay and lesbian identity as stable, accomplished, and, seemingly, recognized and "celebrated" for its achievements by a broader community. She locates Buddies within the gay and lesbian community, and appeals to gays and lesbians to think of their attendance at the theatre as a means of participation in that community; as acts of "Lesbian and Gay Pride." The only place the word queer appears in the brochure is in the message from the Board of Director's President, Sonja Mills, where she "promises" to "conduct the affairs of this company in a responsible manner; [to] continue to search for new and better ways to support and serve artists, patrons, our staff and members of both the Queer and Theatre communities" ("A Message from the Board of Directors"). In Mills's statement, queer is used as an inclusive term that, presumably, describes the gay and lesbian community. In no way could this employment of queer be read as radical or challenging to lesbian and gay identity; rather, in light of other appeals to the "Lesbian and Gay" community in this brochure, it functions metonymically for lesbians, gays and other sexual minorities.[22]

David Oiye continued Stanley's wooing of the lesbian and gay community in order to increase patronage and stabilize the company's finances. Oiye also welcomed "mainstream" work, middle-class gays and lesbians (people Gilbert so deplored),[23] and fostered cooperation with other gay and lesbian organizations. In a 1999 interview, Oiye stated:

> 'Mainstream' has such negative connotations. Buddies recognizes that we need to reach out to a

> broader community base in order for us to survive financially. One of the elements of inviting so many high-profile rental companies was the ability to include them in our subscription series. It's an attempt to bring people into what can be considered a Buddies season. (Al-Solaylee)

Oiye's desire to produce "mainstream" work and to include "high-profile rental companies" under a mandate that nominated Buddies a "professional *queer* theatre company" ("Mandate 2002-2003" my emphasis) demonstrates the extent to which the queer signifier had been de-radicalized by the company during this period. Under Gilbert, the theatre had become alienated from a number of gay and lesbian community organizations; Oiye, like Stanley before him, worked to (re)establish strong ties with the lesbian and gay community, particularly *Xtra!*, "Toronto's Lesbian and Gay Biweekly,"[24] and to forge new relationships within various queer and "straight" theatre companies and with professional artists in Toronto, Ontario, and Canada.

During Oiye's tenure, queer slowly began to reemerge in marketing materials, but always in tandem with, and never as a critique of, gay and lesbian identity. Queer is most often used in these materials as a rhetorical means to portray Buddies as "hip" and inclusive. For example, in the *2002-03 Season Brochure*, which billed the company as a "Hotspot 4 [*sic*] queer urban culture," queer is employed alongside amicable and inviting language, such as "a welcoming atmosphere" for "Buddies folk" where everyone is "at home." The look and language of this brochure is "youthful," "cool," and welcoming. On its second page there is a montage-style picture that depicts a group of young people talking and socializing with a caption that reads: "After a performance or during a festival, the Buddies experience differs from any other—people feel incredibly comfortable, and at home" (see figure 2). While the gender-neutral and low definitional value of queer continued to be invoked by Buddies, the radical critique of lesbian, gay, and straight identities, so important to its invocation under Gilbert, was abandoned. Under the mandate from 1997 to 2004, queer was exploited as a linguistic strategy that positioned Buddies as an inclusive space "dedicated to the promotion of lesbian and gay theatrical expression" ("Mandate 2002-2003").

Figure 2 Photo: R. Kelly Clipperton. Graphic design by KD Design.

The de-radicalization of queer at Buddies needs to be understood within the term's broader discursive and political contexts. Under the weighty complexities of negotiating the diverse militants who organized under Queer Nation's banner, for example, nearly every chapter of the group had ceased to exist by the mid-1990s. Ironically, issues of identity and politics, which had been one of the impetuses for queer theorizing and organizing, were expressed as a central contestation against queer. In the Canadian context, Tom Warner notes:

> Like the many groups that preceded them, queer nation organizations, riven with dissent and disagreements over how to deal with sexism and racism, soon dissipated and eventually collapsed. Women and people of colour, despite the group's professed commitment to inclusiveness and fighting oppression in all forms, drifted away because

> their voices were 'lost in the frenzy of mostly white, mostly male meetings.' (260)

