

**INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS: DIRECT AUDIENCE ADDRESS IN
CONTEMPORARY THEATRE IN CANADA**

SIGNY LYNCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

NOVEMBER 2021

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the phenomenon of direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada, focusing in particular on how it informs discussions of theatrical interculturalism. It addresses a dearth of scholarship on this common theatrical device, while arguing that limited mainstream understandings of direct address have contributed to its marginalized position in scholarship. The chapters that follow draw from existing theoretical frameworks in theatre and performance studies and other disciplines in order to map out direct address as a theatrical phenomenon that can extend the dramaturgical work of a theatre piece, and begin to chart its history and contemporary roots in the Canadian theatre scene. The following chapters also establish how the concept of relationality helps to illuminate the work that direct address does, particularly in intercultural contexts.

Chapter one explores direct address in theatre in Canada, drawing from interviews with contemporary theatre artists who employ direct address in their work and existing literature on monologue, solo performance, and a range of performance forms to theorize direct address in a Canadian context. Chapter two explores direct audience address in Tetsuro Shigematsu's autobiographical play *Empire of the Son*. It draws on media studies' conceptions of technological immediacy to investigate Shigematsu's use of multimedia and direct address to illuminate his complicated relationship with his father, which carries implications for how we understand interpersonal and intercultural distance and difference and theatrical immediacy. Chapter three explores how the oppositional gaze of direct address in Cliff Cardinal's *Huff* challenges settler audiences to examine their complicity and undo harmful conceptual binaries that mar Indigenous-settler relations and perpetuate injustices. Chapter four, a queer feminist reading of Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and Evalyn Parry's *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, examines how direct address is part of the show's larger messaging to encourage relational ways of living, and how Williamson Bathory's performance of uajaerneq mask dance models for spectators this relationality in real time.

These varied case studies present an introductory look into direct address' richness, while exploring how the way in which an audience is addressed and who that audience is can have significant impact on a performance's meaning-making process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank my supervisor Laura Levin, as well as my committee Jenn Stephenson and John Greyson for all of their support, encouragement, and critical feedback on this project. These were joined by Elizabeth Pentland, Alberto Guevara, and external examiner Barry Freeman, to make an examining committee for whose provocations and generosity I am very grateful.

I would also like to thank others in the department whose classes informed my work and/or who offered me valuable advice and administrative support during my years at York. These include Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston, Mary Pecchia, Marlis Schweitzer, Susanna Talanca, and Belarie Zatzman. I also received valuable support and advice from professors outside the school, in particular Grahame Renyk who helped me to approach my work strategically, and Michelle MacArthur, who was an excellent mentor on a number of projects on which we collaborated.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my colleagues without whose support, encouragement, and writing company, I would surely not have written a single page. These include my cohort-mates, Tabia Lau, Elan Marchinko, Kathe Gray, Ian Jarvis, and Megan Davies. These also include writing group fellows, including Shiraz Biggie, Kymberley Feltham, Tara Gallagher Harris, Stephanie George, Shannon Hughes, Alison Humphrey, Caroline Klimek, Elan Marchinko, Julie Matheson, Julia Matias, Jessica Thorp, Shalon Webber-Heffernan and Kalle Westerling; partners on other projects, including Thea Fitz-James, Ben Gillespie, and Hannah Rackow; and other collaborators including Kelsey Jacobson, Scott Mealey, Jenny Salisbury, Lisa Aikman, and Kelsey Blair, along with countless others.

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INTRODUCTION: FORGING RELATIONS

The invitation may arouse curiosity, trepidation, or dread—stirring excitement throughout the audience. A ghoulish Richard III makes eye contact with each spectator as he shares his murderous plans, thus implicating us in the dreadful deeds that follow. *The Russian Play*'s cartoonish narrator Sonia draws the audience in (and critiques the patriarchy) through her “shit Russian love story.” Former radio broadcaster Tetsuro Shigematsu uses intermedial technology to immerse his audience in his complicated relationship with his father. These are all examples of direct audience address, a mode of theatrical communication in which the performer, often through the construct of a character, addresses the spectator directly—what many refer to as “breaking the fourth wall.” Drawing from theatre and performance studies, affect theory, media studies, queer and critical race theories, and scholarship on theatrical interculturalism, my dissertation theorizes direct address in the theatre as a mode of performance that can be understood through the emotional encounters it fosters between performers and spectators by means of its “invitation” to audience members to participate in the performance (White 7). The first study of its kind dedicated to this subject in a Canadian context, this dissertation offers a framework for understanding direct address as dramaturgical and relational device that can in particular inform scholarly discussions of theatrical interculturalism.

Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing uses the concept of “friction,” to describe how ‘universal’ ideas give rise to the global in “the sticky materiality of practical encounters” with the local, forged in the space “where the rubber meets the road” (6). Engaging quite literally with these ideas, Nicholas Billion’s play *Iceland* examines how the operations of global capitalism play out on the level of encounters between individuals. *Iceland* consists of the intertwining monologues of three strangers whose lives touch each other in ultimately tragic ways. But it tells

a larger story than that, too: that of the fragility, loneliness, and valuelessness of human lives under capitalist forces, “the capital-C, free-market type” (Billon 43). The play’s title is a reference to the Icelandic banking crisis of 2008 which many have attributed to the influence of neoliberal capitalism. The small scale of Billon’s show makes the immeasurable costs of capitalism tangible through the medium of personal tragedy. Beyond its concretization of often abstracted relations, as the show demonstrates the very real consequences of the Icelandic financial crisis of 2008 on three individuals living in Toronto, there is also another element of friction at work in Billon’s play, found in the relationship between the characters and the audience which is shaped through the medium of direct audience address. Direct address in the show serves to present the fractured reality of capitalism, its connected precarity that Billon exposes, and to invest the audience in the characters and story through the kinds of relationships it ‘sparks.’ I find friction a useful concept for understanding direct address as a device that operates in the interstices between a theatrical work and its reception, where the actual meets the theoretical, in the liminal space between the stage and spectators.

Through specific case studies of various Canadian theatrical works, this dissertation examines direct address as a dramaturgical as well as emotional and affective device that operates relationally between performer and audience. In particular, I examine how direct address is employed in specific pieces to work out the nuanced interrelations of interculturalism and constructions of subjectivity in ways that examine the complexities of identity and identification, and can inform discussions of theatrical interculturalism. In so doing, I develop understandings of participatory, digital, and intercultural theatre by exploring how direct address has been used variously to speak back to the colonial gaze, to enhance understandings of mediation and interpersonal closeness, and to investigate the nature of the encounter itself in

order to interrogate intercultural difference. In my analyses, I argue that the specific material conditions of the address (including its tone and the larger context of the encounter between performance and audience member), and the way in which the audience is invited to engage as its intended recipient (as what/whom and on what terms), can strongly shape both the performance's dramaturgical effect and its cultural/emotional impact with specific audiences, as the spectator's experience of the address comes to shape their experience and understanding of the larger theatrical work.

The scholarly precedents for this study of direct address are relatively few. Despite its contemporary proliferation and global historical ubiquity, direct address has largely been unexplored by theatre scholars, likely due to associations between the device and didactic, populist performance. On the rare occasions it is discussed in an academic setting it is often understood as a one-dimensional effect or gimmick. Occasionally scholars may acknowledge the use of direct address in brief, punctuating examples, but rarely do they consider its particular effects or its use as a larger performance-shaping strategy. In chapter one, I theorize some potential reasons for this scholarly neglect, but it is enough to say here that in certain circumstances direct address has emerged as something of a cliché. In Kat Sandler's complex take on police violence *Bang Bang*, for example, direct address is discussed by the characters as a trite device used in political theatre to didactically reduce complicated issues towards an overly-reductive and ultimately politically fruitless goal of "implicating the audience." Acknowledging the truth evident in this trope, this study does not make an argument for the innate sophistication of direct address as a device. Rather, through its specific case studies, it avoids generalization and argues for a more complex understanding of direct address as a device that can be put to critically sophisticated use as well as employed in simplistic or overly-didactic

ways. Beyond addressing this debate around direct address as a theatrical device, I also take time in this dissertation to acknowledge the limits and potential problematics of framing performance pieces through the discourse of ‘direct address,’ given its origins in and limited application outside a legacy of Euro-American post-Enlightenment dramatic tradition.

U.K.-based scholar Bridget Escolme, one of the few to critically engage with the device, explores in *Talking to the Audience* how employing direct address in productions of Shakespeare brings forward particular readings of Shakespeare’s plays and can be used to understand the development of Early Modern subjectivity. My dissertation extends her work—particularly her understanding of how direct address constructs the performer as an embodied subject before the audience—and broadens the scope of her theorization of the device, most significantly thinking more about the audience and the affective impact of direct address. Where Escolme is mostly interested in what the device can reveal about specific plays, my work will also examine how the current popularity of direct address reflects its unique abilities to work through the complex positioning and politics invoked in contemporary discussions of intercultural subjectivity and exchange.

In the rest of this introduction, I will first lay out how we might understand direct address as a dramaturgical device through a concrete example, briefly analyzing two plays by Canadian playwright Hannah Moscovitch to frame my understanding of direct address’ sophisticated dramaturgical potential. Next, I will explore how direct address can be understood through existing scholarly conversations about theatrical participation, space, notions of presence, and audience. I will then lay out the context for this study, situating it in discussions of contemporary theatre and theatrical interculturalism, and detail my methodological approach. Finally, I will briefly outline the case studies that make up the chapters that follow.

Direct address as dramaturgical device

“Do you want to meet him?” *East of Berlin*’s Rudi asks the audience, after announcing to us that his father is a Nazi. The protagonist of Hannah Moscovitch’s critically acclaimed 2007 play then gestures to an onstage door that leads to a study where his father reportedly waits, lurking just out of sight. Thus begins an ambivalent relationship between Rudi and the audience that forms the heart of the play and lasts its entire course. It continues as Rudi—at varying points abrasive and sincere, and with punctuating flashback scenes—recounts for the audience the events that have led up to the moment in time in which the play takes place, one in which he is considering killing his father. The show’s performer-audience relationship is directed by Moscovitch’s characterization and led by the actor who plays Rudi, but importantly also plays out in the reactions of individual spectators through the way in which they receive and respond to Rudi’s provocations. Direct audience address in *East of Berlin* serves to elevate the emotional stakes of the play for the audience and encourages their active social engagement with the work. Perhaps most importantly, through the fostering of a kind of emotional surrogacy in which the audience’s ambivalent relationship with Rudi comes to mirror his own troubled relationship with his father, direct address leads the audience into an affective understanding of Rudi’s dilemma, right down to his final, gripping decision at the play’s end. This is just one brief example of how direct audience address is employed in contemporary performance as a relational device that can affect audiences both intellectually and emotionally, and that may simultaneously have deep, dramatic impact through its engagement with a play’s core themes. Through these capabilities, I argue that direct audience address can serve as a potentially powerful dramaturgical tool that can greatly impact an audience’s experience and meaning-making process.

In order to support this argument, which underlies the chapters of this dissertation, I will offer another, more detailed example to demonstrate how direct address as a mode of performance can help to further a theatre piece's dramaturgical aims. If, in my first example, the audience has a tense relationship with *East of Berlin*'s protagonist, Rudi, the opposite is true of their relationship with Sonya, the narrator and protagonist of Moscovitch's earlier work, *The Russian Play*. This one-act play is a dark and humorous short fable set in early Stalinist Russia. The show tells the story of a young flower-shop girl who falls in love with a gravedigger and in the consummation of their affair finds herself in a downward spiral towards her own destruction. Direct address in *The Russian Play* is integral to the play's structure and serves to connect the seemingly foreign world of Sonya's story to the world of her audience. Through this connection, Moscovitch cleverly utilizes the Russian play-world to reveal the patriarchal systems that control our own society.

The implementation of direct address lends the play its storytelling format. The unabashedly metatheatrical show opens with a woman standing alone on stage who speaks with a Russian accent and wears "a ragged skirt and a shawl" (*The Russian Play* 125): she is our narrator/storyteller, Sonya, who comments on the adventures of her younger self. In *East of Berlin*, Rudi addresses the audience in a non-specific context; however, in *The Russian Play* the narrator is conscious that she is taking part in a theatrical production and makes several references to this when addressing her audience: "You are looking in program to see if there is intermission when you can leave" (125); and later, when there is a brief blackout, "Ahn, yes, the shit lights. I am sorry to apologize" (129). Through her awareness of the reality that exists outside her play, Sonya functions as a figurative bridge between the world of the audience and the world of the play: though she is a character of the play-world and parts of her are foreign to

most of her audience (her accent, nationality, time period, dress) she is very literate in our culture, which is apparent in her unexpected familiarity with and understanding of contemporary North American theatrical conventions, and, as we later see, contemporary North American culture as a whole. She cheekily weaves stereotypical Russian tropes into her tale—vodka, cold, factories, the KGB, and Stalin—as an indicator that her story does not take place in the actual Russia but a conventional fictionalized Russia that we Western audiences are familiar with; the one that comes to mind when we hear the title “The Russian Play”: “you are thinking Chekhov, Tolstoy” (125). Through the repetition of acknowledging phrases such as “So you see how it was between them” (126, 127), and “We all know what happens [...]” (132), Sonya affirms that despite the seemingly foreign setting, this story operates under the narrative rules we are familiar with. The subject matter is still relatable; it is a story for our time and its morals are for us.

Our narrator announces, at the beginning of the play, her goals for this production: “I am wanting for your amusement, and also your illumination on many subjects. But mostly on subject of love” (125). In this way, the play follows the format of a fable, which can be described as “a short narrative, in which some moral truth or principle is explained by means of a story” (Easton, Jones, and Yelland 71). The story Sonya tells is framed by her narration, and she imposes upon it the moral lesson that we are to take away: “love is shit” (131). The direct address in *The Russian Play* allows for a dual perspective on one storyline as Sonya’s cynical narration is superimposed over a sad love story. The story of “the gravedigger and the flower-shop girl” (140) is fraught with opposing images à la Victor Hugo’s Romantic conception of creation in which “the ugly exists beside the beautiful” (Hugo): flowers and graves, the beautiful and the dirty, the alive and the decaying, the warmth of love in the cold Russian town, sex and death. Our narrator, in her critique, rejects the Romantic elements of the story for the harsh realities of life. She critiques its

romantic viewpoint and the idea of love as a whole, and yet ultimately ends up subscribing to these views when the cynical narration and the tragic, romantic story meet at the end of the play.

This convergence of narration and story begins when the narrator reveals that *she* is Sonya and it is actually her own “shit Russian love story” (139) she has been telling. She goes on to explain that being in love with Piotr, the gravedigger, has ruined her life and that “love is like Russia. There are some beautiful pieces, but mostly it’s shit” (140). However, her final message is obscured by the play’s last stage direction. She begins her last phrase, “love is--” but before she can say the final, ‘shit’:

PIOTR enters and puts his arms around SONYA. She feels his warmth. She is terribly, terribly happy. The Violinist stops playing abruptly, Sonya is dead in Piotr’s arms. As Piotr lays Sonya in the grave, the lights fade out. (140)

Even while she complains that “I fall in love with Piotr, and that’s my whole life gone for shit” (139), as soon as Piotr reappears she once again falls under love’s spell, unable to avoid the source of her own destruction. This ending demonstrates that despite her earlier protests she is destined to repeat the same mistakes, making her cynicism, in effect, pointless: faced with temptation, we will always give in for the brief moment of happiness it will provide. However, Sonya has been mistaken about one important thing: it was not the act of loving itself that caused her downfall but the restrictive nature of the patriarchy under which she lives.

While I have stated that the moral of Sonya’s story is “love is shit,” this could easily be amended to “love is shit—for women.” *The Russian Play* has a hidden political undercurrent—there is more to this play than just Sonya’s tale of woe. In the patriarchal society presented by Moscovitch, a woman’s entire worth is related to her sexuality (in terms of purity, beauty, or availability), and her sexuality is much more heavily policed than that of men (hence Sonya is kicked out onto the streets by her employer when her sexual relationship with Piotr is discovered). Sonya is romantically involved with two men in the play and while she suffers from

each relationship each of the men get away completely unscathed. A closer examination of Sonya's woes reveals that what ultimately gets her into trouble is not the fact that she falls in love, but that she as a woman does not have the same social and economic freedoms as men. Furthermore, her pacifying preoccupation with romance prevents her from identifying or taking action against this problem, resulting in the bleakness of the play's ending.

Critical to the play's success is how Sonya, through direct address, draws connections between her own experiences and those of her audience. When making statements about love, Sonya frequently uses the modifier "Ahn, Ladies?" indicating that her address is targeted at the women in the audience and furthermore connecting her experiences with theirs. For example, when describing how Piotr wooed her, she observes, "You see? You fall in love with him too!" (128). Through like relations, Sonya allies her own story with the audience members' and presents the possibility that any one of the 'ladies' she addresses runs the risk of falling victim of the same trap. While in the world of the audience the same concrete restrictions are not placed on women as in the play-world, not everything is as different as we would like to believe. Midway through the play, Sonya offers the simile "when woman is sixty, she is like Russia. Everyone knows where it is, but no one wants to go there" (129). She then notes, "Ladies, you can't see, but all the men are nodding" (129). Through Sonya's perceived verification of this maxim by the men in the audience, Moscovitch implies that current attitudes towards women are as bad as those held in the Stalinist Russia that Sonya inhabits in the play. An alternative reading to Moscovitch's narrative—one that is only available through the play's clever use of direct address—is that as long as women are fixated on love and the idea of romance as the source of all of their joys and failures, they will never be able to address or overthrow the social, sexual, and economic inequalities that plague them.

This small case study of *The Russian Play*, besides providing an example of how direct address can function as a dramaturgical tool, also demonstrates how through its bridging of the ‘actual’ and ‘fictional’ worlds that coexist in theatre space, direct address can serve as a useful political tool, a theme that continues throughout the dissertation. Before I move on, I want to clarify that direct address is ultimately an effect of performance, albeit one that is often specified by (and in turn often dramaturgically supports) the script. While my readings of direct address in *East of Berlin* and *The Russian Play* are based on the play texts rather than a live performance, they depend on the directors’ and performers’ employment and understanding of the device to bring it to fruition. My case studies of theatre pieces throughout this dissertation are primarily based upon live performances, and also refer to play texts and occasionally archival footage of a live performance where available. Most of the shows I focus on as case studies are tied to or only performed by a particular performance and writing team, which results in typically strong connections between the show’s textual dramaturgical structure and performance choices.

Conceptualizing direct address

While direct address occurs in other forms of media, most notably film and television, and some scholarly work has been done on this subject, this dissertation will focus primarily on theatre. In this next section, I will lay out how direct address might be conceptualized and understood through a theatre studies lens. Though I acknowledge that this framing—with its grounding in a Eurocentric and historically white supremacist dramatic tradition—may not align with the understandings or conceptualizations that some of the artists I write about in this dissertation have about their own works and respective performance practices, I find it a useful starting point to begin to think about how this dissertation might be situated in theatre studies

context. As Hans Thies Lehmann mentions in *Postdramatic Theatre*, direct address in the theatre is not the same thing as a dramatic close-up in film. Whereas in a film close-up signals the “removal of spatial experience,” “by contrast the monologue of figures on stage reinforces the certainty of our perception of the dramatic events as a reality in the now, authenticated through the implication of the audience” (127). Thus, direct address in the theatre, as opposed to in film, is concerned with simultaneity of time, place, and space; the duality of the stage as both fictional world and ‘real’ place; the presence and relationship between audience and actor; and the implication, or ‘participation’ of the audience in the performance. In the next few pages, I’ll sketch out how we might begin to conceptualize and theorize direct audience address within a theatre studies context through a number of different frames. In particular, I’ll situate direct address within ongoing discussions about theatrical participation, about theatrical space, about notions of presence in theatre, and through its effect on theatre audiences.

Direct address and theatrical participation

Direct address is likely not the first thing that comes to mind when hearing the phrase “participatory theatre.” While Gareth White concedes, “of course all audiences are participatory” (3), he chooses to focus his book *Audience Participation in the Theatre* on physical and verbal participation, the kinds of participation most frequently invoked in participatory theatre pieces. And yet, it is my argument that direct address can be productively understood through the lens and framework of participation. The participatory theatre movement can be read in part as an attempt by artists to fight the perceived passivity of Western audiences (both in the theatre and in the world at large). However, some have questioned these presumptions of audience passivity, such as philosopher Jacques Rancière who argues that watching and sitting still should not necessarily be equated with intellectual passivity. Similarly, theatre scholar Gay McAuley asks,

“acknowledging that the audiences for mainstream theatre nowadays generally behave in a restrained manner...does being quiet equate with passivity? Is activity to be judged solely in terms of bodily mobility?” (240). White observes that audience members who watch a performance “are affected emotionally, cognitively and physically by the action they witness,” and that the performer in turn is affected by their reactions (4). Could this interplay not be construed as a kind of participation? Indeed, despite this trend of understanding audiences as passive, much contemporary theatre seems to take a more involved spectator as a given. In the introduction to her foundational text, *Theatre Audiences*, Susan Bennett, describing contemporary trends in Western theatre, writes of “emergent theatres [that] have sought the centrality of the spectator as the subject of the drama, but as a subject who can think and act,” one who is a, “productive and emancipated spectator” (1). My analysis of direct audience address in this dissertation presupposes such an engaged and active audience member. Many contemporary Canadian artists who make use of direct address do so with this appreciation for the centrality of the spectator, and under the assumption of the spectator’s ability to actively engage with the performance. Direct address functions as a specific invitation to these spectators, one which once accepted begins a participatory relationship.

White writes that participation in theatre is initiated by an invitation from a performer that is either overt, implicit, covert, or accidental. An overt invitation may consist of, “a performer, in or out of character, addressing spectators directly in a way that makes it clear that they are being asked to respond in some way, something as subtle as a change in tone of voice, or a gesture, and a particular sequence of words” (12). We could understand directly addressing an audience as issuing the exact same kind of invitation, though in cases of direct address, the performer is usually asking for a slightly different kind of participation than what White is

referring to. Instead of asking for an audience member's physical or verbal response, the performers in the theatre pieces I study typically ask for attention or consideration; their mental, emotional, and/or spiritual participation. By giving the performer this requested attention, the audience member has completed a dialogical exchange, and thus could be re-characterized as a 'participant.' Phenomenologist Bert O. States would agree with this assessment. He suggests the existence of three distinct 'modes' of performance that the actor adopts: the self-expressive (I), the collaborative (you), and the representational (he/she). The "guiding characteristic" of the 'collaborative' mode "is that the stage uses some form of the 'you' address in its relation to the audience" (170), making this a mode of direct address. States sees in the collaborative mode both the potential for activity from the audience—as it breaks down "the distance between actor and audience...to give the spectator something more than a passive role in the theater exchange" (170)—and the potential for participation in the "invitation to collaborate" from the performer (170).

Lehmann dismisses the notion that audiences of direct address are passive when he explains that most understandings of monologue¹ which conceive of it as something that happens 'to' an audience are based on a "text-centred approach," which "do[es] not recognize the theatrical subtlety of monologues" (Lehmann 128). So, what does the audience actually do in these interactions? Under the circumstances of direct address, the audience's reactions are the primary feedback the performer receives (where they would normally have a scene partner), thus the audience is interpolated into the play as co-performer. Although the play may still be scripted, audiences can affect how this script is delivered. While not seeking to denigrate physical participation in performance, I desire to explore the characteristics and possibilities of

¹ While Lehmann adopts the term 'monologue,' it is clear from his multiple references to the "implication of the audience" that he is talking specifically about direct address.

emotional, embodied, and intellectual participation that may emerge out of this co-performative relationship. This relationship resembles the performer-audience relationship as construed in understandings of postdramatic theatre pieces, one in which the audience takes on a key role of meaning-maker in the performance. In some cases, the audience's 'participation' may also have a tangible impact on the piece itself. This resemblance somewhat explains my reliance on Lehmann's foundational book *Postdramatic Theatre* in my conceptualization of direct address. I will continue these discussions about the connections between direct audience address and participatory theatre a little later on this chapter where I elaborate on the scholarly context for this study. At that time, I will also lay out the ways that understanding direct address as participatory might intervene in and advance these existing discussions. In chapter three, I further develop these ideas by theorizing direct address and participation through a specific case study of Cliff Cardinal's *Huff*.

Direct address and theatrical space

Another way to conceptualize direct address is by understanding how its employment as a device shapes theatrical space. The participatory exchange between performer and spectator established by direct address creates a figurative bridge that changes the space between them, and valuable information might be gained in the investigation of this space and its possibilities. Ric Knowles recaps Robert Weimann's conception of the platea, or the forestage, which in early modern staging practices is a "non-representational unlocalized public space that is occupied and shared by the actors and the audience" (*How Theatre Means* 64). This same description could apply to the theatrical space created through direct address, space that exists on the border between mimesis and non-mimetic performance. Knowles elaborates that "the platea was the subversive space of devils, clowns, fools, and ordinary folk, who ran among or enjoyed special

relationships with the audience” (64). This liminal space contains subversive possibilities, which may emerge through the “transgression of the border of the imaginary dramatic universe to the real theatrical situation” that is instigated by direct address (Lehmann 128). Lehmann suggests that while much dramatic communication occurs along the “intra-scenic axis of communication” (or, between the performers within the frame of the stage), direct address occurs along the “theatron axis,” that is “the orthogonal axis of communication between the stage and the (really or structurally) distinct place of the spectators” (127). He goes on to note that in “all the different varieties of monologue and apostrophe to the audience, including solo performance,” the “intra-scenic axis recedes compared to the theatron axis” (127). Thus, the employment of direct address foregrounds the relationship between performer and spectator over the relationships among performers on stage, and could be conceptualized as a re-positioning of theatrical space.

Joanne Tompkins, who writes about site-specific performance, explores theatrical space through the concept of ‘heterotopia’. Borrowing from Foucault and others, Tompkins defines heterotopias as, “imagined spaces in dialogue with real ones (which could also be a definition of theatre itself)” (106). Heterotopia, “resides not in the performance per se but the interstices between the performance and the real of today. In this interstitial gap is the potential for (re)thinking theatre’s function in its social space” (106). This potential, according to Tompkins, exists in the “heterotopic dialogue” between the two spaces (106). In her article, “Theatre’s Heterotopia and the Site-Specific Production of ‘Suitcase’,” Tompkins discusses a site-specific performance she witnessed that was performed and set in a train station. Tompkins observes how the dialogue between the real train station (where business continued as usual throughout the performance) and the fictional one of the performance caused her to connect the two and

consider the events of the play in the context of the ‘real’ world: “the presence of the everyday...located this event in real life” (106). This specifically resulted in Tompkins making connections between the Jewish kinder or children who arrived in England in advance of the Second World War (the subjects of the play) and the status of contemporary refugee children worldwide, leading her to suggest, “one value in heterotopia is its capacity to connect theatre much more directly with the social and political world in which it takes place” (110). Through the transgression of the boundaries that separate the stage and the audience, direct address facilitates similar heterotopic dialogue between the fictional world of the play and the ‘real’ world of the audience. This dissertation, through its specific case studies, will consider some of the implications and effects of this heterotopic dialogue, including how it might contribute to a performance’s sociopolitical efficacy and reconceptualize intercultural encounters.

Direct address and theatrical presence

There is another element of performance relevant to my discussion of direct address: the controversial subject of presence. Here we might consider presence to describe the nebulous and often idealized intangible experiences associated with the act of viewing a performance. In *Presence in Play*, Power describes the “conflict within theatre studies between those who advocate and affirm theatrical experience as being founded on presence, and those ‘poststructuralist thinkers’ ... who view the notion of presence with suspicion” (Power 7). Those who subscribe to the latter camp, of which Derrida is often credited as leader, include Baz Kershaw, Jacques Rancière and Phillip Auslander. Alternatively, the former group, those who believe in the centrality of presence to theatre and performance studies, include scholars such as Jill Dolan and Erika Fischer-Lichte. Power’s response to these two camps is useful. Rather than choosing a side, he shifts the lens away from the ontology of theatrical presence arguing, that

whether or not unmediated presence could be said to exist does not preclude the *experience* of presence, which could even “be seen as a function of theatrical signification” (9). In this way, “Theatre can be seen not so much as ‘having’ or containing presence, but as an art that plays with its possibilities” (8). Accordingly, this dissertation will examine how direct address can help foster feelings of presence and immediacy between the performer and audience to dramaturgical effect.

One way we might begin to consider presence in performance, particularly in regards to direct address is through Fischer-Lichte’s notion of the “autopoietic feedback loop,” formed by performer and audience, which White explains succinctly. For Fischer-Lichte:

In all performance, but in a self-conscious and strategic way in performance since the 60s, there is an ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ ... Autopoietic because it is self-generating, an emergent system that arises from itself, with only the input of raw materials rather than an exterior guiding hand; and a feedback loop because the activity of the spectators, however subtle, becomes part of the event, generating the variations in the activity of the performers and other spectators that generate more variations, and so on, and produce the liveness of the theatre event. (White 23)

In this feedback loop it is the relationship between the performer and the audience (and among the audience) that constructs the performance. White elaborates that,

in Fischer-Lichte’s account a feedback loop defines all theatre, but this autopoietic character arrives with the ‘performative turn’, with three processes ...role reversal [in which the audience takes on an active choice-making role], the creation of community and mutual physical contact (163)

Direct address could fall particularly into the middle category of, “the creation of community of out actors and spectators based on their bodily copresence” (Fischer-Lichte 51). Lehmann has observed that theatrical discourse is “doubly addressed”: “it is at the same time directed intra-scenically (i.e. at the interlocutors in the play) and extrascenically at the theatron” (127); however, when the intra-scenic communication fades in favour of the extra-scenic, as happens in

direct address, the device may serve as a, “‘magnifying glass’ on the feedback system of performance” (as Fischer-Lichte observes happens with role reversal) (White 163), intensifying the relationship and the strength of the feedback loop, and increasing the audience’s engagement with and impact on the performance. For example, in the aforementioned play *Iceland*, the majority of the show is played as direct address to the audience, and all three characters want things from the audience, in the form of approval, laughter, support, etc. In the 2012 production I saw in Toronto at the SummerWorks Festival, directed by Ravi Jain, Kawa Ada’s Halim in particular played off the audience. He would pause significantly after each off-colour joke he made to gauge audience reactions, which would shape his delivery of the next lines. His frustration at the insufficient response was then clearly carried into the play’s final confrontation when the three characters at last meet face-to-face. In my role as a spectator, because my earlier function as a scene partner served to prime the characters for this moment, I felt particularly implicated in the disastrous ending.

But what informs this feedback loop? Certainly, the performer’s words and actions and the visible and audible reactions of the audience. The extent of the individual audience member’s engagement in the narrative and attention to the performance also affects this loop. We might also consider part of this feedback loop the specifics of the relationship created between the audience and the performer through direct address. Are they friends? Adversaries? What is the audience’s ‘role’ in the production? These parameters are ultimately decided by the individual audience member based upon cues the performer gives them. This loop could also include things like the particular emotional relationship created between performer and audience (or even among audience members), and might potentially include corporeal exchange alongside the other forms I’ve mentioned. As demonstrated in the brief *Iceland* example above, the exchange

created by this loop may shift the course of a performance, for example, through an adjustment in the play's emotional beats and peaks, even if the script remains the same.

Most theories that privilege presence in performance connect it to a corporeal sense, and place the body at the centre of 'present experience.' Susan Leigh Foster refers to "kinaesthetic empathy," "an empathetic sharing of experience during the moment of witnessing another body," or a form of body-to-body communication (Foster 246). Phenomenologist Stanton B. Garner, in *Bodied Spaces*, posits this kind of experience as central to the theatrical experience: "bodied spatiality is at the heart of dramatic presentation, for it is through the actor's corporeal presence under the spectator's gaze that dramatic text actualizes itself in the field of performance" (1). This "kinaesthetic empathy" derived from presence could quite easily be seen as the source from which "utopian performatives" emerge. Jill Dolan describes utopian performatives as "small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense" (*Utopia in Performance* 5). These moments are a product of communal experiences; Dolan notes that she is drawn to performance, "lured by the possibility that in its insistent presence (and present), my fellow spectators and I might connect more fully with the complexities of our past and the possibility of a better future" (5). Through this description, we might consider communal experiences like utopian performatives a potential product of the feedback loop between performers and spectators (and among spectators) and thus another potential layer in the actor-audience exchange. This dissertation especially engages with these ideas of presence through the concept of immediacy in chapter two.

Direct address as audience experience

While some, like myself, are intrigued by the possibilities of direct address as a sophisticated and generative device, others are much more skeptical of its potential, deeming it pedantic and limited, or simply a dated practice. (I explore these perspectives in more detail in chapter one.) Why is this device so polarizing? Perhaps its divisiveness can be linked directly to its participatory nature. As I have observed, Lehmann suggests that while much of dramatic communication occurs along the “intra-scenic axis of communication,” in instances of direct address the “intra-scenic axis recedes compared to the theatron axis,” or the axis between the spectator and performer (127). This means that while the success of the performance typically rests on the interactions between performers as interpreted by the audience, it now depends upon the success of the audience both participating in the performance and interpreting their own interactions, a more difficult proposition. Through this reframing many complicating factors arise. The audience member, interpolated into the performance as co-performer, is under-rehearsed and may be unprepared to accept their role as scene partner, potentially leading to awkwardness. Yet another factor can be seen in White’s observation of the ways in which an audience member’s emotional state can affect their participation (and interpretation):

A good mood and positive outlook – enhanced, of course, by an adventurous attitude to participatory art – makes the landscape of action contained by a horizon appear accessible and welcoming. A skeptical or fearful anticipation of the event, provoked or influenced by unhappy circumstances unconnected to it, makes the space of the horizon uninviting, an area of dark motives, cold encounters and hidden horrors (166)

White also notes how a performer may seek to influence this “internal weather,” “by operating on the affective state of the audience as a whole” (166). Just as the thought of physical participation disturbs some audience members, the employment of the direct address may result in embarrassment, something that Nicholas Ridout explores at the beginning of a chapter amusingly titled, “Please Don’t Look at Me.” Ridout, examining a particular instance of

embarrassment resulting from direct address, attributes this reaction to a difference of expectations: “the embarrassing thing about eye contact in the 2000 production of *Richard III*, then, may be that it is in the wrong place at the wrong time...modern theatrical spectatorship is a relationship set up to generate a particular set of pleasures, and it is in the confusion generated by action that departs from those that sustain this relationship, that the embarrassment occurs” (76-7). The notion that this embarrassment arises from unmet audience expectations could be supported by Susan Bennett’s theories of audience reception. Bennett describes a “horizon of expectations” that informs how individual audience members receive and interpret a performance. This horizon of expectations is a constantly renegotiated process that is influenced by an audience member’s expectations based on their previous experience and what they are presented with in the moment of performance, and is specific to each audience member (49-52). If the individual spectator is not expecting to encounter this device, finding themselves suddenly the subject of a performer’s gaze may cause embarrassment.

Finally, one cannot underestimate the impact of something as simple as the logistics of staging. As I’ve already discussed, direct address is prevalent in smaller-cast shows, including solo performance. In these productions, an actor may have to fight harder to keep an audience’s attention, as the lack of other performers limits blocking possibilities and can lead to vocal monotony. Audiences accordingly associating direct address with more disappointing experiences could inform its unpopularity. This multiplicity of influencing factors could explain why direct address as a performance device can be so ‘hit or miss.’ David Watmough describes this uncertainty from his many years as a solo performer, and accepts it as part of the form:

At best, I share with my audience...a unique sense of at-oneness. Of having been somewhere together. Our differences of background, psychology, and sexuality having met in the place of stripped pretense...At worst, we share the garments of

embarrassment. Mine of stripping away the layers of convention, my audience for being offered such. (1)

This uncertainty is also noted by Dolan of her “utopian performatives” when she observes: “creating or finding utopia in performance is of necessity idiosyncratic, spontaneous, and unpredictable” (*Utopia in Performance* 5). From these points, I would suggest that the uncertainty of the reception of direct address should not limit its use, nor does it outweigh the potential payoff from a successful interaction (some of which I examine in detail in my case studies through this dissertation). I would further argue that although the specific outcome of employing direct address in performance may be unforeseeable, there are certainly techniques one can employ to increase the chances of a positive audience experience (as Dolan explores with her utopian performatives).² Now that I’ve mapped out some potential ways to conceptualize direct audience address as a theatrical device, this next section of the introduction will lay out the theoretical context for my exploration of the device in this dissertation.

Additional theoretical contexts

The contemporary popularity of direct address (further explored in chapter one), I argue, ties into a larger sociocultural obsession with audience and participation. In contemporary Euro-American and Canadian art and performance, direct address can be situated within a proliferation of participatory and immersive strategies and of ‘postdramatic’ presentational theatrical techniques which self-consciously rely on and engage with the encounter between the spectator

² By the end of this dissertation, the reader may have their own ideas about what kinds of strategies of direct address might prompt the most positive response. I would suggest that the experiences that work best with audiences seek to avoid didacticism and don’t rely on audience members for rote or trite responses. Instead, well-employed direct address treats spectators as complex and multi-faceted figures, and invites them into nuanced and ambiguous relationships that allow spectators to form their own understandings about the characters addressing them and how they relate to us, rather than relying on a particular, singular response as part of their effects.

and the artwork (see Bishop; Bourriaud; Jackson; Lehmann; Lavender). These practices are typically depicted as breaking from so-called ‘traditional’ theatre that takes place in a theatre building behind a proscenium. In considering direct address as a participatory device, I will investigate how more ‘traditional’ theatre has been impacted by this participatory turn, and further how direct address might blur boundaries between ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ theatres while responding to critiques of both forms. The first chapter of this dissertation will do more to situate this dissertation in its practical context, which is the employment of direct audience address in contemporary theatre pieces in Canada, while this section of the introduction will continue to unpack its broader theoretical context.

My work engages with recent attempts by scholars to theorize a distinct and emerging movement of twenty-first century performance, which centres audience experience. In *Performance in the Twenty-First Century*, Andy Lavender describes a post 9-11 performance paradigm that focuses on scenarios of “actuality, authenticity, encounter and experience,” and is “definitely beyond the postmodern, even while it continues to trade in certain postmodern strategies” (10). Lavender’s description of this twenty-first century performance form, which he refers to as ‘theatre(s) of engagement,’ emphasizes a foregrounding of personal stories and inter-human immediacy and intimacy. These factors could be seen as consequences of the ‘post-truth era,’ where, through a Baudrillardian barrage of simulacra, the directly experienced real has come to take precedence and be valued over the real that is overtly mediatized and experienced through digital technology (Tomlin 144). These factors may also play a part in understanding direct address’ contemporary resurgence as a device that foregrounds the immediate ‘event’ of the performance. Lavender’s study makes a good attempt to take account of the cultural context of contemporary performance and the way it is often imbricated with neoliberal ideals and an

experience economy; however, given the ambitious scope of his project, attempting to explore a broad swathe of twenty-first century theatre, Lavender's account is sometimes sparsely described and can feel disconnected. My work explores several of the trends Lavender discusses (including affect, participation, and digital technology) but my focus on direct address allows for greater continuity and more detailed analysis, while at the same time working with and extending his observations that contemporary performance has been heavily influenced by growing individualism and the experience economy.

A key component of Lavender's 'theatres of engagement' is an emphasis on affect. The recent affective trend in performance has appeared in concert with a larger scholarly turn towards affect in the arts and humanities, spearheaded in theatre and performance studies by scholars such as Erin Hurley. The affective turn helps me to understand the complexities of response that these works solicit from audience members, and to distinguish between the feeling of affective immediacy and the specific emotional relationships created through the device (just as Hurley in *Theatre & Feeling* clarifies between affect, emotion, and mood). Secondly, the affective turn's focus on the body's ability to affect others and be affected carries great political potential; the affective element of direct address makes it particularly useful in addressing the inequalities of intercultural relations in Canada. While Hurley mentions that explorations of affect in theatre often investigate how it may foster a collective sense of *communitas* among audience members (10), the affective impact of the direct address I explore may target spectators from their place within a larger audience or as individuals, the implications of which I discuss a little later in this chapter. Critically in my case studies, this affect does not rely on empathy. While empathy frequently emerges as a much-touted and praised effect of theatre, idealized understandings of empathy, particularly in intercultural contexts, have recently come under scrutiny; from Saidiya

Hartman's trenchant critique of empathy in her book *Scenes of Subjection*, to scholars such as Jill Carter and Dylan Robinson who have examined the toxic and unproductive role empathy plays in Indigenous-settler relations. In *Immersions in Culture Difference*, Natalie Alvarez's case studies of theatrical immersions (from tourist attractions to military training activities) invite us "to trouble the thrall to empathy and the tendency to think of performance as a 'veritable empathy boot camp'...reminding us of the limits of exercises that aim to immerse oneself in the experience of the other" (163), observing that empathy does not often lead to ethical or equitable intercultural relations. Accordingly, this dissertation will instead examine other forms of what Kim Solga calls "intercultural affect," that theatre can evoke, including fear, embarrassment, and what I call "felt immediacy" (more on this shortly).

