

At the same time, in this expansion of what comprises the field as well as the methodologies with which we undertake its description and analysis, we appear—figuratively and sometimes literally—to have forgotten history. Again, this is a refrain that might be heard from theatre studies organizations in many countries, but, in the absence of a book like Jackson's that might address the specific conditions of emergence for Canadian theatre studies, we find it harder to remember or discover the decisions that shifted the mandate so emphatically from theatre history to theatre and performance research. A genealogical project would be a reminder, too, that the "need" that Saddlemeyer and Plant identified was profoundly national; they sought to record and understand theatre within the country, in contexts that were not over-determined by Anglo-American practices on stage and in scholarship. Their inaugural editorial looked for a "history of resident and touring companies and their impact on Canadian theatre and audiences," as well as a full range of "studies of individuals who have contributed to the craft of theatre, records and calendars of performance, and analyses of the social and artistic conditions which give rise to theatre in any particular time and place,"—how much of this do we now know? What has been done and what left undone, and how do we understand this in terms of the ongoing ambitions of our field? We might remember, too, that the process of cultural forgetting is, as Paul Connerton has shown, endemic to modernity and an "informational capitalism," mobile and international, that deletes as quickly as it creates (133); in other words, the more we know the sooner we have forgotten it.

In 2016, our scholarly association will celebrate its fortieth anniversary: this might be just the occasion for public recognition of our genealogy. We might celebrate the commitment to "the tradition of theatre in Canada" that initiated the field to which we belong as well as remember—critically and in its valuable complexity—what we have been doing for the four decades since then.

Disciplinaryity and Dissolution

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Canadian: Theatre: Research: three words plastered together in a tenuous conjunction that promises solidity but dissolves under scrutiny. Forty years ago, the proposition of a disciplinary field organized around research into theatre in Canada seemed like a self-evident attribute of nationhood, despite the wuffling of an older generation of academics who were scandalized at the thought of it. ("How," I was asked by a donnish professor at the University of Toronto in 1982 when interviewed for a teaching assistantship, "can you justify a thesis on *Canadian* theatre?" I returned the sneer—"all theatre is local and all things deserve study"—and left, pride intact but jobless.)

By the time I entered doctoral studies, the discipline of Canadian theatre research had emerged into an organization around historical recuperation, and was exactly four years old. It had been formed by a loose alliance of enthusiasts and amateurs, many of whom were moonlighting professors of English literature, and it was in part a result of the great schism of the late 1960s, when the university system was awash in visionary optimism and money,

and departments of drama carved off the glacial face of English departments across the country. This was a time that has entered the record as a period of “nationalism” but which was less a fetish of nationhood than a recuperative postcolonial anxiety and a desire for a subjunctive fixity of history and place. For a brief moment—roughly coinciding with the Trudeau years—Canada was Bhabha’s “in-between,” at a time when the gap between the pedagogical and the performative nation was formless and rife with intellectual possibility. At stake was the great blank canvas of the historical nation. Whose nation? How defined? Where found?

In the mid-1970s the aggregation of theatre research coalesced into a disciplinary field that sought a broad consensus around the defining principle of “Canadian theatre.” Consensus was possible only because the constituent terms were not subjected to close scrutiny or troublesome questions, although the binary of Canadian/Quebecois was always reciprocally vexatious. At the University of Toronto, Ann Saddlemeyer initiated the Canadian Theatre History Research Programme (CTHRP) in 1976 and put PhD students to work on regional performance calendars. At the same time at the University of Alberta, Len Conolly and Frank Bueckert founded the short-lived Institute of Canadian Theatre History. That was the same year that Ball and Plant published their first *Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History*. It was also the year in which the new field materialized its disciplinary claim with its own association and journal, then named the Association of Canadian Theatre History (ACTH) and *Theatre History in Canada*. In their current forms as CATR and *TRIC*, they stand with *Canadian Theatre Review* as the survivors of the disciplinary institutions founded at that time.

This coalescence of research interests resolved in organization with the CTHRP First Working Conference on Canadian Theatre History at Laval in 1976. The records of the conference include a “List of Canadian Theatre History Specialists,” many of whom were not in fact specialists but rather provincial and federal arts officers, journalists, critics, editors, artistic directors, advocates and hobbyists whose names gave the emergent field a patina of cultural authority and national purpose. The list reads today like an index of the late mid-century cultural establishment. It includes Floyd Chalmers, Jean Duceppe, John Hirsch, Donald Davis, Claude Bissell, Pauline McGibbon (then Lt. Governor of Ontario), Robertson Davies, William Hutt, Elsie Park Gowan, and many more. Some of the academic names are still active in the field, but most have long since retired.

The conference program focused largely on research tools at the dawn of the digital age, and several papers explored the possibilities of computing technology and MARCs (Machine-Readable Cataloguing). The overarching premise was confidently structuralist and positivist. There were reports on pioneering local studies, on bibliographies, on “cultural reclamation,” on archives, oral histories and radio drama. Reading through the reports we can sense the historical affect of a new field with a national mission.

In the years following, the concerted effort in cultural archeology slowly came apart even as it grew institutionally. I joined the then Department of Drama at Guelph at the high point of “reclamation,” when Benson and Conolly were publishing their *Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, and Guelph hosted the Records of Canadian Research Project, which published the several volumes of *Canada on Stage*. It was exciting because the sense of mission was still there, and at times it seemed heroic (hauling truckloads of boxed records out of moldy theatre basements to bring to the newly established theatre archives at Guelph had a kind of Stakhanovite reward).