The possibilities for erasure were becoming apparent in queer's general and polysemic nature. In this context, queer was not abandoned; rather, it was becoming another possibility for resistance alongside the older "ethnic models" of gay and lesbian liberation and feminism, including those that organized critiques around sex, race, and class within these movements. Instead of calling for an abandonment of "gay" and "lesbian" as meaningful and effective sites of resistance and a full deconstruction of homo/heterosexuality, some "queers" were advocating for change by working within the discourses of gay, lesbian, and queer. Gary Kinsman, for example, suggests: "In order to undermine the relations of our oppression, we must accept the experiences and classifications of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, and/or queer as terrains of resistance and transform them to more fully conform to our diverse needs" (379). At Buddies, queer would increasingly be invoked alongside gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities, as another site of resistance.

In the world of theatre scholarship, queer was being questioned by scholars such as Jill Dolan, who voiced her "ambivalences about the word queer—as a description of a political movement and of an identity" (1). In the context of a keynote address for a 1995 conference called "Queer Theatre: A Conference With Performances,"[25] Dolan suggested that,

> 'Queer' opens spaces for people who embrace all manner of sexual practices and identities, which gives old-fashioned gays and lesbians a lot more company on the political front lines, as well as in capital consumption, and, of course, in bed. That's the beauty and the flaw of 'queer,' depending on how you look at it. (6)

Queer's openness, Dolan is suggesting, allows for coalition building among those who constitute the sexual fringes, although the diversity of these fringes, coupled with the possibility that a dominant group's concerns may overshadow the specific needs of others, almost always positions queer's efficacy as questionable. Dolan articulated the dangers of queer's generality when she cautioned that "the insistent anti-hegemonic pose of 'queer' can also be a ruse for not taking responsibility for the vagaries of a

movement, a style, a life" (2). Similarly, and at about the same time, David Halperin asked if "queer politics may, by now [1995], have outlived its political usefulness" (112).[26]

At the same time that queer's efficacy was being questioned, Buddies's occupation of 12 Alexander Street created new pressures and responsibilities for the company. The "mainstreaming" of queer at Buddies during this period, as well as the friendly way in which the company marketed itself, was an inevitable consequence of the financial pressures that attended the new space, the deep cuts to arts funding during the 1990s, and the demise of the radical queer politics that questioned the political efficacy of "gay" and "lesbian" organizing. While Buddies could attempt to (and still can) *act queerly*, the company's physical location in the Alexander Street Theatre Project—literally at the centre of Toronto and its gay and lesbian community—made being a company that situated itself as marginal and oppositional a tremendously difficult position to negotiate. In this financial and political context, Buddies's effort to graciously welcome its audience was not, in my opinion, a negative move, but a real financial necessity. It is, in fact, a credit to both Stanley and Oiye, as well as to the many people who worked with them, that they were able to keep the theatre open, increase audience numbers, procure corporate sponsorship, and develop relationships with gay and lesbian organizations. On top of these administrative achievements, they introduced new programs, for example the "Ante Chamber Series," a development program where six playwrights work with company dramaturge, Edward Roy, and the "Queer Youth Programmes," which have provided a number of initiatives to engage and serve queer youth from across the province. Queer's changing signification from a radical critique of stable subjectivity to a linguistic strategy of inclusion at Buddies was possible because of its low-definitional value and its continued currency as a signifier for a wide range of sexual minorities. This de-radicalization of queer at Buddies, and its re-positioning as another possibility for gay and lesbian organizing, echoes and corroborates a far-reaching re-signification and de-radicalization of the queer signifier.

Sexually/Aesthetically Queer

Buddies's 2003-2004 season marked the "Silver Anniversary Season" of the theatre's founding. During this season, the company remounted shows by former artistic director Sky Gilbert, hired former associate artist (under Gilbert) Moynan King[27] to curate the "Hysteria Festival,"[28] and Franco Boni (another artist with a