Another important context for understanding the direct address trend in contemporary theatre and performance is recent interest in questions of agency, interaction, and participation. French philosopher Jacques Rancière (whose ideas are explored in greater detail in chapter three) has become an important touch point for scholars discussing what is often referred to as 'the social turn' in contemporary performance. Rancière views the agency of individual spectators as the key to creating politically progressive performance. He challenges the notion that seated audiences are passive and that all participatory performance must involve the physical participation of the audience. He furthermore sees political power in the audience member's individualized reception of a performance; however, Rancière's approach, with its focus on the individual, also has a problematic alignment with neoliberalism that may challenge its progressive political potential. Current debates about performance and participation have investigated the influence of neoliberal ideals on the recent popularity of these trends in Europe and North America. Jen Harvie has explored the difficulty of separating out the

discourses/effects of an emancipatory, participatory turn in performance and neoliberalism by showing how neoliberalism impacts arts funding and policy and the development of contemporary art pieces in the UK. Other scholars, such as Andy Lavender, Adam Alston, and Keren Zaiontz (these last two speaking specifically about immersive performance) have made similar connections about participatory performance catering to individual audience members as consumers. These scholars are influenced by broader studies on the confluence of performance and neoliberal capitalism such as Pine and Gilmore's book *The Experience Economy* and Maurya Wickstrom's *Performing Consumers*. I will return to discuss some of the implications of these influences on my study of direct address later in this chapter.

The rise of performance studies from the nineties to the present provides another important context for this study. As Laura Levin has observed, performance theory has the potential to greatly enrich the study of theatre through its focus on the spatiality and 'eventness' of the theatrical production ("It's Time to Profess Performance," 164). The rise of performance studies has also, in recent years, encouraged scholarly attention to audience. As Karen Jürs-Munby writes in the introduction to Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, "the turn to performance is... at the same time always a turn towards audience, as well" (5). Recent work on audience by scholars such as Susan Bennett, Helen Freshwater, and others has facilitated my approach to performance works, which is interested more in how the works are constructed in concert with the spectator than their artistic autonomy. This work on audience is enriched by contributions from theatre phenomenologists like Bert O. States who theorize the specifics of how a performance is experienced by an audience. However, whereas States theorizes audience experience from a universalist perspective, my study takes a cultural materialist approach and understands that phenomenological experience is perceived individually and is influenced by

factors including cultural background and ability. On a final note, Ric Knowles defines performance studies as a field that “concerns itself in part with the performative constitution of social identities (or subjectivities)” (*Performing the Intercultural City* 1). This focus makes performance studies an excellent lens through which to consider the intercultural implications of direct address, and how the device can be employed to navigate encounters between various social identities or to engage with/critique this process of their construction in and of itself.

Theatre and interculturalism

An overarching theme of this dissertation is its exploration of how direct audience address informs discussions of theatrical interculturalism. While this was not initially a focus of my study, early on in my research into direct address interculturalism emerged as a key trend and valuable area for inquiry, one that has shaped and recontextualized the entire dissertation. Ric Knowles separates ‘intercultural’ from similar terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘transcultural’ as a term that can, “focus on the contested, unsettling, and often unequal spaces *between* cultures, spaces that can function in performance as sites of negotiation” (*Theatre & Interculturalism* 4). The term, “evokes the possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings, avoiding binary coding” (4). This definition’s focus on the space of the in-between should immediately recall my framing of direct address as a relational device; indeed, I argue that direct address provides an excellent tool to negotiate cultural difference and the systemic inequities present in encounters with difference. This extends not just to interpersonal encounters, but, as my case studies reveal, epistemological encounters as well. Many of the works I explore use performance to unpack and challenge dominant Western beliefs, perceptions, and ways of understanding the world by taking advantage of the feeling body in encounter between stage and audience.

In the context of theatre and theatre studies, the topic of interculturalism has had a distinctly ambivalent history. Knowles notes how explorations of interculturalism reside in “fraught territory” due their history of association with, “cultural imperialism, appropriation, and colonisation” (1). Indeed, some prominent examples of this live in very recent memory on the Canadian theatre scene. In 2018, internationally celebrated Québécois creator Robert Lepage faced intense criticism for two of his recent theatrical ventures on this front. The first, *Slav*, purported to be a “theatrical odyssey based on slave songs,” a journey through “traditional Afro-American songs,” yet featured no Black collaborators in prominent roles and had a mostly white cast (Banerjee). The next show, *Kanata*, which narrativized meetings between settlers and Indigenous people in Canada, inspired a similar backlash for its failure to involve First Nations collaborators in the creation process (Ackerman). Such projects may be understood through Patrice Pavis’ hourglass model of theatrical exchange, which “posits a one-way flow and filtering of information from source to target culture rather than any kind of fluid interchange” (Knowles *Theatre and Interculturalism* 26). The target culture in these equations is almost always a Western audience, who receive a performance that is conceived of and developed by artistic teams that are predominantly members of a dominant culture group adapting the story of a sub-group. This model frequently conceives of cultures in rigid and binaristic terms, and often fails to take into account how cultural exchange can and does occur in forums other than between the dominant cultural and subgroups.

While the example of Lepage’s recent shows demonstrates that these one-way models of intercultural theatre, at their height in the eighties and nineties, are still very active today, they are in part being replaced, by various artists and companies, with what Knowles has coined “new interculturalism.” New interculturalism moves away from uni-directional shows which binarize

identities (for example, across East/West divides), have white Western target audiences, and envision culture and cultural exchange in limited, non-reciprocal ways. A much-anticipated example of this new interculturalism on the Canadian theatre scene is Why Not Theatre's adaptation of the *Mahabharata*. The show's scheduled opening at the Shaw Festival was delayed by the 2020 pandemic. Why Not Theatre's production recalls director Peter Brook's adaptation of the ancient Indian epic which received a fair amount of criticism for Brooks' 'universalist' and hourglass-model-based approach. Indian scholar of intercultural theatre Rustom Bharucha categorized Brooks' adaptation as, "a particular kind of western representation which negates the non-western context of its borrowing" (71). This newer adaptation, led by Why Not's artistic directors Ravi Jain and Miriam Fernandes, features a creative team that is majority- and a cast that is entirely of Indian diasporic descent. This production is thus designed from the perspectives of individuals who have, to varying extents and connections, grown up with the stories of the Mahabharata, and promises to steer away from binaristic understandings of culture and interculturalism as its artistic team explore their relationships to these ancient stories. With the Shaw Festival's proximity to Toronto, including its South-Asian dominated suburbs such as Brampton and Mississauga, this production can be seen to mark an attempt by the Festival to actively appeal to South-Asian audiences, rather than, as it may have done in the past, merely providing 'exotic' fare for their older white audiences. The theatrical works I explore in this dissertation can be thought of as part of and contributing towards this new intercultural theatre movement that Why Not Theatre's *Mahabharata* represents.

One important context for this intercultural framing is the history of multiculturalism in Canada. Canada, as a settler-invader state established on Turtle Island, is not just intercultural but international, containing within it many sovereign Indigenous nations (even if that

sovereignty is rarely recognized by the settler Canadian government). Toronto, a key location of this study's works, claims to be the most diverse city in the world. This context needs to be considered alongside Canada's landmark official policy of multiculturalism. While this policy purports to reflect the value of diversity, and harmony within the Canadian state, critics such as Himani Bannerji and Eva Mackey have examined how this policy serves as a ghettoizing and othering force which prevents non-dominant cultural groups in Canada from gaining any material improvement in circumstances, and furthermore supports the colonial settler state's genocidal campaign of Indigenous dispossession, using the settler state's tolerance of 'others' in part as a grounds for its legitimacy.

Canadian stages have been a valuable site of critique of this policy of multiculturalism, as well as a site of progressive intercultural innovation via collaboration among minoritized groups in what Ric Knowles has dubbed 'interculturalism from below.' To offer some brief examples, Guillermo Verdecchia's 1993 solo show *Fronteras Americanas* exploded Latinx stereotypes and criticized the reductive and exclusionary formulations of difference that emerged from Canadian multiculturalism through direct address. His later play, *The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the aXes of Evil*, created in collaboration with Marcus Youssef and Camyar Chai, among other things took aim at how Canadian theatre ecologies heavily encourage the presentation of immigrant "trauma porn" which valorizes the settler-invader state of Canada as a 'safe haven,' ignoring its role in the global neocolonial hegemony. More recent pieces such as Jivesh Parasram's *Take D Milk, Nah?* have deconstructed the limitations of the 'identity play' format, which, for one thing, has traditionally constructed identities as fixed, relying to some extent on colonial formulations. Interculturalism does not just appear as a subject on Canadian stages, but occurs within the theatres as well. Ric Knowles writes how global cities' increasing multiculturalism "shakes

foundations that assume that intercultural theatre has a monocultural (typical white) audience” and “locates interculturalism no longer simply on the stage or between the stage and the auditorium but within the audience itself” (*Theatre & Interculturalism* 29). This change is certainly in effect in the works I study, and part of my work looks at these differentiated audiences, and explores how theatre artists (performers and playwrights) employ direct address to appeal to particular ones.

Direct address (employed in all of the plays discussed in the previous paragraph) is a valuable device through which to explore questions of interculturalism in the theatre. By drawing attention to the encounter between performer and audience, direct address is primed to rehearse and/or critically interrogate the nature of encounters themselves, including intercultural encounters. Furthermore, Bridget Escolme notes the ability of direct address to construct for the audience an image of the performer/character’s subjectivity—presenting the unknowableness and uncapturability of the subject. When viewed through the power dynamics of traditional intercultural theatre, this framing of the subject can be seen as an empowering move, one that can help to rectify the way that members of “source cultures” are often portrayed in limited and reductive ways. Escolme notes that direct-address-based approaches to performing Shakespeare are “capable of rendering the post-modern spectator vulnerable to the questions of subjectivity and agency embedded in the plays” (152). So, too, I argue, are the direct address approaches taken by the artists I study particularly useful for understanding and negotiating the complexities of subjectivity and relation constructed in interculturalism.

Joanne Tompkins and Julie Holledge have written about the increasing complexity of notions of interculturalism in a globalized world: “As the economic forces of globalisation shrink and stratify the world, the creation of intercultural performance is an increasingly complex affair.

Even the concept of cultural identity is fraught with the complications of migration, cultural authenticity, and ‘ethnic cleansing’” (182). Accordingly, within the context of this study I am thinking about interculturalism expansively, not defining it in reductive formulations such as the meeting of fixed cultural groups. Tompkins and Holledge’s conceptualization of interculturalism in *Women’s Intercultural Performance* inspires my work on an intercultural theatre “where cultures are no longer represented as fixed essences embodied by performers and placed side by side” (182-3). I borrow from Holledge and Tompkins the definition of intercultural theatre as “[t]he meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions” (7), and lean into the flexibility that this definition offers, thinking of interculturalism as a process, and sometimes even a frame, by which artists and audiences engage with questions about difference. My framing also accommodates complex understandings of culture and where it is located. I draw from Holledge and Tompkins’ method which “locates ‘culture’ in the construction of the self (or the subject position) and in the context for that self” (Knowles *Theatre & Interculturalism* 37), but also expand that framing, looking at how culture is also constructed in the relationship between selves, and even, in chapter three, in the eye of the spectator. The various sites of performance and culture I treat “as sites of negotiation of the meanings that constitute both culture and human...subjectivity” (*Performing the Intercultural City* 38), following Knowles’ move towards rethinking “interculturalism as a complex set of negotiations across multiple sites of difference, on stage, between the stage and the audience, and within audiences” (2).

There is furthermore a focus in my work on the actual, concrete, and material circumstances of performance, elements found in materialist and feminist understandings of intercultural performance. This mirrors the work of writers on intercultural theatre such as

Rustom Bharucha along with Holledge and Tompkins and Ric Knowles, whose work investigates “what intercultural or intracultural performance contributes to the lives and material realities of its local sources and audiences” (Knowles *Theatre & Interculturalism* 35). Knowles’ important book *Performing the Intercultural City* does just that by grounding his explorations in the material to theorize Toronto as “a place where the traditional hegemony of whiteness on the city’s stages is actively challenged ‘from below’ by an informal coalition of artists of color working in solidarity across difference” (2). These theorizations of intercultural theatre demonstrate that one cannot fully understand a theatre piece by just focusing on what happens on stage, but one needs to understand how culture is negotiated and how it emerges through the *entire situation* of theatrical performance and its context. My grounding of this study in the material connects back to Lowenhaupt Tsing’s ideas in *Friction*, discussed briefly earlier. Tsing’s conception of the “sticky materiality of practical encounter” as the site where the local gives rise to the global, connects direct address, which operates in the site of theatrical friction between performer and audience, “where the rubber meets to road.” This location makes direct address a useful tool through which to understand how interculturalism operates and is produced as reality through encounters between individuals, and importantly how understandings of intercultural encounters shaped by the limited scripts of Canadian multiculturalism might be generatively rewritten.

Theatrical relations

My approach to interculturalism and the theatre works I study can be better understood through the concept of the relational. Theatre and performance studies as well as visual art scholars may associate the term “relational” with curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud’s 1998 book, *Relational Aesthetics*. In the book, Bourriaud observes and describes the emerging trend of

‘relational’ art, art predicated on an interpersonal encounter. Bourriaud suggests that in contemporary times artworks have gone from being about human-deity and human-object relations to focusing on contingent inter-human relations. Relational artworks emerge from a late-capitalist world where ‘communication superhighways’ and creeping commercialization have turned Debord’s ‘society of the spectacle’ into a “society of extras, where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication” (26). In this context the relational art exhibition becomes a ‘social interstice’ that can create “hands-on utopias” (9) by opening up passages of communication to “connect levels of reality kept apart from each other” (8), through direct inter-human communication. According to Bourriaud, the artist’s role in this new, relational art is to focus “on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability” (28), with the ultimate, political goal of creating genuine social interactions that serve as an antidote in a world where “anything that cannot be marketed will inevitably vanish” (9). Thus Bourriaud sees the political power of these artworks in their ability to invite social interaction in ways that resist capitalist commodification. Sometimes this might involve interventions into interculturalism and global relations, as seen in German theatre group Rimini Protokoll’s *Call Cutta in a Box*, which connects audiences in Europe with call centre ‘performers’ in India via phone.

Besides this connection to theatre and visual arts via Bourriaud, the relational is also associated with traditions of knowledge that use it as a framework to think through ways to be and act in the world. The concept of relationality, for example, is heavily embedded in thousands of years of Indigenous epistemology. This understanding of relationality is picked up in Ric Knowles’ intercultural work; where it informs his methodological approach to studying intercultural theatre. He writes, “I attempt to engage the reader with the practices I am describing

in ways that are less critical than relational —not in the sense of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, which are primarily about aesthetic *judgement*, but as in the relational bases of Indigenous research methodologies” (*Performing the Intercultural City* 11). Knowles gets some of the wording for his formulation of relationality from Cree scholar Shawn Wilson’s book *Research is Ceremony*. Wilson articulates that under the principle of relationality “relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality” (7). He observes, “We could not *be* without *being in relationship* with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships” (76). This conception of relationality is importantly not interested in how we theoretically relate to one another, but rather, as Knowles writes, “In Indigenous practice...the relationality that the Western theorists I’ve cited employ metaphorically is real” (*Performing the Intercultural City* 13). This formulation points out one of the limits of Bourriaud’s conception of the relational. Bourriaud theorizes that artistic works that put people in relation with each other are inherently progressive and politically productive on their own, without considering the effects of their larger contexts that influence each specific material encounter with their dynamics of power, etc. In contrast to this, my discussion and understanding of relationality in the theatre works I study is primarily grounded in my real, material experience of these pieces and in my situated positionality, as opposed to merely theoretical readings.

In his work on intercultural theatre Knowles employs relationality as a research methodology that informs how he conducts himself as a researcher by being accountable to his relationships with his research partners: “I try to work...*with* the individuals, companies, and communities that I am writing about rather than *on* them” (16). While this is certainly an ethic I try to bring to my work, I also look at how the intercultural theatre pieces I study explore this conception of relationality and often attempt to put it into practice in their treatment of the

performer-audience relationship. This exploration is strongest in chapter four, but carries through all of my case studies.

By aiming to produce not just an aesthetic, but an ethic of relationality, the theatre pieces I explore are able to navigate some tricky political terrain. While direct address stages encounters between individuals via the performer-audience relationship, by engaging audiences relationally in ways that ask them to actively reflect on their relationship to the performer and others, it can avoid valorizing the individual in ways that support neoliberal agendas. Natalie Alvarez' book, *Immersions in Cultural Difference* explores how immersions are “used as a means of deepening understanding across cultural difference” (1). Her case studies of military training and tourism sites investigate “whether the first-person experiential encounters afforded by the immersion could lead to meaningful cross-cultural encounters” (1). By looking at simulated immersions as a kind of “intercultural rehearsal theater” (2), Alvarez develops an argument about “how immersions serve variously as a neocolonial and decolonial” (3). While the enmeshment of the spectator in immersive performance means that the immersive situations that Alvarez studies are grounded in “presumptive intimacies” among the subjects involved, direct address positions audiences at the moment of contact, in that initial encounter when relationships, including levels of intimacy are being established. While on one hand the targeted feel of the address may ask individuals to turn inwards and examine themselves, signaling how direct address can be used to engage in conversations about negotiated subjectivity, a key part of its intercultural potential relies on the fact that it asks spectators to engage with themselves in relation to others. Rather than focusing on individuals themselves, direct address lends itself to an examination of the space between them, their points of difference and connection.

Canadian theatre scholar Barry Freeman notes that theatre is “positioned...at the nexus of the local and the global” (8) which gives it a particular ability to explore how these spheres intersect. Situated, “where the rubber meets the road,” where the play meets its audience, direct address makes visible the relationship between the performer and the audience, the play and its context that the fourth wall occludes in ‘traditional’ theatre. In its targeted address, direct address can examine how structural power relations play out and can be interrogated in individual bodies and across relationships, and offer space for spectators to ponder the relationship between the individual and the collective. In his book, *Staging Strangers: Theatre and Global Ethics*, Freeman looks at “the ways in which ethical relationships proposed between the local and the global, the stage and the audience are realigning in a global context” (xxi). *Staging Strangers*, “use[s] the stranger as a guiding metaphor for an analysis of cultural difference in theatre Canada” (xx), in order to investigate “how [multiculturalism] continues to shape cultural encounters in the theatre in an increasingly globalized context” (12). Freeman’s final chapter features two performances which, for him, succeed ethically where others he’s featured have failed because “[t]hey stage a meaningful encounter with difference...and, in a gentle fashion, allow space for the difficult and indeterminate” (130). Accordingly, my case studies explore how direct address has been used by theatre artists in Canada to facilitate nuanced and meaningful encounters with difference. These explorations of interculturalism do not borrow Freeman’s figure of the stranger, but examine how difference exists within us as individuals, among our families, and in the eye of the beholder. These differences can even serve as touch points through which we can come into new relation.

Methodology

A performance studies approach, with its expansive definition of performance and focus on spatiality, helps me to make sense of direct address' unique metatheatrical effects. As explored through this introduction, my theorization of direct address relies on the recent work of scholars writing about space, audience, and affect in “traditional” theatre (that takes place on a stage behind a proscenium arch) including Joanne Tompkins and Bridget Escolme; about “alternative” forms such as postdramatic theatre (Lehmann); and participatory and/or immersive performance (Alston). By putting these scholars in conversation with each other, I work to unravel binaristic distinctions between these forms and examine how they are all subsumed in a contemporary performance-driven culture which values close, intimate, and emotional experiences (Lavender 10). While these scholars provide an overall broader framework for thinking through how theatrical address functions, each chapter also has a more specific theoretical framework, which is adapted to each theatre piece I examine. For these I draw on various fields, including media studies; feminist, queer, and critical race theories; Indigenous studies; postcolonial theory; critical multiculturalism studies; and theories of theatrical interculturalism. These scholars together help me to make sense of direct address' unique metatheatrical effects in particular contexts, as a device that engages with both the dramatic and material conditions of performance as well as their phenomenological experience by spectators, and help me to read the play and performance texts I explore in three of the chapters.

My theoretical analysis is guided by case studies of plays—both texts and live performances—which use my immediate experience and interaction with the works as the basis for my response. (In my first chapter, the plays are swapped out for artist interviews.) A key part of my methodological inquiry and the grounding point for my cultural materialist approach is

focused on my encounters with the performance pieces themselves. This focus is important in determining the specific effects of direct address; a general theoretical model only goes so far. I attended live performances and read performance texts, using my immediate experience and interaction with these works as the basis for my response. Guided by Milhous and Hume's method of "producible interpretation," employed by scholars including Jenn Stephenson, as well as Andrew Sofer in his book *The Stage Life of Props*, I examine pieces based on the 'bid' they make for certain kinds of audience response (Stephenson 18). These bids may include differing appeals to individual audience members on the basis of subject position (such as cultural background or ability), a flexibility that is one of direct address' strengths as it offers a way to navigate the complexities of subject positions in audience response. This method acknowledges that responses from individual audience members may differ and can be unpredictable, but tries to find coherence by paying attention to the responses that a performance seems to be soliciting.

With its metatheatrical focus on the interactions between performers and spectators and the space between the stage and the audience, explorations of direct address necessarily engage with ideas about the contingency and ephemerality of theatrical experience, including notions of presence and liveness. Cormac Power has discussed how theatre as a medium 'plays' with presence, and Liz Tomlin has done the same regarding how theatre uses/manipulates 'the real.' Like the work of these scholars, my work separates out the ontological status of theatrical experience from how it might be phenomenologically experienced. My focus on the experience of performance allows an examination performance's felt ephemeral qualities including 'liveness' and 'immediacy' while still accommodating poststructuralist critique. This productively sidesteps the question of whether or not direct address actually achieves meaningful intersubjective exchange between performer and audience, to assert that, questions of the

metaphysics of presence aside, it may generate for the spectator the feeling of having done so. The same thing applies to my approach to immediacy. I don't suggest that the feeling of immediacy created between actor and audience is real (if I were to engage with that particularly loaded term), but rather that it might be experienced that way by the individual spectator. Indeed, I argue that these feelings are at times problematic as they may, for example, create a feeling on the audience's part of deep involvement which masks only a surface level of engagement or participation with an issue. Regardless of the ultimate value of these feelings of immediacy, audiences' experience of what I call "felt immediacy" shape their understanding and reception of theatrical works.

My direct experience with theatrical pieces is supplemented with reviews (both 'professional' reviews by theatre critics associated with national newspapers, and amateur reviews on blogs) to get an idea of how others have interpreted the works (as well as to address the limitation of my own reception of performances which is filtered through my particular situated experience, etc.), which is useful to me in helping to understand a production's appeal to specific audiences. Sometimes an address may deliberately solicit differing reactions from differing audience members (for example, on the basis of cultural background) as part of its effect.

I look at both texts and performance pieces for several reasons. Performance analysis allows me to examine subtle nuances in the relationship between performers and audience that are not available in a performance text, and, crucially, to account for how the real, material conditions of a performance (including those of production and of reception) can have a major impact on how an address is offered and/or received. On the other hand, textual analysis is important both because of the greater accessibility of the performance texts, and because

individual productions and performers might choose not to use direct address even if the text holds inherent possibilities for engagement with the device. I occasionally also examine ephemera related to specific productions (such as social media posts, programmes, etc.). These ephemera can give insight into how the performances were intended to be received by specific audiences, and may speak to the companies' larger outreach and engagement strategies (which may also involve a form of direct address). These ephemera, along with occasional video footage of performances, were sourced from the artist themselves, or from the websites of producing companies.

I also draw on interviews with selected artists, particularly in my first chapter on the context and reception for direct address in contemporary theatre in Canada. These interviews focus on artists' reflections on their own works that employ direct audience address, as well as their approach to and understanding of audiences, and their artistic training and/or other factors that influence the way they think about performance and direct address. Together this information provides a useful basis for understanding how direct address is conceptualized and understood in the context of the theatre scene in Canada, and offers some insight into individual artists' strategies and practices (although, since the effects of direct address are constructed between performer and audience, this doesn't account for all effects, and indeed, sometimes audience reception may be counter to an artist's intent).

A cultural materialist ethos underlies my work. Such an approach allows a welcome escape from some of the more scriptocentric methods often used in theatre studies, methods which read theatrical productions as literary texts, often overlooking the material conditions of performance. I share with many cultural materialists a commitment to social justice; and I will explore how direct address opens up room for political intervention, particularly for marginalized

groups. This approach is useful in the context of Susan Bennett's observations that contextual cues play a key role in determining an audience's reception of a piece (49-52). As noted briefly above, material factors (including space, the place of performance, production design, etc.) can significantly contribute to the reception of direct address as well as its potential success with audiences. For example, Escolme discusses how direct address in the RSC's 1999 production of *The Winter's Tale* was facilitated by the company's move from its 1930s proscenium to its smaller spaces which "demanded that the audience...encounter [actors] directly" (4). In my work this cultural materialist approach manifests in careful attention to the specific material conditions of the performances I go to (including the make-up of the audiences themselves) to see how they shape the production and reception of the performer's address. Key to my materialist approach is my investment in theorizing embodied spectatorship, including affective experience of the performance. I argue that direct address functions similarly to immersive theatre in that "the audience experience produced by an audience's relationships to a set of materials" becomes a key "aesthetically meaningful element" of the performance (Alston 9, for more on this see chapter three). By examining in particular my own embodied experience, I am better able to understand and untangle the complexities of affective experience that the shows provoke and rely on in their ultimate effect. This approach allows me to understand how the material conditions of the performances I study shape the moments of their theatrical encounter, "where the rubber meets the road," and so too the experiences that spectators take away from them.

On top of this materialist framework, central to my exploration of direct audience address in this dissertation are theories of identity and subjectivity as advanced by scholars in feminist and queer theory, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, etc. These theorists understand the contingency of performance, and often have an interest "in audience and how they're hailed and

constituted by performances of all sorts across contexts” (Dolan “Code Switching” 192). In line with this investment, in my analysis of plays and performances I rely in part on my own situated position and lived experience. I am often a central figure in the interpretive work, as I think through how the performance and its particular bid for audience response resonates and is understood through my particular subjectivity—my sense of self as a subject. The investment of myself and my subjectivity in the pieces I study gradually increases through the dissertation. Chapter two, on Tetsuro Shigematsu’s *Empire of the Son*, examines how the show’s more generalized engagement of its audience is a strategic attempt to speak across differences in line with the production’s goals, and thus involves myself to a lesser extent. By chapter four, which responds to Laakuluk Williamson Bathory and Evalyn Parry’s *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, my reading of the show’s dramaturgical effect is inextricable with my own unique lived experience and personal encounter with the production.

One key factor of my subjectivity that plays into my reception and experience of theatre works and conceptualization of direct address itself throughout the dissertation, is my experience of being mixed-race. As a mixed-race person, who occupies a body that is read differently by people depending on their own background and context (as white, Black, mixed, or even ‘Greek or Jewish or something’), I understand the role that subjectivity plays in reception, and indeed, the effect that reception and perspective can have on understandings of subjectivity. This experience has helped me to understand how the processes of identification and subject formation are complex, contingent, and multifaceted; and has made me aware of the multiple, often competing, subject positions that I occupy at any given moment. This experience illuminates the negotiation of the complex processes of interculturalism in which many of the artists that I study engage.

I am myself a product of interculturalism. When my parents first met in Vancouver as young, newly-arrived immigrants to Canada from Grenada and Ireland, it was only one year after the Loving v. Virginia case which overturned anti-miscegenation laws in the United States that would have forbidden their marriage had they instead met there. Just as with Canada's policy of official multiculturalism, while mixed-race people are often symbolically understood to represent a utopian ideal of intercultural harmony and the end of racism, more often than not our lived experiences reveal the complex, challenging processes of multiple identification that interculturalism creates, and the tensions and pressures inherent in it—whether that's interculturalism at the level of the individual, within theatrical projects, or enacted at state level.

Chapter Breakdowns

Chapter One

Understanding Direct Address in Contemporary Theatre in Canada: Drama vs. Performance

While this introduction has provided a framework to understand the “direct address” and “contemporary” elements of “direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada,” theorizing direct address more abstractly, chapter one seeks to further explore the phrase, by contextualizing the case studies that make up the rest of this dissertation within the context of “theatre in Canada.” Specifically, this chapter addresses the question, ‘How might we understand the trend of direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada?’

This chapter situates the practice of direct address within a broader body of related but distinct literature on monologue and solo performance in Canada and then extends this work by looking at the various artistic genealogies and influences that impact the employment and shape understandings of direct address. I contextualize these within what Andy Lavender characterizes “the increasingly hybrid nature of theatre form” in the twenty-first century (7), which shapes my

approach to theatre as an amorphous category, an understanding that is at odds with the realist assumptions that often frame discussions about the device. Indeed, I also discuss how the framing of ‘direct address,’ as a distinct performance mode is one that relies on an understanding of theatre that is grounded in European realist approaches.

This chapter lays out and highlights some of the formal influences of direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada, including performance, radio, and stand-up comedy. In making my case, I draw on my interviews with five theatre artists who use direct address in their work(s): Hannah Moscovitch, Cliff Cardinal, Tetsuro Shigematsu, Franco Nguyen, and Byron Abalos. These artists all have varied training and experience and have been recognized in various ways for their artistic excellence. Taken as a whole, my interviews with them help me to make sense of how these artists understand their own work, and feed into a larger discussion about direct address’ ambiguous and overlooked status within mainstream theatrical discourse. Drawing from these interviews, I unpack how certain framings and assumptions have contributed to conceptions of direct address as an unsophisticated device and help to explain scholars’ reluctance to engage with it, employing the terms “theatre as drama” and “theatre as performance” to illustrate my argument.

Chapter Two

Closing the Distance: Technology and Immediacy in Tetsuro Shigematsu’s *Empire of the Son*

This chapter, a case study of Vancouver-based playwright and performer Tetsuro Shigematsu’s *Empire of the Son*, engages with the complex discussions that surround notions of theatrical presence, immediacy, and intimacy. A central focus of this chapter is scholars Bolter and Grusin’s concepts of “immediacy” and “hypermediacy” which explore how various media

forms construct and negotiate feelings of closeness and distance in their strategies to engage audiences.

Through a close reading of Shigematsu's play text, archival footage of the show, and my interview with Shigematsu, I argue that *Empire of the Son*'s use of media to explore Shigematsu's complicated relationship with his father plays with notions of interpersonal, intercultural, and technological immediacy in ways that probe and trouble the ontology of immediacy and our desire for it. I analyze the connections the show establishes between technological, interpersonal, and intercultural forms of immediacy; as well as what its use of media, in particular radio, mean for it dramaturgically and in the context of discussions about interculturalism and Asian diasporic experiences of affect and intimacy. This chapter further demonstrates how media can illuminate the complexities of Asian North American diasporic subjectivities, and exposes how experiences of media and immediacy are themselves culturally mediated, while at the same time thinking through the intercultural implications of understanding immediacy as processual, relative, and multifaceted.

Chapter Three

The Gaze Turned Inwards: Direct Audience Address in Cliff Cardinal's *Huff*

Chapter three builds upon observations from chapter one about how understandings of the fourth wall as theatrical norm inform contemporary ideas and understandings of theatrical works in its analysis of the audience gaze in Cliff Cardinal's play *Huff*. The show, by the Cree/Lakota playwright who also performs it, is a brutal and deeply affecting play which dramatizes the effects of colonialism and the Canadian residential school system on a family, most specifically two young brothers, Wind and Huff. It deals with what Cardinal calls, "our most taboo subculture": "First Nations' kids abusing solvents, at high risk of suicide" (iv). In this

chapter I examine how, through the dramaturgical structures and the material conditions of *Huff*'s performance, Cardinal uses direct address to 'speak back' to a colonial gaze that is both institutional—embedded in the power structures and historical context of the proscenium theatre—and individual, contained in the overwhelmingly white, middle-class audiences of Canadian theatres.

I argue that Cardinal challenges colonial ways of viewing the Indigenous body as well as notions of action and inaction both in discussions of theatrical participation and in the larger Canadian cultural context of settler-Indigenous relations. *Huff* demonstrates through the bodies of individual spectators how the inaction of settlers makes us complicit with the oppression of Indigenous peoples. In deconstructing the dynamics of the gaze as the source of this inaction, Cardinal interrogates a history of the settler gaze on Indigenous bodies, offering settlers the chance to challenge our unconscious viewing structures, and consider the questions the play poses about agency and complicity within the context of the world at large.

Chapter Four

Queering Relationality: Radical Intersubjectivity in *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*

In the fourth and final chapter I explore how *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* by Laakkaluk Williamson Bathory and Evalyn Parry examines direct address as an intersubjective practice—something that happens between subjects. The autobiographical piece centres on the relationship between Williamson Bathory, an Inuk artist from Iqaluit (or “from the North” as it is figured in the play), and Parry, a white, queer artist from Toronto (“from the South”). The show explores the notion of intercultural encounter both theoretically and through its performer-audience relations, but the whole show is also based on and stages this encounter between its two key performers.

Through Parry and Williamson Bathory's interactions with each other, their address to the audience, and their artistic explorations—including Williamson Bathory's fantastic performance of uajaernejq mask dance—I argue that Kiinalik invites a kind of queer relationality that I call 'radical intersubjectivity.' Using Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* and other important performance-based queer theory texts, I examine how the show uses direct address and an openness to sexuality as a way to queer the performer-audience relationship, asking audiences to orient toward each other in a model of relationality, built on a "politics of encountering" (Ahmed *Strange Encounters* 180) that the show puts forward as the way to approach not only close interpersonal relations, but systemic relations like those between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and human relations with the environment.

Via a close reading of the archival footage of the performance, as well as several of my experiences in the theatre, I work through the various ways the show presents how we should maintain relations between people and environment, a question of orientation and renegotiation of concepts of closeness and distance, trying to find the balance between the harms of an excess of distance and the collapsing of distance, into a configuration of relationality based on the recognition of difference and mutual respect. Central to this task, I argue, is Williamson Bathory's performance of uajaernejq mask dance, which takes up a significant portion of the show's second half. I argue that the dance's brazen sexuality, rather than intending to titillate the audiences, leverages a kind of asexual or 'ace' queerness that uses sexuality as a metaphor of coming into relation with others which then allows the audience not only to view the process of radical intersubjectivity for which the show advocates, but to actually take part in it themselves.

CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING DIRECT ADDRESS IN CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE IN CANADA

My dissertation discusses direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada. In the introduction I defined direct address and explored my theoretical approach to it as a dramaturgical device that operates relationally between performer and spectator. Through discussions of theatrical participation, space, presence, and audience, I explored the various ways direct address could be conceptualized as a theatrical phenomenon, and situated the device within discussions of theatrical interculturalism. This first chapter seeks to explore the end of the phrase, “theatre in Canada,” to provide a grounding for the specific case studies that follow. Specifically, it addresses the question, how might we understand the trend of direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada?

My phrasing “theatre in Canada” is deliberate. My decision to avoid the expression “Canadian theatre,” acknowledges that many artists working in Canada (including perhaps some of the specific artists whose work I examine in depth), are not or may not consider themselves or their works ‘Canadian.’ This would include Indigenous artists disidentifying from the arbitrary borders Canada as a settler-invader nation imposed on Turtle Island 150 years ago, or rejecting the sovereignty of the Canadian state over occupied territories, many of which remain to this day unceded. This would also include artists of diverse backgrounds and origins, who might find the term ‘Canadian’ unfitting, or at the very least reductive. Toronto, my home for the past seven years, is the de-facto theatre capital of Canada, the origin point for many of the productions I mention, and home to many of the artists. It’s also considered to be one of the world’s most multicultural cities, with 51.2% of residents born outside of Canada (“Toronto as a Glance”); and while many of these residents may identify as Canadian, others may not.

The phrase “theatre in Canada” also avoids the difficulties of trying to puzzle out how to define ‘Canadian.’ When I asked celebrated playwright Hannah Moscovitch if she saw her work as Canadian, she brought up something that Toyoshi Yoshihara, the major translator of Canadian plays into Japanese, offered to her: that Canadian plays (and Moscovitch’s work in particular) “really smell like dirt.” Moscovitch’s response (“What does that even mean?”) framed this epithet and her subsequent confusion as encapsulating the difficulties of defining or determining ‘Canadian-ness’ (Personal interview). This murkiness extends beyond just art. As Anishinaabe and Irish artist Brian Solomon says, “When I look at Canada, the question is always what is the Canadian identity?” (10). Art has historically played a key role in navigating this question, through its involvement in the process of national self-definition. In this process, writes Alan Filewod, author of *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre*, “nations such as Canada have reinforced their claims to autonomy and indeed their occupation of territory with canonical structures of value in literature and art” (6). Filewod’s description here also carries an implicit warning, revealing how the “Canadian” in Canadian theatre can be seen as and has been used as a tool of colonial violence. One way to think about “Canadian theatre,” then, is to track the ways that theatre has been used by policymakers and funders in this country in the service of nationalist goals. However, despite its historical significance, Filewod argues that this relationship is weakening in a contemporary context “as the boundaries of national and of cultural aesthetics begin to dissolve under external pressures: of empire, hybridities, cultural mobilities, and the migration of forms and practices” (6). The resulting effect is that in this current moment, even while artists and policymakers continue to respond to and react against it, the concept of ‘Canadian’ theatre is murkier than ever.

A final benefit of looking at ‘theatre in Canada,’ over ‘Canadian theatre’ is a shift in focus from ideological relationships between art and nation, what Erin Hurley calls “the national(ist) paradigm promoted by policy makers and commentators” (161), to more material ones. These material conditions include the influences of economic and structural factors of national arts policy and funding structures (such as the Canada Council for the Arts and national organizations like the Professional Association of Canadian Theatre), the histories of theatre in Canada (especially as a colonial or settler-invader institution), and the more immediate material conditions of performances: the theatre spaces, the training of artists, the theatrical traditions and performance genealogies. These are often governed by the accepted ‘norms’ of Canadian theatre, ruled by “the disciplinary regime of the ‘theatre estate’,” “the complex of industry, professionalism, economy and canonicity that constitutes ‘the theatre’” (Filewod 5). An example of these norms is the prominence of the playwright in Canadian theatrical tradition (as opposed, for example, to the dominance of the director-centric auteur model in Germany). By foregrounding these material factors in my investigation of direct audience address as theatrical device, I align with Filewod’s observation that “the formal principles of dramatic literature [or theatre more broadly] derive not from aesthetic theory or critical tradition but from the material and economic conditions of theatre work” (Filewod 10). This emphasis on the material allows me to track the development of direct address as a form, as well as to understand the performance pieces I look at in their material realities at the moment that they are received by the audience.

Before moving on, I offer two additional notes on my ‘theatre in Canada’ labelling. Firstly, I feel it important to acknowledge that the insights and influences I identify in this study about direct address and solo performance are not necessarily uniquely Canadian. Others could

likely develop quite comparable studies in the U.K. or U.S., mapping similar patterns of influence in the development and use of direct audience address in the theatre; however, this study seeks to understand these issues in a distinct Canadian context. Secondly, while this dissertation purports to examine direct address ‘in Canada’ writ large, my investigation here primarily covers theatre in English Canada, though I will make occasional nods to French theatre as well. This decision reflects my attempt to limit the potentially vast terrain of the project, and to recognize that French Canadian and Québécois theatre comes out of its own unique cultural context that is outside of the scope of the present analysis. Further, the theoretical groundwork for this study covers specifically (though not exclusively) English-language theatre.

