

In her keynote at the 2013 meeting of CATR in Victoria, Julianna Saxton, a pioneering practitioner and scholar in the field of drama-in-education, argued that in a cultural context in which “the arts are running on thinning oxygen,” Applied practices may be as important as ever, and I would agree. Regardless of whether we need more of a home for Applied Theatre and Performance research in Canada, or whether the existing international venues fill the void for now, developing a culture of rigorous, scholarly reflection on our various Applied research practices are important to the vitality of Theatre and Performance Studies more generally. Benefits have accrued from the slow divorce of Canadian Theatre programs from English Literature departments, but leaving that familial embrace has also left our programs to fend for themselves in the cold—and the wolves are howling in the distance. My sense is that Applied researchers are all separately learning that our hands-on, community-engaged, interdisciplinary, experiential education projects are attracting attention in a post-secondary education environment that has itself become more Applied or vocational in orientation. We don’t—and won’t—need any new organization or journal to tell us that this work is important, but such formal gathering places can foster a training and research culture that will encourage a new generation of Theatre and Performance Studies artists and scholars to imagine doing it in the first place.

For the Future, the Past: LGBT2Q Theatre, Performance, and Scholarship in Canada

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In her introduction to *Queer Theatre in Canada*, Roz Kerr notes the dearth of historical work in the field: “It is really only in the mid-nineties that articles dealing with queer theatre pertaining to English Canadian scholars and theatre practitioners/spectators begin to appear” (viii). The extant scholarship on queer Canadian theatre and performance in English, which Kerr brings together admirably in her anthology, coincides with the rise of queer politics and theory as social and political formations, and, importantly, as a scholarly approach in the early 1990s. The essays in her anthology are a testament to this academic trend. Of the twenty-one articles only two were published before 1994, and among these at least eleven are “queer” in their methodology, theoretical framework, or focus—including my own contribution. Kerr suggests that her “volume has a heavy concentration on the last fifteen years in recognition that queer theatre really only begins during the 1990s” (viii). This point is important. Kerr differentiates “queer” theatre from earlier gay and lesbian theatre, noting: “By the early 1990s the term queer replaced gay and lesbian in recognition of the need to move beyond the identity politics they implied” (viii). While queer did not exactly *replace* gay and lesbian, the need for the term and the political and theoretical positionality it denoted was brought about by a set of historical forces: in the late-1980s and early 1990s, inspired by post-structuralist theories of identity, debates about the limits of identity politics, and in the wake

of the AIDS crisis, the term was reclaimed and redeployed within specific social, political, and scholarly contexts in the Anglo-American world (queer theory and politics did not, for example, take firm hold in francophone Quebec). Similarly, in a number of scholarly fields, but especially in literary, theatre, and performance studies, queer theory became a highly productive rubric and approach in the 1990s, precipitating a wide array of important research. But what of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, and queer (LGBT2Q) theatre and performance produced in Canada before the 1990s?¹⁰ Without sounding cliché, how are Canada's LGBT2Q theatre and performing artists, as well as its scholars and students, to understand the present, and to map out the future, when so very little is known about our individualized and collective pasts?

The relative dearth of LGBT2Q theatre scholarship is not commensurate with the vitality of the work in the country today nor does it reflect the history of LGBT2Q theatre and performance in the contemporary period. The politicization of gender and homosexuality that began in the 1960s, undertaken by the heterosexual and lesbian women of the Women's liberation movement, and by the gay men, lesbians, bisexual, trans and two-spirit people of the gay liberation movement, has had significant impact on theatrical production in the country. From coast to coast to coast, LGBT2Q artists, plays, performances, and companies have taken the stage—among other performance spaces—as these communities have “come out” and proliferated in cities large and small. In 2014, vibrant queer communities are home to exciting theatre and performance scenes across the country, the lineages of which extend backward to the beginnings of the twentieth century, but whose histories remain largely uncharted.¹¹

From my perspective, then, what is currently lacking in Canadian theatre research is historicist scholarship on LGBT2Q theatre and performance. What is needed is scholarship that documents, mines, and theorizes the relationship between LGBT2Q theatre and performance, and the contemporaneous discourses that ramified and formed the epistemological, social, and political situations of LGBT2Q-identified peoples and communities. Once upon a time, the idea that Canada did not have a theatre culture, and did not have a theatre history, was relatively current. In the last thirty-to-forty years, Canadian theatre scholarship has investigated, interrogated, and radically reconceptualized the narratives of “theatre in Canada” and “Canadian theatre,” revealing the existence of a rich and complex theatrical past. It is now time to do the same work for LGBT2Q theatres in Canada, and to shed light on the histories of theatre and performance before the 1990s.

Currently, there are a number of queer theatres, performance spaces, and festivals across the country. The oldest is Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto, which Alan Filewod called “one of the most creative theater plants in Canadian history,” a company that continues to produce and present work, and which has been undergoing an artistic renaissance under its current artistic director, Brendan Healy (*Committing* 174). Vancouver boasts the Queer Arts Festival, Frank Theatre (formerly Screaming Weenie), Zeezee Theatre, Raving Theatre, Leaping Thespians, and Ghostlight productions. Regina has Performatorium, a multidisciplinary queer performance art festival. Edmonton has the Loud and Queer Cabaret, produced at Workshop West Theatre, and is the former home of the Exposure Festival, which closed in 2013. Calgary is home to Third Street Theatre, and Lethbridge to the newly founded Theatre Outré. Montreal is home to the Edgy Women Festival,¹² to the theatre company Radical Queer Semaine, and was home to Out Productions until 2012.

Halifax is home to the annual Queer Acts festival, and St. John's to Engine Productions' Queer Theatre Festival. And although it is not a queer-identified company, Nakai theatre's Pivot Festival, in Yukon, has presented the work of a large number of queer artists.