The reason it came apart is the same reason that theatre research is today an immensely active and productive—even urgent—field. The glue that held the three constituent terms came unstuck, exposing them as unstable constructions. As scholars began to question them, the deeper questions emerged. That was to be expected because that is the how scholarship changes. But why did the disciplinary glue become unstuck? I suggest two initial vectors of critique, proceeding from the two political activisms that opened the doors to theorization in research in the 1980: identity politics and class analysis. Both reissued the fundamental challenge of “whose nation” and began to identify the gaps and interstices in the research mission. It began with small disagreements about research terms (Is vaudeville theatre? Is dance? What counts as a stage?) and accelerated to the first reformation of the discipline, when ACTH became ACTR, a change that was not without its share of acrimony and accusations of betrayal.

The first term to dissolve was “theatre,” as soon as researchers began looking past the playhouse stage to comprehend a wider realm of performance. This led to a methodological crisis that could only be resolved by the application of materialist cultural theory in order to historicize understandings of performance and spectatorship. History and criticism converged, and the questions began to get more interesting. They became even more interesting as “Canada” began to shake under scrutiny. The national crises of the 1990s, of Oka, Meech Lake and the Quebec referendum, and the ensuing pressure of First Nations political assertion in the national sphere all contributed to a growing understanding that Canada is not a unitary nation but rather a regulatory framework. As in other nineteenth-century resource extraction colonies of the British Empire, nationhood was a device to reduce defence and administrative costs by downloading them to a local legislature and judiciary. The work of filling that framework with sentiment and affect gave rise first to the anxiety over “identity” and then to the absurd notion, resonating through the 1976 CTHRP conference, of a nation “in search of itself.”¹ The original nation-building enterprise had by the 1990s become a deeper renegotiation of the terms and inclusions of the nation as a cultural space-time matrix.

As we turned the corner of the millennium, the proposition of Canadian theatre research had become so recursive that it was effectively evacuated of content. Faculty appointments in “Canadian Theatre” began to disappear, and graduate students were being advised to keyword their dissertations to foreground problematics rather than location. Research into Canadian theatre became one stream of research into theatre in Canada-however-defined (or, reverting to nineteenth century formulation, “the Canadas”), and ACTR in course renegotiated its mandate to become CATR. “Canadian theatre” had become an atomizing and divisive concept that only retained coherence when applied to a narrow vector of institutionalization and the canons that it reinforced. And the questions became more interesting still, because theatrical practices and theatricalized bodies cross borders of politics, geography, disciplines, and identities.

Like Women’s Studies and Cultural Studies, Canadian Theatre Research has lost organizational centrality but has in fact blossomed through institutional dispersal. Contemporary engagement with performance across media has given new life to the discipline of theatre research. My own program at Guelph shows this. I joined it at a time when we were pushing to become the epicentre of Canadian Theatre studies; we built the archives, published *Canada on Stage*, edited *Canadian Theatre Review*, and started an MA program with a specific focus on Canadian Theatre. Today we are something very different, less a coherent program

than an aggregation of research and creative practices that intersect productively. Over time, questions of lived experience, of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class became more urgent than nationhood, and it may be that as successive neoliberal governments pushed state patriotism as the sugar pill of globalization, we felt somehow complicit and uneasy with the paradigm of nation. And as the theatre world became more and more stratified with a widening gap between institutionalization and precarity, we began to ask hard questions about what we were teaching, and to what end. Our students were changing; today they are “native” to digital media more than live performance, and they push us to think of theatre and spectatorship across and through media. That in turn enables us to revise the terms of historical research, and to rethink the object of inquiry.

Sometimes the way forward and the way back converge. In my current research I am looking at the theatre of the First World War. At one end of that, I find myself returning to performance calendars — not to identify and fix events but to understand spectatorship, to see how and where audiences gathered and what they watched. I’m not particularly concerned about “Canadian” in this, except to note how the war experience changed popular understandings of nationhood. For me this is a very personal and local study; as we reach the centenary of the outbreak of the war, I want to know more about what my grandparents saw, at home and in the trenches. I want to know more about the Canadian army theatre school in Mons; I want to look at how theatre both reinforced and disturbed governing ideologies of imperial racism and cultural exclusion. We can anticipate several years of hyperbolic patriotic nonsense from Ottawa about the war as a “crucible” of nationhood, to climax in the centenary of Vimy Ridge in 2017. Already we have been hearing how that victory was the founding moment of the modern Canadian nation, as if the history of a country is reducible to the history of its army. I don’t believe that my grandfather joined the army the day after the victory at Vimy Ridge because he was a patriot; I don’t know whether he even identified as Canadian rather than imperial British. In part my research is my own resistance against the distorted history that is using the trauma of men like my grandfather as grist for propaganda.

The fact that I can even admit to the personal investment in my research interest is a marker of how our discipline had changed over the years since that Laval conference. We may never see another academic posting in “Canadian Theatre” but that just means that, as always, scholars need to adapt to the shifting disciplinary conversations that coalesce into research program and institutes. In theatre history, companies come and go but bodies keep working; in research, disciplines change and adapt, but scholars keep digging. All theatre is local and all things deserve study.

Theatre / Research / Canada

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Theatre Studies in Canada is a young field, but already it has come a long way since the founding in the mid-to-late seventies, in rapid succession, of: *Canadian Theatre Review* (1974); *Canadian Drama/L'art dramatique Canadien* (1975), later folded into *Essays in Theatre/Études théâ-*