The situation of my study ‘in Canada’ means that I contextualize it within the field of Canadian theatre studies. As I mentioned in my introduction, there is a relative dearth of scholarship on direct address, with almost nothing written on the performance mode in a Canadian context. Accordingly, I draw from the related and considerably richer writings on solo performance and monologue in Canada. Direct address, solo performance, and monologue are not synonymous. Solo performance refers to theatre pieces with just one performer, and while many shows in which performers directly address the audience are solo shows (since the performer does not have another actor to talk to) others have multiple cast members. Monologue is a term describing a performer speaking alone on stage (when stepping away from others to do so, it may be classified as an aside). Monologue is the de facto technique for solo shows, so there’s a very large overlap between monologue and solo performance, but since a number of shows that use direct address have multiple performers, they also frequently involve dialogue, or larger, group scenes as well as monologue. Furthermore, while the act of direct address itself arguably always involves monologue, not all monologues are directed *to* the audience (besides

the audience a monologue could be directed, as Shakespeare expert and former RSC director John Barton puts it, to God, introspectively to oneself, or to another performer currently offstage)—and thus not all monologue involves a direct address. Despite these differences, there is a fair amount of overlap between these three categories, which complement each other. For example, dramaturg/director Byron Abalos observes that direct address affords the opportunity “to have this very intimate, very direct, very honest conversation with the audience. And for a solo show, one-person show, that feels especially important...to have that sense of intimacy” (Personal interview). This overlap justifies my drawing on writings about solo performance and monologue, most prominently Jenn Stephenson’s edited collection of essays, *Solo Performance*, in my discussion of direct address.

In addition to this and other Canadian theatre studies literature, this chapter draws on my interviews with five theatre artists who use direct address in their work(s): Hannah Moscovitch, Cliff Cardinal, Tetsuro Shigematsu, Franco Nguyen, and Byron Abalos. These artists represent a range of styles, forms and artistic backgrounds. They have all had key theatre works that employ direct address in the past several years (specifically from 2006 onwards), capturing a very contemporary moment in theatre. They are all ‘up-and-coming,’ artists, most beginning their artistic careers after 2000, and thus to me gesture towards the potential for direct address going forwards, as opposed to more established artists who may have influenced them, like veteran playwright/performer Daniel MacIvor. Their shows are collectively a mix of both autobiographical and clearly fictionalized performance, and solo shows vs. shows with multiple performers. While I aimed to look at artists from across the country, there is perhaps an unfair concentration of those primarily working in Toronto. This is a result of both that Toronto is a very important theatre hub through which many shows tour or premiere (Moscovitch, for

example, currently lives in Halifax, but still has many shows premiere in Toronto). Additionally, living in Toronto myself, I have greater access to performances in this city. Regardless of their origins, all of the shows I examine in this dissertation—including shows by the above artists—have either had multiple productions, or have toured nationally and sometimes internationally, an indicator of both popularity and wider cultural recognition. My inclusion of these interviews in this chapter allows me to showcase the breadth and depth of direct audience address through specific examples, as well as, broad as they are, to identify some preliminary patterns in artists' understanding and use of the device.

In the rest of the chapter, I'll establish direct address as a prevalent staging technique or phenomenon in contemporary theatre in Canada. I'll then situate the practice of direct address within a broader body of literature on monologue and solo performance in Canada. Next, I'll extend this work by looking at the various artistic genealogies and influences that impact the use of direct address, augmented by my interviews with theatre artists. In the final section, I develop the insights gleaned from my interviews to speculate on the reasons for direct address' ambiguous and overlooked status in mainstream theatre discourse. Specifically, I argue that the reception of direct address is shaped by the expectations that we bring to 'drama' and 'performance,' which may have a significant impact on how artists' work is viewed in particular contexts.

Establishing direct address

Before I begin my study of direct address in Canada, I should provide some evidence that it is present as a performance mode and to a degree worthy of notice or attention. One important factor in this evaluation is its history as a theatrical practice within Canada. Although art has

been practiced on Turtle Island for thousands of years, and traditional ‘European’ theatre can be traced back to the arrival of early settlers in the seventeenth century, a distinctly Canadian theatre (one that relied on plays written in Canada) took longer to emerge. Jerry Wasserman observes that, “Canadian theatre as an indigenous professional institution dates only as far back as the end of World War Two” (1). Before this time, beginning in the 1930s, a medium of great importance to Canadian actors and writers was CBC’s radio drama³. Wasserman notes that even after the end of its golden age in the 1950s, “radio drama continued to provide an important source of work and income for Canadian actors and playwrights until 2012” (Wasserman 4-5). As I discuss later in this chapter, radio as a medium is compatible with direct address, so this important connection between radio and theatre might explain some of its popularity. (In fact, Moscovitch noted that her transitions between theatre and radio were made very easy, “because the radio shows I worked on were all direct address-based” (Personal interview)).

Wasserman dates the emergence of English-Canadian drama, “as a body of dramatic work by Canadian playwrights written for performance in professional theatre” to 1967 (1). He mentions several landmark Canadian plays produced this year, including John Herbert’s *Fortune in Men’s Eyes*. Herbert’s play contains key moments of direct address which, as Paul Halferty writes, are “central to *Fortune’s* critique” (Halferty 99), marking the use of direct address in the early years of Canadian drama. With subject matter focusing on gay and incarcerated men, the play also exemplifies the use of direct address by social outsiders and the marginalized—a trend which connects strongly to my discussion of direct address as an intercultural device—as well as its specific use in queer contexts (discussed further in chapter four). Besides a playwright,

³ The radio drama tradition of the CBC in Canada was explicitly modeled on the radio dramas of BBC Radio in the United Kingdom, which (unfortunately unlike its Canadian counterpart) continues to produce original dramatic work

Herbert was also a drag performer, and drag's reliance on performer-audience interaction, which I discuss later in this chapter, may have informed his use of direct address.

A foundational moment in Canadian theatre history before the emergence of mainstream Anglo-Canadian drama was the opening of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in 1953. The festival's famous thrust stage, designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, made waves when it broke from the then default proscenium model. Surrounded by spectators on three sides in a 185-degree sweep, the stage aligns with Bridget Escolme's observation that certain staging setups invite direct address by "demand[ing] that the audience...encounter [actors] directly" (4). Indeed, founding director Tyrone Guthrie argued that the Festival theatre and stage "are not...architecturally suitable for the kinds of plays written for a proscenium theatre, and that includes the Classic Drama since the second half of the seventeenth century" (Guthrie 206). Designed to align with traditional Elizabethan staging practices, including relaxed divisions between the stage and audience, one might argue that the Festival Theatre is instead suited for direct address. Given the Theatre's prominence within the Canadian theatre scene, one might even go so far as to speculate that this design may have to some extent increased the use of direct address among the country's theatre artists.

After the onset of Canadian drama, direct address continued to regularly appear, particularly within a history of monodrama, such as the classic work *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, or in the work of prominent experimental artists such as Daniel MacIvor. Direct address can also be found in the 'identity plays' of the eighties and nineties such as Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas*, as it is an excellent device through which to explore notions of subjectivity and identity. This is in part because the problem of identification is the problem of address. Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation theorizes how

individuals encounter and internalize ideology. Althusser famously described this by invoking the figure of the policeman who hails, “hey, you!” It is in turning in recognition that the individual accepts the hail and is interpolated into the scene. Taking place in that moment of initial encounter, then, in the direct address case studies I examine both the performer or the audience may serve as the person hailed, as they decide whether to identify with the address. In a 2019 article for the *Globe and Mail*, acknowledging the device’s political potential and elaborating on its value when employed by marginalized figures, Martha Schabas wrote, “There’s nothing new about direct address in theatre but, recently, I’ve been noticing the way it can operate as a feminist device, allowing a character to express thoughts, feelings and opinions that are, perhaps, too radical or threatening to be contained inside the conventions of the rest of the play.”

This history of direct address in theatre in Canada has continued to the present day. In Nicholas Hanson’s 2013 investigation into solo performance in Canada, he examined “the frequency of [solo performance’s] inclusion in theatre companies’ seasons and the rate of collecting acting awards” (298), to determine its prominence as a theatrical technique. While this is somewhat trickier to measure in regards to direct address, which is as an effect of performance and can’t be determined solely by looking at theatre companies’ websites, I attempt a similar examination here, first looking at the 2018 nominees for the Governor General’s Award for English Drama as a case study. The GG’s Award for English Drama honours plays published in Canada the previous year, and from the 2018 selection all of the nominated plays were also produced in Canada within a couple years of publication, usually preceding it. These plays are: *Gertrude and Alice* by Anna Chatterton, Evalyn Parry and Karin Randoja; *Paradise Lost* by Erin Shields; *The Men in White* by Anosh Irani; *This is How We Got Here* by Keith Barker; and

Botticelli in the Fire and *Sunday in Sodom* (a double bill) by Jordan Tannahill. Drawing on the published play texts, and either my own experiences of each of these shows in performance or observations from reviewers, I determined that four out of five of them (all except *The Men in White*) featured moderate to high amounts of direct audience address. (I define ‘moderate’ to mean that direct address is a significant element of the play.) Even if this number is not representative of other years of the award nominees, the frequency of the use of direct address this year I think is sufficient to establish it as a phenomenon, and its potential literary merit.⁴

While the Governor General’s Award demonstrates how plays that use direct address are celebrated as dramatic literature, they are also celebrated as performance pieces. Looking, like Hanson, at Toronto’s Dora Mavor Moore Awards, the four 2018 Governor General’s Award nominees which employed direct address fared quite well. *Gertrude and Alice* was nominated for Outstanding New Play in the 2016 Doras (it was beaten by *Huff*, one of my case studies), and the production was also nominated for Outstanding Ensemble and Costume Design. *Botticelli in the Fire* and *Sunday in Sodom*, which also premiered in Toronto in 2015 as a double bill, was nominated for a total of 7 Dora awards, including Outstanding New Play, Outstanding Production and Outstanding Direction. Since it premiered outside of Toronto at the Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario, *Paradise Lost* was not eligible for the Doras, but received rave

⁴ Interestingly, while there is a fair amount of overlap between direct address and solo shows, all of these nominated shows happen to have multiple performers, aligning with Hanson’s observation that solo shows, even those that are critically acclaimed, don’t tend to receive Governor General’s awards. (For example, *Huff*, the solo which beat *Gertrude and Alice* for best new play at the Dora Awards in 2016, was *not* nominated for the Governor General’s Award when it was published the following year). There are many potential explanations or factors contributing to this. Perhaps the dramaturgical (and thus more literary) function of the address is clearer in forms that have more ‘traditional’ dialogue alongside monologue, as most multiple-performer pieces do. Solo work also tends to be more interdisciplinary than other forms of theatre, possibly drawing on artistic traditions whose effects don’t read as clearly on the page (for example, stand-up comedy, dance or movement work, etc.). Some discussion of these possibilities is featured at the end of the chapter.

reviews from critics (such as the 4 out of 4 stars review from the *Toronto Star*, cited below) and was remounted by Centaur Theatre in Montreal in early 2020 (with a planned Toronto run cancelled due to the pandemic), a significant achievement for any show. The last play with arguably the least amount of direct address, *This is How We Got Here*, received its mainstream premiere in Toronto in 2020, and garnered critical acclaim as well as four Dora nominations, including Outstanding New Play.

Finally, as an alternative measure of frequency, here's a non-exhaustive list of productions using direct address that I have attended in Toronto just in the past few years: *Daughter* (2017), *Empire of the Son* (2017), *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* (2017), *Lukumi* (2017), *Mr. Shi and His Lover* (2017), *The Fish Eyes Trilogy* (2017), *True Crime* (2017), *...and you'll never believe what happens next* (2018), *Gertrude and Alice* (2018), *Obaaberima* (2018), *Pearle Harbour's Chautauqua* (2018), *Secret Life of a Mother* (2018), *Take D Milk, Nah?* (2018), *The Chemical Valley Project* (2018), *The Negroes are Congregating* (2018), *The Runner* (2018), *We Are Not Alone* (2018), *887* (2019), *A Beautiful Man* (2019), *Buffoon* (2019), *Chicho* (2019), *Cliff Cardinal's CBC Special* (2019), *Good Morning, Viet Mom* (2019), *Inner Elder* (2019), *let's run away* (2019), *Paolozzapedia* (2019) *Prophecy Fog* (2019), *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story* (2019), *salt* (2019), *Acts of Faith* (2020), *House* (2020 [remount]), *How to Fail as a Popstar* (2020), *Lady Sunrise* (2020), *Pearle Harbour's Agit-Pop* (2020), *Paradise Lost* (2020 [seen in Montreal in February, pandemic delayed scheduled Toronto run]). From the information I have presented, it is reasonable to conclude that direct address has a significant presence in theatre productions and plays in Canada. This frequency also suggests something about its value as a device, even if its use is sometimes (as I explore later in this chapter) charged with a lack of

sophistication. This evidence has given me enough of a foundation to move in this next section into exploring how we might understand this use of direct address.

Contextualizing direct address

In this section, I will examine existing literature on solo performance and monologue in Canada, including cultural and economic influences, to see what explanations it might offer to understand the prominence of direct address in Canadian theatre. I'll then expand upon and examine in detail one particular factor—the influence of particular performance or broader artistic genealogies. As I articulated at the beginning of this chapter, while direct address, solo performance, and monologue are not interchangeable terms, there is a high degree of overlap between them. Solo performers often play to the audience in the absence of other onstage scene partners. Similarly, monologues are often delivered to the audience. While there has been no scholarly content written on direct address as a theatrical device in a Canadian context, I argue that the frequency of direct address in theatre in Canada coincides in a large part with the frequency of solo performance and monologue and the commonality of monologue and solo performance in Canada is connected to the commonality of direct address. Thus, by looking at existing literature on the origin and context of solo performance and monologue, we might begin to extrapolate about direct audience address. Scholars writing about the trends of monologue and solo performance point to several reasons for its uses and prominence, which fall into two major categories: cultural factors and economic factors. While monologue and solo performance are not the same thing, most of the authors I cite here conflate the two, and for this reason they're used fairly interchangeably throughout this next section.

One cultural explanation for the prominence of monologue in Canada is offered by Renate Usmiani who argues that the technique complements “the double theme of isolation/alienation central to modern Western literature,” which, “gains a special significance in Canada” (9). Particularly, she points to scholar of Québécois theatre Laurent Mailhot’s description of monologue as the art form of “the individual who is lost and fragmented,” arguing that this figure described by Mailhot “stands as a symbol for a specifically Canadian condition” (10): in other words, the Canadian ‘identity crisis’ I discussed earlier. For Usmiani, this thematic resonance with ‘Canadian’ cultural experience helps to explain why “it would appear that in Canada, drama relies more than elsewhere on the monologue technique” (9).

Another cultural explanation for the popularity of monologue and solo performance in Canadian theatre arises in Nicholas Hanson’s study of solo performance. Hanson quotes John Gray, co-creator of the Canadian classic solo show *Billy Bishop Goes to War*:

Canadians don’t much like listening in on other people’s conversations. They think it’s impolite. This plays havoc with the basic convention of theatre itself, so what do you do? Well, you drop the fourth wall and you simply talk to the audience. They tend to relax a bit because they are in an arena whose aesthetics they understand: the arena of the storyteller (qtd. in Hanson 302)

Interestingly, Gray’s description here—speaking specifically of direct address—characterizes monologue in quite a different way than Usmiani’s, tonally. Gray’s implication that the act of addressing the audience opens up a pleasant kind of sociality between performer and audience could be considered at odds with Usmiani’s assertion that the form amplifies thematic isolation. The difference in these characterizations lies in the difference between understanding solo performance or monologue as the actor as alone on stage versus understanding them as the actor in a shared space with the audience. While these perspectives provide interesting counterpoints, it is perhaps too reductive to characterize monologue/direct address through this simple binary.

Some performances have effectively used direct audience address to highlight a sense of isolation; Nicholas Billon's *Iceland*, for example, uses its characters' appeals to the audience to highlight their desires for approval and connection, presenting these desires as consequences of their loneliness and isolation. Furthermore, while Gray's narrative is intriguing, as Hanson points out, "perhaps an analysis of contemporary solo performance through the lens of 'traditional' Canadian storytelling risks mythologizing our rural history" (302)—or, to speak the unspoken, risks glorifying white, settler narratives of Canadian-ness and Canadian theatre to the exclusion of others. Perhaps as a counter to this, Hanson notes "the prevalence of solo productions performed by members of minoritized (and other marginalized) communities" (302), in which the performers often create their own text. There's thus quite a bit of overlap between this work and autobiography: as Deirdre Heddon observes, "The majority of artists who use autobiography in their work are marginalised subjects" (2). This also coincides with the high inclusion of direct address in artistic works by marginalized subjects, as for these creators, just as Heddon observes of autobiographical performance, direct address "provide[s] a way to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise" (3).

Besides these cultural concerns, economic factors are also commonly cited to explain solo performance's popularity. On the whole, one-person shows are viewed as cheaper to produce, especially as touring productions. Usmani observed that compared to countries with high arts subsidies, such as Germany, the more limited resources of Canadian theatre mean that it is "imperative for a young playwright to keep costs of production as low as possible if he or she wishes to see the work performed at all" (10). Writing, in 1980, about the relative lower cost of *touring* solo shows, Bruce McDougall observed: "While a full cast with sets and technical equipment might cost as much as \$25,000 to move around the country, a one-person show can

travel for one-fifth that amount” (6). McDougall cites several artists and producers, who concur with his assessment. In fact, one artistic director he interviewed noted that one-person shows are not just cost efficient, but potentially *lucrative*, in their potential to attract and showcase big-name performers that can draw audiences (7). Hanson offers some disagreement here, arguing that, “the commonly circulated arguments relating to solo productions’ perceived affordability are predicated upon understandings that are at best overly simplistic, and at worst, downright erroneous” (301), and that at most economic factors can be said to be only partially responsible for this trend.

To complicate this understanding of the impact of economic factors on solo performance, we can look at how solo performance practice varies among regions. The economic challenges faced by theatre practitioners in Toronto in the 80s due to recession were more severe than those faced by artists in Montreal, who benefitted from Quebec’s stronger arts funding. Compare the bare-bones stagings of Toronto’s favourite solo show practitioner Daniel McIvor with the extravagant and imaginative theatre works of Montreal’s Robert Lepage, including his numerous solo pieces such as *Vinci* (1986), *Needles and Opium* (1991), *Far Side of the Moon* (2000) and *887* (2015). If the creation of solo shows was mainly influenced by economic factors, we likely wouldn’t see shows like Lepage’s and other Quebec practitioners who present a scaled-up version of the form. On top of these cultural and economic factors, another reason offered by Usmiani is the influence of various performance traditions. Noting the connection between monologue and solo shows and fringe festivals (a connection which also applies to direct address), she writes, “fringe theatre tends to be subversive; because of its often carnivalesque character, plays cross genre borders from drama to the clown and mime show, which again leads us back to the one-person performance and heavy use of monologue” (10). Usmiani also cites

vaudeville and the related “monologue as public performance” as an influence particularly in Quebec, mentioning the famed monologist and theatremaker Gratien Gélinas. My next section will extend Usmiani’s initial insight concerning the influence of various artistic genealogies on direct address, and, drawing heavily on my interviews with artists, investigate in detail several forms that connect to these artists’ use of the performance mode.

Genealogies of direct address in theatre

In the previous section, by extrapolating from writings on solo performance and monologue, I contextualized the ‘in Canada’ element of ‘direct audience address in contemporary theatre in Canada.’ In this section I will qualify the ‘theatre’ element of this phrase. This dissertation is interested in work that could be classified as ‘theatre,’ on the basis of its presentation in a theatre building, often by theatre companies or artists. This work is not conventional ‘fourth wall drama,’ but, as mentioned in my introduction, it is also not covered under conventional understandings of the participatory and immersive trends in theatre. As also discussed in my introduction, the theatrical history of direct address dates back to the Ancient Greek ‘parabasis’ and continues through Elizabethan drama and Restoration comedy, temporarily receding during the realist movement of the nineteenth century, and re-emerging with Brecht and others in the theatrical avant-garde. This history, while familiar to many theatre scholars, presents a very drama-centric and Eurocentric understanding of theatrical work. Indeed, to understand direct address as a convention that is in any way unusual or special relies on an acceptance of the fourth wall as default, which is not the case for many historic and contemporary theatre and performance traditions and practices. The theatre I study pushes these

boundaries through its association with non-Western or non-normative forms of theatre, and other art forms.

Postdrama, as I briefly discussed earlier, is a term coined by German scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann to describe the work of a wide range of American and European companies in the second half of the twentieth century that bucked traditional dramatic conventions. Today ‘postdramatic’ is colloquially applied to a wide variety of contemporary avant-garde and ‘boundary-pushing’ theatre. Writing of this tradition, Karen Jürs-Munby observes that postdrama “is much more immediately informed by cultural practices other than traditional drama (from visual art and live art, to movies, TV channel hopping, pop music and the internet)” (9). Similarly, the works I look at are heavily informed by such practices, producing shows that could be said to be both interdisciplinary and intermedial. A question that this raises, then, is, ‘what makes these shows theatre?’: with such variety in form and content, it can be difficult to define.

A key factor for me in determining what ‘counts’ as theatre is the context of the particular performance. Is it being programmed by a theatre company? Is it happening in a theatre space? Is it being marketed as theatre or through ‘theatre’ publications? Stand-up comedian and *Good Morning, Viet Mom* creator Franco Nguyen offered a very interesting response (discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter) when I asked him if he identified as a theatre artist. He offered a tentative yes, after concluding among other things that, “I’ve been in a couple publications as, ‘theatre artist to watch’” (Personal interview). For Nguyen, the label of ‘theatre artist’ is awarded in this case not due to the intrinsic characteristics of his work, but others’ perceptions of it. Another determining factor for me regarding a work’s status as ‘theatre’ is how it relates to the theatrical fourth wall. To many, the act of directly addressing an audience is

considered synonymous with the related term ‘breaking the fourth wall.’ This next subsection unpacks this relationship to reveal how this association can qualify a work as ‘theatre.’

On Form and the Fourth Wall

The conflation of the mode of direct address with the term ‘breaking the fourth wall,’ is a practice that’s spread well outside the theatre—as seen in the title of Tom Brown’s book, *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema*—and has thus entered popular culture. When describing my research on theatrical direct address to others (in particular those outside of my field), the most common feedback I receive is, “oh, you mean ‘breaking the fourth wall’?” The fourth wall as a concept arises relatively recently in Western dramatic tradition. It is associated with the ‘box set,’ a realistically detailed set of an indoor location carefully reproduced on stage which is made accessible to the audience through the removal of the ‘fourth wall,’ creating an open space through which they could view the action. Despite its physical removal, ‘the fourth wall’ nonetheless maintains an invisible presence, in that all performers behave as though it is still there, and thus do not look at nor acknowledge the presence of the audience.

The introduction of the box set is associated in English-language theatre with Madame Vestris in mid-nineteenth century London (“box set”). It marked both the growing realism in the theatre of the time and a departure from earlier performance traditions, such as those of the Elizabethan and Restoration eras in England, in which performers freely acknowledged and played to the audience. The effect of the introduction of the ‘fourth wall’ is that it seemingly severed the fictitious play-world from the ‘real’ world of the audience, hermetically severing the theatre’s mimesis from the object of its reproduction. This action complemented the scientific goals of the realist and naturalist movements of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century

theatre. The fourth wall figured the theatre space as a sealed scientific laboratory in which objective truths about human nature could be played out. Any direct acknowledgement of the audience would risk working against this goal by drawing attention to the fictitious and contingent nature of the play and ruining its appearance of reality. This fact figured any acknowledgement of the audience as gauche and unsophisticated, and cemented the fourth wall as the theatrical default, a state of affairs which to some extent still holds to this day.

The accepted practice of making ‘direct address’ synonymous with ‘breaking the fourth wall,’ then, implicitly demonstrates this default, as it presupposes the existence of the fourth wall which the direct address breaks. However, several performance forms that involve direct audience address may not involve breaking the fourth wall, as they don’t carry the history or formal assumptions that enable it. This point is evident in a section of my interview with performer/writer Franco Nguyen. When I asked him whether he identifies with the term ‘direct address’ as what he’s doing in his theatre/stand-up comedy hybrid, *Good Morning, Viet Mom*, he responded (Note: I’ve deliberately left in some of the hesitations that I typically edit out of interviews for clarity, as I think they’re useful here):

Umm, yeah. I think...huh. It’s kind of interesting. Like, I’m talking to them, but it’s kind of an illusion, too. Because I don’t—I’m talking to them, but I don’t—they’re not permitted to respond, you know? Like, the only way they’re allowed to respond is with—it’s anything except words...And that’s not being addressed, so is that a direct address? I’m not directly addressing their inability to do the same thing [to respond]. Then once they start talking, does that become theatre anymore or is it a lecture? Am I teaching class? So, I don’t even know--I don’t know if I--...I guess...Yeah. I mean, I am talking to the audience? I’m breaking the fourth wall. If you say this is a theatre show, then it is more direct address. But if you say this is a stand-up, one-person show, then--it doesn’t--I don’t know, I guess--because I haven’t really heard that...it’s kind of like, ‘oh, am I breaking something?’ (Personal interview)

Nguyen's response not only exposes how 'fourth-wall breaking' is specific to form, but points out the odd asymmetry of the action and associated conventions in theatrical tradition, such as when a performer is permitted to address the audience, but they are not expected to respond.

Other examples of forms without fourth-wall traditions, include many Indigenous performance traditions which may have fundamentally different understandings of performance-audience relations than 'traditional Canadian conventions' dictate, through practices may vary greatly across nations (there over 300 distinct nations in Canada of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples). For example, a key assumption behind fourth-wall drama is that the play-world is a fictional one, separate from reality (even if it is supposed to depict a reality outside of the theatre). Ric Knowles and Monique Mojica reveal, in their introduction to their anthology of Indigenous plays, *Staging Coyote's Dream*, that "Unlike in Western European tradition where theatre is 'just fiction,' . . . [i]n First Nations cultures, stories are never 'just stories.' They are essential ways of communicating memory, history, belief and tradition" (vol. 1, v). In this context, performance "can be used to bridge the interruption, the disconnect of colonization" (iv) for both performers and audience members, and a fourth wall would only disrupt this process.

Performer, playwright, and scholar d'bi.young anitafrika incorporates this blurring of theatre and life into her work on a methodological level. Her Anitafrika Method, the performance methodology she devised drawing on Jamaican dub poetry and Caribbean popular theatre traditions, also serves as a general method of self-actualization for her students. anitafrika describes it as a "ground-breaking creative praxis," an intersectional and anti-oppressive method which, "can be applied to personal growth, play-making, creative devising, health intervention, transformational justice, and leadership development" ("The Anitafrika Method"). The flexible applicability here demonstrates anitafrika's belief, "that my art mirrors society, encourages its

self-critique, and inspires its self-growth” (“r/evolution begins within” 27). To that end she deliberately specifies that in her work “a theatrical fourth wall is rarely present as the performer erases the divide between audience and storyteller, real and make-believe” (29). Thus anitafrika’s disavowal of the fourth wall allows the performer “to constantly explore and expand the relationship with themselves, their communities, and their belief and practice in art as a tool for social transformation” (29).

However, despite these artistic practices’ lack of fourth-wall adoption, the fourth wall is constituted not just by the performance form, but in the structures of the theatre itself (just as the fourth wall’s emergence is tied to the box set and proscenium stage), including physical theatre buildings and behaviours/expected practices. As Laura Levin has argued, the proscenium or scenic frame “is not merely a material entity found in theatre but also something that we have psychically internalized and project onto the world” (94). Michelle Olson, artistic director of Raven Spirit Dance, argues that the power of the colonizer’s gaze is inscribed in the structure of the proscenium arch that separates performers and audience, and is often a key signifier of the fourth wall. Olson observes that the focalized gaze invited by the frame of the proscenium allowed for the development of a detached, ‘objective’ and over-mastering ‘scientific perspective.’ In a proscenium setup, Olson argues, “the audience sits...in a place of power and a place of judgment” (273), and through this inequitable performer/audience relationships rises, “the gaze of the oppressor” (274). For Olson, this gaze is importantly both institutional and individual. On the individual level it is the gaze of the non-Indigenous spectator, under which, “the fourth wall of the theatre stage can feel like the bars of the cages at the human zoo” (279). Institutionally, the gaze of the theatre itself manifests through “assumptions about ‘Indianness’

[which] are embedded in our collective consciousness as a society,” and supported by “the power structure inscribed in the mechanics of the proscenium” (279).

Christine Lenze’s analysis of *fareWel* demonstrates how this might work in practice. In her article, “‘The Whole Thing You’re Doing is White Man’s Ways’: *fareWel*’s Northern Tour,” Lenze examines a touring production of Ojibway playwright Ian Ross’ *fareWel*. Lenze notes the differences between the show as performed in the proscenium at Prairie Theatre Exchange (PTE) in Winnipeg, and the makeshift performance spaces used in the northern circuit, including school gyms and community halls in various First Nations communities. She observes, of a moment of direct address in the show, “At the PTE the rupture of the traditional fourth wall was temporary and the proscenium was restored almost immediately” (79). However, this break was much more permanent in the northern communities: “in virtually every instance in the north the audience spoke directly to the actors throughout the performance, asking questions and vocalizing comments on, or objections to, what the characters were doing” (79). Thus, due to the lack of proscenium along with the audience’s expectations Lenze observes, “Because the majority of the audience had not previously encountered ‘professional’ theatre, the theatrical stage was not inferred” (80). This meant that the northern performance spaces, “functioned as [they] would in a First Nations oral performance,” and as a result, “changed the experience of the play for both actors and spectators, as the audience readily entered into dialogue with the script” (80). If these two examples show that the fourth wall is a colonial construct, they also show how the act of breaking it can be seen as an anticolonial action.

Lenze’s discussion above also reveals how the concept of the fourth wall mandates certain audience behaviours, such as sitting quietly and not interacting with those onstage. Naila Keleta-Mae describes how playwright Trey Anthony frequently uses direct audience address in

her pre-show announcements and talkbacks to challenge these expected behaviours. For example, Keleta-Mae recalls an instance where Anthony addressed a predominantly Black and female audience before a show, telling them “that they were not to sit quietly and applaud at the end of the play,” but be “be vocal in...support of and disgust with the characters and the story” (234), including a call-and-response demonstration exercise. For Keleta-Mae, this intervention, “signaled to [Anthony’s] audience that they were not at a conventional Canadian play where they could mostly passively experience or receive the performance. Instead, they were implicated in its success and were tasked with actively making meaning as it unfolded” (234). Here Anthony’s directions, provided before the performance started, encouraged the audience to break the fourth wall from the other side, so “break[ing] traditional Canadian conventions of performer-audience relations” (234).

While I do wish to draw attention to the perhaps too-easy associations the above examples draw between action and empowerment, a more physical audience engagement in the show and its political potential; they nevertheless reveal, firstly, how the fourth wall—whether explicitly presented or not—haunts much of contemporary theatre, and secondly, how the breaking of the fourth wall is viewed by many artists and scholars as a political tool. Like the above examples, most of the forms I will discuss in the following section, forms which have influenced my interviewees’ approaches to direct address, do not have a traditional ‘fourth wall.’ And yet the transposition of these forms to a theatrical context, such as that of a theatre space or even just a theatre perceptual frame, shapes their meaning and reception. In this way these forms, including radio, clown, and stand-up comedy, are in some ways engaging with, and thus reacting against this norm of the fourth wall, even while breaking it through direct address. Regardless of theatrical form, the established association between ‘direct audience address’ and ‘breaking the

fourth wall,' demonstrates the rooted-ness of this fourth wall norm in theatrical culture. Because of the dominance and normalization of the fourth wall, and direct address' definition in opposition to it, despite direct address' frequency on the Canadian theatre scene it is yet always viewed as a challenge or deviation from theatrical norms (the consequences of which I explore more fully in the final section of this chapter), rather than a normative device in and of itself.

Performance forms

In this section I will look at a few performance forms mentioned specifically by the artists I interviewed or connected to their work, including performance art, radio, and stand-up comedy. However, as I only interviewed a limited number of artists, these forms make up just the tip of the iceberg of influences on direct address. Accordingly, before going into a detailed discussion of the forms mentioned by the artists I interview, I will briefly discuss some not mentioned.

One of the most significant performance forms not mentioned by my interviewees is clown. In Canada, the influence of bouffon clown (a tradition descended particularly from the French schools of Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier) is particularly noticeable, espoused by theatre performers and creators such as Adam Lazarus, Karen Hines, Rebecca Northam, Adam Paolozza, and more. The bouffon character is explained by Nina Gilmour, co-star of the fabulous bouffon show *Death Married my Daughter*, as "the outcast of society, returned to civilization from the swamps" (Kaplan). She elaborates, "We know the character best as the fool in Shakespeare's plays, someone who's supposed to relieve the ruler of his cares. Unlike the clown, whose sole purpose is to make the audience laugh, the bouffon criticizes society by referring to the audience, pointing out the truths that people don't want to hear" (Kaplan). Gilmour's

characterization of the form reveals its close relationship with the audience and thus association with direct address, as well as its particular interest in ‘implicating’ the audience through criticism (as opposed to merely entertaining them). This possibility for critique and the complex relationships it engenders between performer and audience perhaps makes this performance form attractive as the basis of a theatre show, particularly for shows that grapple with more political themes. Yasmine Kandil and Michelle MacArthur write about how in *Death Married my Daughter*, Gilmour and co-performer Danya Buonastella use direct address to “seduce and provoke” their audiences, in line with the show’s political and dramaturgical goals. While the bouffon form remains predominant, other forms of clowning also persist in theatre circles, through creators such as Michelle Thrush whose show, *Inner Elder*, draws on Indigenous clowning as well as bouffon. Or Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, who in her hit show with Evalyn Parry, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, heavily employs the use of *uaajeernejq*, Greenlandic mask dancing which she describes as a kind of a clown.

Clowning can be characterized as one of a number of popular performance forms that are associated with a close relationship between performer and audience. As cited earlier, Usmani connects these forms of populist theatre to an increased use of monologue, but also to alternative venues, such as fringe festivals: “In line with the popular tradition since the time of the *commedia dell’arte*, fringe theatre tends to be subversive; because of its often carnivalesque character, plays cross genre borders from drama to the clown and mime show, which again leads us back to the one-person performance and the heavy use of monologue” (Usmani 10). There is thus a relationship (visible in many of this chapter’s examples) between popular artforms, monologue and direct address, and alternative theatre venues/festivals. There are a lot of reasons why fringe spaces prove a fruitful ground for developing these kinds of works. The open, non-

curated model that fringe festivals adopt and the low cost of production make these spaces an excellent, low stakes place to workshop material that requires audiences' feedback, and to experiment with relations that push traditional theatrical boundaries (as opposed to the safer fare and higher stakes⁵ associated with non-profit subscription companies). The relatively smaller scale of productions at fringe festivals makes smaller casts more likely, leading to an increase in solo performances, monologue, and use of direct address. However, just because many direct address shows originate in fringe settings, that doesn't mean that they end there. The movement of many of the shows I study from the fringe to more 'mainstream' non-profit venues, is, I argue, an indicator of their artistic excellence and compatibility with the lofty artistic goals of non-profit theatre, as well as the 'entertainment value,' typically associated with more populist forms and venues.

Other performance forms that could be grouped in this category of popular performance tradition include drag and spoken word poetry. Drag has some similarities with clown in the fact that it is a highly theatrical, often costumed performance relying on performer-audience interaction, that is moving more from performance-specific venues such as drag bars and clubs into 'conventional' theatre shows (though, of course, it has some pre-existing legacy in the theatre, such as the long history of the British pantomime Dame). One prominent example is Pearle Harbour, alter ego of performer/creator Justin Miller, who's become a big hit on the Toronto theatre scene with shows like *Pearle Harbour's Chautauqua* (referring to the popular turn-of-the-century direct-address based form of lecture theatre). Another delightful example

⁵ Playwright Hannah Moscovitch describes some friction that emerges when workshopping her direct address plays in more conventional theatre noting that "because of the direct address, the previews are a scramble" (Personal Interview), as it's only once an audience is in that she, the director and the cast can see if what they've been rehearsing works on audiences in its intended manner.

is Izad Etemadi's shows based around his character Leila including *A Very Leila Christmas*. Spoken word poetry is especially prominent on the Toronto theatre scene, where companies such as b current were formed in the Jamaican dub poetry and dub theatre tradition, producing the work of artists including adri zhina mandiola, Afua Cooper, d'bi.young anitafrika, and Motion.

Finally, traditions from other mediums have made their way into shows that employ direct audience address. I will explore radio in the next section, but will here briefly mention film. The tradition of combining both direct address and use of film in the theatre dates back at least as far as the work of Robert Lepage in Canada and Spalding Gray in the U.S. in the eighties. Direct address theatre works that employ film, as is the case with my case study, *Empire of the Son*, tend to be autobiographical, and may be seen in part to emerge from a rich tradition of documentary film in Canada funded by the National Film Board. *Good Morning, Viet Mom*, a theatre piece created by my interviewees Franco Nguyen and Byron Abalos, in fact began its life as a documentary film, which then switched to theatre as Nguyen hoped the theatrical context might help to better highlight the emotional significance of the film he captured.

As I move into more detailed discussions of specific performance forms, it's important to note that while I talk about these forms discretely, they are often mixed together in a kind of postmodern or postdramatic pastiche. Andy Lavender characterizes "the increasingly hybrid nature of theatre form" as one of the key components of twenty-first century theatre (7), an observation that has certainly held up in the works I've looked at. This trend emerges clearly in the way that many contemporary shows market themselves. Take, for example, *Oraltorio*, a collaboration between poet and writer Motion and DJ L'Oqenz, directed by Mumbi Tindyebwa. The show is described on the website for its run at Soulepper Theatre in Toronto with its

hybridity centralized, listed as: “Part poetry slam, part house party – a coming of age story like no other.” *Empire of the Son*, one of the plays I discuss in detail in this dissertation, is described on its publisher’s website as “a unique theatrical hybrid that combines cinematography with the raw immediacy of a performance piece intimately connected to real life in real time.”

This trend towards hybridity, while perhaps increasingly popular, is not new. In her 1991 essay on Daniel MacIvor (Canadian solo show pioneer, and source of inspiration for several of the artists I interviewed), Johanne Bénard writes of MacIvor’s play *House*: “to what genre belongs this theatre hybrid? Although *House* did win the prize for the best Toronto play, the anglophone critics have asked if this is truly a work of theatre. This show situates itself on the border of stand-up comedy, of theatre and of performance art” (30). On top of this, Bénard also connects *House* to a tradition of other formally/conventionally challenging pieces, such as the monological work of Spalding Gray in shows such as *Swimming to Cambodia* (1987) and Samuel Beckett’s revolutionary *Not I* (1972) (33-4). My observation about the hybridity of these forms, then, is not that the mixing of forms is a brand-new innovation. Rather, I’m interested in the work this mixing does in concert with a heightened use of direct address, and how that artistic strategy connects particularly to this contemporary moment. In the sections that follow, based on the artists’ self-identification with forms or identification with certain elements or conventions associated with them, I will look at how the theatrical work of the artists I interviewed reflects on and builds from performance art, radio, and stand-up comedy, genealogies that both help to explain and to complicate their use of direct audience address.

Performance (Art)

Performance is a term that has been quite flexibly employed by a wide variety of scholars and artists. In Shannon Jackson’s seminal study *Professing Performance*, she examines some of

the complex and often contradictory ways this term has been employed in the academy. For the purposes of this section, though, I am not interested in any official understanding or definition of performance as offered by scholars or artists who practice it, but more in performance as envisioned more broadly as a generalized category by my interviewees. The tentative appellation of ‘performance art’ I use to indicate that these artists are often thinking about performance as a kind of artistic genre, ruled by formal characteristics and similarities that are distinct from dramatic norms. Despite Josette Féral’s assertion that performance “escapes formalism,” (174) for the artists I interviewed, the concept of ‘performance’ seemed to hold some clear defining features. This understanding of performance as a genre was often held alongside another understanding of performance as an umbrella term, a catch-all for forms that don’t fit within traditional or conventional artistic boundaries.

Of all the artists I interviewed, Tetsuro Shigematsu is perhaps the most invested in and grounded in performance. He has said that his work, “could either be construed as postdramatic or performance art” (Personal interview). In our interview, he specifically located himself within a postdramatic context, first by observing his status as theatremaker trained in visual arts, a trend that Lehmann points to as a key contributing factor to the growth of postdrama. Shigematsu also situated his work very clearly in a line of artists who work with performance, beginning with the aforementioned Spalding Gray’s *Swimming to Cambodia*, and other influences from “other performance artists who were prominent at the time,” including “Eric Bogosian, Laurie Anderson, Annie Sprinkle, Diamanda Galás” (Personal interview). On top of these connections, he directly quoted for me a passage from Lehmann’s book, describing his work as “more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than production, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information”

(86). While this passage is rich with meaning, I want to focus on this first comparison in particular, “more presence than representation,” and the concepts of actuality versus mimesis that it juxtaposes.