long history at Buddies) to curate what was called "Retro-Rhubarb!"[29] At this time Buddies also undertook the implementation of a Canada Council initiative called "Flying Squad," a programme designed to assist theatre companies with strategic planning, capacity building, and to "further an organization's growth and development" ("Flying Squad"). Already in the mood to take stock, Buddies used this funding to hire theatre consultant Jane Marsland, who conducted meetings and interviews with the management, staff, Board of Directors, and Associate Artists to help the company chart a course for the future. According to Oiye, two questions were asked: the first was "are we a theatre company that does queer work, or are we a queer organization that does theatre?"; the second was, "how do we keep a queer company relevant in changing times, and to whom are we being relevant?" (Oiye). The answers to these questions, again according to Oiye, were as follows: Buddies is first and foremost a theatre that does queer work and, while Buddies is committed to the LGBT community, it also feels an obligation to develop and present "challenging" work that does more than just represent LGBT constituencies. Based upon these two statements, Buddies rewrote its mandate with a renewed focus on how the company defines and employs the queer signifier.

The new mandate focuses on redefining and redeploying queer. It defines the term along two axes: the sexual and the aesthetic. It uses queer's fluid definitional value in a bifurcating manner to signify the various sexual minorities the company seeks to represent and to articulate an oppositional and anti-normative aesthetic agenda that promotes theatrical performances that are "outside the norm." The current mandate reads:

> Buddies in Bad Time theatre is a not-for-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to the promotion of Queer Canadian Culture. We are dedicated to producing, developing, and presenting theatrical works that speak to one, or both, of the following criteria:
> 1. QUEER, referring to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered identity, encapsulates the core of our organization. Buddies is a queer-run organization committed to representing the LGBT community by supporting its artists, and by telling its stories.
> 2. QUEER, referring to anything different or

> outside of the norm, represents the nature of artistic work presented at 12 Alexander Street. Buddies is dedicated to work that is different, outside the mainstream, challenging in both content and form. ("Mandate")

In this mandate, queer's elastic signification is stretched far enough to describe both the company's commitment to a range of sexual minorities and the aesthetically challenging work it wants to develop. The mandate's openness is made explicit by the qualification that performances presented by the company need only address *one* of its definitions of queer, allowing Buddies to produce and present a wider range of work. Its opening statement and its first definition of queer repeat aspects of how queer was articulated in the 1997-2004 mandate, employing queer as a metonym for LGBT communities—although the addition of "Transgendered" and "Bisexual" demonstrates the company's expanded commitment to sexual diversity. It does not reclaim queer to critique coherent conceptions of identity, but continues to exploit it as a linguistic strategy to foster inclusivity and fluidity. The mandate's definition of queer is expanded by the second section, in which the term is pitted against anything that Buddies deems normative—an aesthetic understanding of queer akin to Gilbert's.[30] In effect, with this mandate, Buddies mitigates its "central" location at 12 Alexander through queerly multiplying two "negatives"—and I speak mathematically, *not* in terms of judgment—to make a positive. It uses queer once again to renegotiate its "relation[ship] to dominant power, and [its] relation[ship] to marginality, as a place of empowerment" (Dolan 6). In tandem with years of adroit fundraising and sponsorship campaigns, both inside and outside the gay and lesbian community, that have situated Buddies on a solid financial footing, with this mandate the company aligns the marginalized positions of queers and avant-garde artists to create a positive environment for the production of "queer theatre"—in any and all of its polymorphous forms and manifestations.

The 2004-2005 season reflected the new mandate in which queer denotes representations of LGBT communities on the one hand, and work that is "challenging in form as well as content" on the other. The season included ten shows, as well as the "Hysteria," "Rhubarb!" and "Sexy Pride" festivals. Its plays were almost equally split between those that spoke to the mandate's first and second definitions of queer. The shows that in some way represented the first definition of queer were: *Snowman* by Greg MacArthur; *Cul-*

de-sac by Daniel MacIvor; *Yapping out Loud* by Mirha-Soleil Ross; and *Rope Enough* by Sky Gilbert. The plays that fell under the second definition of queer were: *The Unnatural and Accidental Woman* by Marie Clements; *Director's Cut: Planet Claire* by Jim Millan and A. Shay Hahn[31]; *Swimming in the Shallows* by Adam Brock; *A Suicide Site-Guide to the City* by Darren O'Donnell; *Kingstonia Dialect Perverso* by Ann Holloway; and *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen, adapted by Judith Thompson.[32]