Some very important work has been done in gay and lesbian theatre scholarship and publishing, though much more is needed if we are to more fully address the historical coalescence of LGBT2Q identities, communities, and politics, and theatrical production in the country. Robert Wallace has written many important essays and articles, and, in his role as editor at *Canadian Theatre Review*, and as drama editor at Coach House Press, has contributed greatly to the publication of queer artists' work. In this vein, numerous articles on LGBT2Q theatre and performance as well as play scripts have been published in *Canadian Theatre Review*, and three theme issues have been dedicated to these subjects.¹³ I have already mentioned Roz Kerr's anthology of queer theatre, but her *Lesbian Plays: Coming of Age in Canada*, the first collection of lesbian plays to be published in Canada, must also be recognized. Susan Cole published *Outspoken: A Canadian Collection of Lesbian Scenes and Monologues*, and Sky Gilbert has edited *Perfectly Abnormal: Seven Gay Plays*, and *Gay Monologues and Scenes: An Anthology*. Peter Dickinson's *Here Is Queer: Nationalism, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* remains the only book-length investigation of queer Canadian literature and drama, addressing both work by gay men and lesbians in English and French. *Trans(Per)Forming Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work*, edited by Judith Rudakoff, with myself as associate editor, makes a foray into trans identities and performance through the developing *oeuvre* of performance artist Nina Arsenault. Vivian Namaste has done important work in trans studies, with *C'était du spectacle! l'histoire des artistes transsexuelles à Montréal, 1955-1985*, and *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, a text that includes some analyses of theatre. David Bateman is currently editing an anthology of essays on Sky Gilbert, which will do much to address his importance to queer theatre and performance in Canada. Kym Bird is uncovering examples of early lesbian drama, specifically in the plays of Amy Redpath Roddick. TL Cowan is working on a book on feminist and queer cabaret cultures, and my recently completed dissertation charts the history of gay male theatre in Toronto, from 1967-1985, which I am presently revising toward publication. Despite these important contributions, the histories of LGBT2Q theatrical production and performance in the country remain largely unaddressed.

Although significant theatrical production and performance is being done at the intersections of gender, sexuality, and race, there is very little scholarship that addresses this vibrant work. The performance histories of queers of colour, an area that has generated some of the most vital interventions in queer performance studies in the US, are meager in the Canadian scholarly context. Once again, the scholarship does not reflect the vibrancy of these performance cultures, with Native Earth Performing Arts being at the forefront of First Nation's performance since the mid-1980s. Jean O'Hara has done very important work in this area. Her recently completed dissertation addresses the intersections of indigenous theatre and queer performance, and in 2013 she edited the anthology, *Two-Spirit Acts: Queer Indigenous Performances* for Playwrights Canada Press. Plays that address the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality are also being staged by non-queer identified companies; in Toronto, Obsidian Theatre Company, Fu-gen Asian Canadian Theatre Company, Cahoots Theatre Company, Eventual Ashes, Lemon Tree Creations, and B Current are producing this work.

Thankfully, it seems that there is an upsurge of new LGBT2Q scholarship being undertaken by a group of early-career scholars.¹⁴ With the advent of queer theory, as discussed above, there was an increase in scholarship on queer theatre and performance Canada; however, it is time to simultaneously return to, and create new, modes of historiographical research, which do more than address the ways in which a play or performer queers conceptions of sex, gender, and/or sexuality. As American queer theorist Michael Warner notes, since the 1990s:

Queer theory [. . .] got to be very good at redescribing nonnormative sexualities and the flaws of identitarian thinking. But partly because the field relied so heavily on psychoanalytic theory for this purpose, it was somewhat less adept at describing the worldliness of sexuality and the conditions of the social-movement form. (18)

LGBT2Q theatrical production and performance has been central to the public “worldliness” of sexuality, and remains an important site and medium for the performative production of LGBT2Q identities, and communities, often at the margins of culture. A growing body of work has amassed around the political development of LGBT2Q communities in Canada, but very little research describes, historicizes, or theorizes the place of LGBT2Q theatre and performance in these developments, which needs to extend beyond the queering of heteronormative, including gay and lesbian, categories of identity.

Some of the most exciting developments in queer performance that I have witnessed in Toronto, where I live, are happening among young queer people. Videofag is a storefront performance space in Toronto’s Kensington Market, run by playwright and filmmaker Jordan Tannahill and actor William Ellis. The twenty-something duo opened the space in October 2012, and since then it has become a bastion of cutting edge queer video, art, theatre, and performance, and a home for a new wave of young queer artists. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre’s youth programming is also producing exciting artists and work. Each year in its Young Creators Unit, led by Evalyn Parry, three young queer artists create their own one-person show. Some of Buddies most exciting young talents have emerged from this program, including Tawiah M’carthy, whose play *Obaaberima* opened the company’s 2012-13 season, and Waawaate Fobister, whose play *Agokwe* opened the company’s 2008-09 season. Equally exciting is Pride Cab, run by Chy Ryan Spain. It is a larger group of youth whose talent and range of experience has amazed me over the last few years. According to Spain, reflecting the diversity of Toronto queer communities has been a priority for him, and this past year the participants comprised the programme’s most diverse group ever. Since Pride Cab’s founding in 1999, a number of queer organizations, such as Supporting our Youth and the Inside Out LGBT Film Festival, have started similar arts-based youth programs. Spain thinks the increased support for youth, combined with the less institutionally focused drag king and queen scenes, and a blossoming House/Ball Culture, signals a promising future for queer performance in Toronto (Halferty). I am inclined to agree. And I hope that Canadian theatre scholars will provide these young artists with histories of the lives and works of their LGBT2Q theatrical forbearers, as they go about making the futures of Canadian theatre and performance.