The idea that performance differs from theatre, or drama more specifically, due to its non-representational nature is central to performance studies. Performance is not invested in drama’s “closed-off fictional cosmos” (Jüres-Munby 3) and suspension of disbelief, but rather thrives in the blurring of boundaries between art and life that foregrounds performance’s connection with actuality. The difference between performance and theatre has typically been figured as ‘presence versus representation.’ For an example of this argument, we can look at Cormac Power’s summation of Chantal Pontbriand’s famous essay on the subject: “Performance is not dominated by semiosis and representation as the theatre supposedly is; rather than the stage being a mere vehicle for the representation of something necessarily absent, performance has an ‘obvious presence...a here/now which has no other referent except itself’” (Power 106). Power also points out that the binaristic thinking associated with this division has been challenged and unpicked by scholars such as Marvin Carlson; however, while not absolute, these differences remain part of artists’ and scholars’ conceptions and categories of theatre and performance.

Performance’s ‘presence’ typically derives from its ‘realness,’ its connection to the actual, and its ‘authenticity.’ This can be seen in the framing and reception of Tetsuro Shigematsu’s show *Empire of the Son*. A review of the show by Vancouver’s *Vancity Buzz*, begins, “Tetsuro Shigematsu is a terrible actor. He states as much in the one-man show *Empire of the Son*, which is currently enjoying a sold-out world premiere and hold over at The Cultch” (“Theatre Review: *Empire of the Son* is understated perfection”). The writer’s choice to open the

favourable review with the observation that Shigematsu's acting is bad—which would seem quite bizarre for the review of a theatre show whose aim is representation—makes sense when the show is understood through the lens of performance. Shigematsu's 'bad acting,' or failure at mimesis, reaffirms the show's success at presentation, by which Shigematsu's latent 'presence,' rather than disappearing into or being obscured by a character that he's playing, can be felt or experienced by an audience. In this way performance's seeming avoidance of fiction and artifice establishes the show's authenticity.

Performance's interest in 'presence,' primes it for the presentation of events on stage that are not overtly theatricalized, or are seemingly 'non-fictionalized,' thus explaining the large overlap between the theatre shows I study that employ 'performance' and those that are autobiographical. Performance-inflected theatre thus takes great advantage of theatre's "capacity to be a hypermedium which 'stages' other mediums" (Nelson 13), a capacity of which both Shigematsu and Nguyen take advantage in their intermedial pieces. For Shigematsu, this strategy of using theatre as a staging ground arose from the response his work received in art school: "very often the professors would find my narrative explanation of the work, the story of the piece, much more compelling than the work itself" (Personal interview). Shigematsu took from his professors the message that "we're less interested in your artwork; we're more interested in this performance you're enacting"; and so performance in *Empire of the Son* forms a platform for a variety of artistic forms and experiments with cinema, poetry, photography, and others. While Shigematsu's staging ground is lively and varied in its use of technology, many other artists use performance as a more pared-down staging ground, employing a kind of lecture theatre. These include works such as Alanna Mitchell's *Seasick*, *Gertrude and Alice* by Evalyn Parry, Anna

Chatterton, and Karin Randoja, Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia's *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, and Anita Rochon's *Pathetic Fallacy*.

Franco Nguyen recounted a similar path to Shigematsu in finding the form of his show, *Good Morning, Viet Mom*. Nguyen, who spent time in York University's MFA documentary filmmaking program and is trained in improv and comedy, began the seed of the show with video footage he took of his mother on their trip to visit her dying mother in Vietnam. He found that just showing the footage alone was not effective at getting the kind of response he was looking for from audiences:

...when I would talk about the footage, people were really prepared to be moved and impacted. But then I would show people the footage, and there was almost no reaction...And I was like, oh, that's interesting that when I pitch it to people they're very invested, and very moved, but when they see the footage itself, they're not really--and even the footage, some of it is like, you see my mom meeting--seeing her mother for the first time in 28 years. It's so intense emotionally, but people weren't reacting at all. And I thought it was because when I pitch it it's coming from this body [gesturing to himself], this voice, and you automatically see me as a person because I'm talking to you. And that way the story--it's like my experience. Or, like, I'm telling you the story, so you can relate to it more. Whereas there's a disconnect between when you watch something on video, it's like looking through a window (Personal interview).

There's lots to unpack here in Nguyen's statement, starting with his designation of performance as the ideal medium to convey emotion. Nguyen's observation of the felt 'disconnect' from watching the video situates performance's liveness and felt immediacy as the source of its emotional success. This is supported by the emphasis he places on his actual body in the space with the audience as a source of authenticity. Another takeaway from this passage is Nguyen's clear attention to audience. As Nguyen outlines above, his search for specific reactions from his audience foregrounded and justified his turn to performance. The close relationship between performance and audience is marked by Karen Jürs-Munby when she observes in her introduction to *Postdramatic Theatre*, "[t]he turn to performance is...at the same time always a

turn towards the audience, as well” (5). Accordingly, a commonality among the artists I interviewed who aligned with performance is their heightened attention to audience (which may carry political possibility in the attention to *specific* audiences, for example, of marginalized groups). The last thing I wish to draw from the above passage is how Nguyen’s discussed interest in actuality and audience clearly sets up a connection between performance and direct address, as for Nguyen and other artists whose work I look at, talking to the audience becomes yet another way to take advantage of performance’s actuality (and sometimes, as we will see, to trouble it). These direct address works, then, can be read within a broader tradition in performance art of artists implicating and challenging the audience through forms of direct address, from Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* to Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena’s *Couple in a Cage*, that resonates throughout many examples of theatre shows. As a whole, this interrelation between performance, audience, and direct address are key materials of Andy Lavender’s described contemporary performance scene that “finds pleasure, meaning and pertinence in scenarios of actuality, authenticity, encounter and experience” (10).

Another passage that supports this connection between performance, audience, and direct address is from Byron Abalos, director and dramaturg of *Viet Mom*, speaking of his experiments with autobiographical work:

[T]here’s something very interesting and exciting to me as an artist, about, what if we see these real people talking about their real lives, and what if that is spoken directly to the audience in a way that is, yes, crafted, and yes, artful, but not devised in any way to manipulate as such? It’s more, if you can find a way to remain true to yourself, and what your truth is and speak it clearly and plainly, and you have the right kind of build and support around it to allow the audience to receive that, then I think the level of engagement that we can get with the audience is a lot deeper, than say if they were watching something that they know is completely fictionalized (Personal interview).

Note again the use of autobiography as a strategy of immediacy and actuality, and direct address as a catalyst for it.

One last interesting way in which my interview participants understood performance was through its effect on the *process* of art making, as observed by Hannah Moscovitch. Moscovitch differentiated her most recent show, the autobiographical and experimental *Secret Life of a Mother*, from her earlier ‘more traditional’ dramatic pieces through the invocation of performance. In *Secret Life of a Mother*:

[B]ecause everything is so synthesized and integrated in terms of design and performance and text, and that the text will never be performed by anybody else, nor will it ever be performed outside of a particular design which is integrated into the text, so then I’m kind of outside of the zone of what we would consider...even in the most collaborative playwriting experiences of mine, there’s still a text with a director and performers and designers, and as much as we all collaborate and I integrate, that has its limits. With this, that had no limits. So I would say this is--probably performance and not playwriting (Personal interview).

In the above passage, Moscovitch justifies her classification of the work as performance via its authenticity and a connection to the ‘real’ (including its autobiographical narrative, and Moscovitch’s actual, physical appearance in the work). However, on top of that, the blurring of traditional theatrical divisions of labour mark performance as a process, as much as it is defined by the formal characteristics identified above.

Radio

Several artists I interviewed had experience working in radio as a form, or referenced it in their works, or mentioned it as some sort of artistic inspiration. The prevalence of radio in my interviews surprised me, as it’s not the most ‘current’ form, and yet there has been a long and well documented history connecting radio and theatre in Canada. As mentioned briefly above, in his introduction to *Modern Canadian Plays*, vol. 2, Jerry Wasserman notes: “Perhaps the most

significant development for English-Canadian drama in the 1930s and '40s was the rise of radio” (4). Wasserman then goes on to describe the radio plays broadcast by the early CBC as “‘The Golden Age’ of Canadian radio - Canada’s equivalent of a national professional theatre” (4), and observes that “[a]lthough radio’s golden age faded with the coming of television in the 1950s, radio drama continued to provide an important source of work and income for Canadian actors and playwrights until 2012 [when the Harper government slashed the CBC’s budget]” (4-5). This is a history that one of my interviewees was directly implicated in: Hannah Moscovitch worked for the hit program *Aghanada*, for many years, and Tetsuro Shigematsu also worked for the CBC as a broadcaster early in his career.

Perhaps one explanation for its prominence is radio’s status as perhaps the most ‘Canadian’ of the forms, in terms of the place it holds in Canadian national memory. The relationship between notions of ‘Canadianness,’ Canadian identity, and radio (specifically through the CBC) is well documented. When I asked Cliff Cardinal if he thinks of himself as a ‘Canadian artist,’ Cardinal (who was born in the United States) used his appearance on the CBC as evidence for the affirmative: “I guess I am. Yeah, I’m a Canadian artist, I’ve been on the CBC. You know? I’ve been interviewed on the CBC. I’m part of the story of the CBC...so there’s nothing more Canadian than that” (Personal interview). Cardinal’s show *Cliff Cardinal’s CBC Special*, which he developed after my interview with him and premiered at Toronto’s SummerWorks Festival in August 2019, plays with these ideas. In an interview about the show, Cardinal articulated his support for the typical narratives that surround CBC Radio in Canada: “I forgot to mention in the opening-night performance that I love CBC Radio. I grew up with it. It brings everybody who lives here on Turtle Island together. There’s no part of me that wants to make fun of that. There’s nothing cynical at work” (Morrow). However, despite this support,

Cardinal's show at the same time brilliantly subverts the quaintness of stories about Canadian provincial life, that typically mark the feel-good 'CBC Special' (a prime example being Stuart MacLean's renowned and popular series *The Vinyl Cafe*), by using his 'Special' to reveal the hidden darkness of rural life Canada and class inequalities perpetuated by systemic racism.

Phillip Auslander observes the connections between radio, television, and theatre, specifically their central reliance on liveness, that is not shared, for example, by film (13-14). Another connection between radio and the work I study, perhaps because of this joint connection to liveness, is that radio is often used as a means of direct address. Shigematsu gets at this in *Empire of the Son*, which, through a series of poetic passages, stylizes radio as a lone voice reaching out across the distance for comfort from another. This characterization directly complements the direct address the show is delivered in, which features Shigematsu reaching out to the audience in the role they play in the show as emotional surrogates for his father. In this way he takes advantage of similarities in communicative mode between radio broadcasting and direct address in theatre. Shigematsu told me that when he was training in radio broadcasting with Heather Kennedy, she drilled a particular lesson into him:

She said, 'you're not talking to the whole country. You have to get that out of your mind. You're not speaking to people across every time zone.' She said, 'the person who's listening to you is alone. They are in their kitchen in the Maritimes and they're ironing. They are in their garage in the Prairies and they're working on their car.' She said, 'every person that you're talking to is just one person.' And she even went so far as to place a dummy, a kind of scarecrow, in the guest seat across from the mic, so that I would learn to focus on just the one person (Personal interview).

This lesson directly bled into Shigematsu's theatremaking. He goes on, "And in turn I've taken that same lesson when I perform. I'm often talking to just specific individuals within the audience" (Personal interview). Here we can see a direct correlation between Shigematsu's radio work and his theatre work, through their mode of address and the intimacy (or imagined

intimacy) of their connection with the singular audience member. *Afghanada*, the radio drama Hannah Moscovitch worked on, also famously employed direct address, which for Moscovitch made almost seamless her transition between the two forms. She told me: “because the radio shows I worked on were all direct address-based; characters were addressing the audience, it felt very...100% what I do [using direct address in the radio] made the transition to that medium easy” (Personal interview). Moscovitch also connected her radio and theatre work with another form of media, television, which she frequently writes for and is also very audience-focused in its own way. In TV, Moscovitch says, “there’s a technical desire to hold the audience’s attention,” as a result of which, “in TV, honestly, we think endlessly about the audience, endlessly...I’m really, really aware of trying to reach an audience in TV and really calculating exactly what the effect will be on the audience, and exactly where they’re gonna feel what” (Personal interview).

Radio’s popularity and connection to direct address can also be traced to the podcast form, which, modeled on public radio shows in the U.S., rose to prominence as a key mass media form in the early twenty-first century. This connection has been noted by reviewers, for example J. Kelly Nestruck observing in his review of the show that *Empire of the Son* can “feel like a podcast on stage” (“Tetsuro Shigematsu’s *Empire of the Son*”). These forms’ appeals have been discussed in terms of the perceived intimacy of the singular voice in one’s ear, and their related perception as a source of truth (what Andy Lavender calls ‘truth-turning’ [10]). For example, Stars performer Torquil Campbell invokes radio as a motif in his play *True Crime* which asks, in this post-truth age, does it matter to us if our true crime is really true? The intimacy of the radio/podcast form is appealing as it directly addresses what Walter Benjamin describes as “the desire of the masses to bring things closer spatially and humanly” (225). The infiltration of the

podcast or radio form into theatre marks a similar one going the other way, whereby popular podcasts make money off and celebrate through live touring shows (one example being Jesse Brown's *Canadaland*).

Stand-up comedy

Stand-up comedy seems to be on the rise in theatre productions. Stand-up was especially mentioned by Shigematsu, Cardinal, and Nguyen—the latter of whom identifies most strongly as a stand-up comedian. One similarity between stand-up comedy and theatre is both forms' valuing of the 'live' experience. This rhetoric of 'shared liveness' between the two is noted by Jason Zinoman in his 2019 article for *American Theatre* magazine, entitled, "Why Comedy is Eating Theatre's Lunch." Zinoman observes: "the same romantic defenses you often hear of theatre you can also hear from comics—the beauty of its ephemerality, the present-tense nature of the form in a time when everyone is on screens." Franco Nguyen echoed this in my interview with him when he argued that recorded stand-up specials are generally not as effective as the immediacy of the live experience, in which "You're experiencing the danger--like, 'What if they fall off the stage,' 'Why's the mic sounding like this?' 'Oh, he's so close to us.'" For Nguyen, this immediacy makes for the difference between a recorded and live session, "the difference between someone telling you their experience and you living that experience, versus watching it through a window, and just really having no reference" (Personal interview).

The context for these discussions is the recent popularity of sophisticated comedy shows like Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* (now made accessible to the masses via Netflix specials). Comedy is now being taken more seriously by the general public as an 'art' form which is "just as likely [as theatre] if not more so to speak to important issues" (Zinoman). (For example, in October 2019, the Theatre Centre in Toronto held a week-long comedy festival entitled "Comedy

is Art.”) This is partially the result, I argue, of what Shannon Jackson has referred to as an “experimental chiasmus across the arts,” whereby artistic media borrow from each other: “breaking the traditions of one medium means welcoming the traditions of another” (*Social Works* 2). This chiasmus was observed by one of my interviewees, Byron Abalos, when he noted how comics like Hasan Minhaj are becoming more theatre-like in their stand-up via theatrical use of lighting, sound, and props, and even screens with projected material as set, “to tell the story in a more compelling way.” This is in contrast to Abalos’ show, *Good Morning, Viet Mom*, which crosses the chiasmus the other way: “Where we were bringing stand-up into a play, they’re bringing a play into a stand-up routine” (Personal interview). Similarly, Zinoman observes that *Nanette* has strong connections to the theatrical solo shows of eighties and nineties, citing Eric Bogosian and Spalding Gray (who are both mentioned in the ‘performance’ section above), that make Gadsby’s show a kind of theatre.⁶ However, despite these crossovers there remain in mainstream discourse clear distinctions between understandings of stand-up and theatre. *Good Morning, Viet Mom*, in fact, relies on these distinctions in its deliberate switches between the two forms.

While Nguyen notes that stand-up and theatre are similar in that they employ interaction with the audience, he explains that they differ in terms of audience expectations. Describing the switch from stand-up to theatre, he notes, “I think in a one-person show in a dramatic environment, there’s a different expectation from the audience; there’s a different contract”

⁶ There is further work to be done to investigate the links between direct address, stand-up or sketch comedy, and theatre. Sketch shows often contain a self-aware and metatheatrical style which sometimes even crosses over into direct address. One key example of this is the frequent use of direct address in the nineties Canadian sketch show *The Kids in the Hall*, including by the iconic and groundbreaking Buddy Cole, played by Scott Thompson. Other important, more recent shows in this legacy include *Baroness Von Sketch* and *Tallboyz*, the latter of which is executive-produced by eponymous ‘Kid,’ Bruce McCullough and has as one of its stars Franco Nguyen.

(Personal interview). Part of this difference lies in how each form appeals to audiences emotionally. He says, “In a stand-up show it’s kind of like, ‘I don’t want to feel anything. You better trick me, if I--you do.’ Whereas, in a theatre show, I think people sit down, and they really want to know who you are right away.” Nguyen also cites comedian Pete Holmes, who characterized the feeling at a comedy show as, “that feeling of like, ‘the teacher’s not here and we’re going to say all the bad words,’” whereas in theatre, “we empathize with the teacher—‘oh, the teacher’s actually a person,’ you know? So we come here, and it’s not about saying the bad words, it’s just about being honest and being vulnerable.” These differences can be useful as the ‘different contract’ each form has with an audience can be used to specific effect.

Adopting stand-up comedy as a formal inspiration may also affect a work’s process. Nguyen, who is trained primarily in improv and is an active stand-up comedian, let his training inform the material in the rehearsal process and even during the shows, where he is constantly trying out new things in the moment. Byron Abalos, director/dramaturg of Nguyen’s show, observes, “He’s playing the room...He’s looking for opportunities to deepen, or to find another joke” (Personal interview). Just like in a performance paradigm, stand-up’s spontaneity, a product of its liveness is valued here, as for Abalos: “It’s most fun when the audience has real sense that he’s not on script anymore and he’s actually with us, responding to the room and what’s happening in the room.” This increases the show’s authenticity and makes it, “feel...like a very genuine conversation.”

One final thing of note in Nguyen’s discussion of stand-up is the connection between stand-up and speaking truth to power, which resonates with discourse around the bouffon clown, mentioned earlier. Nguyen, discussing the job of the stand-up comedian, says, “It’s like the jester. It’s like you’re saying things to the king that no one else wants to say.” Only for Nguyen

in today's context, where the monarchy is a figurehead, the 'king' that the jester comedian is speaking back to is "like, Canadians' status quo" (Personal interview). One of the few connections between how Nguyen and Cliff Cardinal think through stand-up in their work, is via this observation of the potential disruptive power of the comedian employing direct address to "talk back" to authority figures. Observing its oppositional or disruptive function, Cardinal describes his play *Huff* as a punk show, a "fuck you to a society that would put our little brothers and sisters' backs against the wall" (*Huff and Stitch*, iv).

Cardinal and Nguyen model different ways of devising direct address material. Compared to Nguyen's more improvisational approach, which involved workshopping bits of the show with multiple audiences before compiling them into a script, Cardinal, who primarily identifies as a writer, wrote the script of his play *Huff* in a much more 'traditional' way—in its entirety before rehearsing it. When talking about his stand-up comedy influences, Cardinal cites the tone of particular comedians he was inspired by. For example, he said, "George Carlin had a razor-sharp perspective on the world in terms of calling out bullshit, as he saw it. Calling out illusions and tearing down hate, you know. A very aggressive and violent poeticism to him, but he was a beautiful soul" (Personal interview). He also spoke of Richard Pryor's use of personification techniques in a set that is directly referenced in *Huff*—giving voice to car, gun, and dog—as "kind of magic realism, but kind of just break-your-heart funny." Thus, what influenced Cardinal was these comedians' use of humour with dark subject matter, something that Cardinal was able to draw out through his, at turns, antagonistic and vulnerable invitations to the audience through direct address. On top of this, he also referenced comedians that engage with themes of existentialism. He notes:

It's scary to know that you're going to die. And the people who are out in front of that laughing in the face of that always really spoke to me. And in terms of theatre, theatre is

the most existential of art forms...Everyone [those outside the theatre] is striving to create something long-lasting but we want to create something that dies. That lives and dies in two hours and it was just about that moment. (Personal interview)

In this case, Cardinal understands the liveness of theatre and comedy primarily through their ephemerality, in a way that resonates with human mortality. In *Huff*, the choice and use of direct address, particularly in its contingency, becomes the best way to harness and directly engage with this ephemerality.

Drama vs. performance and direct address

With this wide variety of forms influencing these kinds of theatrical works, how can we understand direct address shows as pieces of theatre? Shannon Jackson's observation of an "experimental chiasmus across the arts," means that interpretation of works "will differ depending upon what medium they understand themselves to be disrupting, i.e., which medium is on the other end of whose 'post'" (*Social Works 2*). According to Jackson, "disciplinary perceptual habits that can make for drastically different understandings of what we are in fact encountering" (4). In other words, perceptual habits, or 'horizons of expectation,' affect what different individuals understand as 'theatre.'

For example, when I asked Franco Nguyen if he was a theatre artist he admitted, "Yeah, but I guess theatre in a looser sense" (Personal interview). He continued,

Well, I said that because I think there are people that actually go to school and study theatre, and so there's this wide understanding of what theatre is, which is mainly performance, acting...and my path into theatre was through improv....Because I think the techniques of a theatre person is like, understanding the stage--stagecraft is very important...I'm not a theatre artist in the sense that I haven't studied theatre, I didn't go out for auditions or anything like that. But I'm a theatre artist in the sense that I do a lot of stand-up and I have an interaction with an audience. And I share my ideas publicly. And, so, I guess I would say I'm a theatre artist that way...But when I think of theatre, I

think I have a different idea, which is more like, dramatic, have dabbled in Shakespearean script at some point, you know where Stratford is... (Personal interview)

Through Nguyen's perceptual habits, we can see the tension he apprehends between two different forms of theatre: his improv-inflected work and "more dramatic" work. I'm going to recharacterize these two different forms as 'theatre as performance' and 'theatre as drama.'

To further explore these differences, we can look at how Cliff Cardinal responded when I asked him about the genre of his plays, *Stitch* and *Huff*:

They're a one-woman show and a one-man play... one of my mentors Deanne Taylor would say that a one-man show is not a play but a theatrical event. And I really like that. Although there are elements of my solo shows which are bits of plays. That have intense bits of dialogue where the actor is talking back and forth with themselves. But it itself is not a play (Personal interview).

The distinction that Cardinal is making here between "play" and "theatrical event" seems to be based in differences of dramatic technique: 'dialogue' between two characters counts as "bits of plays," but is not in itself a play.

Take also the earlier example offered by Shigematsu. He specifically locates himself within a performance-based postdramatic context, in the passage from Lehmann's book he quoted, noting that his work is, "more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than production, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information" (86):

And for me, those distinctions are really important for when I perform. Because I am an untrained actor, but I think that that doesn't make me less qualified to be on stage because in some respects I think that the audience has a more powerful experience if I'm bringing to bear—if I'm drawing upon a certain set of strengths that are underpinned by a different set of values that feels, maybe, that much more vital, or high-stakes in the moment of performance. (Personal interview)

Shigematsu separates himself from the more traditional training of the dramatic actor to a more performance-based way of being in the moment that's "vital" and "high-stakes."

How Shigematsu's performance is read depends on the viewer's frame of reference or perceptual habits. Karen Fricker, in her review of the show, takes a rather negative stance on Shigematsu as an untrained performer. She writes, "Shigematsu's lack of performance training limits the show's capacity to plumb emotional depths." Furthermore, she observes that, "because it lacks structure — the show meanders." Fricker's points here, concerned with the plumbing of emotional depths and 'structure,' indicate she's reading the show as traditional drama, in which the verisimilitude of the show and its dramatic structure are important features, and not as a performance that's more "presence than representation." Later on, she observes, "The use of video illustrates his points rather than complicating or extending them, adding visual texture but not substance." In this section of the review, since Fricker is reading the piece as a closed dramatic text, the video for her must somehow complicate Shigematsu's points in order to support the dramatic structure of the show; she has not taken into consideration, for example, the video's emotional effect on audiences, a more performance-based motivation.

On the other hand, Nestruck's more positive review of the same production for *The Globe and Mail* looks at the piece through its composite forms and influences, including radio. For example, he writes, "While there are some clever visual elements to his show, it's Shigematsu's radio voice, larger than life, and the inclusion of recordings of his father's, postlife, that lends *Empire of the Son* its unusual tone, slightly distanced and yet extremely intimate" ("Tetsuro Shigematsu's *Empire of the Son*"). Here Nestruck looks at each element for its potential aesthetic contribution rather than clear dramatic impact—thus the visual elements that Fricker takes issue with are "clever." Later in the same review, he writes of Shigematsu, "He has

an understated physical presence and moves calmly about the stage setting up cameras while he speaks. Indeed, *Empire of the Son* can, at times, feel like a podcast on stage.” Rather than looking at Shigematsu’s ‘understated’ performance as failure of dramatic realism, by reading it through other media forms and artistic contexts, Nestruck was more able to engage with Shigematsu’s work on its own terms, allowing for a much more favourable review. It is perhaps perceptual misunderstandings like this that have framed direct address for some in a more negative way.

While Fricker may not have specifically singled out direct address in her review of Shigematsu’s play, my argument is that *Empire of the Son*’s performance-inflected style is an important backdrop for understanding its employment of direct address (for more on this, see my chapter on *Empire of the Son*). Whereas an analysis of *Empire of the Son* from a dramatic perspective may find it lacking in structure, the lack of structure that Fricker observes is an effect of Shigematsu’s larger theatrical strategy which deploys direct address to invite the audience to take on some of the meaning making as co-creators of the work. Another way to sketch out this difference is through Bridget Escolme’s description of an actor playing a part with character objectives vs. with performance objectives in her study of direct address in Shakespeare in performance (50). Whereas character objectives connect to a realist/naturalist tradition and rely on a psychologically coherent dramatic subject with a clear arc finding their motivation within the container of the play itself, playing with performance objectives (as, for example, many of Shakespeare’s clown characters might be played) involves acknowledgement of, and even dependence the entire situation of performance, including the audience. This might involve, for example, the objective of making the audience laugh. While Fricker’s observation that “Shigematsu’s lack of performance training limits the show’s capacity to plumb emotional

depths,” makes sense when considered through the lens of a traditional dramatic character arc, it makes much less so when considering the show on its own terms. After all, the play is about Shigematsu’s difficulty with expressing emotion, an issue which is never fully resolved, and a performance which sought to plumb emotional depths would work directly counter to this. Just as Bridget Escolme argues that naturalistic and dramatic readings of Shakespeare foreclose the possibilities invited by the text through its use of direct address, reading direct address plays through a strictly dramatic lens creates problems, and has resulted in a series of critical assumptions around the device itself. In the next few paragraphs, I explore some of these assumptions, including the framing of direct address as an unsophisticated practice, one associated with artistic heteronomy, with the body, and with solipsism in order to reflect on direct address’ current ambiguous status across mainstream understandings of theatre.

One possible reason for the lack of scholarship on direct address is that it is sometimes seen by scholars as an outdated theatre practice and not considered a technique of contemporary performers/dramatists. McDougall, writing in 1980 of Canadian monodrama, discusses new productions which ‘rebuild’ the fourth wall and, “free the performers from the restrictions of addressing the audience directly”; noting that, “the playwright and the performer can draw from a wider range of theatrical effects than if the material were presented directly to the audience” (6). He also suggests that, “Many one-person shows are no longer addressed directly to the audience because such presentation leads to ‘rhetorical inevitability’ and can become very ‘school-teacherish’” (6). Perhaps McDougall’s aversion to the device can be traced to his association of it with Brechtian didacticism. Nicholas Ridout notes that even in studies of Shakespeare (a playwright very commonly associated with direct address), the device remains largely undiscussed, “perhaps because it is viewed as a technique on the wane, the mark of

attachment to old traditions and the resistance to the modernising technique in the interests of an evolving ‘naturalism’ [in Shakespearean performance]” (71). Usmiani lists as one reason for the popularity of monologue form “possible insecurity on the part of the dramatist” (10). In a paragraph a little later on, she expands on these ideas:

There are solid historical parallels for the heavy reliance on monologue by Canadian dramatists, especially in the early stages of the drama. The monologue is characteristic of the very beginning of a theatrical tradition: we need only look at the Greek model, which goes from Arion to Thespis to Aeschylus (in whose work the transition from monologue to dialogue occurs), and on to Sophocles and Euripides. (11)

Usmiani’s narrative here engages with ideas of progress, looking at theatre as moving from its simplest form into more complicated ones. In this Western narrative of progression, the early stages are by definition more ‘primitive’ and less sophisticated than the forms an art ‘evolves’ into. Thus, monologue, as the starting point for Greek theatre, with its attendant reliance on direct address cannot be viewed as sophisticated as drama.

This assumption regarding direct address’ simplicity and thus unsophistication is marked by Cliff Cardinal:

And a lot of the things that I did in *Huff*, I’m not going that way again any time soon. Splashing the audience with tomatoes or doing those sort of things. That was an exploration I was doing because I didn’t know how to make theatre. And now I do, and now it’s like, you don’t have to do that--that, direct address stuff, you know. It doesn’t have to be so intense as all that. You can make a good play with seven characters who never talk to the audience, and it can be something really beautiful, as well. I just didn’t really have those kinds of influences when I started making *Stitch* and *Huff*. (Personal interview)

Cardinal’s explanation places his use of direct address within a narrative of progression: he used it when he didn’t know how to do theatre, and he does now. I interviewed him about the show several years after *Huff* premiered, and in the interim he attended Canada’s National Theatre School for playwriting. This goes with a trend where often direct address appears more

frequently in creators' early works, and is more commonly employed by those not trained in specifically theatre (i.e. Shigematsu, Nguyen). Cardinal's position on direct address seems to have shifted since his enrollment in a school versed in a dramatic view of playwriting. Even Hannah Moscovitch, the most 'traditional' of the playwrights and creators I interviewed, studied plays in depth for structure in her own spare time, but is formally trained in *acting*. This does not tell me that direct address is incompatible with the theatrical form, or can't do theatre well (as discussed earlier, many direct address shows have received significant critical acclaim), nor that its use is necessarily incompatible with drama. For example, Shigematsu's skill as a dramatist was recognized with a Governor General's Award nomination for his recent direct address show, *One Hour Photo*. Hannah Moscovitch remains the only Canadian playwright to win the prestigious and highly competitive Windham-Campbell literature award, for several direct address plays. Rather, this suggests to me that looking at the theatre from a purely dramatic perspective limits appreciation of what direct address can do, due to the way it challenges several assumptions of fourth-wall drama.

Direct address collapses the aesthetic distance that may be seen as a marker of proper, serious, 'autonomous' drama—that is a work that is perfect and complete in and of itself, and is not contingent on audience participation or reception. This ideal of artistic autonomy is explored in art critic Michael Fried's infamous essay "Art and Objecthood." In it, Fried criticizes minimalist sculpture for its 'theatricality,' which arises from its concern "with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work" (153). He contrasts this with what he sees as the superior 'presentness' of modernist painting, in which the entire painting, removed from the physicality of the viewer, is meaningful in and of itself, transcending the context of its reception and in its autonomy transcending the limits of the body. Fried would

doubtless hail direct address as a highly ‘theatrical’ device because of its reliance on the audience and thus its contingency. One way to understand this difference is through theatre scholar Bert O. States’ discussion of the collaborative mode of performance. As discussed in my introduction, States contrasts the collaborative second person ‘you mode’ mode of performance, against first and third-person modes. States notes, “A useful way to discuss the collaborative mode of performance is to contrast the relation of comedy and tragedy, as polar opposites, to their audiences” (170). For States, “The point of the distinction is that tragedy is a noncollaborative form, as usually performed” (170). States asserts that tragedy as a form invites its audience toward inward reflection, that “isolates each spectator vicariously in the experience,” and is “a private thing” (171). Accordingly, he notes that tragic figures are less likely to address the audience than comic ones: “because there is something in the abridgment of aesthetic distance that gives the lie to tragic character and pathos. A character who addresses the audience immediately takes on some of the audience’s objectivity and superiority to the play’s world” (174). States argues that “comedy...encourages the rapprochement of art and reality in a way that tragedy...does not” (175). While States’ categorization, including his Shakespearean division of theatre works into comedic or tragic, does not necessarily line up with the shows I’m studying, it reveals how direct address’ involvement of the audience in its work—collapsing aesthetic distance—associates it with the ‘less sophisticated’ form of comedy. The collapsing of aesthetic distance closely relates to the collapsing of the physical separation between performer and audience that is achieved through direct address.

Direct address engages and implicates the bodies of audience members. This is especially true of Cardinal’s show *Huff* which was inspired by the “dangerous writing” school of writing, which is interested in telling stories from the experience of the body. Cardinal gave the example

of describing the experience of drowning in a pool, focusing on the physical sensations of each part of the body: “the idea is if you’re doing that well, you fall into that experience. *You* start to-- *your* body starts to get into it, right? And I thought those are interesting ideas to apply to theatre. Is to try to tell those stories from the experience of the body, because then you have a real presence in front of you, actually doing these things” (Personal interview). By Cardinal’s description, his engagement with the body and his use of direct address involved the bodies of the spectators. This connection to the body, through a dramatic lens, is associated with comedy, and the baseness of bodily functions. Its grounding in the physical works against the spectator’s absorption in the theatrical work, and thus attention to the bodies of performers and audiences is frowned on by theatre traditionalists. This comes up again in Ridout’s critique of the device, who describes the effect of the performer’s direct address of a spectator, arising from “this flesh-and-blood presence to one another” (80), as a feeling of embarrassment. The embarrassment here, arrives from the involvement of the viewer in a scene when they’re supposed to remain ‘invisible.’ It challenges the ‘objective, distanced view’ of drama.

The messiness of bodies also rouses the messiness of feelings. This comes through in Cardinal’s reflection on a moment in *Huff* when the audience are splashed by tomatoes. He said, “That was kind of like an energy that I needed to have when I was young, and getting everyone to pay attention to me. And now I don’t have that kind of anxiousness...And so I have much less interest in affecting the audience’s physical being in my work” (Personal interview). Here Cardinal links his own messy feelings to his involvement of the audience. However, when these acts are read through another lens, that of performance art, this messiness can be seen as deliberate artistic choice. Some of this possibility is carried in Cardinal’s language in regards to that tomato moment: “texture is coming from the art piece onto the person, onto the audience

member, and changing their clothes or changing their chemistry” (Personal interview). Indeed, when I mentioned performance art to Cardinal in connection to *Huff* (though it wasn’t an influence he ascribed to his work) he responded positively and seemed to understand the work more favourably.

A final charge laid against shows that use direct address—in particular solo shows—is their solipsism. Ann Wilson, noting this trend, writes about “the proliferation of performers who get up on the stage and blab on about their lives” (38). In Karen Fricker’s conclusion to her review of the *Empire of the Son* quoted above, she notes that the show for her reflects, “our contemporary culture of narcissistic self-exposure.” There is something of this critique implicit in Cardinal’s words, too. When he describes his writing of *Huff*, he says, “I was very much finding my voice as a writer. And so it was about the first person, and trying to make it intense...and that’s really what was happening at the time. Is that I was hearing my own voice and figuring out how to become a writer” (Personal interview). Here Cardinal conflates his interest in the first person with a self-interest arising from early exploration.

In some way, these critiques are pointing to how the messy sharing of subjectivity involved in explorations of the self challenges an objective and distanced view of drama. However, what these critiques don’t take into account are the possibilities and potential benefits of seemingly solipsistic acts. Byron Abalos notes that, “for me there seemed to have been this prevalent idea throughout theatre school, and even as a young emerging artist, that it’s indulgent for artists to talk about themselves...but I kind of have rejected that idea. I feel like the best stuff comes from things that are very intensely personal” (Personal interview). He then compared this mentality with a “theatre school thing” where schools, “try to strip everyone down to a quote

unquote ‘neutral,’ which is like a European neutral.” Abalos’ observations suggest that for people of colour there can be great power in a personal narrative:

I think there’s also something for me, because we come from communities that are not often represented, of assuming voice and taking space. The creation of these pieces are one way of doing it, to very clearly say ‘this is my experience and this is my truth’. There’s something about being from marginalized communities, or traditionally marginalized communities where that feels, I think, a bit more important to me than maybe if I wasn’t a part of that community. Saying ‘this is who I am,’ ‘this is how it is in my life.’ (Personal interview)

Abalos’ statement reveals how for people of colour, or others marginalized by mainstream culture, what reads as solipsism may serve the very important role of affirming identity. This connects back to the value of direct address as a form for the outsider. Addressing the audience combats charges of solipsism by reorienting performers/characters from obsessing over themselves in the mirror created by the fourth wall, to engaging the audience in a dialogic conversation, often about identity. In so doing, as I will explore in the following chapters, direct address may also replicate and stage for critique meetings between majority and minority groups, including intercultural encounters. Furthermore, the unstable subjectivity that Escolme notes is created through direct address makes it an ideal mode through which to work out the complexities of subjectivity and identification. These are all points which highlight why direct address is such a useful and powerful tool for exploring notions of interculturalism on stage.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have established some of the key influences on direct audience address in theatre in Canada, as well as explored how the dominance of dramatic paradigms in the theatrical mainstream favour ‘theatre as drama’ over ‘theatre as performance.’ However, while direct address trades prominently in performance, as established in the introduction, it may

also do important dramatic work. Indeed, direct address' ability to jump between these two modes—the performative and the dramatic—is very useful, both for the kinds of artistic effects it can achieve and the way it may destabilize the artificial binaries between these modes of performance.

One final takeaway is that this preference for dramatic work in form also has material consequences which shape the theatrical scene, and may explain why many direct address shows—often influenced by other performative forms—have to work their way up from alternative venues before achieving mainstream success (for example, *Good Morning, Viet Mom* first played at the Toronto Fringe Festival). That's why when I asked Byron Abalos, "What for you is the difference between stand-up comedy and theatre?" he replied not with a formal difference but a material one. He told me that when applying for grants for *Good Morning, Viet Mom*, the granting bodies, "said that Franco didn't have enough quote unquote 'theatre' experience, because for some weird reason, stand-up and sketch and improv exist outside of what we consider theatre in this country." He continued, "They don't count all of the hours that Franco puts in, doing gigs, and bombing, and training. They don't count that as being professional. Which is unfortunate." (Personal interview)

These issues matter in discussions of theatrical interculturalism such as form the main body of my dissertation because of the predominance of dramatic theatre in Eurocentric contexts and the insufficiency of dramatic constructs to understand not just interdisciplinary work, but many non-Western theatrical forms. Despite recent exciting and important changes in arts council funding, such as the Canada Council's inauguration of the "Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples" grants, which allow Indigenous applicants to apply for arts funding that doesn't rely on settler and ultimately white-

supremacist constructs of what art is and should be, this chapter has revealed that dramatic (and often Eurocentric) constructs of theatre still predominate understandings of form in Canada. This predominance and its material consequences connect with critiques of Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, which point out how through its rigidity it furthers essentializing narratives, and that it doesn't adequately address structural inequities. It is thus that my project in this dissertation, which exposes the power of reading direct address theatre pieces through a performance-inflected lens, is an equity project in addition to a theatrical one.

CHAPTER TWO: CLOSING THE DISTANCE: IMMEDIACY AND TECHNOLOGY IN
TETSURO SHIGEMATSU'S *EMPIRE OF THE SON*

Introduction: liveness, immediacy and presence

On the back of the published edition of the play, Tetsuro Shigematsu's *Empire of the Son* is described as "a unique theatrical hybrid that combines live cinematography with the raw immediacy of performance art." This catchy epithet is concerned with two key terms in theatrical parlance: 'liveness' and 'immediacy.' Cormac Power notes that such terms can be grouped with others considered synonymous with 'theatre', including 'presence': "'Immediacy', 'spontaneity', 'intimacy', 'liveness', 'energy'" (1). While these and other such nebulous terms are widely considered important to the study and discussion of theatre, they are also highly contested and often ill-defined. One of the arguments of this chapter is that separating these terms (here 'immediacy') and unpacking their specific implications and disciplinary affiliations, can greatly enhance and offer nuance to our understandings of the theatrical encounter. In her introduction to Shigematsu's second, Governor-General's award nominated play, *1 Hour Photo*, Naomi Yamamoto observes that through his work, Shigematsu "has closely examined the uncomfortable distance that often appears in the relationships between traditional Asian Canadian fathers and their children" (xvii). Making use of the concept of immediacy, this chapter investigates how Shigematsu uses it as a framing device for understanding notions of emotional, and importantly, intercultural closeness or distance. By harnessing media studies' understandings of technological immediacy in order to understand interpersonal and intercultural immediacy, I argue that Shigematsu demonstrates how direct address and intermediality can be used as strategies to explore diasporic and intercultural emotional distance.