Daniel MacIvor's *Cul-de-Sac*[33] is an interesting example of Buddies's new mandate because it arguably satisfies both of the company's definitions of queer: it is aesthetically innovative and represents issues specifically relevant to LGBT communities. The play, a one-person show written and acted by MacIvor and directed by Daniel Brooks, traces the life and death of "Leonard," a man whose quest for love is met with his violent murder at the hands of a young, drugged-up hustler called "Eric." In the play, Leonard retells the story of his death through, and from the point of view of, each of his neighbours, all of whom live on the same suburban cul-de-sac. *Cul-de-sac* qualifies as an example of the first definition of queer in Buddies mandate because MacIvor is an openly gay man, and the play represents LGBT community "by telling [one of] its stories." The play's violent but, in my opinion, hopeful conclusion, where Leonard learns to say "yes" to his life instead of "no," is very relevant to queer communities who are subject to varying forms of violence and who publicly say "yes" to their queer lives by coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender—much like Leonard learns to say "yes" in the public domain of the theatre and before his community on the cul-de-sac.

A Suicide-Site Guide to the City,[34] written and performed by Darren O'Donnell, directed by Rebecca Picherack, is queer according to Buddies's second definition of the term: the play is "different" and "outside the mainstream, challenging in both content and form."[35] In terms of content, the play presents a series of musings on suicide, current political events, the erosion of civil liberties, and the need for urban "cultural workers" to effect a better and more just world. Its anti-capitalist sentiments reflect O'Donnell's own political activism (the play is dedicated to the members of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty) and align the plight and poverty of Toronto's chronically unemployed and working poor with the city's artists and cultural workers. It also juxtaposes recent studies in urban political economy that cite a large population of cultural workers, or "creative classes," as an essential element in a successful post-industrial urban economy, with the

reality that many of the artists O'Donnell knows are living on "$19,000 a year." The play's politics are intended to implicate and politically motivate the audience of urban theatregoers, who O'Donnell self-consciously assumes are mostly artists and cultural workers, to effect political change. This sentiment is confirmed and developed by the "Talk Backs" that O'Donnell hosts after each performance to discuss with his audience the issues that emerge from the play.[36]

According to Buddies's second definition of queer, *A Suicide-Site Guide to the City,* which O'Donnell calls a "stand-up essay" (Isaacs), is also "queer" because of its innovative form. The performance's *mise en scène* employs video and sound media and is self-reflexive about its own construction and presentation. It uses what could be described as Brechtian conventions, such as placing the sound designer/operator and lighting designer/operator onstage with O'Donnell, to similar ends: defamiliarization, the constant breaking of theatrical illusion, aligning the possibility of theatrical action with action in the real world, and calling broadly for political engagement and change. It highlights the "performance" of the two onstage technicians by introducing them by name and keeping their actions—usually relegated to "backstage" spaces—within the audience's field of view. It also draws attention to the constructedness of O'Donnell's performance as "performance" (O'Donnell refers to his own acting as "pretending") by detailing the date, time, and place when each section of text he recites was originally written. The play makes light of the complexities of subjectivity, identity, and performance by asking if the "Darren" currently speaking the text is the same "Darren" who wrote it two years earlier. According to Buddies's mandate, *A Suicide-Site Guide to the City* qualifies as a queer text because its form is innovative and its content is challenging to both the "capitalist establishment" and to the demographic that O'Donnell assumes attend small theatre: leftist, urban cultural workers.

Kingstonia Dialect Perverso, a one-person show written and performed by Ann Holloway, directed by Moynan King, does not represent the LGBT community, nor does Ann Holloway identify as bisexual or lesbian;[37] for these reasons the work is not queer according to Buddies's first definition of the term. The play's content, however, is graphically sexual. It presents a woman who speaks powerfully and openly about sex in a manner that some theatre patrons—especially those who are unaccustomed to blatant "dirty talk"—may find surprising or even offensive. The play begins as a pseudoscientific lecture given by "Ann Semblance,"

a professor of Linguistics whose area of expertise is the dialect of Kingston, Ontario. In this talk she examines the syntax and cadence of Kingston's particular dialect of English, as well as revealing some personal experiences gained while conducting research in Kingston. The lecture and the character slowly break down, leading to the emergence of two other characters: a Cockney domestic and a contemporary Canadian woman. These two characters continue the action by telling the stories of their lives cast against the backdrop of Kingston in the 1960s and 1970s, and then Toronto in the 1980s and 1990s.

