
Theatre Research in Canada Recherches théâtrales au Canada

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Peter Dickinson, C.E. Gatchalian, Kathleen Oliver, and Dalbir Singh, eds. "Q2Q: Queer Canadian Theatre and Performance: New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume 8"

Xavia A. Publius

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**DICKINSON, PETER, C.E. GATCHALIAN,
KATHLEEN OLIVER, AND DALBIR SINGH, EDS.
*Q2Q: Queer Canadian Theatre and Performance:
New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume 8.***

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018, 320 pp.

XAVIA A. PUBLIUS

I. The irony that I have been procrastinating writing this ‘statement’ because I have been stressing out over what form it should take. (208)

I begin my review in the same way Evalyn Parry begins the essay “Re: Form: (An Informal Set List of Considerations)” in this volume for two reasons. The first is because it’s equally true of this project, having never written a formal book review before and balking at the idea of writing this in anything but my queer tongue. The second is that this sentence fragment distills the productive fragmentation pervading this volume. A perusal of the essay titles demonstrates a community, or collection of communities, coming to terms with the tensions and struggles both within the myriad positionalities under the queer umbrella and between these and the larger cisheteropatriarchal Canada: “Constituting Community” (Stephen Low); “Queer Insularity” (Sean Metzger); “Proudly Welcoming” (Laine Zisman Newman); “Divisions Within” (T. Berto); “Productive Contrary” (Spy Dénommé-Welch).

The editors acknowledge this in their introductory article, “Putting the Qs in Q2Q”, when they ask, “what aesthetic and political traction is to be gained—if any—in retaining the label ‘queer’ to describe contemporary theatre and performance practice made under the LGBT2Q banner? In a country as regionally, linguistically, and culturally diverse as Canada, can one even adequately account for all the material produced under such a label?” (7). Their answer seems to be embracing the contradictions that currently make up the queer community, as well as embracing the “queer art of failure” from Jack Halberstam’s book of the same name, which surfaces in several of the articles and which was evidently a point of considerable controversy at the conference from which many of these papers come (271). If no comprehensive or cohesive map of queer Canadian theatre and performance is possible, the failure of such a project requires a fragmented approach, reaching as far in every direction one can get to find the nebulous borders where queer resides. Of course, as often happens in the queer community, the farther into the LGBT(2)QPIA+ acronym one’s identity is, the less likely it is to appear in such a survey, and this collection is no exception.

I use this map metaphor deliberately, because the geopolitics of Canada are central to this collection. Perhaps the most delicious example of shade in the volume is the placement of Jean O’Hara’s “Unsettling the Frontier Fable” directly after Richie Wilcox and Jay Whitehead’s “Homesteading a New Queer Frontier,” a trope they seem to use in their otherwise delightful piece without irony. Indeed, the question-which-isn’t-even-a-question of whether two-spirit identities should be included in a volume on queer theatre and performance forms the subject

of Ryan Cunningham's "2-Spirit or Not to Spirit" and appears in Dénommé-Welch's essay. Meanwhile, Metzger's article looks at both the insularity of Québécois theatre and the spatial connectivity of webseries, probing the potential for community in the genre.

Community and connection, after all, is the unifying thread of these essays, however contentious. Multiple authors note how the Q2Q conference occurred in the wake of the Pulse shooting in Orlando in June of 2016. What struck me and many others about Pulse is that even as it laid bare the racism and queerphobia that has only flourished in the U.S. (and Canada) since its aftermath is, as Eury Colin Chang notes, an example of tragic *communitas* (186). The grief this event triggered in locations far from Florida points out that we are brought together by our collective oppression through colonial capitalism and its reverence for straight, cis, white maleness. As Cameron Crookston reminds us in "Passing the Torch Song," "In addition to the common personal trauma of being disowned by one's family, both queer youth and adults must live in a community that defines their identity in opposition to the very philosophical and political idea of 'the family' [...]. Yet the idea of a chosen family, as well as kinship-based rhetoric [...] has continuously been used within queer subcultures" (57). To (very loosely) paraphrase Sara Garton Stanley's "A Queer Redo," we may certainly not be one big happy family, but we're still family.

If this were a vlog instead of a print review, I would cut to me lip synching for my life to the Sister Sledge drag standard "We Are Family," because I should bring it back to performance somehow. The breadth of performance traditions included in this volume is commendable; everything from theatre to webseries to drag to performance art to protest to reality TV to identity and beyond makes an appearance. Itself a performance of queer theory, this is also an important document in its multiplicity of editors and range of scholarship styles employed, allowing for an expansive and contradictory look at a topic rarely centered and collected in such a prominent way in Canadian theatre and performance (1).

JOHNSTON, KIRSTY

Disability Theatre and Modern Drama: Recasting Modernism.

London: Bloomsbury, 2018, 240 pp.

JESSICA WATKIN

What do you think of when you hear the words "Disability performance" together? I will not guess, because I know my answer may be different as a Disabled theatre artist in Toronto, but bringing attention to what we think of and how we consider Disability in performance, and specifically modern drama, is the crux of Johnston's new contribution to the growing field of critical disability theatre studies. Johnston asks us to consider early on in the text: "how art is changed when we conceive of disability as an aesthetic value in itself. In particular, it