This chapter begins with a brief overview and discussion of theatrical liveness, presence and immediacy—examining how these terms have been employed within theatre studies and the central debates surrounding them. Next I specifically examine the term immediacy, looking at how it has been understood in media studies, and the particular implications these understandings offer for reading theatrical performances. Then, through a close reading of Tetsuro Shigematsu’s play *Empire of the Son*, I will argue that by aligning conceptions of technological and interpersonal immediacy and playing critically with this immediacy through strategies of direct address and intermediality, *Empire of the Son* offers a useful re-envisioning of the way that immediacy has been understood in media and theatre: moving from understandings of immediacy as a product to immediacy as a process. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, Shigematsu’s use of immediacy in the piece offers valuable insight for the way we conceptualize and understand intercultural relations, and allows the piece to resonate across a variety of audiences.

Immediacy as a term, most scholars will agree, has played a central role in discussions about theatre. In the opening of his book *Presence in Play*, Cormac Power groups the nebulous phenomenon of theatrical immediacy in with a host of other terms commonly used to describe theatrical experience (such as ‘presence’ and ‘liveness’), observing: “Such appellations may seem so fundamental to theatre that they can sound almost like commonsense descriptions” (1). Similarly, in *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated*, Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye observe: “In theatre theory and practice, articulations of presence invariably hinge on the relationship between the live and the mediated, on notions of immediacy, authenticity and originality, and the relationship between performance and witness” (1). I argue that this common practice of grouping these terms together arises from two main factors: first, the ambiguity of

these terms within scholarly discourse (they often lack clear definitions that would isolate them); and, second, their perceived interchangeability.

Because of the frequency of this grouping, while my work is especially preoccupied with the term ‘immediacy,’ I will offer here a brief discussion of its groupmates ‘liveness’ and ‘presence,’ which in the context of theatre studies are perhaps the two most prominent members of the group, and have received the most scholarly attention (immediacy, though often mentioned as an analog to these two terms, is more oblique). I will then turn my attention to the particularities of immediacy, the special focus of my study, before moving on to analyze how immediacy functions in *Empire of the Son*. For the purposes of this chapter, I consider liveness, presence and immediacy, as terms that are strongly related, but not necessarily interchangeable.

Liveness and presence

A cursory examination of the positioning of ‘liveness’ and ‘presence’ within theatrical discourse reveals some particularities of each. ‘Liveness’ as a term is invoked most often in regards to technology or ‘the mediatized,’ where it is positioned as mediatization’s opposite (thus it plays a particular role within discussions of digital performance). On the other hand, ‘presence’ is often invoked in regards to the co-presence of audience and actors in the theatre, or to describe ‘magnetic’ now-ness of the performer on stage. ‘Presence’ also pops up in discussions of performance modes where it is typically figured as the opposite of ‘representation’—performance that ‘presents’ rather than that which ‘represents.’ Both ‘liveness’ and ‘presence’ regularly appear in generalized discussions about the ‘magic of theatre,’ or what makes theatre unique or special as a medium. For example, theatre’s ‘liveness’ may be called upon as a

characteristic that differentiates it from a filmed recording; its ‘presence’ may be foregrounded to argue its discreteness from art forms such as painting, that don’t involve the ‘live’ human body.

Yet while these concepts may be ‘fundamental’ to theatre, they are also highly contested. Most critiques of theories of liveness and presence can be traced back in some form to poststructuralism and Derrida’s “metaphysics of presence.” Derrida rejects West logocentric notions of ‘pure’ presence, or essence, observing how words and ideas are rather engaged in ‘différance,’ or constant deferral of meaning. Indeed, he commented directly on such notions in the theatre in his critique of Antonin Artaud. Artaud, in his theorized Theatre of Cruelty, famously sought to collapse all aesthetic distance between performer and audience, resulting in a theatre that offered “a passionate and convulsive conception of life,” driven by a “severe moral purity” (Artaud 122). Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, like the “ancient popular drama,” would be “sensed and experienced directly by the mind without the deformations of language and the barrier of speech” (124). While Derrida at first suggests that Artaud has imagined a theatre that is utterly immediate, that escapes representation for pure presence, he ultimately decides that, “Artaud knew that the theater of cruelty neither begins nor is completed within the purity of simple presence, but rather is already within representation” (16). Betrayed by dialectics, Derrida concludes that, “There is no theater in the world today which fulfills Artaud’s desire” (15), no pure experience to be had. This brief account of Derrida’s argument touches on many of the questions that most frequently haunt debates about theatrical presence and liveness: Can theatre be defined by its presence or liveness? Does pure, unmediated theatrical experience exist?

Most of the key debates in theatre studies regarding liveness, immediacy, and presence—whether it’s Derrida on Artaud, or Peggy Phelan vs. Phillip Auslander—are looking at these concepts on an ontological level. My work in this chapter joins a party of more recent

scholarship for whom theatre's ontology is less important than how it is *experienced* by its audiences. In *Presence in Play*, Cormac Power—whose work I draw on in more depth later on in this chapter—lays out the conflict in theatre studies “between those who advocate and affirm theatrical experience as being founded on presence, and those “‘poststructuralist thinkers’... who view the notion of presence with suspicion” (7). Rather than announcing himself for one side or the other, Power argues that the views of presence held by both aren't necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, he says, “Theatre can be seen not so much as ‘having’ or containing presence, but as an art that plays with its possibilities,” an approach that, in Power's words, “would allow room for the poststructuralist ‘critiques of presence’ to operate, without needing to discard or reject the intuitive idea that some notion of ‘presence’ is an important aspect of theatrical experience” (8). Another scholar taking this approach is Deirdre Heddon in her discussion of the “here and nowness” of autobiographical performance found in the “visible presence of the performance subject” (5). For Heddon,

Though the notion of ‘presence’ or ‘aura’ that adheres to performance and performers might have been thoroughly challenged following Derrida (the performance is not, cannot be, ‘authentic’ or unmediated, even if they are ‘there’), nevertheless, the fact that the performer is in this space with me might well have an impact on my reception of his/her autobiographical stories (5-6).

Like Power, Heddon is less interested in what the ontological status of presence might be than how it might be received or experienced by an audience, shifting the focus from ontology to phenomenology. Likewise, in my study, I define immediacy as a term that is *experienced* or *felt*, and am generally unconcerned with what it might fundamentally *be*.

Immediacy and mediatization

Having briefly sketched out key debates about theatrical presence and liveness, I want to dive more into immediacy as the particular focus of my study. As I previously mentioned, while ‘immediacy’ as a term is often mentioned in discussions about theatrical liveness and presence, it much less frequently functions as the central concept, or the key term for scholarly inquiry.

For the most part, the term ‘immediacy’ in the context of theatre is embedded in discussions about the ‘special’ nature of theatre, what sets it apart from other mediums. It is thus interesting, as Phillip Auslander observes, that within the word “immediate,” we can see how the concept of, “Mediation is...embedded within the im-mediate” (*Liveness* 56). Auslander argues in his book *Liveness* that there are no “clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones” (7), because, “the mediated is engrained in the live” (56). He asserts that “the relation of mediation and the im-mediate is one of mutual dependence,” because “live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatization) that defines it as live” (56). This feeds into Auslander’s larger argument that the very notion of liveness is culturally constructed and determined—it only exists as a point of reference through the arrival and emergence of the concept of the mediatized. There are two things in particular from Auslander that I wish to bring into my discussion of theatrical immediacy. One is the understanding that, like liveness, immediacy is a culturally and historically situated phenomenon that is embedded in its particular context. The second is the close relationship between immediacy and media, and in particular, immediacy and *digital* media.

Cormac Power takes note of this particular relationship when he compares Thornton Wilder and Andy Lavender’s seemingly similar statements on the ‘nowness of theatre,’ its

preoccupation with presence. Power highlights that while Wilder's concern with this 'now' is in the context of "the classical and neo-classical stages, where audience and actors colluded in acts of pretence and imagination" (4-5), Lavender is writing about mediatized presence in the context of technological media "which both expands that which can be put before us 'now' (like twenty-four hour 'live' news broadcasts), and problematises the continued intimacy of the actor-audience relationship" (5). Power's implication here is that digital media has the potential to alter our understandings and perhaps experiences of theatrical immediacy. With this in mind, I have chosen to read debates about liveness, presence, and immediacy, through the frame of media studies and particular discussions about mediated performance. While, as I've mentioned, theatre studies scholars often assume that liveness, presence, and immediacy are synonymous, or at least very closely related, there are distinctions to be made, particularly when examined through a media studies lens which has precedents for separating these terms.

Take, for example, Walter Benjamin's famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," written in the 1930s. In it, Benjamin argues that the contemporary availability of art arising from technological advances in mechanical reproduction erodes art works' "originary aura." This aura, from which the artwork derives its authenticity, is defined by the "presence of the original," in "its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (222). Benjamin contrasts the sacredness of the aura's presence with technological immediacy, articulated as "the desire of the masses to bring things closer spatially and physically" (225). Benjamin notes that the increasing "urge...to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" (225), is satisfied by this technological immediacy which "enables the original to meet the beholder halfway" (222). However, this immediacy comes at the cost of the degradation of the artwork's aura or presence. (We can see here why Benjamin's arguments

are commonly picked up by theatre traditionalists who believe that the inclusion of digital technology impinges on and degrades the theatrical form.) In contrast to the way these terms are typically understood, Benjamin's conception of presence, rather than being synonymous with immediacy, is actually its exact opposite.

In another perhaps more obvious example, the broadcast of a sports game will often be referred to as 'live,' but is arguably not 'present.' There's therefore a kind of slipperiness to the terms 'presence,' 'liveness,' and 'immediacy'—both within theatre studies and across disciplines—that brings value to the act of “trying to place the vocabularies...in conversation with each other” (Jackson 3) to avoid “false consensuses that surround certain keywords” (4), as Shannon Jackson does with the term 'performance' in *Professing Performance*. That is what I intend to do here with the concept of immediacy, while acknowledging that the term is not stable in meaning, even within disciplines. Through a comparison of the way the term 'immediacy' has been understood both in theatre and in media studies, and the way these understandings converge in *Empire of the Son*, this chapter productively advances understandings of immediacy in each discipline. It then analyses strategies of direct address and intermediality in *Empire of the Son* in order to think through how the show harnesses the concept of 'technological immediacy' to conceptualize interpersonal and intercultural relations.

The most important understanding of immediacy to this chapter comes from media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. In their book *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin analyze media's two “seemingly contradictory imperatives,” immediacy and hypermediacy (5). The authors argue that our cultural drive for immediacy is grounded in an “insatiable desire” to get “beyond mediation,” or to erase it (5). This is the goal of media such as “‘live’ point-of view television programs [which] show viewers what it is like to accompany a police officer on a

dangerous raid or to be a skydiver or a race car driver hurtling through space” (5). (Note the use of the term ‘live’: Bolter and Grusin understand liveness as a strategy, among others, that is used to achieve immediacy.)⁷ In contrast to immediacy, hypermediacy, an “expression[...] of a fascination with media” (12), which “ask[s] us to take pleasure in the act of mediation,” (14) is in some ways immediacy’s opposite. Rather than an erasure of media, hypermediacy is preoccupied with a *multiplication* of media, which may manifest in forms such as “a buttoned and windowed multimedia application” or, in one of its most basic forms, the integration of image and text in the medieval manuscript (12). Bolter and Grusin argue that over time individual forms of media oscillate between these two mutually dependent imperatives, with each medium striving to create “their own brand of immediacy” (9) through the leveraging of hypermediacy, mostly by borrowing heavily from other forms of media, re-inventing or *remediating* them.

According to Bolter and Grusin, “the logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented” (5-6). The erasure of the medium is achieved by “ignoring or denying the presence of the medium and the act of mediation,” an act which seeks “to put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed” (11). This framework of immediacy can be applied to the medium of theatre, which, as all the media that Bolter and Grusin describe, has had to continually refashion itself in its drive to be more immediate, relying on “the current cultural assumptions about immediacy and hypermediacy” (21). As Auslander argues of liveness, immediacy is situated in its particular time, place, and cultural context.

⁷ Another useful formulation for liveness was expressed by Steve Wurtzler. Wurtzler employs a four-quadrant model of, here-now; not-here/not-now; here but not now; and now but not here—of which all but the second can be considered forms of ‘liveness.’

In nineteenth/early twentieth century dramatic tradition, the “disappearance of the medium” was achieved by getting closer to the ‘fictive cosmos’ represented on stage. In the realist and naturalist theatres, as I have discussed earlier, the creation and removal of ‘the fourth wall’ gave audiences the feeling that they were peeking right into the homes of the characters they watched, hiding the apparatus of the theatre and achieving immediacy by pretending that the performance itself was not happening. The ‘same space’ of the viewer and the objects viewed here is the characters’ living room. This rather cinematic style of immediacy can be contrasted with the twenty-first century direct audience address that I examine in this study. In these cases, the medium of theatre is erased through the ‘breaking’ of this fourth wall, or the exposure of the theatrical illusion. The ‘same space’ here is the ‘actual’ space between performer and audience in the theatre. Bolter and Grusin elucidate two distinct strategies through which immediacy is promoted: by “removing the programmer/creator from the image,” or “by involving the viewer more intimately in the image” (Bolter and Grusin 28). While the ‘fourth wall’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could be said to invoke this first strategy, direct audience address could be said to invoke the second.

The cultural assumptions that fuel this particular style of twenty-first century direct address are grounded in a performance scene that is heavily invested in what Andy Lavender has described as “scenarios of actuality, authenticity, encounter and experience” (10). For Lavender, in the post-9/11, post-truth era, theatre artists are creating work that is “definitely beyond the postmodern, even while it continues to trade in certain postmodern strategies” (10). To put it another way, while these contemporary ‘theatres of engagement’ are aware of and subscribe to postmodern notions like the construction of reality and truth, they have put aside postmodern cynicism for a renewed focus on the personal and intimate. This theatre (part of a broader

cultural scene that's rife with podcasts and reality television) thrives on personal stories that offer audiences the experience of inter-human immediacy and intimacy. In the face of the constructed nature of all reality, the 'first order' of the subjective *experienced* or *felt* real comes to be valued over the less immediate 'second order' of facts and objectivity (Tomlin). Accordingly, in a cultural landscape where everything is acknowledged as already mediated, mediatization, embodied in the form of digital technology, is not something that can be escaped or banished, but something to be exposed and manipulated to the end of facilitating these 'first order' experiences.

These logics of immediacy are heavily at work in Tetsuro Shigematsu's play, *Empire of the Son*, which I'll spend most of the rest of this chapter discussing. Particularly I'll look at how *Empire of the Son* uses logics of technological immediacy to understand interpersonal and immediacy, which ultimately helps Shigematsu to understand and re-interpret the emotional distance between himself and his father. He achieves these by employing the dual strategy of direct address and intermediality, the former of which I return to at length in the final section of this chapter.

Intro to *Empire of the Son*

When *Empire of the Son* premiered at the Cultch Theatre in Vancouver in 2015 it was a smashing success, resulting in critically-acclaimed national and international tours. The autobiographical play's premise, cleverly contained in the pun of its title, revolves around Japanese-Canadian playwright Tetsuro Shigematsu's complicated and emotionally distant relationship with his father, Akira. The play examines intergenerational and intercultural difference and constraints on masculinity, and takes the form of a collection of vignettes

spanning Shigematsu's childhood to his father's death in which he examines moments in their relationship, and its impact on himself and his family. In the tradition of much autobiographical performance, Shigematsu plays himself and delivers the show in direct audience address.

Thematically, the play is preoccupied with distance, and through its multimedia format uses technological mediation (and other forms of distance, such as physical and temporal distance) as metaphor to explore the play's central concern: the problem of expressing emotional closeness or distance, what I'd like to call interpersonal immediacy.

Empire of the Son is by no means a 'traditional drama,' a fact freely admitted by Shigematsu who went to art school instead of theatre school. Rather, with its interdisciplinary format, the story's non-linear, almost fragmented progression and reflexive meta-approach that eschews the "closed off, fictional cosmos" of drama (Lehmann 3), *Empire of the Son* is decidedly postdramatic. In fact, postdrama is a term that Shigematsu adopted in my interview with him to describe how he makes sense of his work as theatre, contrasting "classical ensemble theatre" form with his own work, "which could either be construed as postdramatic or performance art" (Personal interview). What particularly links these two forms is a turn towards performance, which can be broadly understood by its attention to and acknowledgement of the whole situation of the performance—including the theatre space and audience—as opposed to a discrete dramatic universe, kept behind a fourth wall. In other words, Shigematsu defines his work through a meta-awareness or attention to metatheatre—an understanding and open acknowledgement of the work of the play as it occurs, of which direct audience address plays a crucial part.

This turn to performance is given shape just a couple minutes into the show when Shigematsu reveals to the audience that his father passed away shortly before the show's opening

(4). His father's death then provides the structure and justification for the piece, as Shigematsu frames the vignettes that follow as a kind of rehearsal, an attempt to emotionally process the loss and to unpack their complicated relationship, towards a stated end of being able to cry at his father's funeral (a feat he tells us that he's not managed since childhood). Shigematsu directly enlists the help of the audience with this goal, telling us, "My sense is, if I open myself to you, and you open yourself to me, then maybe together we can summon a spirit I haven't felt since I was a kid" (4). Shigematsu's statement here positions all of the vignettes that follow, snapshots of his and his family's lives, as moments being reenacted in order to summon this spirit. Thus by this framing, the play is accomplishing something beyond just being a play; it's not just a casual recollection but a performative act (in the Austinian sense), with a clear goal in place. What this metatheatrical framing, grounded in the show's direct address, makes clear is that the show is not, as it first appears, purely about the relationship between Shigematsu and his father, but more significantly about Shigematsu's efforts to interpret and emotionally process their relationship and close the emotional distance between them.

Media in *Empire of the Son* and technological immediacy

Aside from its metatheatrical, extra-dramatic framework, another element of the show that qualifies it as postdramatic is *Empire of the Son*'s use of media/technology. Karen Jürs-Munby explains that "[postdramatic theatre] is much more immediately informed by cultural practices other than traditional drama (from visual art and live art, to movies, TV channel hopping, pop music and the internet)" (10). This holds true for *Empire of the Son*, which Shigematsu revealed is inspired by and incorporates a variety of forms including radio, performance art, stand-up comedy, and film (Personal interview). These forms anticipate and

necessitate the play's wide use of multimedia, a variety of digital and analog technologies adopted in the storytelling, including performance itself. The technologies also include artefacts of Shigematsu's father's—a briefcase, some earphones, a jacket, photos and audio recordings, a microphone, a water tank, and several digital cameras running live feeds that Shigematsu manipulates to produce “live cinematography.” Through these many technologies, Shigematsu takes full advantage of theatre's, “capacity to be a hypermedium which ‘stages’ other mediums” (Nelson 13). For the purposes of this chapter, I use both ‘media’ and ‘technology’ to describe these digital and analog tools that Shigematsu employs. The term ‘media’ complements the media studies theory I use, and brings forward the connections between ‘media’ and ‘immediacy,’ and ‘technology’ refers to how these media function as concrete tools for Shigematsu.

Not only is the media incorporated into the show on a practical level (the medium is actually used on stage), but it also serves the show thematically (the medium is invoked rhetorically/as a theme in the drama). In reflecting on technology and its role in our lives, particularly when it comes to interpersonal communication and understanding, the show's use of technology is also postdramatic in its purpose, aligning with Hans-Thies Lehmann's statement that “postdramatic theatre serve[s] as theatre's response to changed social communication under the conditions of generalized information technologies” (23).

Interestingly, the show makes no particular distinction between digital and analog media. Indeed, the technological approach in *Empire of the Sun* might be best described as ‘postdigital.’ Matthew Causey characterizes postdigital culture as “that of a social system fully familiarized and embedded in electronic communications and virtual representations, wherein the biological and the mechanical, the virtual and the real, and the organic and the inorganic approach

indistinction” (432). Likewise, a postdigital approach is a ‘hybridized approach towards the digital and non-digital, finding characteristics of one within the other’ (Brindle qtd in Causey 431). *Empire of the Son* to a large extent follows this approach, and the analog and digital are presented as not ontologically distinct, yet the show does occasionally make use of particular cultural *associations* surrounding digital technologies for its own ends.

The multimedia technologies that Shigematsu employs in *Empire of the Son* serve several functions. On one hand, practically speaking, they allow audience members multiple opportunities to “have a different experience of looking,” and give the show some variety, breaking up the potential monotony of observing a single performer on stage with constant variation in form (Shigematsu, personal interview). At the same time, the show’s media also crucially present performance and technologies as ways of knowing; as tools to understand, interpret, and most importantly *feel* our way through our experiences—to use Erin Hurley’s term, they are “feeling technologies.”

The interpretive function of these technologies is often foregrounded in the show. At one point, Shigematsu projects a photo that depicts his family before he was born, commenting to the audience, “I don’t know what you see, but when I look at my pre-me family, I see this perfect family leading this charmed life” (13). Embedded in this statement is an acknowledgment of the processes of interpretation inherent to our understandings of media (and our larger lives). At another point Shigematsu reflects on a photo of his dad and himself as a baby, captioned “photo of dad and Hugh” (Shigematsu’s middle name). He observes, “I’m amazed that I could’ve ever been so small to have been held, and that he could’ve ever been so large to hold me” (17). Here we can see that the photo is used as a tool to negotiate the space between the present Shigematsu and Shigematsu and his father of the past; however, the photo itself does not lead to what

Jacques Rancière calls a “straight, uniform transmission” of information (15), a clear and immediate access to the moment of its creation, but rather serves as an intermediary between Shigematsu and the event itself. In this example we not only see evidence of Shigematsu’s interpretation at work—for example, his observation, “I like to think my father is looking out across the Atlantic, trying to imagine what life was going to be like for his young family in Canada” (17)—but the photo’s caption offers evidence of another’s act of interpretation (one of his siblings’, we can infer from the content).

In the scope of the play, what is more important about Shigematsu’s interpretation is not what that act reveals about the subjects of the photos—in the first example, their happy life—or about Shigematsu himself, but the act of interpretation itself and what Shigematsu is doing through it. For example, Shigematsu’s discussion of the first photo (of his family before he was born) reveals two kinds of distance: the mediated distance of the photo up for interpretation— “I don’t know what you see,”— and the temporal distance that the photo enacts. Through his interpretation, Shigematsu seeks to make sense of his family and shorten or close both of these distances. Shigematsu’s action here, of attempting to overcome distance, enacted on a meta level, is, I argue, the central action of the play.

The play’s examination of and preoccupation with distance appears in many other forms of media besides photographs. In another example, Shigematsu uses the form of sound waves to deconstruct the literal and figurative silence between himself and his father. He says:

If you upload a recording of an interview to a digital audio editor, it’ll look like a mountain range.

PROJECTION: VIDEO of waveforms.

But conversations with my father don’t look like that. Our conversations look like Canada. Between my questions, which are the Rockies, and his answers are these long prairies of silence.

PROJECTION: VIDEO of waveforms moving in time with an audio recording.

SOUND: AUDIO CLIP of TETSURO interviewing AKIRA

TETSURO (*recorded*): Did anyone in your family go to war?

A long flat line represents silence.

AKIRA (*recorded*): Yeah, my father went to the war. (16)

In this section (through several layers of mediation) Shigematsu uses the visualization of the recording to illuminate the emotional distance between himself and his father. Here emotional distance is figured both as physical distance (through the metaphor of Canadian landscape) and through the mediated and temporal distance of the recording, setting up an equivalence between different forms of distance that is repeated throughout.

The distance of mediation is particularly apparent during the parts of the show that employ live cinematography. In these moments Shigematsu uses mounted digital cameras to animate analog scenes, transmitted to the audience via live feed. This distance is made manifest through the exposure of the feeling technology apparatus, in Shigematsu's deliberate manipulation of the images before us. In one example, while recalling childhood bathtime, Shigematsu pushes the camera around a miniature bathroom set. The effect is dreamlike and points to a temporal distance between Shigematsu of the present, recounting this for us, and the childhood subject of this recollection, lost to the past. Examples like this implicitly carry the assumption that the distance foregrounded through media is one not solely created in the act of mediation, but rather is or stands in for distance that is already there. It's through this that the show raises the notion that distance, rather than just being a figure of technology, space, and time, is a feature of every communicative act.

Even in more seemingly ‘immediate’ forms of media, such as performance, distance appears. When Shigematsu impersonates his father and they are collapsed into the same body (a fairly immediate situation) ‘Akira’ comments metatheatrically on the performance, questioning his ‘son’s’ temerity to perform a one-man show about him (6), drawing the audience’s attention to the artifice. However, while Shigematsu uses all of these technologies to draw attention to distance, they have the opposite effect of alienating audiences; they actually function to create a sense of immediacy or closeness, to collapse distance.

To illustrate how this works, I return now to Bolter and Grusin. The media scholars’ arguments in *Remediation* reveal that a tension between closeness and distance is an inherent quality of media. Their concept of immediacy can be understood through what Walter Benjamin described as “the desire of the masses to bring things closer spatially and humanly” (225). Like Benjamin’s definition, Bolter and Grusin’s is often figured in spatial terms, as seen in their description of how immediacy: “seek[s] to put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed” (11). For these scholars, immediacy is a question of closeness. In contrast to immediacy, hypermediacy, a sense of increased mediation, can be understood through the distance it creates (or draws attention to) by building and making overt multiple layers of mediation. By making us aware of the medium, we see how we are further from the thing represented, and thus the distance results from the separation of medium, message, and viewer.

However, for Bolter and Grusin, notions of immediacy and hypermediacy are complicated, grounded in the seeming contradiction that “our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them” (Bolter and Grusin 5). In the example I addressed earlier, when Shigematsu impersonates his father and metatheatrically comments on the play in character, he creates

distance by foregrounding the divide between himself (the actor) and his father (the character he's playing). However, drawing attention to this distance or separation simultaneously makes salient Shigematsu's attempt to bring them closer together through this embodiment (which would remain otherwise unobserved). Bolter and Grusin declare, "In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy" (34). In this case, rather than just reminding us, the 'hypermediacy' Shigematsu employs simultaneously *creates* immediacy. It is through Shigematsu's use of multimedia that he creates for the audience a sense of emotional or interpersonal closeness or immediacy by drawing attention to distance. This goes to the heart of the performance's strategy: Shigematsu attributes his inability to cry to perceived emotional distance, so in the service of his goal to produce tears he seeks to collapse this distance through the performance—with various forms of distance, such as physical, temporal, and most importantly technologically-mediated distance, at times standing in for emotional distance. However, the play's understanding of this closeness or immediacy is multi-layered.

Playing with immediacy

In *Presence in Play*, Cormac Power addresses a "conflict within theatre studies between those who advocate and affirm theatrical experience as being founded on presence, and those 'poststructuralist thinkers'... who view the notion of presence with suspicion" (7). Rather than announcing himself for one side or the other, Power argues that the views of presence held by both aren't necessarily mutually exclusive; rather, "Theatre can be seen not so much as 'having' or containing presence, but as an art that plays with its possibilities" (8). Power's approach, "allow[s] room for the poststructuralist 'critiques of presence' to operate, without needing to

discard or reject the intuitive idea that some notion of ‘presence’ is an important aspect of theatrical experience” (8). To rearticulate his point, the fact that ontologically there may be no such thing as unmediated presence, does not preclude the experience of presence, which could even, “be seen as a function of theatrical signification” (9). In fact, Power’s main argument is that “theatre’s distinctiveness as an art form may be affirmed in terms of its ability to play out the possibilities and problematics of presence before an audience,” (14) or “theatre’s ability to complicate presence” (10) by “playing with presence.” Just as Power argues that theatre ‘plays with presence,’ I argue that Shigematsu harnesses *Empire of the Son*’s technology in order to likewise play with immediacy. In order to examine how Shigematsu plays with immediacy, first I’ll look at how the *Empire of the Son* aligns with Power’s three modes presence, and then explain the difference between Power’s ‘playing with presence,’ and the playing with immediacy that occurs in *Empire of the Son*, before finally moving to discuss how Shigematsu uses this strategy to investigate the play’s central problem of emotional distance.

In the early chapters of his book, Power sets out three main modes of presence in the theatre: the fictional mode (“making presence”), the auratic mode (“having presence”) and the literal mode (“being present”). The fictional mode of presence is invested in how theatre has the power to ‘make present’ fictional worlds, including the ‘present’ action of making the fiction which may be deliberately exposed to effect. The auratic mode of presence describes “the ceremonial quality implicit within the theatrical situation itself”; “a presence in theatre that would transcend the fictional and the representational” (Power 11), and through this transcendence get in touch with a kind of metaphysical reality. Power notes that, “aura is prioritised when the autonomy and essence of the medium become prime criteria for aesthetic achievement” (11). The literal mode of presence, or “being present,” is concerned with the

contingency of theatre as a ‘live’ event taking place in real space and time. This mode sees theatre “as both an occurring exchange subject to the conditions of time and place in which the performance takes place, and theatre—almost by definition, as fundamentally contingent on the presence of its audience” (87).

Empire of the Son clearly engages with all three forms of theatrical presence. The literal mode of presence can be seen in how Shigematsu recruits the audience as key players in the work through his direct address. We need to be there in order to help Shigematsu “summon [the] spirit” of his tears. The auratic mode appears in the authenticity of the autobiography, and the ‘spirit’ of his father that Shigematsu is trying to call up. The fictional mode of presence is perhaps the most prominent, as Shigematsu uses the play’s various media to call up other worlds; for example, using a camera to stream live feed of his fingers on a skateboard, transforming it into a scene from his childhood past. Whereas presence is understood by Power in terms of aura, the co-presence of performer and audience, and the creation of fictional worlds; borrowing from Bolter and Grusin, I understand immediacy as the manifestation of feelings of closeness (both technological and interpersonal) determined by the perception of mediation. While Power defines ‘playing with presence,’ as theatrical works moving between or overlapping modes of theatrical presence, Shigematsu plays with immediacy by flipping between degrees and experiences of distance through the strategic employment of technological mediation, playing with our perception of what immediacy is.

For example, in the ‘live cinematography’ sections of the play, while the process of mediation is highly visible, and thus the experience is ‘distanced’ (we see the cameras set up, we see Shigematsu manipulating their position in reference to the miniature sets at the same time as the projected ‘live’ effect) the transparency of this manipulation creates a feeling of immediacy.

This feeling of immediacy is then further complicated by specific context. Take, for example, Shigematsu's attempt to connect to his father's experience of the bombing of Hiroshima as a child. Shigematsu squirts a cream-filled syringe into a tank full of water to create an eerie mushroom cloud effect, accompanied by an audio clip of his father's recollection (27). While on one hand through this representation the felt distance from the event (both temporal and mediated) is strong, alongside the aforementioned immediacy of transparency, there's another kind of immediacy. This felt immediacy emerges through the emotional resonance of the abstraction of the bombing: this unrealistic mode of representation feels like the most appropriate way to convey such an unimaginable event, unreachable to those who weren't there. Shigematsu's representation of Hiroshima here aligns with Bolter and Grusin's description of media's desire to, "get past the limits of representation and achieve the real" (53). Rather than a metaphysical 'real,' the reality that Bolter and Grusin discuss here is instead a reality "defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response" (53).

Adding another level to these experiences of immediacy, Shigematsu's employment of intermediality introduces multiple logics of immediacy borrowed from varying forms of media that rub up against each other. For example, the projected video feed from Shigematsu's 'live cinematography' reproduces the effects Walter Benjamin has ascribed to film: "In the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality" to create a "pure aspect" that is "freed from the foreign substance of equipment," and thus through artifice creates for the viewer, "the sight of immediate reality" (235). What Benjamin is noting here is a particular paradigm of filmic immediacy, one of perceived physical closeness, predicated on the erasure of the film apparatus. The play juxtaposes this filmic immediacy with other sorts: the transparency of the

exposure of the processes of mediation, the emotional immediacy of the Hiroshima representation. The result is that varying ‘logics of immediacy’ are pressed up together, prompting comparison, but also deconstruction. Taken as a whole, through this complex interplay of compounded media, Shigematsu plays with—while at the same time striving for—immediacy, ultimately complicating notions of closeness and distance. Here the forms Shigematsu employs produced a strong sense of felt immediacy, which at the same time, though their compounding, challenge the notion of unmediated presence and the ontological purity of the immediacy the audience experiences.

Interpersonal and technological immediacy

In the previous paragraphs, I’ve explained how Shigematsu plays with technological immediacy through his use of media in the show. Another key element of the production is the analogy Shigematsu makes between the technological and the interpersonal which then extends his complicated presentation of technological immediacy to immediacy (or intimacy) between individuals. One way *Empire of the Son* establishes this connection between the technological and the interpersonal is that dramatically, Shigematsu and his father’s relationships with technology (as the two key figures in the play) also come to stand in for their attitudes towards interpersonal relationships. For example, for Shigematsu’s father Akira, technology demonstrates his difficulties communicating and connecting with others. He wears headphones around the CBC office, his place of employment, to avoid conversation with others (6). On one occasion, unable or unwilling to verbally articulate his feelings to his son after an argument, he removes himself to a hotel where he writes them down in a letter (26). Sometimes even writing has its

limits. Tetsuro reads from his father's unfinished memoir—a single page (17), and then has to make up the rest.

In contrast to his father's relationship to technology, Shigematsu's relationship to technology demonstrates his desire for greater intimacy or connection. For example, the medium of radio is central to the play and serves as a key metaphor for Shigematsu's longing for interpersonal closeness. While discussing a childhood experience with a crystal radio, Shigematsu describes himself as listening between the signals, in the static, for "the moaning plaintive cries" of "barely human, sentient entities," "doomed to wander the netherworld" (36-37). This imagery figuratively echoes his longing for connection across distance (emotional, mediated), in a motif that is repeated throughout the play.

In another example he discusses the difference between AM and FM bands and the global range of shortwave radio:

When I was on FM radio, my voice would only extend as far as the next transmission tower, limited by the horizon, but my father's voice propagated around the world like a never-ending echo.

When we stand on the edge of a cliff famous for its echoing properties, how quickly we become at a loss for words after--

(echoing through mic) Hello! Echo! Can anyone hear me?

(Question repeated through echo) (14-15)

This segment of text transitions from a poeticized reflection on broadcasting experience into a more metaphoric meditation on the communicative nature of radio, figuring it as a lone voice seeking interpersonal connections: "Can anyone hear me?" Again, Shigematsu's longing is embodied in the plaintive cries of the echo. Radio, here, is imagined as a one-sided medium: it transmits, but does not receive.

However, while it symbolizes loneliness, at the same time, as the shared profession of Shigematsu and his father, radio becomes a way for Shigematsu to make sense of their

relationship and to enact or call up a kind of closeness between them. A brief example of this is Shigematsu's recounting of an incident where he interviewed his father on a radio show (25) in order to publically learn about him through avenues that weren't open in private life. Thus Shigematsu's characterization of radio is dualistic, both embodying his loneliness and the potential for its end. In this depiction of radio we see perhaps most clearly Shigematsu's figuring of technology as a cipher for human relations. However, this clear analogy runs both ways. Technology stands in for human relations, and human relations are translated into technology, for example, radio waves. This clear connection allows us to apply Bolter and Grusin's understandings of technological immediacy to interpersonal immediacy. Through this comparison, which links technological mediation and interpersonal connection through the concepts of closeness and distance and a shared drive for immediacy, Shigematsu's show introduces one of the primary questions around media and immediacy in performance—"can pure immediacy or presence ever be achieved?"—into discussions of interpersonal immediacy and presence. However, the answer to this question, and the status of the immediacy towards which Shigematsu is striving, ultimately remain ontologically ambiguous.

There is another, as-yet-unacknowledged layer to this interplay of media that links technological and interpersonal immediacy. Critically, we can understand the distance that appears in Shigematsu and his father's relationship as not just interpersonal, but *intercultural*. This facet is baked into their relationship with the show's titular reference to Japan: *Empire of the Son* is a reference to imperial Japan's epithet 'empire of the *sun*,' thus Shigematsu and his father's relationship is inextricably tied to Japan. Radio—as a global and transnational technology that can connect people across long distances—is also employed in part to help illuminate the intercultural side of this distance. Radio as a form has particular cultural resonance

in Japan, in part due to its use in war and by the Japanese emperor to announce Japan's surrender in the Second World War (*Empire of the Son* 43). Despite his relocation to Canada, radio remained a way for Akira to connect with his homeland. Shigematu recounts how Akira often tuned in to his personal radio during family dinners—listening both to Japanese radio stations and the BBC (the latter of whom he worked for at the height of his broadcasting career) (21). In this example, Akira's connection to Japan also marked his unavailability to his family (including his Canadian son Tetsuro): with his headphones in, he is somewhat literally a world away. As a result of his CBC radio show "Canada no Wadai," Akira also maintained a physical connection to Japan, through the mail he regularly received from Japanese fans (35). This connection demonstrates that technology's promotion of intimacy is not just interpersonal, but rather global and diasporic. The transfer of radio signals and fan mail across the globe illustrates how radio was able to breach the physical divide between Japan and Canada in a way that Tetsuro hoped to emulate emotionally between his father and himself, as well as how these Japanese fans were able to engage in a form of connection with his father that Shigematsu, his son, was not. In a transpacific metaphor that recurs in other moments throughout the play, the distance and difference between Canada and Japan come to represent Shigematsu and his father, placing their cultural differences at the heart of their divide. The utility of radio to negotiate these distances highlights why, in their resemblance to radio interviews, the recorded conversations with Akira upon which the show was built proved to be such a valuable tool for Shigematsu in his attempts to get closer.

In navigating and trying to bridge emotional and intercultural distance Shigematsu engages in a form of cultural mediation. And yet Shigematsu is also himself an intercultural figure, a diasporic subject. After all, it is in his 'Japaneseness' where he locates his own

difficulties with emotional expression. As Shigematsu manipulates technologies to work out and trouble the difference and distance between himself and his father, he also engages with his own complicated relationship to Japan as a Japanese-Canadian. Through this process the show reveals how the negotiation of proximity and distance, key elements in the figuration of technological and interpersonal intimacy, are also key to the act of cultural mediation and the negotiation of diasporic subjectivity, and further demonstrates how these constantly shifting parameters shape the messy and ambiguous spaces of the intercultural and diasporic.

The ontological ambiguity of immediacy

The ontological ambiguity of the interpersonal and intercultural immediacy Shigematsu seeks is set up by the ambiguity that arises from his ‘playing’ with technological immediacy through the show’s various media. This ambiguity is extremely clear in the play’s final moments. Developing the talking point that the human body is 70% water, Shigematsu rhetorically follows the water drops that compose us from a flood in the past, to the amniotic sac of birth, before launching into his final address. On stage an “audio clip of the plucking of a stringed instrument like the pinprick of rain” (47) signals the onset of the poetic mode. Shigematsu says:

And one day, the water that is you, will not be you. But if you were loved, maybe you will be the tears of someone who weeps for you. Not because they’re crying, but because they’re laughing so hard at the memory of how you looked, that time you got caught in the rain. And as they dab their cheeks, they’ll stop to wonder, are you in heaven? When in fact you have never been so near (49).

In this section, Shigematsu harnesses the medium of poetry to reach beyond that greatest distance of death—with some success. However, despite the optimism these closing lines in context with the rest of the play convey about art’s, or specifically here, poetry’s potential to overcome distance, the show offers no magical ending and no clear answer to the question of

whether that distance can actually be overcome. Shigematsu's final speech is juxtaposed with his final action, as he looks back towards a projected image of his father—which shows him a figure of the past and distant as ever—and then outward towards the audience, ultimately leaving us in a place of indeterminacy or, with a nod to Jenn Stephenson, “insecurity,” somewhere between closeness and distance. Indeed, it's possible to argue that the fact that Shigematsu's father has passed away before the play even begins nullifies the possibility of interpersonal immediacy from the beginning (how can we get closer to what is gone?); so, there is a sense in which Shigematsu's task is defeated before it's even undertaken.

However, despite the show's ambivalence on the possibility of pure immediacy, which might seem to disrupt or defeat the closeness that Shigematsu is striving for, I argue that this potential threat ultimately doesn't matter—because the show is not about Shigematsu's success with overcoming or closing emotional distance, but his act of striving to do so. This attitude is manifest in Shigematsu's admission that whether or not he manages to reach his stated goal in the final scene and tear up (the symbolic stand-in for overcoming emotional distance) doesn't actually seem to matter to the performance's success. If he does cry, the audience has the cathartic gratification of release, and the action “gives men in the audience a particular permission to feel that [emotion] as well” (Shigematsu, personal interview). On the other hand, if he doesn't cry (a possibility that Shigematsu suggested may be even more powerful), the audience is then “triggered to consider their own memories and their own experience.”