According to Buddies's mandate, the play's form is queer: it incorporates a number of genres of performance (an academic lecture, mimetic dramatic action, stand-up comedy, and "slam poetry"); however, it is the play's content that pushes the limits of "decency." It verbally conjures graphically grotesque and often hilariously funny images of bodies, bodily fluids, and, of course, sex, which together constitute the play's "queerest" elements. When queer is defined along aesthetic lines, *Kingstonia* fulfills Buddies's mandate by producing a play whose blatantly sexual content is definitely "outside the mainstream" and would, in my opinion, prohibit its production at almost any other theatre in Toronto.

Each manifestation of queer at Buddies, and this essay is far from exhaustive, is particular and can function along and through any number of the multiple relations of power that constitute its discourse. Queer as it was defined and functioned under Gilbert was particular to its time and the context of its articulation. Its utopian aspects and the tenacity of its critique made it temporally and contextually important and useful for opening up new spaces of possibility for a variety of marginalized sexualities. Politically, however, queer lacked the ability to unite individuals for sustained and specified action. The term's continued currency at Buddies as a method for describing lesbian and gay identities under the 1997 to 2004 mandate (and including bisexual and transgendered identities today) shows the extent to which its low-definitional value remained effective, even while its critique of identity waned. The current re-invocation of queer in Buddies's mandate exploits the term's malleable properties of signification and enables the company to extend its programming and re-negotiate its position in Toronto and Canadian theatre by defining the term according to its own aesthetic, sexual, and political ends.

On the one hand, I am happy to see the theatre moving in a direction that entails more risk, one that expresses a commitment both to LGBT communities and to innovative, potentially radical,

Canadian theatre. On the other, I am troubled by an invocation of queer that is so open that the term is almost meaningless. I think the previous mandate's commitment to the "promotion of lesbian and gay theatrical expression" was problematic because it limited the work the company could undertake. With this in mind, I understand and support Buddies's current redefinition of queer as it allows the company to situate itself on the fringes and to occupy multiple and (potentially) shifting sites of resistance to an array of heteronormative and normative discourses. I think that queer when invoked in this way is always moving and always critical. But, despite my sympathy for this utopian vision of a fluid queer signifier, I wonder what pit-falls are possible when just about anyone or anything can be queer.

Queer's lack of a rigid definition makes the term effective, by creating room for multiple oppositional voices, and problematic, by potentially negating the need to specifically address LGBT identities as the primary sites of heterosexist violence. Although queer's power as a critique of coherent sexual subjectivity has waned, its currency as a term defined in opposition to the "norm," as exemplified in Buddies's new mandate, is still productive and still holds currency. As the term's mutable qualities are the object of constant change and re-signification, the future of queer remains murky. And yet Buddies's redefinition of queer in order to reinvigorate the company's aesthetics, while remaining committed to its LGBT constituencies and politics, is a promising and definitively queer step into the future. ❁

Notes

1 Buddies is the resident company of the Alexander Street Theatre Project, located at 12 Alexander Street, Toronto. The building, which is the former home of the esteemed Toronto Workshop Productions, is owned by the City of Toronto and has a separate board of directors. Through a lengthy and complex application process that began in 1990, Buddies won a forty-year lease of the building from the City of Toronto in February 1993 (Carson 208). For an account of the selection process, see Carson, particularly 207-208; and Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 184-89 and 203-04.

2 Wallace's essay explicates and contextualizes Buddies's "theatrical subjectivity" beginning in 1979, its "coming out" as a "gay" and then "gay and lesbian" theatre in the mid-1980s, and its subsequent self-nomination as a "queer theatre." See Wallace, "Theorizing."

3 In "Theorizing a Queer Theatre," Wallace writes "QueerCulture," while in *Ejaculations from the Charm Factory* Gilbert writes "Queerculture." In other marketing materials I have also found "Queer Culture." In this case I have deferred to Wallace.