As Shigematsu says, “by the end of the show, it isn't that I've transcended or that I've bridged those gaps [between himself and his father], or that we've come to kind of a Hollywood happy ending” (Personal interview). Rather the show “offer[s] the possibility of change within a relationship and within yourself” (Personal interview).

By reframing the show in terms of “possibility” Shigematsu reveals that tears don’t matter so much as his attempts to achieve them. In this way, Shigematsu’s play allows us to consider interpersonal closeness and emotional intimacy not through the vanquishing of distance, but rather the act of striving to do so, the nuances of the attempt, and the possibilities it carries. Interpersonal immediacy, in this light, is reconfigured not as a destination, but as a process—a shift in line with postdramatic sensibilities, which privileges “more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than production, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information” (Lehmann 86). Balanced between ontological uncertainties, *Empire of the Son* occupies and foregrounds the space of possibility that it opens up. This possibility evident in Shigematsu’s discussion of how he navigates the fact of his father’s death when performing the show. He told me, “The luxury that I permit myself onstage that I do not permit myself in my daily life is epistemologically and ontologically I allow for the possibility that my father is onstage with me” (Personal interview). This allowance permits Shigematsu to think of the performance “as a kind of séance,” through which he might actually be able to somehow bring back or reconnect with his father.

This possibility and striving of *Empire of the Son* can be understood anew by bringing back the intercultural layer of the piece. Just as Bolter and Grusin reveal that different media have differing logics of immediacy, there too exist differing *cultural* logics of immediacy. Very early on in the show, Shigematsu explains of his desire to cry at his father’s funeral:

when my kids see me being all friendly, shaking hands, making jokes, everyone else will be thinking, “Oh look at the good son, putting on such a brave front,” but my kids will be thinking, Daddy really is a sociopath, superficially charming, but fundamentally lacking true empathy. Can’t even cry at his own father’s funeral (*Empire of the Son* 5).

Here the difference in understanding between Shigematsu’s Japanese relatives and his Canadian children can be attributed to cultural differences around emotional norms, suggesting how

concepts (and thus experiences) of immediacy are culturally relative. This understanding of how cultural standards of emotional expression may differ can be used to re-evaluate the elder Shigematu's emotional distance throughout the play. While Akira speaks rather distantly of his father, Tetsuro's grandfather, we also learn that he went to the train station every day for a year as a boy, waiting for him to come home from the war (43-44), an act that, while not accompanied by any declaration of affection, implies a great deal of closeness on its own. Furthermore, while Akira Shigematsu's use of media in the show demonstrates his difficulty with interpersonal communication, we also see him use media to attempt to bridge emotional distance. His action of writing a handwritten letter to his son to resolve a dispute (23-24) may initially seem closed off, but also demonstrates an honest attempt to communicate and a desire for mutual understanding. His apparently antisocial act of wearing ear protectors in the office (6) later seems much less so upon the revelation that he wears them to avoid the discomfort of the "casual intimacy" of coworkers referring to him by his first name (38); staving off the uncomfortable closeness of this breach of cultural and personal intimacy norms.

Just as the varied logics of technological immediacy pressed together in Shigematsu's intermedial experiments prompt deconstruction and reflection, so, too, do these varied understandings and forms of intercultural immediacy. The revelation of immediacy's cultural relativity doesn't solve the problem of distance, but—just as with Shigematsu's manipulation of various media forms 'plays' with immediacy—it complicates it. Understanding immediacy through this lens suggests that the experience of distance is multiplicitous and relative. Furthermore, it reveals that the distance Shigematsu is seeking to close between himself and his father is at least partly constructed and conceptual: the key cause he ascribes to his difficulties with emotional expression is not as fixed as it would appear. Through these framings the play

proposes that the act of becoming closer interpersonally might in some ways be achieved not through a renewal of relations, but through the reexamination of existing ones.

Another such moment is the space the play leaves for the re-examination of the parameters of meaningful emotional expression. At the play's opening Shigematsu sets his ability to produce tears at his father's funeral as the benchmark for success in his attempts at closing the distance between them. Presumably these would be tears of sadness, yet in the play's final passage, when Shigematsu invokes an imagined and idealized "someone who weeps for you" at your passing, he is careful to note that this weeping comes "[n]ot because they're crying, but because they're laughing so hard at the memory of how you looked, that time you got caught in the rain" (49). Here the tears of laughter are as strong an indicator of interpersonal and emotional closeness as tears of sorrow. This hypothetical individual crying from laughing, would, importantly, meet Shigematsu's benchmark for crying, but in a way that isn't loaded with the same taboos around masculinity and emotional expression (and so wouldn't conflict with Akira's culture norms surrounding emotion) while being no less sincere or heartfelt. This framing acknowledges nuance and variety in emotional expression, and validates alternative modes of expressions of closeness. Such a framing lets Shigematsu re-examine his relationship with his father allowing for intercultural or individual differences in expression, which might manifest differently than expects, but be valid all the same. *Empire of the Son's* possibility thus also lies not just in the creation of new interpersonal closeness, but in the re-evaluation of what's already there.

As a whole, the play's connections between interpersonal, intercultural, and technological immediacies relate to what Shigematsu is trying to express through the show; that despite their difficulties with communication and emotional expression, there is beauty and moments of deep

meaning to be found within his and his father's relationship, as well as through the various points of connection that they shared outside the realm of the emotional. By using intermedial strategies to foreground the naturalness of distance, including interpersonal distance, the show offers a way to reexamine and recontextualize such relationships by focusing attention away from distance itself towards how it is negotiated. Ultimately Shigematsu's delicate use of media expresses for him in such a way that eliminates and indeed makes obsolete the need for words to communicate intimacy. Whereas Christopher Lee's book *The Semblance of Identity* investigates how aesthetic mediation serves as a ground upon which Asian American subjectivity is negotiated alongside knowledge and representation (18), *Empire of the Son* reveals how technological media and mediation can illuminate the complexities of Asian diasporic and intercultural relationships (particularly those between fathers and sons), and how various forms of media can map and make legible the ambiguous and complicated space of the transnational in which these relationships take place. By drawing attention to the connections between technological mediation and the act of cultural mediation, as well as those between the ontological ambiguity of immediacy and the ontological ambiguity of the intercultural or diasporic subject, the show helps us to understand experiences of intimacy and immediacy from an intercultural perspective.

In thinking through immediacy and discussions of mediation in media studies and theatre together with intercultural and diasporic experience, this case study examines how concepts of media and mediation can intervene in conversations about diasporic and intercultural intimacy and affect, via their understandings of experiences of immediacy as processual and multifaceted. Using media studies' conceptions of technological mediation to think through cultural mediation exposes how the act of mediating between cultures is in some ways the act of translating between differing norms of immediacy. Furthermore, a shared grappling with the constructs of closeness

and distance and the ontological ambiguity of immediacy make media forms ideal for exploring and mapping the complicated spaces of the intercultural, transnational, and diasporic. Lily Cho reveals that rather than an object of analysis, diaspora must be thought of as a condition of subjectivity (“The Turn to Diaspora” 15), a condition that is not innate, but that one grows into and *becomes*. If this is so, then through its examination of Shigematsu and his father’s relationship illuminated via its various media, *Empire of the Son* provides an excellent window into how diaspora, particularly diasporic emotional experience, is constructed, conceptualized, and lived.

The audience

A consequence of the ambiguity of immediacy in *Empire of the Son* and Shigematsu’s use of direct address is that that show’s success is ultimately left up to the audience. Shigematsu revealed to me that he “pay[s] a great deal of attention to [his] audience and what they are experiencing in any given moment” (Personal interview), something which he believes distinguishes him from other theatre artists. This attention is detailed, focused around figuring out how he can “facilitate [the audience’s] present state, be it psychological or emotional, and follow them to yet another state” (Personal interview). For example, a driving question for Shigematsu in his curation of the performance’s many technologies was “what is the experience of the audience?” (Personal interview). On a practical level, Shigematsu sought to give them “a different experience of looking,” by constantly varying the visual forms to avoid falling into the monotony that often threatens one-person shows. Shigematsu’s attention to the audience in *Empire of the Son* is present on a dramaturgical level, in his conception and design of the piece,

and extends into the minutiae of his performance, which he will adjust in order to obtain the desired audience feedback (Personal interview).

Shigematsu's attention to his audience goes hand in hand with the audience's important role in the show's meaning-making process, another element of *Empire of the Son* that could be said to be postdramatic. The turn to performance that marks postdramatic theatre, Karen Jürs-Munby observes, is "at the same time always a turn towards the audience, as well" (5). This may include the literal turn to audience that makes up direct address (an element Lehmann refers to as "monologue"), but also a more figurative turn that places interpretation of the performance in the audience's hands. Postdrama produces "'open' or 'writerly' texts for performance," which, Jürs-Munby argues, "require the spectators to become active co-writers of the (performance) text. The spectators...are asked to become active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making" (6). Shigematsu references this process in *Empire of the Son* when he observes, "there's something about this particular entity [the show] that inspires people to invoke their own lenses and see within this work their own beliefs articulated or exemplified" (Personal interview).

Beyond their role as interpreters of the play, the audience also play an important role in *Empire of the Son*'s performer-audience dynamic. Shigematsu notes that when doing direct address, the audience becomes his "scene partner" (Personal interview) and *Empire of the Son*'s audience serve in some way as dramatic figures in the work, functioning as emotional surrogates for Shigematsu's father—as people he can close the distance with. This is seen, for example, in his early invitation, "if I open myself to you, and you open yourself to me, then maybe together we can summon a spirit I haven't felt since I was a kid" (4). This statement epitomizes the play's approach to immediacy, grounded not in ontology but in possibility. In this invocation,

Shigematsu asks the audience to ‘open themselves,’ in a shared emotional vulnerability which he strives for and longs to have with his father.

On the other side of the relationship, from the audience’s perspective the show’s performer-audience dynamic allows us in some small way to physically experience through our relationship with Shigematsu the negotiation of interpersonal closeness between himself and his father that is the main subject of the show. This dynamic then becomes part of the show’s artistic effect, matching Adam Alston’s description of aestheticized experience in immersive theatre works: “the objectification of experience as art” (7), in which “generic audience experience (usually figured as affective) is a key aesthetic feature of the work” (9).

Empire of the Son’s particular framing of the performer-audience relationship complements the show thematically in the way that Shigematsu’s relationship with the audience echoes his with his father; furthermore, the way the show understands this relationship has much to offer our understandings of theatrical direct address, as well as the way that immediacy operates in the theatre.

Shigematsu’s understanding of the theatrical audience is heavily informed by his radio work. He told me that “as someone who has worked in radio, I often think that the audience is my scene partner, and it is a conversation, whether or not they respond verbally or not” (Personal interview). Shigematsu recounted for me a key lesson in his radio training. A mentor told him:

...you’re not talking to the whole country. You have to get that out of your mind. You’re not speaking to people across every time zone’. She said, ‘The person who’s listening to you is alone. They are in their kitchen in the Maritimes and they’re ironing. They are in their garage in the Prairies and they’re working on their car.’ She said, ‘every person that you’re talking to is just one person’ (Personal interview).

Rather than a mass medium, this excerpt depicts radio as a medium that is really quite personal, trading in an imagined immediacy. However, this immediacy, as demonstrated in the play, is

multi-layered, as *Empire of the Son* also configures radio as a lonely or limited mode of communication. While the voice of the individual broadcaster feels close and intimate, host and listener remain separated by distance, and in the tradition of public radio the viewer can't answer back. These characteristics paint a picture of a form that is at once immediate and distanced yet still contains the possibility of communicative success. Interestingly, this performer-audience relationship that Shigematsu attributes to radio—a one-way form of communication, with its imagined intimacy—mirrors the one that he cultivates in the theatre through his use of direct audience address. While Shigematsu can clearly see the audience in the theatre and watch their responses (as it was clear, from my interview with him, that he does), he doesn't get direct feedback from them, isn't able to share what's in their head. This pseudo-connection is where the possibility of success lies.

Shigematsu's introduction to the published edition of the play features the Facebook post of an audience member recounting her experience of the show, in which she expresses her deep identification with Shigematsu's story ("Maybe his words could have been my own?" she writes). Shigematsu, who was directed to the post by a friend, told me that this post especially touched him, as he thinks he remembers watching this audience member having this experience in the theatre (Personal interview). This incident and Shigematsu's choice to feature the audience member's post in his introduction, reveal that on top of his explorations with technological and interpersonal immediacy, Shigematsu is particularly interested in the possibilities of a *theatrical* immediacy.

Theatrical immediacy can be understood as a form of technological immediacy specifically present in the medium of theatre that is predicated on the characteristics and possibilities of the performer-audience relationship (and in this way, is also a form of

interpersonal immediacy). The concept of theatrical immediacy, like Power's literal mode of presence ("being present"), understands theatre "as both an occurring exchange subject to the conditions of time and place in which the performance takes place, and theatre—almost by definition, as fundamentally contingent on the presence of its audience" (Power 87). As with other examples of immediacy discussed, *Empire of the Son's* configuration of theatrical immediacy through the performer-audience relationship embodies the show's suggestion that distance is a feature of every communicative act. As such, Shigematsu diverts the question "can pure theatrical presence or immediacy ever be achieved?" to instead think about how we can understand or measure immediacy in terms of the striving.

Empire of the Son's treatment of theatrical immediacy, alongside its exploration of technological and interpersonal immediacy, adds a final layer to the play's central message. While the show's text and form conceive of its central striving as a task for individuals—something that Shigematsu is seeking alone, his father gone; the addition of the audience to this equation via the direct address of the performance mode further conceives of this striving for closeness as a separately communal practice: a shared enterprise between performer and audience striving individually yet together towards Herbert Blau's "imagined primal unity" (qtd. in Auslander "Boal, Blau, Brecht" 100). It is this last point, I argue, despite unresolved questions of distance, that makes the play's ultimate message one of hope. Through this, *Empire of the Son* argues thus that interpersonal intimacy is not about the vanquishing of distance but the desire and willingness to collapse it; the reaching out is enough.

Blau's claim, mentioned briefly above, that theatre paradoxically gives rise to a desire for an imagined original unity even as the existence and experience of theatre are themselves testimony to the impossibility of that unity (Auslander "Boal, Blau, Brecht" 101), links directly

to the contradictions in immediacy that Bolter and Grusin discuss in regards to media. So, we return to my final point: what the play's take on interpersonal immediacy, drawn from these media scholars, can teach us about theatrical immediacy. Like Bolter and Grusin's discussion of immediacy in *Remediation*, Shigematsu's play opens up the possibility of understanding theatrical immediacy as a practice that does. Immediacy thus is not a state of being, but as an act in motion: immediacy as product to immediacy as process. Just as in Causey's discussion of the postdigital "the ontologies of the performance and media converge and are...understood as a flow, a becoming, and always in process" (430-431), *Empire of the Son* lets us consider what it might mean to interpret theatrical immediacy as a process that can be understood through its attempt. Thus, this chapter offers the following provocations to the field of theatre studies: how does thinking about theatrical immediacy as a process change the way we think about its operations, both broadly and through specific case studies? What might it mean to apply this understanding of immediacy to our examinations of theatre and media? What kind of engagements and productive dialogues might it enable?

We might also use this framework of 'immediacy as process' to think about the work that direct address performs. While Shigematsu's formulations of intimacy and immediacy as communal-but-separate strivings speak to theatre more broadly, they may also offer insight into direct address in particular. Shigematsu's framing raises questions about to what extent, audiences of direct address actually 'participate,' in it and what, if anything is exchanged between performers and audience. However, as in my earlier discussions of immediacy, what I am interested in here is more experience than ontology. Just as the show's ultimate success is left up to the audience, and the extent of Shigematsu's connection to his father remains ambiguous, so too these questions about the significance and effect of direct address remain unresolved.

Compelling and successful direct address as participation doesn't typically rely on the feeling that the audience has done something or achieved a specific benchmark (*Peter Pan's* invocation to audiences to 'clap if you believe in fairies' comes to mind)—but through their own reflection on whether they have done so and whether and in what ways we connect to and impact others.

I will close by exploring one of these implications I raised one paragraph earlier, which is how *Empire of the Son's* take on immediacy, including theatrical immediacy, fosters intercultural understanding. While touring across Canada, *Empire of the Son* has played to a great diversity of houses, and one might argue that the show's wide-ranging success (defined by its multiple tours) has relied on its nature as a piece that can engage spectators from many different backgrounds. By inviting the audience to participate in the show through the medium of direct audience address, Shigematsu gives precedence to the audience's experience of the piece as mediators of its effects (a position emphasized by the show's exploration of various processes of mediation) and opens this personal and culturally-specific story to a broad swathe of interpretations and understandings from a variety of situated positions. While the cultural relativity of immediacy means that Shigematsu's invitation to close the gap hits us differently depending on our cultural background, the varied layers of immediacy presented and played with (technological, interpersonal, and intercultural) promote a politics of scale that through its openness to interpretation avoids reductive or singular understandings of the show, and allows audience members, regardless of their social or cultural background, to find entry points of relation throughout. For example, Shigematsu noticed the effect the performance had on men of a variety of backgrounds:

the front of house shared with me that they had to change their post-show protocols after the show, because men in the audience wouldn't leave the theatre with their wives, their daughters, but they would need an extra five minutes in the audience—in the house with the house lights darkened in order to recompose themselves (Personal interview).

These men staying to collect themselves behind may have been moved by a point of cultural connection with Shigematsu, or perhaps were responding emotionally because of strict expectations of masculinity within their own cultural backgrounds, including broader Western limiting ideas of what it means to be a man. While Josephine Lee has explored Asian American playwrights' use of metatheatres to call attention to and problematize the gaze of the audience, Shigematsu's use of metatheatres, specifically his address to the audience, employs the ambiguous possibility of the audience/performer relationship to draw across difference, inviting audiences to engage in these negotiations with distance from their own located perspectives (whether or not they are similar to his). To that end we can read Shigematsu's various artistic choices in *Empire of the Son* as working towards Lily Cho's understanding of Martinique philosopher Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*. Cho writes how through a poetics of relation one can avoid "a subsumption of the particular or the singular into a universal," but instead consider, "the relation of the specific and the singular to a constellation that includes other singularities without reducing them to synecdochic moments of the same" ("Underwater Signposts" 192). Shigematsu's play does not ultimately subsume Tetsuro into his father, and his desire for closeness does not manage to close the gaps of emotional distance between them. Instead, the play acknowledges this distance, but demonstrates how their striving holds them separate but in close relation. Similarly, as witnesses, and co-creators of the piece, *Empire of the Son*'s spectators are invited in to engage in "the possibility of relation, "or, "what lives on in that which is shared" (Cho "Underwater Signposts"193), while respecting and accepting difference, not seeking, as intercultural theatre has too often been accused of, to reductively overcome it in favour of a hollow universalism.

CHAPTER THREE: DIRECT AUDIENCE ADDRESS IN CLIFF CARDINAL'S *HUFF*: THE
GAZE TURNED INWARDS

The second in my series of cases studies is Cliff Cardinal's play *Huff*. The show, by the Cree/Lakota playwright who also performs it, is a brutal and deeply affecting play which dramatizes the effects of colonialism and the Canadian residential school system on a family, most specifically two young brothers, Wind and Huff. *Huff* deals with what Cardinal calls, "our most taboo subculture": "First Nations' kids abusing solvents, at high risk of suicide" (iv), and Cardinal plays all of its twenty-or-so characters, including the narrator, older brother Wind. The play began as a workshop production in 2012 (at the SummerWorks performance festival), and has since toured within Canada and internationally to great acclaim. It was published by Playwrights Canada Press in 2017.

I approach my analysis of *Huff* from my position as a settler—specifically, as a settler watching a performance by an Indigenous creator and performer. Accordingly, my experience in some ways embodies an interaction that is central to the 'Canadian' nation as we know it—the encounter between settlers and Indigenous peoples. I have tried to do what Ric Knowles demands of responsible intercultural theatre practice, by adopting a "model of scholarly praxis that is humble before dizzying multiplicities of its objects of study, that is cognisant of the researcher's own positioning and the process of scholarship as itself necessarily intercultural performance, and that does its homework in terms of attempting to understand cultural and performance forms in situ" (61). Brenda Vellino discusses how Métis playwright Marie Clements's *The Edward Curtis Project* stages the encounter between settler and Indigenous peoples in order to rehearse redressive relations. This chapter examines how, for settler audiences of Cliff Cardinal's hit *Huff*, the play contains the possibility of *being* this encounter. In

this chapter I will examine how, through the dramaturgical structures and the material conditions of *Huff*'s performance, Cardinal uses direct address to 'speak back' to a colonial gaze that is both institutional—embedded in the power structures and historical context of the proscenium theatre—and individual, contained among the overwhelmingly white, middle-class spectators of Canadian theatres. This chapter looks at how direct audience address in *Huff* invites the reflexivity of settler spectators (like myself) and challenges active/passive binaries as well as calls for a reconsideration of the Indigenous body as imagined by the settler-colonial state. It also explores some of the anti-colonial possibilities of direct address and participatory performance. On top of this, this chapter as a case study demonstrates how direct address can target specific audiences; a performer and/or character's direct address distinguishes between audience members—separating them along lines of privilege or cultural background—to specific ends. Finally, it examines the value of exploring the experience of theatre generally, and direct address specifically, on the level of situated individual experience, and what such a perspective can offer to scholarly conversations regarding theatrical participation.

Huff came to my attention after it had its first major run at Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto in 2015. Having missed that initial chance to see it, I picked up a copy to read when the play was later published by Playwrights Canada Press in 2017. My powerful emotional reaction to this reading translated into a strong desire to see it performed. Shortly after I first read the play, I read Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi scholar Jill Carter's excellent analysis of *Huff* in her article, "Discarding Sympathy, Disrupting Catharsis: The Mortification of Indigenous Flesh as Survivance-Intervention." In the article, Carter writes that *Huff* "speaks specifically to Indigenous audiences," whom Cardinal challenges "to reject the sympathy of well-meaning allies" and "to engage in an utterly sovereign act" (428). For her the play is a "hyper-visible

pageant [that] obscures the hyper-vital ceremony, protecting it from the outsider's gaze" (432). Carter argues that the play offers a message of empowerment to Indigenous spectators and that to settlers, "the well-meaning allies who look on, Cardinal has nothing to say; they are merely witnesses" (428). While I agreed that as a non-Indigenous audience member the play did not necessarily promote to me the message of Indigenous sovereignty that Carter identified (and that perhaps she was specifically referring to with this statement), I also felt that 'nothing' didn't encapsulate what I *received* from the experience, the profound and emotional impact that the play had on me. It's thus in my analysis here that I examine what precisely is staged for 'the outsider's gaze': what, through the material conditions of its performance, this play communicates to both settler audiences and to the theatrical institution itself as a site of colonization.

This specialized or situated response to *Huff*, individual to each spectator but located in our various positionalities, I argue is not just a product of Carter's or my own agenda, but rather is invited by the show. One factor influencing this is the way that *Huff* calls its spectators to attend to their unique, subjective experience. This type of interaction is typically and perhaps most obviously invited by immersive theatre, one-on-one theatre, and other types of participatory performances. In these types of performance, attention is called to audience members' bodies as they move through space or to the individual spectator through the unavoidable closeness with the lone performer. Adam Alston, writing about immersive theatre, specifically notes that in immersive productions "the audience experience produced by an audience's relationships to a set of materials tends to be framed as the primary, aesthetically meaningful element" (7). In *Huff*, it's the audience's relationship to the performer that significantly contributes to the production of audience experience, and though it's not the *primary* element of the piece—it holds sway with

other factors like the dramatic text—I'd argue that through the way the audience is implicated (both rhetorically and physically) in the piece, *Huff* draws spectators' attention inward, establishing their particular experiences as an important element of the overall performance experience. *Huff* achieves this through several metatheatrical strategies that ground and involve audiences in the immediate theatrical event, including the show's provocative language and scenarios; the 'irruption of the real,' through the possibility of real danger and its focus on the body (the latter two of which both recall performance art sensibilities); and, most importantly for me, the performer's direct address of his audience members, which implicates the audience on a very direct level. The use of these strategies means that instead of being 'absorbed' into the artwork and detached from their bodies and sense of self (recall chapter one's discussion of theatre as drama vs. performance), *Huff's* audiences are enmeshed in a very real, theatrical situation that brings their experience to the foreground and makes that experience worthy as an object of analysis when considering the show's dramaturgical appeal and techniques.

Another way that *Huff* lends itself to analysis on the level of the immediate experience of the spectator is the strong and varied emotional reactions the show seems to provoke. While *Huff* could overall be said to be critically acclaimed (it won two Dora Awards—Toronto's local theatre awards—for Outstanding New Play, and Outstanding Performance for Cardinal in 2016 ("Dora Awards Recipients Database")), there was yet notable division in the strong and sometimes polarizing reactions it garnered from audiences. For example, at a panel entitled "Directing Across Difference" in April 2017, Karin Randoja, *Huff's* dramaturg and director, recalled with zeal a particular incident during the show's Australian run in which a disgruntled spectator tracked Randoja down personally in order to tell her how much she hated the show. Situating this response within a broader pattern, Randoja gleefully observed, "People thought it

was horrible!” This polarization demonstrates a certain individuality of response. On top of this, the strong emotional element of reactions to the show (for example, both my own and the briefly mentioned Australian woman’s) suggest that a particularized approach might be more useful at capturing the complexities of affect in each spectator’s experience of the show. Thus, while I’m interested in how direct address can appeal to particular groups—here specifically settler audiences—I choose to approach the show through my individual experience of being ‘hailed’ by the show through my identification as a settler. In that way, this is *a* settler reading of *Huff* and not *the* reading.

The factors discussed above mean that in this chapter more than the others, my positionality as a particular, situated spectator (most prominently my perspective as a second-generation settler-Canadian) is central in my discussion and analysis of the work. In my analysis I look at *Huff* through the potential it carries to be received differently by different groups. More specifically, *Huff* resonates with Dominic Johnson’s point that “[t]he particularity of the spectator’s identity affects how it feels to be the subject of reciprocal vision, in performance, but also in other social situations” (41). Being a settler-spectator of a show by an Indigenous creator not only affects how Cardinal’s address affects me, but also comes with attendant power dynamics. This forces me to acknowledge and address these dynamics throughout this chapter, including what film scholar Laura Mulvey would call “the spectator’s unconscious structures of viewing,” which are “formed by the dominant order” (Bennett 81). It’s thus that in my approach to *Huff* I examine the politics of viewing and the gaze not primarily through Lacan, or other frames that might be considered colonial—but heavily informed by the theorizations of Indigenous scholars and artists, particularly Michelle Olson and Daniel David Moses.

In the following sections I'll describe the show and how it engages with the gaze of the particular audience members (specifically settlers). Next, I'll look at how the colonial gaze has been understood by Indigenous artists Michelle Olson and Daniel David Moses both as inscribed into the power dynamics of the proscenium theatre, and as a strategy of colonization. Then I'll discuss how through *Huff*'s use of direct address Cardinal responds and speaks back to this gaze, challenging colonial ways of viewing the Indigenous body as well as notions of action and inaction both in discussions of theatrical participation and in the larger Canadian cultural context of settler-Indigenous relations. I'll conclude by providing some takeaways from this chapter regarding the benefits and drawbacks of performance analysis conducted from an individualized audience perspective, and what this says about intercultural theatre.

***Huff* in context**

It's a Monday night when I first see *Huff*, preview night, and the theatre is packed. When Cardinal first steps on stage at the opening of the show, I feel a jolt as he addresses his first words to us through a suffocating plastic bag duct-taped around his head, his hands tied behind his back. "Turn off your fucking cellphone... This is an interruption of your regularly scheduled programming," he tells us (*Cardinal Huff and Stitch* 5). The fourth wall, along with any aesthetic distance it preserves, is smashed; and something is clearly wrong. "This is a suicide attempt" Cardinal says, "I say 'attempt' but it's looking pretty good" (6). After several nail-biting minutes, Cardinal at last relieves the tension while breaking the final barrier that separates us by asking an audience member (in this case a young white-presenting woman sitting near the front) to free him. After he is freed, he hands the bag to the spectator and asks her to keep it from him, "no matter what." "I need you," he says (7). This opening sets up the close, tense, and

emotionally-fraught relationship between performer and spectator that defines the rest of the performance, and here introduces a primary dependence. Cardinal (or Wind, as we will soon learn, who is the character he is currently playing) *needs* the audience to ensure his safety.

The performance that I saw took place at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, the home of Soulpepper, Toronto's largest not-for-profit theatre company. Through a run of success, *Huff* moved from a small Indigenous arts festival in the city of Peterborough in 2012 to a production by Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto which toured nationally, before arriving at Soulpepper in October 2017 as a long-established hit. Though only 20 years old, Soulpepper is largely regarded as the theatrical establishment in Toronto, due in large part to the prominence of its founding members—many of them celebrated performers at the prestigious Stratford Shakespearean Festival—and its mandate to produce lesser-known “classics.” Its audiences are overwhelmingly older, white, and upper-middle class, and it derives a high percentage of its operating budget from private donors. While, prior to my seeing the show, the company had recently made a commitment to diversity—including developing the smash-hit Fringe show turned TV-sitcom, *Kim's Convenience*—Soulpepper has also been subject to some critique due to its approach to inclusion, and has been hit with two major sexual misconduct scandals in the past couple of years.⁸ As I watched the performance my awareness of this context, of Soulpepper as an institution, informed my experience and heightened my awareness of the power dynamics of the piece.

⁸ These dynamics in place in October 2017 at Soulpepper have perhaps since started to changed. In January 2018 longtime Artistic Director Albert Schultz was accused by four women of sexual misconduct and resigned. His replacement, young, Black, and female director Weyni Mengesha, has since begun to shift the company's profile with more diverse programming and a cooler image, perhaps best exemplified by the attendance and Instagram recommendation of one of their shows by superstar Drake in 2019.

As the play continues, led by the primary narrator Wind, Cardinal's characters, with innocence and sardonic humour in the face of horrific circumstances, narrate and enact the events that result in Wind's attempted suicide via plastic bag in the scene that opens the play. As Cardinal plays all the roles, this enactment is mediated through his body, offering a form of telling that is itself a strategy that works against the 'outsider's gaze'. The danger of this gaze, realized for Carter in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, lies in presentation of traumatic events "packaged for public consumption" (417)—specifically the voyeuristic consumption of Indigenous grief—in a way which disempowers Indigenous people and provides settler spectators with a false catharsis.⁹ By mediating the story through his body, Cardinal prevents the audience from achieving a position of voyeuristic superiority because he controls which parts of the story get told and how they are told. As an audience member, the only access I have to the story is what Cardinal allows. This form of storytelling also makes visible the actor/character duality and the simultaneous co-existence of the 'real' and fictional which are key elements of the play's effect. This mediation distances the audience from the violence featured, both physical and sexual, and limits the sensationalization of the play's traumatic elements. The continuous switching of character by Cardinal makes the spectator constantly aware of his presence as a 'real' performer, which prevents us from being absorbed into the piece enough such as to achieve a collapsing of identifications and experience sensationalistic catharsis at the tragedy that unfolds before us. At the same time, from the first moment he steps out it is

⁹ For an in-depth example of this, look at Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin's edited collection *Acts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Many of the articles criticize the various ways the TRC centred settler understandings and values over Indigenous ones and presented spectacles of First Nations' pain for settler consumption.

unclear whether we are witnessing the suicide attempt of Cardinal the actor or of a fictional character. Is this danger 'real'?

My gaze revealed

As the story plays out, its characters, especially Huff and Wind, continue to address the audience. As they do so they reveal a desperate and desolate situation fueled by intergenerational trauma: an alcoholic, physically abusive father affected by his wife's suicide, a brother with fetal alcohol syndrome who is sexually abusing Wind and Huff, and a negligent stepmother who provides them with solvents to huff just to keep them out of her hair. The horror of the situation is only increased by how unaware Wind and Huff seem to be of the awfulness of their circumstances: for them it's just daily life. While the two boys are friendly towards us, encouraging intimacy and complicity in the play's action and raising the emotional stakes, at many times my experience is also deeply uncomfortable, as in different moments Cardinal swears, unzips his fly, and graphically simulates rape. In these moments I feel embarrassed, my discomfort arising not from the actions themselves, but Cardinal's return gaze: the fact that he is watching me watch him. As Claudia Castellucci remarks, "the actor who looks at the spectator reveals to the spectator his own gesture, a form of mirroring that also creates a profound equivocation and puts in doubt the spectator's proper role" (qtd. in Grehan 4). Cardinal's return gaze draws my attention to my own voyeuristic consumption of traumatic content—an act of watching which I would prefer not to be seen by others. (The power of this gaze is strengthened by the show's constant foregrounding of the performer in his embodiment of all the characters—that I am aware that it is *Cardinal*, and not just the fictional characters that he plays, looking back increases my embarrassment.) My discomfort, emerging from tensions between the actual

world and the fictional one, is what Nick Ridout calls “ontological queasiness.” This ‘queasiness’ has the potential to reveal what “is always already there, built into the structure of ‘the entire situation’” (Ridout 9)—for Ridout this is the workings of capitalism behind the theatrical illusion; in *Huff*, as I will discuss, it is the proscenium’s gaze and its particular power dynamics. However, while for Ridout this queasiness is incidental to the play’s content, despite (according to him) being the real purpose of the theatre, in Cardinal’s play it ties into the dramaturgical work of the play to inform a larger aesthetic strategy.

My discomfort, then, at these moment in the plays, emerging from tensions between the actual world and the fictional one, activates what Jim Drobnick describes in performance art as the “‘implicated gaze,’” often invoked in ‘body events.’ Drobnick explores the return gaze as a common strategy in performance art, something that scholars such as Dominic Johnson also acknowledge: “[i]n performance art...the artist often returns the spectator’s look with conviction; the spectator is often called upon to act on his or her political or ethical convictions” (Johnson 45). For Drobnick, in contrast to the ‘aesthetic gaze,’ a form of disinterested, disembodied gaze called upon by many art objects, the ‘implicated gaze’ is “embodied and interested”; through the latter “the experience of the spectator is itself a primary element for contemplation and critique” (65). These ‘body events’ which invoke the ‘implicated gaze’ use the audience’s gaze as “an aspect and material of the artistic process, a practice to be engaged, reworked and reflected back upon itself,” and in so doing they “disturb assumptions of a natural and transparent viewing position and seek to uncover its political and ideological investments” (65). Body events’ blatant use of the visceral and the implicated gaze are not an end in themselves, but are strategically employed and redirected towards examining the politics of viewing (73). Accordingly, discomfort, such as that I experienced watching the show, is an expected consequence, a sign

that social viewing patterns are being challenged (73). Thus, I argue that Cardinal's direct address through the performer and the play's dramaturgical structure functions like a body event and invokes this implicated gaze, reflecting my own gaze back to me, and encouraging an examination of "the relation between the body seen and the body seeing," which, as Maaik Bleeker points out, is often left out of discussions of vision (Bleeker 4). Importantly, what I feel, and what the play makes me aware of, is not just my own gaze, but that mine is a settler gaze looking at an Indigenous body.

While Johnson says that in performance art, through this use of the return gaze, "the scene of looking opens onto political possibilities that may not be available in the traditionally more tightly constrained theatrical setup" (45), in the case of *Huff*, the theatre space actually offers some very useful political possibilities, through its colonial origins. These possibilities exist through the situation Johnson describes; that, "Due to the different social and technological conditions of theatrical production, the experience of 'looking' at the stage is shown to be radically contingent" (Johnson 32), as well as through the history of theatrical structures (most prominent, perhaps, the proscenium arch) and the gazes they invite. Furthermore, in theatre there is added potential in the way that interrogations of the gaze can be combined with a dramaturgical structure that performance art typically doesn't follow.

The colonial gaze and the stage

Artist and dancer Michelle Olson, writing about Indigenous dance performance, argues that the power of the colonizer's gaze is inscribed in the structure of the proscenium arch that separates performers and audience (discussed in my introduction). As discussed earlier in this dissertation, in European theatrical tradition the popularity and rise of the proscenium and the

fourth wall is associated with the late-nineteenth century naturalist movement, where the focalized gaze invited by the frame of the proscenium allowed for the development of a detached, 'objective' and over-mastering 'scientific' perspective. This arguably is the culmination of the move that began with Renaissance perspective, which as Maïke Bleeker says, "is fundamental to the development of the modern scientific world view and the constitution of the modern scopic regime" (Bleeker 12). In a proscenium setup this perspective takes hold, as Olson argues, because "the audience sits...in a place of power and a place of judgment" (273). Through this inequitable performer-audience relationship rises "the gaze of the oppressor" (274). This onstage gaze reflects a cultural history of performance—what Coco Fusco has called, 'the other history of intercultural performance'—including shows like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, whereby, "Indigenous bodies have been the site for the colonizer's gaze where the west was won and conquered, over and over again" (276). For Olson, these shows "were about entrenching the power of the colonial gaze, asserting the power that the settlers had over the First Nations of North America" (276). This gaze is importantly both institutional and individual. On the individual level it is the gaze of the non-Indigenous spectator, under which "the fourth wall of the theatre stage can feel like the bars of the cages at the human zoo" (279). Institutionally, the gaze of the theatre itself manifests through "assumptions about 'Indianness' [which] are embedded in our collective consciousness as a society" and supported by "the power structure inscribed in the mechanics of the proscenium" (279). These elements are mutually dependent as the institutional gaze is enacted through the individual (settler) spectator.

This relationship between Eurocentric theatrical traditions and a colonizing gaze is explored by Delaware/Iroquois playwright Daniel David Moses in *Almighty Voice and His Wife*. The play links settler forms of representation to colonial regimes of watching in order to reveal

that the white gaze may be one of the most damaging forms of colonial violence. The play is Moses' interpretation of the murder of Almighty Voice, a Cree man, at the hands of a Mountie in late-nineteenth century Saskatchewan, "a revisionist account and reclamation of a story frequently retold in plays, short stories, and popular histories by non-Native authors" (Moses 173). Act one is staged fairly naturalistically in style; and dramatically introduces the power of the white gaze, a concept later explored metatheatrically. White Girl is haunted by the colonizing gaze of the glass-eyed white god (having attended a residential school), a gaze the settlers also possess (White Girl asks a Mountie: "You've got a bad look on your face, a blindness, a glass gaze. What are you staring at?" (198)). White Girl directly connects this white gaze to a paralysing power, a power of death, when describing the state of the Cree imprisoned by the settlers: "It's the jail, husband. They watch you all the time. You can't move"; and "you forget everything.... You're not a man then. You're like a ghost. You're lost" (201). Not only does this gaze have the power to kill (by turning one into a ghost), it also blinds the visions (double-meaning no doubt intended) of the Cree: "One Arrow told my father that the visions of warriors have no more power against the soldiers" (201). In jail (and under the oppressing stare of the colonial gaze—here institutional), "you can't see anything but stones" (201).

One of the clearest illustrations of the colonizing theatrical gaze appears in the play's second act. Act one's thematic discussion about vision and the power of the gaze is a lead up to act two, where at last the theatrical gaze and the gaze of the audience is explicitly acknowledged and challenged. Act two uses metatheatrical techniques to deconstruct settler performance forms that perpetuate racism and colonialism, including melodrama and the minstrel show. This act of the play is set "on the auditorium stage of the abandoned industrial school at Duck Lake" (Moses 176). St. Michael's School in Duck Lake is one of the most infamous residential schools, thus

this setting explicitly links the violence of the residential school system with the Western-style auditorium as a site for the inscription of the colonizer's gaze. This both reveals the Western theatrical gaze's colonizing impulse and also demonstrates how the stage with its proscenium dynamics acts a microcosm of the dynamics of the gaze in the larger colonial state.

Like Moses' play, *Huff* is also aware of the power of the gaze as a violent act. At the reservation school a disobedient pupil is greeted by the class with a "Care Bear Stare" (39), a supposedly compassionate act that instead causes the boy to defecate. Huff also clearly carries Olson's assertion that "the colonial gaze upon the Indigenous body has been our inherited collective self-perception" (278): when a high Wind fantasizes himself as the star of Hockey Night in Canada, the announcer reports, "What a performance, Harry! And he's only an Indian!" (Cardinal *Huff and Stitch* 15). However, while both agree on the gaze's power and its perpetuation through the theatre, Moses responds by using metatheatrical strategies that invite spectators to question the processes of representation and their complicity with them; whereas Huff responds through direct address, which invites spectators to contemplate the nature of the gaze itself as it functions both in and out of the theatre.

The gaze of the individual spectator

The previous paragraphs have discussed the institutional gaze of the theatre; however, in the next ones I wish to talk a bit more about the second gaze that Olson mentions, the gaze of the individual spectator (specifically, mine). This gaze comes down to the fact that when I am watching the show, I receive from my specific, located, and particularized position; from my positionality, rooted in the various intersections of my identity. For a brief example, my interest in how subjective experience and positionality inform reception and interpretation—an interest

which underscores this entire project—is heavily informed by my experience as a mixed-race person (Irish, Scottish, Afro-Caribbean), who is viewed very differently under different circumstances. People see me variously as white, ‘Greek or Jewish or something,’ mixed, or Black, depending on their own experiences, backgrounds, and expectations. This located experience makes me especially receptive to the nuances of reception and interpretation, as well as how particular contexts invite certain kinds of readings. A crucial part of this positioning involves power dynamics. Performance studies scholar and ethnographer D. Soyini Madison writes: “Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects. A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as “reflexive ethnography”: it is a “turning back” on ourselves” (7). Madison’s engagement here with questions of power and privilege is also relevant to my experience of *Huff*. My own relative power and privilege including factors such as my middle-class status and white-presenting privilege, are why I identify as a settler (and feel called to the performance from this subject position) and not as a “displanted person”—as journalist and activist Anthony Morgan suggests should be used to refer to Black Canadians—or some other term. My identification as a settler is one that is contingent and contextual. For example, I was very aware of my Blackness when watching Cree performer and creator Michelle Thrush’s show, *Inner Elder*. In the show Thrush frequently conflates settlers with white people to the exclusion of other groups, creating in her show a limited binary of Indigenous peoples and white settlers. Later in a comic motif, she draws on Aretha Franklin’s ‘Respect,’ which she refers to as a “song of her people,” without acknowledging the existence or presence of Black people. While this may not have been Thrush’s intention, I read this moment as an appropriation of Franklin’s voice, via a song whose transformative power is specifically derived from Franklin’s

particular and multiply-marginalized position of Black womanhood. By drawing on Franklin's song in a theatre piece which relies on a white-settler/Indigenous binary in its critique of structural power relations, and does not acknowledge the complexity of Black positionality in Indigenous-settler relations as a 'forcibly displaced' people, Thrush left me, from a position of Black subjectivity, feeling alienated, and concerned about the reactions of the other Black women that I spotted in the audience the evening I saw the show.

My own, situated gaze is importantly not just that of a viewing subject, but also that of a writing subject, one making sense of my experience from my position within the academy. As sociologist Jon Dean asserts in *Doing Reflexivity*, "reflexive work cannot just be about the person doing the research. It is the examination of both structural and personal conditions which help us to understand the knowledge we create" (11). Accordingly, my research context and my positionality as an academic are as important as my personal identifications and experiences, including my academic background in theatre and performance studies, and the broader context of the play I'm examining in the Canadian theatre scene. Returning to the power that Madison mentions, I am aware that I am operating as a settler in the context of Canadian theatre in which, as Syilx, Tsilhqot'in, Ktunaxa, and Dakelh artist Kim Senklip Harvey writes, "Settlers have oppressively positioned themselves...to have some presumed kind of academic and or artistic 'authority' over Indigenous peoples" (Harvey). The Canadian theatre world is at a vital moment in conversations about this critical settler gaze. In February 2020, the manidoons collective asked that reviews for their show *bug*, created and performed by Ojibwe/South Asian artist Yolanda Bonnell, be written only by Indigenous, Black, or critics of Colour, sparking mixed responses. Their reasoning for this request acknowledged both the cultural specificity of the work itself (as Indigenous "artistic ceremony") and the systemic racism embedded in "current colonial

reviewing practices” (“Why playwright Yolanda”), as well as the more overt racism of particular reviewers. (For example, an earlier run of the same show received the insulting suggestion from a reviewer that the show would be more appropriate to present on reservations.) While mainstream critics were for the most part supportive of manidoons’ request and abided by it, critics displayed varied, often limited, understandings the reasoning and the context (both recent and historical) of the appeal. For example, while the *Globe and Mail*’s Kelly Nestruck acknowledged that his reviewing was shaped by a “white settler lens,” his example of how that lens operated was an instance where he teared up at a moment in a specific production which featured a lullaby his grandmother used to sing (“How should critics respond”). By grounding this example in an extremely personal anecdote, Nestruck failed to address the structural component of the ‘white settler lens,’ specifically its history of systemic racism, and in so doing severely understated the impact of his positionality on his reviewing practice. As discussed by critical race and critical whiteness studies scholars, as well as in Olson’s analysis of the colonial gaze of the theatre, this structural power is where the white, settler gaze derives its true harm. Rather than offering an example connected to his grandmother, had he truly understood manidoons’ request Nestruck might have delved further into the “dismissive review” he wrote about Native Earth Performing Arts’ 2008 adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, *Death of a Chief*. Nestruck criticized the production in ways that harmfully furthered reductive and racist narratives of Indigenous peoples, lamenting that “play fails to make any resonant connections to Aboriginal issues,” in a review that may have had great impact on *Death of a Chief*’s mainstream reception, and possibly even its financial success (“Shakespeare done right...and wrong”). Interestingly, when employed in a certain way, direct address has the potential to address such

misunderstandings as by speaking to both the individual spectator and the broader audience as a whole, it may point out the connections between individual and structural gazes.

To attempt to redress these power dynamics in my research, it was important to me that I not attempt to pass judgement on Cardinal's work or evaluate its artistic merit, and that I keep my response located in how I received the play as a settler, and not seek to offer authoritative judgement of Cardinal's goals or intentions. While throughout my analysis I often invoke the phrasing of what Cardinal or the show is doing for efficiency, it is important to note that what I am discussing here is my *interpretation* of what he/it is doing. Similarly, my invocation of the collective 'we' in describing my experience as a spectator demonstrates my awareness of being part of a larger audience, but is not intended to suggest that all the other spectators might be experiencing the same thing, merely that my response is one that is open to other spectators (particularly settlers). Beyond these points, it was important to me, particularly when examining what the show might be saying or offering, that I read and cite Indigenous artists and scholars to aid in my understanding and theorizing of my experience from a place of greater knowledge. Rauna Kuokkanen, in her book *Reshaping the University*, highlights the contemporary university's structural "epistemic ignorance" of Indigenous knowledges (5), grounded in its singular promotion of the Western Enlightenment tradition as a source of knowledge. Since this academic background is where I write from—and where much of the knowledge production that is accessible to me is located—I sought Indigenous writers not just from within the academy, but artists with lived experience of this gaze in the theatre, too, thus acknowledging lived experience as an important source of knowledge. Another important element was to have the voice of the artist present in my work, something that is my preferred practice, which allows me to discover and highlight places where our respective understandings may diverge. To that end I interviewed

Cardinal about his work and *Huff* in particular, the results of which I explore in the final section of this paper.

Resisting the gaze

Having gone into the specifics and intricacies of the gaze, both individual and institutional, I now want to discuss what Cardinal does in *Huff* to respond to or react against it—how he *subverts* this colonizing gaze. One way that Cardinal does this, mentioned already, is by using the mediation of the show through his own body to protect the show's characters and its traumatic content from the spectators' and theatre's gaze. Another tactic Cardinal employs is to address the gaze's invisibility. The same forces that empower the operations of the colonial gaze on the Indigenous subject also configure this gaze as 'passive.' This act hides the processes of the gaze, rendering it invisible; and through this invisibility, it gains power, becomes normalized and institutionalized. Cardinal's mediation of the story through his body, in his position as the storyteller, not only gives him the power to invoke close relations with the audience and to make us feel complicit in the work, but also to dismiss us. At several points in the play, the audience is addressed as "imaginary friends"—an assertion that emerges from Wind's hypoxic brain (6), but also resonates with Canadian citizens' absence and silence in the face of our government's systematic cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples. This dismissal inverts the typical paradigm of the stage by establishing the audience as fictitious and the stage action as real. Cardinal's dismissal of the audience gaze subverts the powerful narratives by which, as Carter explains, Indigenous groups "have been largely rendered nameless in [Canada's] master-narrative...unimagined and legislated into silence by the settler-state" (Carter 420) by allowing Cardinal to render the *spectator* unimagined and invisible ("they're not even real," Wind tells his

brother of us (50)). In so doing, Cardinal situates settler spectators in a position in which settler society has historically placed Indigenous peoples: an invisibility that is disempowering (as experienced, for example, by hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls), and shown here to be a deliberate action. At the same time, this action is part of a larger strategy that makes the gaze visible, calling attention to its operation through disregard. By pushing back and dismissing the audience's gaze, Cardinal contradictorily highlights it.

No such thing as looking: challenging active/passive binaries

The culmination of what Cardinal achieves in rendering this invisible gaze visible can be seen in the final moments of the play. Driven by the accidental suicide of his little brother Huff, Wind pleads with the audience member he originally entrusted it to for the plastic bag to be returned to him. The spectator's satisfaction at their own refusal, however, is ultimately frustrated as Wind pulls out yet another plastic bag and places it on his head. Wind ultimately survives; deciding to free himself in what Carter calls an "utterly sovereign act" (428). In so doing he eschews a narrative of victimhood (despite the disturbing content of the play) and denies the audience both the position of saviour, and the notion that broken Indigenous/settler relations can be fixed by one reparative act.

Jill Carter writes of this moment that through Cardinal's gesture of refusal, the play reaffirms its message of empowerment to Indigenous spectators. Further, she argues: "To the well-meaning allies who look on, Cardinal has nothing to say; they are merely witnesses—the battle is ours to fight" (428). However, while settlers are reduced to our gaze through Cardinal's rejection, what the play has been teaching us is that there's no such thing as a 'mere' witness, or as James Elkins writes, "There is no such thing as just looking" (31). Through key moments of

address, *Huff* prompts reflexivity, asking the audience to interrogate the mechanics and politics of viewing and doing. Shortly before the play's end and the act I just described, little brother Huff ties a belt around his neck as an attempt to seek a respite from his life via an oxygen deprivation high. After he does so, he asks the audience, "Don't let me pass out for too long, okay? Promise?" (52). Of course, none of the audience will actually intercede at this moment: we know this is a play, and will not interrupt the action; however, at the same time, the audience's inaction makes them complicit in the fictional world for not preventing Huff's death which immediately follows. Cardinal's implication of the audience at the moment of Huff's death via the emotional hooks of his address means that by gazing we are breaking our promise and 'allowing' Huff's death to happen. This moment lets us recognize our gaze as in itself an action; not only that, but an action that is influenced or dictated by the outside forces of theatre etiquette which prevent us from intervening. We are not 'merely' witnessing. Cardinal has shown us that witnessing is a choice and an act.

Philosopher Jacques Rancière blames political theatre practitioners such as Brecht and Artaud for the creation of a false doing/viewing binary which ends up promoting passivity in spectators through attempts to rid them of it. However, here Cardinal demonstrates that rather than being produced by theatremakers, passivity is built into the mechanics of the stage itself. Rancière believes that in order to emancipate the spectator, artists must challenge these binaries. In doing so, we can re-distribute the "distribution of the sensible," "the *a priori* distribution of the positions and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions" (12): in other words, the ordering and valuation processes which construct such binaries—which for Rancière is the key to performance's power and politics. To that end, Cardinal re-embodies the disembodied gaze by locating it within individual spectators where it can be interrogated in relation to the collective.

Huff demonstrates through the bodies of differently-positioned spectators how the inaction of settlers makes us complicit with the oppression of Indigenous peoples. In deconstructing the dynamics of the gaze as the source of this inaction Cardinal interrogates a history of the settler gaze on Indigenous bodies, offering settlers the chance to challenge our unconscious viewing structures and consider the questions the play poses about agency and complicity within the context of the world at large. By understanding looking as an action I can reflect on how, just as in the play my gaze is a choice that doomed Huff, that same gaze unchallenged makes me complicit in the gross miscarriage of justice in the murders of Tina Fontaine and Colten Boushie, two Indigenous youth from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, for example. (And, in the months since this was first drafted, the numerous other unredressed acts of violence carried out against Indigenous peoples by settler Canadians and representatives of the colonial government.)

Thinking about gazing as an action is particularly resonant at this specific cultural moment in Canada, with the recent results of both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry (MMIWG, 2019). The Calls to Action generated as a result of the former call upon the settler government to take concrete steps to address systemic inequities between settlers and Indigenous people in Canada and move towards righting the ongoing wrongs of settler colonialism. Action is a major theme in contemporary discussions of settler-Indigenous relations in Canada; the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation commission are offset by the settler government's inaction in the face of what the recent MMIWG report found definitively to be genocide. Action was also a major theme at a plenary panel on Land Acknowledgements at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research's 2018 Conference. The panelists reframed the land acknowledgement, as

commonly practiced at theatres, universities, and other institutions, as a weak or insufficient action, and offered suggestions of how to strengthen it. This framing was captured in respondent Lisa C. Ravenbergen's summation of the discussion, which included a list of action words that had emerged from it, offering as an alternative to 'acknowledge' actions such as "dismantle, subvert, and learn" (30). This marks a move in terms of thinking about Indigenous/settler relations beyond action or inaction, one that undoes the various binaries that Rancière critique—support or not support, acknowledge or not acknowledge—toward a more specific, '*which action*'?

This question, 'which action?' has resonated particularly among settler Canadians over the past few months, with the uncovering of thousands of unmarked, undocumented graves of First Nations children at Residential School schools across the country. While the existence of these graves was a matter of public record at least since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report in 2015, many settler Canadians took the Internet to express their shock at the findings. Considerations of 'which action' came into play as critics responded, noting the ineffectiveness of such posts at addressing material inequalities and the ongoing legacies of systemic genocide, serving rather as an outlet for settler guilt without structural change. Prompted in part by these conversations, there have been shifts towards other actions, going from writing Facebook posts or hanging up orange t-shirts on porches to perhaps more constructive actions; which, as per Ravensbergen's words above, seem to be moving from acknowledgement, towards dismantling, subverting, and learning. For example, Theatre Passe Muraille, in a move that is being echoed by theatre departments across the country, began communal weekly readings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's several-hundred-page report, including its ninety-four calls to action. More people reading these curated and targeted calls and taking on the

labour of educating themselves about Canada's genocidal past and present might begin a shift from the rehashing of the same stories of Indigenous pain and trauma towards redress and measurable structural change.

Returning to *Huff*, Cardinal's de-binarization of action, particularly his undoing of doing versus viewing binaries, has greater epistemological and decolonial value beyond its dramaturgical function in the way it deconstructs Cartesian and Eurocentric conceptions of the mind/body split. It serves, as Drobnick's implicated gaze does, to "question[...] the foundations of social propriety and force[...] a confrontation with an audience's positionality," in order that "the cultural politics of the body can be exposed and potentially reconfigured" (Drobnick 74). In their book *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming*, Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Rebecca Tillett highlight Cartesian dualism, which separates the mind from the body and holds the mind as superior, as a key principle in Western understandings which other and objectify Indigenous bodies (x-xi). Through his return gaze Cardinal invites settler audiences to undo this dynamic, both to re-establish connections between our own minds and bodies and to reconsider how we view Indigenous ones. Thus, in the return gaze we can see that Cardinal's challenge offers settler audiences not just new understandings of settler/Indigenous relations, but also an alternative way of ordering the world through both looking and doing, one that creates space for better, more equitable relations.

The limits of particularized interpretation

Having talked about the way *Huff* interrogates the gaze of its audience, I want to conclude by returning to further discuss my situated gaze in my interpretation of Cardinal's work and the writing of this chapter. When I interviewed Cardinal about a year after seeing the show, I

asked him whether he ever found himself distinguishing between different audiences of *Huff*, noting my awareness of being a settler while watching the show. He replied, “I give the same...show to anyone who’s there.” He went on to observe that while in terms of audience reaction, “[e]very single [show] is a little bit different,” he “hope[s] to affect the audience the same way” every time (Personal interview). These comments suggest that the show’s particular appeals to specific audiences—a central feature of both my analysis and Carter’s before me—is something that the show’s creator was entirely uninterested in. Furthermore, Cardinal’s comments here point towards one of the limits of interpretation grounded in individual experience.

Throughout the interview, Cardinal did not once mention or contextualize *Huff* as an Indigenous piece of theatre, or himself as an Indigenous writer. Furthermore, on Cardinal’s website the link to the page on *Huff* is accompanied by a prominently featured and carefully chosen quote from the author: “*Huff* is about kids who abuse solvents and are at high risk of suicide. It’s not the story of Indigenous people in Canada. If you change ten references in this story, it can be about any group of disenfranchised kids from any community” (“Cliff Cardinal”). The phrasing of the first sentence includes a noticeable change from how it is presented in the blurb describing the published edition of the play, which indicates more specifically that it’s about *First Nations* kids who abuse solvents at high risk of suicide. Cardinal’s careful more recent framing on his website speaks to his attempts to resist a categorization that both pigeonholes the show as a specifically ‘Indigenous’ show—and therefore one that doesn’t hold universal appeal—and at the same time positions it as ‘other’ to mainstream theatre.

The process of ‘othering’ by which the potential universality of Indigenous works is continuously ignored or denied by ‘mainstream’ audiences and commentators has been noted by

many. Playwright Drew Hayden Taylor in an article for the *Globe and Mail* discussed Cardinal's recent show and first multi-character play, *Too Good to Be True*, observing that while many members of the cast, crew, and creative team were Indigenous, "there is nothing particularly Indigenous about the play." Hayden Taylor writes, "I found it refreshing, as not everything in our lives is a direct comment or the byproduct of our aboriginal heritage - sometimes eating a pizza is just eating a pizza (on Italian bannock). When I watch a hockey game, it's not a reflection of a treaty signed 200 years ago."¹⁰ Here Hayden Taylor points out that a one-dimensional view of Indigenous-led performances is a symptom of settler audiences' limiting expectations, which could well be said to apply to my own, particularly in choosing to focus on *Huff's* Indigeneity and reading the show through my settler perspective. Noting a particular reviewer's inability to let go of some characters' Indigeneity, Hayden concludes, "it seems you cannot expand the bounds of what the dominant culture perceives Indigenous people and theatre to be - or do." Hayden's writing here speaks to a trend of one-way interculturality, which Jill Carter referenced when she observed in a panel that, "settlers never ask for Indigenous interpretations of the canon" (Carter, "Directing Across Distance"). This trend is also evidenced in the unequal intercultural relations that Ric Knowles observes as often being perpetuated in intercultural theatre practice—for example, in Patrice Pavis's "hourglass model that posits a one-way flow of information" (*Theatre & Interculturalism*, 26)—but it can also extend outside the bounds of theatremaking to the larger conditions of production and reception of the theatre show.

¹⁰ It is perhaps worth noting how Hayden's characterization of Indigeneity here seems to be grounded in tropes or Western stereotypes including the harmful conceptualization of Indigenous peoples as a product of the past (connecting being Indigenous with "a treaty signed 200 years ago") rather than considering Indigeneity as an identity that can be lived and inhabited in the present or future.

I have put Cardinal's Indigenous body at the forefront of my reading of *Huff*, and in so doing have foreclosed the show's universalist possibilities. My reading here says more about me than it does Cardinal, and demonstrates that interculturality is on some level always a product of the beholder. To pronounce something as 'intercultural' is to suggest the presence of two or more cultures that meet in this space of 'inter,' and yet as Holledge and Tompkins write, "Culture is located in the construction of the self (or the subject position) and in the context for that self" (4). Indeed, for them "[a]ny understanding of culture is inevitably refracted through one's own experiences, or 'identity spaces'" (4). I take this phrase to mean that not only is our own culture constructed at the level of the self, but that so too are our perceptions of others' cultures, including that crucial line of difference that defines interculturality. Commenting on their book, Ric Knowles writes that Holledge and Tompkins, "treat the site(s) of performance - whether considered to be the (female) bodies, the theatrical spaces, the postcolonial nations, or the transnational marketplaces in which it takes place - as sites of negotiation of the meanings that constitute both culture and human, female subjectivity" (*Theatre & Interculturalism* 38). Just as they "analyse the female performing body as the site of intercultural encounter" (38), I reflexively investigate my own *spectating* body as the site where interculturality is produced. In my experience of *Huff*, interculturalism is a space of projection that operates on the boundary between the real and fictional.

Conclusion

Along with the numerous limitations of my first-person reading, there are also many benefits. My experience of the show is not necessarily generalizable to that of other settler audience members, nor does it speak to the experience or designs of the performer and/or the

show's creators. However, flawed and limited as this first-person perspective may be, one of the goals of this chapter is to establish the value to be found within such case studies of individualized audience response, and what such an approach can add to the richness of theatre writing and performance analysis. My consideration of direct address as a relational practice, one that plays out in the relationship between performers and audience, prompts consideration of not only the general audience, but the specific. This chapter particularly is engaged with the role of situated positionality in this performer-audience exchange, and foregrounds how turning the critical lens towards the audience can enrich more traditional dramatic or theoretical readings of theatre.

My reading of *Huff* has allowed me to explore some of the nuances of audience experience. In an interview with the producing company Native Earth Performing Arts about the show, dramaturg and director Karin Randoja offered an intriguing note about *Huff*'s impact on audiences—one which seemed in some ways to resonate with my own experience:

This show has proven to be a powerful experience for many people who have seen it," recalls Randoja. "It's something about how the show re-arranges something in the viewer – something in their brain, or their DNA or their heart or a combination. Many people walk out changed and not the same person they were when they walked into the theatre" ("Karin Randoja").

Through its detailed engagement with feeling and differentiated audience reaction, my exploration of *Huff* in this chapter offers some suggestions as to how this ineffable effect described Randoja might work—especially for settler spectators. In so doing, it demonstrates the potential of such focused inquiry to begin to entangle some of the complexities of emotional or affective audience response.

A final takeaway of this chapter, returning to an earlier topic, is that *Huff*'s challenge to notions of action and passivity also allows us to rethink theatrical participation. While it doesn't

fit the prototypical model of such theatre, *Huff*, through its implication of the audience, could be understood as a participatory or immersive work. Despite a lack of physical audience participation typically associated with these genres, the way the show aestheticizes audience experience as a key element of its artistic effect fits with Adam Alston's definition of immersive theatre (cited above) in its aestheticization of audience experience (9). Many theatre scholars, following after Rancière and others, have critiqued unchallenged but widely-held views about the emancipatory potential and inherent political productivity of participatory and immersive theatre. As Helen Freshwater puts it, "participation does not necessarily amount to empowerment" (62). Furthermore, scholars are increasingly exposing the ideological investments of these supposedly 'free' and 'open' forms. As Laura Levin has pointed out, the perception of an "unmediated and undifferentiated landscape of interpersonal exchange," in an environmental theatre production resulting from the removal of the proscenium arch or 'frame,' "fails to account for the ways in which the frame is not merely a material entity found in theatre but also something that we have psychically internalized and project onto the world" (94).

Royona Mitra looks to *rasa*, the art reception theory of the Indian *Natyashastra*, to argue that "immersion can...be theorized and experienced as an embodied, psycho-physical state that transpires interstitially between any audience, any artist and any art that is primarily premised on gestural dimensions of communication, and regardless of interactivity" (90). In so doing she "decentr[es] the discourse of immersion by considering concepts beyond Western and Anglophone thinking on immersive theatre spectatorship" (90). These scholars and others have shifted conversations in the field away from simple equations of physical participation and political empowerment towards a more nuanced and complex understanding of theatrical participation.

Huff conceived of as a participatory or immersive work not only furthers Mitra's work of "dismantling the problematic binary between active spectatorship and agency, and passive spectatorship and oppression" (91), but offers the opportunity to more broadly consider what the addition of a decolonizing lens adds to theories of participation in the theatre. My reading of *Huff* suggests that as discussions about participatory theatre move from binaristic understandings of participatory and/or immersive experience ('physical participation = good,' 'passive watching = bad') towards the specific *qualities* of particular experiences, scholars should equally be aware of and focus on the impact of the individual participant in the quality of these interactions. This might be more obvious in certain kinds of theatrical experiences than others (for example, the sheer physical inaccessibility of a lot of immersive theatre makes it difficult for many wheelchair users to participate), however the underlying conclusion that *Huff* draws is that in participatory or immersive performance the WHO is participating matters.

Many recent discussions about participation in the theatre have been influenced by Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*. Rancière's perspective, together with the popularity of postdramatic theatre, has contributed to an ongoing movement whereby many scholars and theatermakers reject the notion of a 'universal' understanding of the audience as a singular form (see also Freshwater), and move towards an understanding of theatre audiences through the individual spectator. Yet Rancière's maxim around the 'equality of intelligence,' namely, that all individual spectator experiences matter and carry political potential, seems almost entirely to do away with the particular context and circumstances of these experiences. Claire Bishop has offered a similar critique regarding the broader social turn in the arts, noting that: "intersubjective relations are not an end in themselves, but serve to explore and disentangle a more complex knot of social concerns about political engagement, affect, inequality,

narcissism, class, and behavioural protocols” (39). However, while Bishop argues that it is important to “[examine] each artistic practice within its own singular historical context and the political valencies of its era” (40), my analysis of *Huff* goes further to argue that analyses of the effect of political potential of participatory art need to go beyond an examination of the artistic practices that surround each particular art piece to also understand how these pieces are received by their differentiated audiences.

The importance that *Huff* reveals of the ‘who’ is participating is a very significant concern throughout intercultural theatre broadly—and relates to Knowles’ question of “who benefits”? (41). This chapter has established that not only is culture produced, created moment-by-moment, but that the notion of the intercultural encounter is produced by the viewer at the moment of viewing and through other expectations surrounding the event. This chapter and the rest of this dissertation work towards Holledge and Tompkins’ call for more investigations of “audience-stage relations” (182-83) by positing how this interculturality operates in specific theatrical circumstances, enriching scholarly understandings of intercultural theatre along the way.

CHAPTER FOUR: QUEERING RELATIONALITY: RADICAL INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN
LAAKKULUK WILLIAMSON BATHORY AND EVALYN PARRY'S *KIINALIK: THESE*

SHARP TOOLS

In the preceding chapters, I've discussed how direct audience address is employed by theatremakers to investigate questions of interculturalism and relationality both within the theatrical pieces themselves and by staging an intercultural encounter between the performer and audience. *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, the main focus of this chapter, explores the notion of intercultural encounter both theoretically and through its performer-audience relations, but the subject matter of the show is also based on this real-life encounter that occurred between its two key performers.

Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools is an award-winning autobiographical show starring two women: Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, an Inuk artist from Iqaluit (or “from the North” as it is figured in the play) and Evalyn Parry, a white, queer artist from Toronto (“from the South”). The play explores their relationship, beginning with their meeting on an Arctic expedition and following through their subsequent artistic collaboration which resulted in the show. It also covers North/South relations, related colonial wrongs, and the global climate change crisis, throughout a larger examination of how art helps people to navigate their positions as individuals and their identification with their environments and within larger social and cultural groups.

Through Parry and Williamson Bathory's interactions with each other, their address to the audience, and their artistic explorations—including Williamson Bathory's fantastic performance of *uaajeernej* mask dance—I argue that *Kiinalik* invites a kind of queer relationality that I call “radical intersubjectivity.” Using Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* and other

important performance-based queer theory texts, I examine how the show uses direct address and an openness to sexuality as a way to queer the performer-audience relationship, asking audiences to orient toward each other in a model of relationality built on a “politics of encountering” (Ahmed *Strange Encounters* 180). The show puts forward a politics of encountering as the way to approach not only close interpersonal relations, but systemic relations like those between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and human relations with the environment.

Before I continue on, I want to offer a brief note on terms. “Relationality,” and the concept of being in relation with others, is a constant theme of both this chapter and larger dissertation. As noted in my introduction, while my understanding of these terms is grounded largely in their basic definitions—having to do with being in relation with someone or something—the concept of relationality is also heavily embedded in thousands of years of Indigenous epistemology. For example, Cora Weber-Pillwax names “Relationality” as one of three key ‘R’s’ of Indigenous research methodology (the other two being “Respect” and “Reciprocity”; qtd in Wilson 58). Such histories may have inspired the largely non-Indigenous settler-scholars from whom I first borrowed this term. While delving further into Indigenous or Inuit-specific epistemologies would undoubtedly produce a strong reading of the show, because this particular case study more any other is grounded in the nuances of my subjective experience of the piece, I have chosen to keep this analysis of *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* focused more on the particularities of my situated experience as a settler scholar, drawing on theory that can understand this experience.

Defining queerness

Before I begin my analysis of *Kiinalik* I will first unpack what I mean when I say that the show takes a queer approach. My choice to examine the show through a queer lens is not ungrounded, as it was first produced in Toronto in 2017 by Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (Buddies for short), the oldest and longest-running queer-specific theatre in the world. The question of the show's queerness is actually raised meta-reflexively within it, when, as they discuss their plans for *Kiinalik*, Williamson Bathory wonders if by virtue of being produced by a queer company like Buddies the show needs to be queer. Parry (who was until recently Artistic Director of Buddies) responds to this question by saying, "Well I'm queer, and I'm doing this show with you." Parry's response is one that conceptualizes queer theatre as theatre that is done by queer (that is, 2SLGBTQIA+) people; and yet the show can also be read as queer under of a more expansive definition of queerness.

This kind of more expansive definition is taken up by feminist and queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick writes in her book *Tendencies* that "one of the things that 'queer' can refer to [is] the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (7). Included in these "constituent elements" of sexuality and gender (of which any diversion from the 'norm' signifies queerness) are not only one's gender identity or expression or choice of sexual and romantic partners, but many other small and various ways that gendered and sexual identities and behaviours are dictated by mainstream culture. These include elements that are not seemingly explicitly related to sex and gender, such as "your main locus of emotional bonds" which Sedgwick writes are "supposed to reside in your preferred sexual partner" (7). Sedgwick's

definition here thus encapsulates anything that goes against gendered and sexual norms that seek to organize people “into a seamless and univocal whole” (7). The ‘univocal whole’ is one defined by societal hegemonic powers, a monolith that is thus a hetero-patriarchal, white supremacist, colonial, ableist, transmisogynist construction. ‘Queerness,’ then, emerges from anyone or anything that challenges these norms: thus, for example, the uajaernej form’s rejection of colonial ideas of sexuality imposed on Inuit communities can also be understood as a ‘queer’ act, even if its conception of sexuality isn’t identified with or directly related to 2SLGBTQIA+ lived experience.

More expansive definitions of queerness gave rise to the popularity of the usage of queer as a verb. As Sedgwick writes in *Tendencies*, “The queer of these essays is transitive—multiply transitive...Keenly, it is relational, and strange” (vii). *Q2Q: Queer Canadian Theatre and Performance*’s editors examine the importance of verb-based queerness in terms of the explosive power and political potential of queer theatre: “one intervention associated with the reclaiming of ‘queer’ in the 1990s, especially among queer theorists in the academy, was to think of the word as much as a transitive verb as a noun: to *queer* something (or someone) as a strategy of both relationality and of quasi-Brechtian alienation or defamiliarization” (6). This notion of queerness as relational is particularly important to this chapter as well as my larger dissertation project, however I want to take a moment to highlight the other key function of “queering” mentioned in the above passage: queering as an act of unsettling. The editors elaborate on this, observing how one of their contributors “in suggesting that queer performance is a ‘prototype’ to ‘expand,’ ‘push,’ and ‘transgress’ boundaries, is asking how we might think of queer as playing with, upsetting, and defying theatrical norms, making the familiar strange, and generally disrupting the expanded teleologies of aesthetic production and reception” (6).

These understandings of queerness illuminate how the term is a relevant, useful, and intuitive frame through which to read my study of direct audience address as a relational theatrical device. Indeed, direct address has a clear history within queer performance. Jill Dolan, tracing the queer performance movement of the late twentieth century, observes that “[q]ueer performance theorists reacted against realism’s conservatism by championing post-modernist styles and genres that refuse to observe the conventions of fourth-wall domesticity” (15). Dolan then more explicitly observes that within queer performance traditions “characters often directly addressed spectators, refusing to observe the compact in which actors pretend spectators aren’t there, watching” (16).

The notion of relational queerness—though she doesn’t engage with this term specifically—is key to what Sara Ahmed explores in *Queer Phenomenology*. In the book Ahmed works from the concept of ‘orientation’ as in ‘sexual orientation,’ and applies a queer lens in order to explore how phenomenology is relational, grounded in particular ways of thinking and being or ‘orientations’ that are dependent particular subject positions. This approach asks about the concept of orientation in phenomenology in order to understand the generation of queer objects and how we as subjects become orientated in certain directions, but also “reveal[s] something about the ‘orientation’ of phenomenology, or even of philosophy itself” (3).

One other important element of Sedgwick’s discussion of queerness is how it is defined by the first person singular. She writes, “[a] word so fraught as “queer” is— fraught with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, excitement—never can only denote; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locutionary position itself. Anyone’s use of ‘queer’ about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else” (8). How this manifests in my work is that

my reading of *Kiinalik* is defined not only by the queer theorists I cite, but is crucially in relation to my own identification with queerness. My experiences of the show are filtered heavily through my experiences as a cisgender queer woman, specifically an ace (asexual and aromantic) person. Thus, this reading is especially driven by a kind of “ace queerness,” one that still, as *Q2Q* characterizes queer performance, “remains unabashedly sexual and rooted in the body” (*Q2Q* Intro, 6) and yet engages with the body and sexuality in a different way. Through this lens I read my experience of, in particular, the sexual nature of the *uaajeernej* or Greenlandic mask dance that is performed by Williamson Bathory and takes up a substantial portion of the show’s second half. I read *uaajeernej*’s sexuality not through a heteropatriarchal construction of sexuality that is grounded in reproductive futurity, nor through a more general sex-positive queer reading that looks at sexual acts as sites of sexual pleasure and sometimes romantic intimacy. Instead, I read it through an ‘ace-queerness’ that examines and foregrounds the more metaphoric possibilities of sexual acts/behaviour—particularly interpersonal connection and intimacy between individuals: the act of “knowing someone” traced back from its metaphorical sexualized meaning to its more literal one.

Importantly my queer reading of *Kiinalik* and *uaajeernej* is conducted from my own situated position, which aligns more closely with Parry’s than with Williamson Bathory’s. While the performance of *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* in a space like *Buddies* (one that is set up in acknowledgement of and often opposition to capitalist heteropatriarchy) before largely settler and non-Inuit audiences opens up queer readings of *uaajeernej*—in particular expansive readings that find queerness in any non-hegemonic performances of gender or sexuality—it is important to acknowledge that that doesn’t necessarily mean that *uaajeernej* could or would be considered queer in an Inuit context or through Inuit worldviews. Thus, as a settler with limited knowledge

of Inuit cultures, I do not seek to impose my individual experience and subsequent queer reading of *uaajeernej* on the dance as a fact or as Williamson Bathory's intention (which is why I talk about its 'queer potential'). At the same time, I don't think that Williamson Bathory's non-identification with the term queer means that *uaajeernej* is necessarily NOT queer in an Inuit context; this could perhaps be better understood with more perspectives from Inuit folks, especially those who are queer-identified, and, importantly, is not up to me to determine.

Encountering *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*

Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools premiered at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto in October 2017 and has since toured nationally and internationally. My accounts of the show are grounded in several performances I saw, first at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto 2017, then at Espace Libre in Montreal in March 2019, and finally back in Toronto in June 2019 as part of the international Luminato Festival. Over the years the show has undergone some (though not significant) changes. While I occasionally make reference to specific moments from more recent variations of the show, the bulk of my analysis is grounded in the 2017 Toronto Buddies run, largely because that production is what the show's archival footage captures. Unlike the other case studies in this dissertation, there is no published script for *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, and so I read the show's dramaturgy through both my live experience of the show, and repeat viewings of this archival footage. Accordingly, all descriptions of the performance's mise-en-scène and stage action, and all of the punctuation and phrasing of direct quotations are my own. Finally, unlike the earlier chapters in this dissertation, this chapter does not draw on interview material from the show's creators. While Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and Evalyn Parry were both contacted about an interview, due to the artists' busy schedules in the end it was not

feasible. This ultimately worked out, as this chapter contains some of the most involved analysis in the dissertation. My subjective experience of *Kiinalik* is inextricably wrapped up in my analysis of the production, and so while there are still places where the artists' voices and perspectives are featured (through interviews and features about them and the show), this chapter is well suited to the highly-personalized reading that emerges.

The show, described in promotional material as “a concert and a conversation” (“2019-2020 Season”), takes the form of a series of what could be called ‘movements’; episodes defined much more by feeling and theme than any unity of time or action. The mode of the show varies: a primary mode is autobiographical duologue, with some sections defined by direct address, some involving dialogue between the two performers. *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* is fundamentally about how art carries cultural knowledge, epistemologies, and ways of being towards and living in the world. It demonstrates how art provides a way for individuals to navigate their place in culture and tradition and offers stability, joy, and consolation, while also carrying the potential to transmit toxic colonial mentalities. It showcases various types of art throughout, including tattoos, folk song, throat singing, spoken word, theatre, and *uaajeernej* (Greenlandic mask dance). Through the show's movements, Williamson Bathory and Parry shift between recounting moments in their relationship and the show's development; discussing familial and national histories, both individual and shared, and their respective artistic practices; demonstrating said art; and in one section engaging the audience in group discussion. While Williamson Bathory and Parry are the primary presences on stage, two of their collaborators are also with them for the duration of the show. Cris Derksen, who sits just off and to the side of the stage, underscores much of the show on the cello. Elysha Poirier, one of the show's co-creators, runs live video for the performance. A final co-creator, director Erin Brubacher, is not on site.

The set of the show is simple and fairly conventional for theatre production. The live video presented by Poirier is projected onto a large screen composed of two smaller screens placed side-by-side, with a black line marking their separation running down the middle. Throughout the piece this screen shows shifting, dynamic close-ups of Arctic land, water, and ice, and what appear to be satellite-imaged views of the territory. In front of the screen the stage stretches out, a raised black platform with a step leading down to the floor of the auditorium from which the raked audience seating rises. The exact configuration of this set-up varies slightly depending on the theatre in which the touring production is staged. In all configurations, lining the set or the front of the stage are rectangular blocks of ice, pressed flush against the side of the stage, and lit from within. These blocks slowly melt throughout the show. On the stage, there are several microphones, instruments, and other tools used by the performers.

As I mentioned above, in line with many forms of intercultural theatre, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* centres around a moment of encounter between artists of differing cultures: in this case Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and Evalyn Parry. The show's central encounter features heavily in its promotional material. For example, on the Great Canadian Theatre Company's website (the company that produced *Kiinalik*'s early 2020 run in Ottawa), the production is described as follows:

A concert and a conversation, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* is the meeting place of two people, and the North and South of our country. Inuk artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and queer theatre-maker Evalyn Parry met on an Arctic expedition from Iqaluit to Greenland.... (“2019-2020 Season”)

The “meeting place” is presented both as the literal site of encounter on the Arctic expedition as well as a more metaphoric site where minds and cultures meet, and serves as the point of departure for the entire show. The production's central encounter is also embedded in its title, on either side of its dividing colon. *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, is made up of two phrases—one in

Inuktitut and one in English—which represent two disparate thoughts and important theatrical threads (which I will explore in greater detail later on) that are brought into encounter with each other by a connecting colon. Each component stands in for one of the performers’ throughlines in the show. “Kiinalik,” as Williamson Bathory explains, is an Inuktitut phrase that describes sharpness, and means, literally, ‘has a face.’ When referring to her hunting knife or ‘ulu,’ she would say “Ulu kiinalik,” meaning “My ulu has a face.” Williamson Bathory then explains, “If I cut for too long ... the blade gets dull,” in which case the accompanying Inuktitut phrase means “my knife has no face.” She then follows this definition by explaining, “My face must remain sharp lest it ceases to exist.” The knife is associated with the cutting of seal meat, an important part of the Inuit way of life. The knife blade, Williamson Bathory says, reflects her face and “it reflects my womenfolk.” Thus the metaphor of needing to keep her face sharp can be seen to refer to the need for Inuit resilience in the face of ongoing colonial violence. Parry’s central thread is posed in call and response with Williamson Bathory’s. While Williamson Bathory’s tool is her ulu, Parry’s tools are her folk songs, which serve as agents of colonial violence in their refiguring of the North and erasure of Inuit as subjects of Canada’s colonizing project. While Williamson Bathory’s arc in the production shows how art is a tool for Inuit resistance to colonialism, as well as resilience and joy, Parry’s arc is about her reckoning with and challenging the colonial violence inherited through her folk songs, the sharp tools which were “handed down without instruction.”