4 The artistic directorships of Stanley and Oiye are obviously not synonymous; however, when Oiye took the helm at Buddies in 1999, he did not change the company's mandate, but continued to work under the tenets articulated during Stanley's tenure. Because this essay focuses on the definition and deployment of "queer" in the company's mandate, I organize this history via changes to that mandate.

5 George Chauncey explores the meaning and usage of "queer" in relation to other terms used to describe "homosexual" men, specifically "fairy," "gay," and "trade," in New York at the turn of the twentieth century. See Chauncey, particularly 14-23.

6 For a brief, but succinct, discussion of identity politics in relation to queer, see Jagose 58-71.

7 For a discussion of Michel Foucault's influence on the "queer" political organizing of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), see Halperin, particularly "The Queer Politics of Michel Foucault," 15-125.

8 Again, in "Theorizing a Queer Theatre" Wallace writes "4-Play," while in *Ejaculations from the Charm Factory*, Gilbert writes "Fourplay." In this case, I have elected to compromise between the two with "Four-Play."

9 In this section I am paraphrasing Wallace, although I updated the name of the "Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives," formerly the "Canadian Gay Archives."

10 Buddies, under Gilbert, Stanley, and currently, both *produces* work and *presents* work in association with other theatre companies. Not only is it necessary to differentiate what *producing* and *presenting* means in relation to a discussion of theatrical mandate, but it is also vital to differentiate between the theatre company that produced the work and the venue where that work is presented, when the venue company did not also produce that work. It is important to disaggregate producing and presenting to ensure that a theatre company's work is not erased by presenting it within a venue closely associated with another theatre company—such as Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Work that Buddies *produces* means the play was developed—in whole or in part—by the theatre through one of its development programmes, and/or a play developed by another

playwright/company, which Buddies independently mounts or produces for a run. An example of a play from its 2004-2005 season that Buddies *produced* is Ann Holloway's *Kingstonia Dialect Perverso*. Work that Buddies *presents* means that the play is developed by another theatre company, and Buddies has negotiated with the company to *present* the play as part of its season. An example of a play that Buddies *presented* in its 2004-2005 season is da da kamera's *Cul-de-sac*. The complexities of the relationship between Buddies's mandate and da da kamera's mandate, for example, is beyond the focus and scope of this paper. When examining plays that have been presented by Buddies as part of one of its seasons, I will be reading them within the Buddies's context and in relation to the Buddies's mandate; however, I will draw attention to and differentiate between Buddies's productions and plays that Buddies presents in order that the production company and its work are not subsumed into the presenting venue.

11 In *Saint Foucault* David Halperin compares the "queerness" of ACT UP and Queer Nation, and suggests that Queer Nation "is significantly less *queer* [. . .] than ACT UP" (63). See 62-67.

12 For brief account of the rise and fall of Queer Nation chapters in Canada, as well as queer challenges to gay and lesbian identity, see Warner 258-61.

13 For a discussion of Sky Gilbert's plays and performances as explorations of "the slippery terrain of queer sex where not only gender roles but also sexual behaviors are mutable, unfixed, open" (Wallace, "No Turning" 17), see Robert Wallace "No Turning Back: An Introduction."

14 I have not been able to determine the precise point when Golding's tenure as president of the board of directors ended. When I asked Sky Gilbert, he said 1995, which I have quoted here. Golding moved to London in the early 1990s and commuted between the two cities to attend board meetings every three months (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 204). She is listed as board president in *1995-96 Season Brochure*. I was unable to locate a brochure for the 1996-97 season. Tori Smith is listed as board president on the 1996 Toronto Arts Council operating grant; Sonja Mills is listed as the president in the 1997 application to the Toronto Arts Council. No board president is listed in the 1997-98 brochure, and Sonja Mills is listed as president in the 1998-99 brochure. Gilbert notes: "one of my last acts as director was to make sure that Sonja Mills was the new president of the company" (*Ejaculations* 270), which means she

would have become board president about the time of his departure in March 1997.

15 The most infamous and interesting of these may be the "Dungeon Parties." The Dungeon Parties were fundraisers that had the usual drinking, music, and dancing, but these parties also provided spaces for various forms of consensual sexual expression and practice. They were attended by gays, straights, lesbians, members of the S/M community, anyone and everyone who was respectful of people's (sexual) boundaries and wanted to party and have a good time. In his memoirs, Gilbert states: "Sue [Golding] was adamant about it. We were a sex-positive theatre and should do nothing to stop sex at the parties. […] I cannot stress enough how important these Dungeon parties were for queer politics in the city. Nowhere else were dykes and fags partying and having sex in the same space" (193). See Gilbert, *Ejaculations*, particularly 190-95.

16 Gilbert concedes that neither these activities, nor this approach to theatre, is necessarily new; however, he contends, "for a theatre town which embraces Crazy For You as a new and exciting production, our theatre is intensely radical" ("Dramaturgy" 26).

17 Becoming less radical as a result of acquiring property is not unprecedented in the history of Canadian and specifically Toronto theatre. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Toronto Free, Factory, Passe Muraille and Tarragon theatres each experienced a similar transformation. On this topic, Robert Wallace states that the acquisition of property "introduced a new era in the history of these theatres in which they underwent a shift in their priorities: once governed by primarily political (read: nationalistic) and aesthetic concerns, these theatres now became equally, if not more, preoccupied with financial survival" (102-03). See Wallace, *Producing Marginality*, particularly 97-105.

18 The extent to which Buddies sought to represent gays and lesbians across Canada is exemplified by the programming of the 2000-2001 season, the focus of which was the promotion of "queer culture across Canada." The company website states: "Over the 2000-2001 season [Buddies] explored the notion of a national queer repertoire by programming Vancouver-based artist Dorothy Dittrich's award-winning musical When We Were Singing [*sic*], Winnipeg playwright Ken Brand's comedy Burying Michael[*sic*], and PileDriver![*sic*] from Edmonton-

based companies Guys in Disguise and Three Dead Trolls in a Baggie" ("About Us").

19 This season's plays were billed as follows: "Buddies in Bad Times Proudly Presents the World Premiere of Brad Fraser's *Martin Yesterday*"; "Mything Productions, Nightwood Theatre and Buddies in Bad Times present *Random Acts*"; and "Inanna Productions in association with Buddies in Bad Times Present *Baal*" ("1997-98 season"). The season also included: "Strange Sisters: A Sexy Lesbian Cabaret"; the "Rhubarb!" festival; and "The Ante Chamber Series," a staged reading of "works-in-progress" developed through Buddies by the company dramaturge Ed Roy ("1997-98 season").

20 Cullis's *Baal* is described as a "response to," not an adaptation of, Brecht's play. See Todd.

21 It is important to note that under Gilbert Buddies also worked in association with, and presented the work of, other Canadian theatre companies; however, these companies were usually part of what could be safely called the avant-garde or the "fringes" of Toronto theatre in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the companies Buddies collaborated with in its 1995-96 season were: da da kamera, Tothin Theatre, VaVa Venus, Sto Union, Video Cabaret, East City Productions, Dancing Faggot Division, Modern Times Stage Company, DNA Theatre, and fFIDA (Fringe Festival of Independent Dance Artists). During this season, the company also collaborated with artists Ken Brand, Sonja Mills, Margaret Hollingsworth, and Nadia Ross.

22 Under Stanley, the infamous and radical "Dungeon Parties" were cancelled (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 272).

23 Gilbert has been quoted in many publications decrying the problems with middle-class, assimilationist, gay men—whom he calls "sweater-fags." See Gilbert, "This Panther."

24 For an obviously biased, but nonetheless interesting and illuminating account of Buddies's relationship with *Xtra!* and other gay and lesbian organizations during Gilbert's tenure, see Gilbert, *Ejaculations*, particularly 208-11.

25 This address was first published in *Modern Drama,* and in this essay I quote from this source. It was subsequently published in a book edited by Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla called, *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater.* The address is slightly shorter than that published in *Modern Drama*, lacking a preamble explanation about Dolan's address at the conference. According to Solomon and Minwalla, the

book was "inspired" (Solomon and Minwalla *x*) by the conference at which Dolan made her address, and of which Solomon and Minwalla were coordinators. The conference, "Queer Theatre: A Conference With Performances," was held 27-29 April 1995, presented by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, co-sponsored by the CUNY Graduate Center's Theatre Program.

26 Halperin partially answers his question by asserting that "if [queer's] efficacy and its productive political life can indeed still be renewed and extended, the first step in this procedure will be to try and preserve the function of queer identity as an empty placeholder for an identity that is still in progress and has as yet to be fully realized, to conceptualize queer identity as an identity in a state of becoming rather than as the referent for an actually existing form of life" (112-13).

27 Moynan King and Kirsten Johnson were associate artists at Buddies under Gilbert. Their contracts were not renewed when Sarah Stanley became artistic director (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 270).

28 "Hysteria: A Festival of Women" began in the 2003-2004 season and was produced in association with Nightwood Theatre. The festival featured a wide range of performances by women, as well as art exhibitions and music.

29 "Rhubarb!" is a yearly festival of new work that began with the theatre's inception in 1979, then called "New Faces of '79," and renamed "Rhubarb!" the following year. For an overview of "Rhubarb!", see Boni.

30 Defining queer as an aesthetic to represent "work that is different, outside the mainstream, challenging in both content and form" directly echoes Gilbert's sentiment in the 1993 "QueerCulture Guide" where he states that queer art is "from another culture, non-linear, redefining form as well as content" (qtd. in Wallace, "Theorizing" 147).

31 In actuality, Crow's Theatre did not mount *Director's Cut: Planet Clair,* but instead produced *The Dirty/Beautiful* by Stephen Massicotte.

32 Buddies produced Greg MacArthur's *Snowman*, Mirha-Soleil Ross's *Yapping Out Loud*, and Ann Holloway's *Kingstonia Dialect Perverso*. Buddies presented Daniel MacIvor's, *Cul-de-sac*, which was billed "a da da kamera production"; Marie Clements's *The Unnatural and Accidental Woman* "in association with Native Earth Performing Arts"; Adam Bock's *Swimming in the Shallows* "in association with Theatrefront";

Darren O'Donnell's *Suicide-site Guide to the City* "in association with Mammalian Diving Reflex"; and an adaptation by Judith Thompson of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabbler* "in association with Volcano." *Rope Enough,* by Sky Gilbert, was billed "Cabaret Company presents" and *Director's Cut: Planet Clair*, by Jim Millan and A. Shay Hahn, was billed as "Crow's Theatre presents" ("2004-05 Season").

33 *Cul-de-sac* was presented by Buddies, but produced by da da kamera, an independent production company with its own particular mandate. The artistic director of da da kamera is Daniel MacIvor, and its producer is Sherrie Johnson. For da da kamera's mandate, as well as a complete list of *Cul-de-sac*'s development partners and presenters, see the da da kamera website: <http://www.dadakamera.com>.

34 *A Suicide-Site Guide to the City* was presented by Buddies, but produced by Mammalian Diving Reflex, an independent production company with its own particular mandate. The artistic director of Mammalian Diving Reflex is Darren O'Donnell, and its producer is Naomi Campbell. For Mammalian Diving Reflex's mandate and a complete list of *A Suicide-Site Guide to the City*'s co-producers and presenters, see the Mammalian Diving Reflex website: <http://mammalian.ca>.

35 In the performance, O'Donnell says that while he identifies as straight, he has had some satisfying sexual experiences with men and is open to more. As part of the performance he also asks a random audience member, male or female, to come on stage and make out with him. At the performance I attended (Sunday, 12 March 2005), the person who accepted his invitation was a man.

36 At the "Talk Back" that I attended, O'Donnell asked the audience to indicate by a show of hands who considered themselves to be "cultural workers"; nearly the entire Sunday afternoon, "pay-what-you-can" audience raised their hands.

37 Although Holloway has sex with men, she does not identify as strictly "heterosexual." She does identify as "a queer freak Kingstonian pervert (prevert)." "My whole approach to sex" says Holloway, "has more of a queer, or an outsider sensibility. What this means is I do the choosing, I engineer the dynamics, and I own my own pleasure and my desire. It does not fit into a neat package. I refuse to be represented in terms of heterosexuality, because it always recalls the heterosexual binary" (Holloway, Personal interview).

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