Parry’s arc highlights the dangers the show might have fallen into, those of the “fraught territory” of intercultural theatre with its history of “cultural imperialism, appropriation, and colonisation” (Knowles *Theatre and Interculturalism* 1). In particular, white, queer artists like Parry have a history of invoking the colonial construct of the ‘other’ to explore how white queer

folks are marginalized within mainstream white society. These presentations typically reinforce simplistic and essentializing stereotypes about nonwhite peoples, and ignore the existence of queer people of colour who face othering due to their race as well as their sexuality. Other dangerous patterns in intercultural performance include inequitable interaction between the cultures involved (as occurs, for example, in cultural appropriation) or the tailoring of narratives for monolithic (typically white) audiences. Some of these dangers are referenced by Williamson Bathory in the show, when she mentions her initial hesitation to engage in the project, observing, “all too often non-Inuit come up with concepts that have a ‘just add Inuit artist’ section.”

However, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* manages to avoid these traps as its framing and interrogation of the encounter, its focus on relationality, and the equal contribution of its artists, serve as the grounds for its anti-colonial critique. Williamson Bathory acknowledges the last of these when she observes during the show, “We create for both the North and the South. We can’t be defined only by our otherness.”

Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools’s central encounter is the staging ground for its exploration of how people use art to navigate their identities as individuals and their identification within their environments and larger social groups. Significantly, however, the encounter is not merely a static staging ground for difference. Rather, Williamson Bathory and Parry’s meeting is like one of Sara Ahmed’s “strange encounters” of “international feminism” (*Strange Encounters* 163) in that it has an effect both on the story and the participants, particularly on Parry. Ahmed also reflects on the notion of encounter in her later book *Queer Phenomenology*, observing that “accidental or chance encounters...redirect us and open up new worlds. Sometimes, such encounters might come as the gift of a lifeline, and sometimes ...[s]uch sideways moments

might generate new possibilities” (19). The show reveals how meeting Williamson Bathory became for Parry one of these positive encounters.

This encounter is crucially not just a theoretical or rhetorical exercise but an embodied one, and the show at length explores this notion through its themes and the bodies of the performers. Sara Ahmed explores the centrality of the body to experiences of (dis)orientation. She writes, “The body provides us with a perspective: the body is ‘here’ as a point from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds, as being both more and less over there. The ‘here’ of the body does not simply refer to the body, but to ‘where’ the body dwells” (8). Our bodies are locative, not just material objects. They cite our positionality and through their locations, shape our understandings and experiences of the world. Furthermore, they are shaped by outside forces. Ahmed observes that, “Bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the co-habitation or sharing of space” (54). This is where the power of encounter potentially takes hold. Over time repeated interactions/experiences of particular locations shape how bodies operate and establish the normative. The encounter therefore “can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action, which puts some objects and not others in reach” (66).

The production also presents the making and experience of art as an embodied act. This point is emphasized in various ways. First, *Kiinalik* showcases highly embodied art forms, such as tattooing where the art is crafted directly onto the body. *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* also reveals how art carries ideology which inscribes itself upon the bodies that practice various artistic forms. For example, in her performance and critical deconstruction of Stan Rogers’ famous folk song “Northwest Passage,” Parry, with live recording and playback technology, first

creates her own backing track on guitar, recording and building up the elements of musical accompaniment before her audience. This act highlights the layering of performance as an iterative embodied act. This notion is carried further when Parry sings that the colonial ideologies contained in the song are “colonizing the grooves of the mind”: literally inscribing themselves upon the body. While art may inscribe harmful colonial mindsets, it also can promote more positive and affirming ones. An example of this is contained in Williamson Bathory’s stirring spoken word piece that overturns assumptions about the darkness and bleakness of the Arctic to celebrate the wonder and comfort of long Arctic nights. (She asks, “I wonder who’s awake in this night? A snowy owl with her gleaming yellow eyes swiftly killed a hare, foxes sniffing the empty food tins, lovers suddenly awoken by their swollen and slightly sore genitalia.”)

Finally, bodies in the show also serve as a way to explore the interconnectivity and relationality of living things. It is through our bodies that we encounter the world and others, and that we can learn about the world at large. The show uses the metaphor of the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the body which connects its various parts, to explore the interconnectivity of earth’s ecosystems. The earth and the body come to stand for one another as the show uses the metaphor to explain global warming: how what’s happening at one part of the body impacts its other components. Parry connects Southern pollution to Arctic ice depletion singing, “The breath of my city, the melting of your body,” and then, from an even greater understanding of interconnectivity: “The breath of the city is melting this body.”

Returning to encounter after exploring its embodied nature, the notion of the encounter is not only engaged thematically within the drama, but was also proactively taken on in the show’s process of development. In order to set up an equitable meeting place, Williamson Bathory

requested that the creative team of the show relocate to Iqaluit for the show's development process, which they did for several weeks in early 2017. It was also important to Williamson Bathory that *Kiinalik* not just be a show that was created and performed for Southern audiences; if it was going to be performed in Toronto, Parry's place of residence, it needed to be performed in her place of residence, in Iqaluit, too. The move was a conscientious response to a history of unidirectional and disconnected interculturalism present throughout both intercultural theatre practice and Inuit-settler relations. This history is explicitly addressed by Williamson Bathory in a CBC special on her artistic work: "[w]hen you think of an Inuk artist you think of printmakers and carvers. The expectation is that you make something to send it away. By making sure that we create our art in our own words, in our own home we're repatriating our own practices" ("Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory"). This move of the show's creative team was also relational. While Williamson Bathory had had a fair amount of experience in the South, the other team members who were about to undertake the creation of this show about North and South relations, had none in the North. By insisting on the location of rehearsals Williamson Bathory put the other creators in valuable contact with a place about which they were making art.

One important point of note is that while the show was carefully designed and constructed by the creative team to speak equally to Northern and Southern, Inuit and settler audiences, I only saw it as performed for Southern audiences which no doubt had a bearing on how I approached and understood the production in my encounter with it. In acknowledging its multiple audiences, *Kiinalik* also foregrounds the space it holds for multiple viewing positions. For example, being a queer, Southern, settler I have more in common with—and thus read the play more through—Parry's experiences than Williamson Bathory's. Inevitably, while my positioning opened certain readings of the show it also foreclosed others, and thus what follows

represents only one way into what *Kiinalik* is offering. For example, not being an Inuktitut speaker I didn't understand much of what Williamson Bathory spoke in the language, which made up about twenty percent of her dialogue (although some of the Inuktitut was translated and repeated by Williamson Bathory into English.)

Direction and (dis)orientation

The opening of *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* features the performers walking out on stage and taking up positions facing the audience, each standing at a mic on either side of the split screen. This staging is a staple of the show, one which designates their discreteness as individuals who yet share the same space, indicated by a unified image that plays out across the split screen behind them. The first lines are sung by Parry, in counter-rhythm to Williamson Bathory's throat singing: "There is a compass inside of me, pulling me forward relentlessly. I try to follow, try to follow. Where is it taking me?" These opening positions set up the conditions for the encounter between the two women: Williamson Bathory already settled and grounded in her Inuit artistic practices, and Parry unsettled and disoriented, seeking direction. The positioning of the two performers, each facing and directly addressing the audience, places them in relation with their spectators from the very beginning of the piece and invites spectators to consider this moment of encounter between us and them. Parry's opening line marks her attempt at wayfinding, a mood which carries her through the show. Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* is also concerned with wayfinding. The opening chapter, "Find Your Way," puzzles what it means to be orientated, "how it is that we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn. If we know where we are when we turn this way or that way, then we are orientated" (1). Starting with the concept of sexual orientation, in which individual

bodies are oriented towards or away from certain objects of desire, Ahmed investigates how orientation works as a concept more broadly. Ahmed's theorization of phenomenology of feminist embodiment makes this a central text for my analysis, as it is well in line with Parry and Williamson Bathory's journeys and observations in the show.

Kiinalik's first movement details Williamson Bathory and Parry's meeting on the Arctic expedition, and carries a pervasive mood of disorientation. This disorientation is experienced differently by each woman. For Parry, the expedition reveals the disorienting truth of what Williamson Bathory describes as the "paradox" of "real life in the Arctic," that "colonization, industrialization and climate change are all the same thing for Inuit." An example of this paradox lies in the disconnect between the aims and the means of the expedition. As Parry observes, "we learn about global water temperature rising, while our diesel fuel vessel sails through unacknowledged Inuit homelands." Disorientation interests Sara Ahmed because of how it exposes how bodies are orientated in space: "In order to become orientated, you might suppose that we must first experience disorientation. When we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think 'to think' about this point" (*Queer Phenomenology* 5). The experience of disorientation can make us realize that we were oriented in the first place, thus disorientation is a powerful source of knowledge about orientation. This characteristic of disorientation is especially important to Parry, who in the show is forced to reckon with uncomfortable truths about how she has been orientated in the world, influenced by the violent forces of settler colonialism.

For Williamson Bathory, disorientation comes in part from the Southern colonial perspective, imported to the North by the Southerners onboard the ship. On the expedition, "the ratio of scientists to Inuit is 100 to 4," and, "Inuit on board the ship are treated like visitors in

their own homeland.” At the time of the expedition Williamson Bathory is also dealing with the death of her father six months previous, leaving her and her family feeling unmoored. Ahmed writes that grief can be a powerful source of disorientation: “it is often loss that generates a new direction; when we lose a loved one, for instance, or when a relationship with a loved one ends, it is hard to simply stay on course because love is also what gives us a certain direction” (19). This understanding of loss through directionality is picked up by Williamson Bathory in an extended ship metaphor. She describes her family as “a bottom-heavy water craft,” helmed by her parents, and assisted by herself and her brother. She reports, “We sailed many waters and we were used to the swell beneath our feet.” Upon her father’s death, “we had to abandon our vessel,” and Williamson Bathory, “had to get onto a new boat.” The boat metaphor highlights the influence of orientation and direction on lived experience and our respective journeys through life. It also demonstrates how lives can be altered by key moments or turning points in which courses change, and disorientation takes hold.

While Williamson Bathory and Parry each have their own reasons to feel disoriented, disorientation is also a mood that pervades the whole first movement of the show, infiltrating the performers’ recollection of the expedition through the metaphor of seasickness. Williamson Bathory says, “We’re in the middle of Davis Strait, and the waves are starting to get bigger and everyone on board starts to feel a little bit queasy.” The mood of disorientation is also captured in a song that underscores this first section and also utilizes this metaphor of seasickness which draws on the literal experience of being on a ship to figuratively convey feelings of unease. The song is sung by Parry who accompanies herself on guitar, and the main refrain is as follows:

When your eyes can’t see what your body is feeling,
When the waves are rolling and you’re trying to stand,
You’re in the belly of the vessel, you can’t see the land.
You can’t digest what you can’t understand.

You're seasick. Seeeeeeeea--sick.

The show's use of seasickness to convey disorientation not only capitalizes on its vessel-bound location but imagines the feeling as a state of unease arising from a disconnection between the mind, body, and the land. In the above passage disconnection with the land manifests as the rolling waves, which upend the stability of the body because, "you can't see the land." The eyes and body are also misaligned, and a lack of comprehension fuels the bodily feeling of indigestion. Such a vision of disorientation as misalignment is upheld by Ahmed. Since "[o]rientation involves aligning body and space: we only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing*" (*Queer Phenomenology* 7). A misalignment of the body and space or a splitting of the body across space (such as conveyed in Williamson Bathory's statement "my body's on the ship, but my mind is on another made-up vessel") causes disorientation.

The question then becomes, how does one get out of this disorientation? Ahmed asks, "[h]ow do we begin to know or to feel where we are, or even where we are going" (6)? One way to address this question is "by lining ourselves up with the features of the grounds we inhabit, the sky that surrounds us, or the imaginary lines that cut through maps" (6). To address a misalignment, we must re-align within our environments, and by turning in particular directions we can line ourselves up. Thus, to reorient requires a change in perspective and a physical and mental re-alignment. As Parry sings, "...we must find the horizon. 'Til your eyes see the waves and your body knows this is the ocean." Meanwhile, the experience of disorientation can be a useful source of information, for it makes clear where and how we are oriented. Ahmed suggests that the experience of recovering from disorientation might teach us "what it means to be orientated in the first place" (6).

While Parry's encounters onboard the ship are a source of disorientation, at the same time they mark for her a clear turning point. A turning point is a moment in which one changes direction. Ahmed observes that: "Life...is full of turning points." This turning might "take subjects in different directions. Depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view" (*Queer Phenomenology* 15). When Parry opens with the line about the "compass inside of" her, she is describing the act of seeking direction and the redirection which she receives during the show. Ahmed explains that (how we occupy) space, "becomes a question of 'turning,' of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear, but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things" (6). Here critically the action of turning and redirection, an act of (re)orientation, is phrased in terms of being in relation to those (things) around us. In other words, (re)orientation is a question of relationality. These concepts of 'turning' and 'the encounter' are framed by *Kiinalik*'s use of direct address, which facilitates a moment of encounter as well as a potential 'turning point' for the audience as well as the performers. How have we responded to the policeman's 'hey, you!' and how will we respond now?

Relationality in *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*

Relationality, thinking about how we relate to and are in relation with others, is a key theme of the show. The performance engages with this theme on many levels, including through its set design. The base of the set is a glossy black stage, wider in the front than the back, which comes to a point in the centre, in a gentle peak like the prow of a ship. Between the slightly raised stage and the theatre floor from which raked seating rises, there's a single step, which is lined with thin blocks of ice, that are lit from inside and slowly begin to melt during the show.

The audience is set up facing the stage, divided into two key sections of raked seating on either side of the central aisle through which the audience enters. (This description is from the original run of the show at Buddies in Bad Times in Toronto; the set was adapted slightly to fit into each of its subsequent theatre spaces, though the key elements remained the same.) At the back of the stage rise two slightly uneven screens which are separated down the middle by a line like the pages of a book, or perhaps more aptly two colliding sheets of ice. At the same time, the narrowing of the stage at the front is like the thrust of an iceberg, and serves to push the performers together and out into the audience through its momentum in a kind of forced encounter. By creating the stage as a site of encounter, one that includes not just the performers, but also the audience members, *Kiinalik* visually sets up the discussions about relationality that follow. The suggestive positioning of this encounter in the Arctic is deliberate, and seeks to counteract a colonialist legacy of discussions about the North happening on Southern territory among people who may never have been there. Besides figuring this site of encounter, the set creates a dynamic backdrop for the performance and further sets up the show's focus on relationality. In a repeated staging strategy the performers stand side-by-side, facing forwards, each backgrounded by one side of the uneven screen. The split down the middle frames each performer in their isolation and highlights their discreteness as individuals. This is a key strategy of the performance; by establishing Williamson Bathory and Parry as discrete subjects who *can* meet, *Kiinalik* makes salient this meeting as a key part of the show and the foreground for discussions about relationality.

Following this initial setup, the theme of relationality is developed gradually through the show. In one moment, the performers discuss the vagus nerve, a nerve that runs the length of and connects much of the human body, from “brainstem to colon.” After describing this nerve's

winding route through the body, Williamson Bathory and Parry then impose this same web of connection on the land:

PARRY: (*spoken*) You can trace the lines of the map of a country, chart your way to the heart of a country, explore, stake a claim, go down in history, write your name on a spot on the map, claim you found it,

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: Look closer.

PARRY: Consider the lines,

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: the roads and waterways spread out in a vast network

PARRY: the nervous system of the continent -- a fine mesh, a filigree, reaching every extremity.

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: A living sentient system, where nothing is left alone. Everything is connected.

PARRY: Everything is felt.

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: If not at the point of original contact, then still, somewhere...

Between this passage and their description of the vagus nerve, the picture that Williamson Bathory and Parry paint is one of the interconnectivity of all things, from a micro to macro level. Because everything is connected, everything and everyone is related to everything and everyone else, which lays the groundwork for an understanding of relationality which is presented in the parts of the show that follow.

Another section in which Williamson Bathory and Parry explore and set up the concept of relationality occurs several minutes after their discussion of the vagus nerve. In this movement of the show the two performers go back and forth exchanging dates and moments in their lives, their parents' lives, and the history of Canada. They introduce the movement thus:

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: There are arcs of history

PARRY: Echoing back and forth

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: Calling to one another.

Each moment mentioned (such as Williamson Bathory and Parry's births, the explorer Martin Frobisher sets out for the Arctic) is accompanied by the year of its occurrence (1979, 1973,

1576) appearing on the screen behind them. The jumps between these moments at first seem erratic, leaping forwards and backwards in time; but it soon becomes clear that these points in time resonate with each other. Taken together they spell out different kinds of relationships and connections across history. One dominant theme among them is family, as Williamson Bathory and Parry trace their connections to the North through their parents, particularly their British fathers. They also draw connections between national events and personal ones, and cause and effect. For example, how the Greenpeace campaign against the seal hunt beginning in the 1970s, an organization with which Evalyn volunteered in the 1980s, led to food insecurity for Inuit preschoolers in the present day. Finally, this part of the show reveals troubling moments of dissonance. For example, while Evalyn's father is obsessed with and romanticizes the North and its connection to Canadian identity formation through folk song, Laakkuluk's father witnesses the forced relocation of Inuit from their homelands by the Canadian government.

A key technique for this section is juxtaposition. Rather than clearly explaining the relationship between these different moments in time Williamson Bathory and Parry place them side by side, and leave it up to audiences to determine how they relate. Sometimes these connections are quite obvious. For example, "1969: Pierre Elliot Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada struggles with how to be a government to Indigenous Peoples" is immediately followed by "2017: Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada struggles with how to be a government to Indigenous Peoples." Here the relationship between these two moments is a source of irony; it is a statement on how little things have changed in Crown-Indigenous relations in the past fifty years. For other moments the connection is more oblique. The operations of this juxtaposition and the work that is being asked of the audience is made clear to them in a moment of humour. Williamson Bathory, shifting briefly from the recap of moments to discuss personal attributes,

observes “I have flaws.” Parry then offers, “I’m from Toronto,” and is met with a burst of laughter from the audience. In this situation the humour only works because of the underlying understanding that the audience is supposed to be connecting the two, which instructs them to read an equivalence between these two statements: that being from Toronto is the same thing as having flaws. This moment is important because the audience’s recognition of the activity of connection becomes an important part of the show’s dramaturgy.

The next section of the show extends this exercise where the audience is implicitly asked to determine relationships. It begins when the performers interrupt their back-and-forth flow of moments with, “2017: You come into the theatre tonight.” This somewhat abrupt change, a clear acknowledgement of the audience, signals a shift, immediately placing the audience among the relations that performers have called forth and asked them to consider. This section further extends the direct address element of the piece, which up to this moment has been subtler and more implicit. The house lights come up, and the performers look out into the auditorium in order to ask questions of the audience. Williamson Bathory explains, “We’re going to take a small break now so that we can turn around in our seats, and talk to each other, meet new people, and talk about where we have family or connections in the North.” Parry adds, “Or perhaps where you have experience in the North, or where you’ve been in the North, how far you’ve been or what the North means to you.” What’s being asked of the audience in this exercise is to put themselves in relation to the North and with other audience members. (I wonder if in the version of the show performed in Iqaluit they asked their audience their perspectives on and experiences in the South).

After allowing a few minutes for discussion Williamson Bathory and Parry call the audience back and, using a projected map of the North, ask them to share the locations that they

talked about so that they can be pointed out on screen. The spectators name places and Williamson Bathory points them out by floating her hand over the correct spot on the digital map (which is at the same time being manipulated by Poirier in the booth, scrolling to different parts of the image). Importantly the map projected is not one that marks out the geopolitical territories that are the product of human politics, but is one constructed of satellite images that shows the land as it physically exists. This positioning exercise with the audience asks them to consider how the North is both relative and relational. By relative, as discussed above, I mean experienced individually dependent on perspective; so, to understand that the North is relative involves acknowledging that it means different things to different people. Relationality, on the other hand, while relying on an understanding of relativity, involves not just understanding that one's perspective is individual and others might differ, but engaging with and positioning oneself in regards to another specific, relative viewpoint. When called to reflect on their relationship to the North as relative, and then, via the experience of engaging with specific places on the map, audiences begin to enter into relation with the land itself.

The audience can understand this engaging in relation as important because of the way the show presents a failure of relations as action with serious consequences. For example, the show presents the failure of the Franklin expedition to find the Northwest Passage as a failure to be in relation with the land, one that resulted in the crew starving to death "in a land so full of food." The Canadian government's inability to recover Franklin's ship for over one-hundred-and-fifty years is characterized as failure of relations with the Inuit, since it was ultimately 'discovered' in an area that is called in Inuktitut "the Bay Where the Big Ship Sank." We can look at the contemporary Arctic expedition leaders' failure to be in relation with the land and its people as a source of the disorientation pervading the ship at the show's opening. For example,

whenever the expeditions disembarked for a land hike, they were led by gun handlers, “all older white men.” Williamson Bathory describes how the Inuit boys that followed, “all of them practiced hunters,” shifted their eyes with “such subtle disdain,” and then offers one more word: “dissonance.” The dissonance here arises from the expedition leaders’ overlooking the Inuit’s expertise in living on and safely navigating the land, “treating them like guests in their own homelands,” and taking on the position of explorers.

This thread of the importance of relationality and the establishment of good relations is carried through to the show’s end. It plays a role in each character’s throughline—with Parry’s increasing consciousness of relationality re-orienting her in a productive manner, while Williamson Bathory’s exploration of various Inuit artistic forms exposes the relational worldview embedded within them which helped her to heal from the grief of losing her father. *Kiinalik*’s final song, sung by Parry with Williamson Bathory, attempts to bring the show’s revelations together. This song marks the last stage in Parry’s journey throughout the show, where after understanding the harm of the folk songs that she was brought up on which serve as colonial tools, Parry collaborates with Williamson Bathory to write a new folk song in which this message of relationality is brought home. The song’s main refrain establishes connections between existing beings in relation: “the ice, your body, the land.” (Representative of the collaboration between the two women, this name is a reference to Williamson Bathory’s 2016 video installation piece at The Blackwood Gallery called, “Timiga, nunalu, sikulu,” or in English, “My body, the land and the ice” (“Timiga nunalu”).

In the song Parry explores the topic of relationality on both a macro and a micro scale by drawing on a metaphor connecting the body to the land. Accompanied by sweeping Arctic vistas on the screens behind her, the opening line of the song sets up a connection between sight and

breath: “If my lungs were eyes, I’d see the breath come into my own body.” This association between the eyes and the lungs (expanding into the larger body) continues with the line, “this vista is, vista is breathtaking,” which makes a direct connection between seeing something and its effect on the body’s ability to breathe. This is a reorienting metaphor about getting the body in alignment, and it positions itself as an important counter to the disembodied colonial gaze. It is through breathing, an intimate act of connection with the body, that one can re-embody this gaze by bringing different elements of the body back into relation with each other: “Take a breath, take a breath, take me back into my body.” This point is further illustrated by Williamson Bathory accompanying Parry via katajjaq or throat singing, an artform that involves the syncing of the breath and body, typically practiced between two Inuuk women as they hold each other’s arms and sing in an artistic contest. By the end of the song Parry’s advocacy for reconnection within the body turns into a larger call for the reconnection of the global body, pointing to a refusal to recognize the planet’s interconnectedness (or inter-relationality) as a key factor in continued and catastrophic global warming. Parry first sings, “the breath of my city, the melting of your body,” which then, in a final acknowledgment of interconnectedness, does away with personal/possessive pronouns and merges into, “The breath of the city is melting this body.

Relationality and direction

Returning briefly to the language of the encounter within the show, we can see that it is used to refer to directions as well as individuals. The earlier-cited promotional material says that the show is “the meeting place of two people and the North and South of our country.” This phrasing figures Williamson Bathory and Parry both as individuals and as representatives of specific regions of the country, regions defined here by cardinal directions. The wording also

opens up the notion that these directions mean something on their own and are also themselves participants in this meeting. As a whole, the show depicts the relationship between North and South as the site of a continual failure of relations on the part of the South.

To set up this failure of North-South relations, the show first demonstrates that these directions are relative, that is, that they mean different things to different people. A prime example of this occurs when Parry discusses her family's move to Ottawa as a child:

PARRY: ...that first winter my eyelashes freeze together and I think something is wrong with my eyes. Ottawa's the furthest North I've ever been. When I meet Laakkuluk, it's new to think of Ottawa being South.

WILLIAMSON BATHORY: My brother works in Alert, which is just South of the North Pole.

Williamson Bathory and Parry's discussion of direction here is in line with Sara Ahmed's observations that directions—even the seemingly fixed cardinal directions—are relative (14). For example, Ahmed points out how the division of the world into East and West is based in politics rather than objective fact. She notes, "what is 'East' is actually what is east of the prime meridian, the zero point of longitude. The East...is thus orientated; it acquires its direction only by taking a certain point of view as given" (14). Importantly, this point of view is not neutral, and it is, in fact, asymmetrical. Foregrounding her later discussions of orientalism, Ahmed observes how the division of the world into East and West supports a worldview in which "the East is associated with women, sexuality and the exotic, with what is 'behind' and 'below' the West, as well as what is on 'the other side'" (just as, she argues, the right side of the body is seen as more powerful than the left) (14).

Ahmed's points about the asymmetry between East and West could just as easily be applied to North and South. While *Kiinalik's* map exercise exposes the relativity of these terms in a physical sense, the show also undergoes an exploration of the relativity of 'North' and

‘South’ as concepts and constructs that are heavily “orientated.” In the show, Southern ideas about the North are embodied in particular in the figure of Parry’s father, a folk singer, who passed away when she was a young woman. The North held a firm place in Parry’s father’s heart, even though he’d never been, and the show implies that Parry’s decision to go on the Arctic expedition that frames the story is influenced by a longing to connect with him by visiting a place that was important to him.

Parry’s father had a strong connection to Hamilton-born folk singer Stan Rogers’ song “Northwest Passage,” which in the show stands in for Southern attitudes about the North in general. It was the perennial closing song at summer music festivals where the whole audience would sing along, and so for Parry, “[i]t filled me with a sense of connection; belonging, the vastness of our land, to being Canadian,” and served as point of connection between her and her deceased father. Described as an ‘upside down song,’ “Northwest Passage,” “takes old Southern ideas of the Arctic and turns them upside down,” by painting the North as a site of adventure and longing as opposed to a frigid, empty, wasteland (these being the ‘old ideas’). It’s also rife with colonial imagery. In one section of the show, Parry explores the song by playing it through in an exercise where she records her own accompaniment live via a looping guitar track. The refrain is as follows:

Oh, for just one time, I would take the Northwest Passage,
To find the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea,
Tracing one warm line through a land so wild and savage,
And make a Northwest passage to the sea.

Through its aspirational drive that romanticizes the image of the Canadian pioneer taming and conquering a harsh, wild land, the song inscribes a variety of colonial ideas; most particularly the doctrine of terra nullius, whereby the European occupation of Indigenous lands was justified under the claim that the lands were uninhabited. This colonial ideology is consistently challenged

in the show, in particular by Williamson Bathory. On another go-through of the refrain she responds to each of the lines as Parry sings. For “Oh, for just one time,” she replies with, “Always, Inuit homelands,” laying bare the misguided ideology that animates the song.

The failure of relations present in the song lies in Southern misapprehension of the North, a misapprehension that is exacerbated by the fact that many Southern Canadians only know about the North from songs like Rogers’. As Parry puts it, “The Arctic is a vast region that defines something so essential about our national identity, and yet has so little to do with most of our Southern, daily, urban lives.” “Northwest Passage” encodes its ideology in the bodies that take it up and so perpetuates uneven relations in those who sing and pass it on. Parry says, “I carried this song with me into my adulthood, along with all the other songs written into my body that I knew, but had never really examined.” “The words of this song became a compass,” she reflects, acknowledging how the song has orientated her, like Ahmed’s “lines that direct.”

Ahmed writes:

The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. So in following the directions, I arrive, as if by magic. (*Queer Phenomenology* 16)

The lines that direct are present in “Northwest Passage” and other songs that Parry describes as “tunes that colonize the deep grooves in the mind.” Indeed, these songs function as objects of colonial power, “these sharp tools, handed down to me without instruction.” The tools’ sharpness reflects the colonial damage they inflict, wielded by Parry, an extension of her father, who through his wielding of “Northwest Passage” and similar folk songs, extended the Canadian settler-colonial imperialist agenda. As a result of accumulation and tradition these ‘tools’ are responsible for drastic, material consequences.

When Williamson Bathory and Parry ask the audience to discuss how they relate to the North and then situate the locations they talked about on the map, they are asking the audience to hold up their preconceived ideas about the North to their experiences, and their experiences with the ‘real thing’ as counter to these colonial tools. In the archival footage performance, Williamson Bathory even points out the actual Northwest passage. Since it’s a satellite-image map, it becomes a proxy for the physical land concretizing the abstract vastness of the North that Parry invoked in “Northwest Passage” and asking the audience to notice how the physical place compares with our ideas and associations. This activity, then, has the potential to change how people are orientated towards the land. Parry expresses this potential in her lyrics “Would you look at this map? Would you look at this map, this? It will look at you back, it will look at you back, this.” This concept of the map returning the gaze resonates strongly with these phrases from Ahmed: “Orientations are tactile and they involve more than one skin surface: we, in approaching this or that table, are also approached by the table, which touches us when we touch it” (54). The map’s ‘approach’ has the potential to shape us, just as we shape it in the act of perception. However, in the show, this act of looking at the land on its own terms is just the first step towards establishing relationality.

When Williamson Bathory and Parry ask the audience to engage with the land, they are asking them to confront its brute physical form, rather than our preconceived notions of it. This moment of direct address is not confrontational like Cardinal’s nor does it cast the audience in any kind of particular relationship to the performer, as Shigematsu does. Instead, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*’ strategy of direct address is one that asks audiences to approach the work through their whole, full existence outside of the theatre. This moment has been staged as a potential

‘turning point,’ and asks audiences to join into these various encounters in progress; with Williamson Bathory and Parry, but also with the land itself.

The goal of this map exercise, of engaging objects away from preconceived associations, is the goal of phenomenology. Ahmed observes that Husserl “suggests that phenomenology must ‘bracket’ or put aside what is given, what is made available by ordinary perception” (*Queer Phenomenology* 32). For example, for a phenomenologist to ‘see’ a table, they must see, “‘without’ the natural attitude, which keeps us within the familiar” (32). Ahmed then critiques this understanding, observing that while Husserl’s ‘bracketing’ of associations is supposed to reveal the object in its own self-givenness, marking a shift from a relative understanding to a relational understanding, Husserl’s overlooks how perception is *itself* orientated. She writes “what is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things” (27). Husserl’s attempt to put aside his associations with, say, his writing table, doesn’t change his orientation in the act of perceiving it; furthermore, his act of perceiving the table itself relies on him being orientated towards the table, and not, for example the towards the housework and childcare, and all the other labour that supports his work, that he might have had to manage if not for the privileges of his position. This is where Ahmed makes her critical intervention. She observes: “rather than the familiar being posited as that which must be suspended in order to see, we might consider what ‘it’ is that we ‘overlook’ when we reside within the familiar. We would look, then, at what we do with things, how the arrival of things may be shaped by the work that we do, rather than put aside what it is that we do” (34).

So how does *Kiinalik*’s approach to the land resonate with Ahmed and Husserl’s conversation? I argue that the show ultimately asks its audience to not just try to put aside the familiar, but to enter into critical engagement with it. This is why the map exercise involves not

just looking at images of the land itself, unmarked by geopolitical boundaries or divisions, but also asking the audience to critically reflect on our relationship to the land, both actually and metaphorically. One can't just "bracket" one's associations with the land and meet it "face to face" without considering its relationship to one's own perspective, because how one turns towards it, or how one *orientates* is just as important as the encounter itself. By presenting both an encounter with the land and an opportunity to critically reflect on it (the latter of which could not have been accomplished without direct address), rather than adapting a phenomenological viewpoint that removes things from their social and political context, like Ahmed's queer phenomenology, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* asks us not to put aside the familiar, but to open up the familiar to see what's hiding inside, and how it connects back to us. The artists take objects not only in their self-givenness (Husserl's understanding of how we encounter objects once we've bracketed the familiar), but simultaneously pay attention to context, recognizing how our approach to them is based in bias and belief systems—we must not just see the thing itself, but how we enter into relation with it.

Queer relations in uaajeerseq

Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools' approach to relationality is strongly exemplified in the uaajeerseq section of the show. Uaajeerseq or Greenlandic mask dance is the most exhilarating and arguably the most crucial art form featured in *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*. Performed by Williamson Bathory, the uaajeerseq dance takes up approximately half an hour (about one quarter of the performance), and falls halfway through. The dance is a fluid, moving act of self-expression that is unique to each performer, and is experienced differently by each audience member that witnesses, or in Williamson Bathory's words, *participates* in it. In the following

paragraphs, I will recount my own experience with *uaajeerneq* in the performances of *Kiinalik* that I attended. As my analysis here is grounded in my received meaning of the show, in this recounting I have chosen not to do things such as seek to translate the Inuktitut text that, as a non-speaker of the language, was not meant to be accessible to me.

It begins with a curious glance, a sly shift in the performer's eyes that then turn bright with relish and mischief. She hears or senses some presence nearby, in the air, that she talks to—a spirit? a flying insect?—I could follow this part better if I understood Inuktitut—and then she pulls off her boots, tossing them on the ground. Then, as the low, threatening rumble of a cello slides in, signaling to the audience an ominous change in tone, she applies a mask of black paint. Using her fingers, she scores out lines in the black so that her skin, pale by contrast, shows through. She paints in lines of red paint, and pushes two wooden balls into her cheeks, making them bulge grotesquely. At the same time, she begins to embody the figure of the mask. She sinks further into her body, knees bent, posture hunching as a new being emerges. She stretches her hands out behind her, spreading her fingers wide as though testing the limits of her new body, in which she finds a distinctly sensual—and then sexual—pleasure. Next come the vocalizations, uninhibited growls and gasps, laughter, and muttering—both to herself and outwards to her rapt audience, of whom she is fully aware.

As she pushes away the makeup cart, the music, a hum of voices and sibilant whispers, and the droning, dissonant sound of a cello, evolves. The cello ramps up, giving a sense of momentum, purpose, as the theatre is bathed in red light and she climbs *up* and *into* the raked auditorium seating—a fearless, uninhibited, and unabashedly sexual being. As she climbs up into the audience, staring down individual audience members, their faces convey nervousness, amusement, and anticipation. In response to this incursion into their space, spectators sit up

attentively, they fidget, and exchange glances, some concerned and some transfixed. Heads turn to follow the unpredictable performer's progress, fearing and half-hoping that they will be singled out for an interaction.

What happens during these interactions varies wildly. The performer doesn't discriminate by gender as she catches the eye of an audience member, a suggestive smile curving on face. She wiggles her hips and twists sinuously while gesturing as though inviting them to join her in a sexual act, every movement measured and deliberate. The interactions quickly escalate. The performer physically picks up an enthusiastic female-presenting spectator and bounces her on her lap, her cries of apparent sexual ecstasy taking on a sharp, echoing and otherworldly edge as they're transformed via her mic on the way through the auditorium speakers. In another interaction she picks up an audience member's umbrella and sticks it between her thighs, thrusting and manipulating it like a giant phallus, which she later pretends to fellate. At another moment she's angry, pointing out a different audience member and seeming to scold them in Inuktitut, raising her fists in an unambiguous threatening gesture. The rage seems short-lived: she's back to sexual overtures in the next encounter, as she continues to make her way through the audience. When she casts her gaze over me, I feel my adrenaline surge in a mixed cocktail of emotions—fear, anticipation, embarrassment—but most strongly of all I feel *seen*.

While the performance is extremely sexual, it differs from many other explorations of sexuality on stage in that the performer's sexuality is not a display put on for the viewing pleasure of the audience, but is pure agentic and magnetic force. The dance is sexual but it does not seem erotic—that is, it doesn't seem to be intending or attempting to arouse sexual excitement among the watchers, but something else entirely. The performer demonstrates great virtuosity that is based in her stamina, focus, and most importantly for the purposes of this essay,

her attention to the *relational*. This last element of virtuosity comes through in the way that she doesn't push, but always seems to know who is receptive and exactly how far to go with each spectator, meeting the audience where they are, and exerting a precise and focused presence in each encounter. The performance continues tirelessly for almost half an hour. It is unlike anything I have ever seen before, and it is *glorious*. As I leave the theatre, I am shaken, electrified, overwhelmed. I notice this, I remember this, because I am because I am in my body, thinking about my body.

Uaajeernej as an artistic practice dates back to pre-Christian times, and its contemporary incarnation has strong political and anticolonial roots, tied to its resurgence in the 1970s after attempts by Christian missionaries to eliminate the practice. Williamson Bathory was taught uaajeernej (by her mother and a teacher) growing up in Saskatchewan, where the family had relocated. Uaajeernej as an individualized practice celebrates Williamson Bathory in her particular relationality and, wherever she is, it evolves with her and is different every time: "It is a fluid practice. Every person that does uaajeernej does it differently. And I continue to give it permission to evolve." While the above description is particularly rooted in the 2017 performance that was captured in the archival footage I reviewed when writing this, my experience with the show in Toronto and Montreal in 2019 demonstrates that it continued to develop. The later performances I saw contained a distinctly mournful section of the dance, one that I hadn't witnessed in my earlier experiences.

In this chapter my interest is not in uaajeernej in general as an artistic form (which I am not qualified to speak about being a settler who is new to the practice)¹¹, but rather what function

¹¹ While not much has been written on uaajeernej in a scholarly context, Williamson Bathory (under the name Laakkuluk Jensen Williamson) has written about it in an article discussing Inuit gender egalitarianism. Another discussion of the practice occurs in the CBC *In the Making* episode on the artist, "Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory."

the dance and its sexuality—as a very specific form of direct address—serve in the context of the larger theatre show, in which the uajaernej section takes up roughly half of the show’s second half. Specifically, from my situated position as a spectator I enter into a queer reading of *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*. Engaging with broader ideas of queerness put forth by theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, José Esteban Muñoz, and Sara Ahmed, uajaernej’s queer potential lies in its circumvention of the rigid conceptions of sexuality and gender identity prescribed by the settler-colonial capitalist heteropatriarchy. It does this by refusing to explicitly gender, and thus heterosexualize its presentation of sexuality—both in the performer’s androgynous presentation and nondiscriminatory choice of audience ‘partners,’ and in its unabashed celebration of sexuality.

I read this queerness through my experiences as an asexual or ‘ace’ woman. While there is some debate whether asexuals can be considered queer or belong in the queer community, certainly expansive definitions of queerness like Kosofsky Sedgwick’s would place ace people under the queer umbrella due to their non-normative sexual identity. Contrary to a common assumption, being asexual does not necessarily mean that a person is anti-sexual. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network or AVEN defines asexuality as follows: “An asexual person does not experience sexual attraction – they are not drawn to people sexually and do not desire to act upon attraction to others in a sexual way.” Taken at its core, then, asexuality could describe both individuals or situations that are nonsexual, but also approaches to sexuality and sexual situations from a position or experience other than that of sexual attraction. An “ace queerness,” as I define it, is one that can still “[remain] unabashedly sexual and rooted in the body” (Q2Q Intro, 6)—as the editors of *Q2Q: Queer Canadian Theatre and Performance* characterize queer performance; at the same time, it engages with the body and sexuality in a different way than

other forms of queer performance in that it can look at the possibilities that sexuality holds beyond sexual attraction or pleasure. Through this ace queer lens, I read in particular my experience of the sexual nature of uajaernej not through a heteropatriarchal construction of sexuality that is grounded in reproductive futurity, nor through a more general sex-positive queer reading that looks at sexual acts as sites of sexual pleasure and sometimes romantic intimacy, but through an ‘ace-queerness’ that examines and foregrounds the more metaphoric possibilities of sexual acts and behaviour—particularly interpersonal connection and intimacy between individuals: the act of “knowing someone” traced back from its metaphorical sexualized meaning to its more literal one.

Uajaernej’s encounter

As discussed earlier, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* is driven by the meeting of and encounter between Williamson Bathory and Parry. This encounter is imperfect and messy, and is worked through by the performers by locating themselves within their family lines, artistic practices and worldviews, and connections to their environments. A significant amount of this work is not explicitly discussed or presented in the show, but rather underlies *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*, which is the product of their encounter and the labours they’ve undergone. It’s a history that is present in every gesture and glance the performers exchange in the show.

The uajaernej section, in its staging of a direct encounter between mask dancer and audience, mirrors the production’s central encounter between Williamson Bathory and Parry. In the context of this clear comparison, the overt sexuality of uajaernej serves as a physical, visceral demonstration of what it means to get close and personal with another human being, and how such an action might be navigated. Williamson Bathory’s performance thus allows

audiences an embodied understanding of the relationality that the show models. Its ‘radical intersubjectivity’ holds individuals close but separate in mutually respectful relation, and in doing so provides a practical demonstration for spectators to navigate, in their own lives, all of the relations that the show investigates. Williamson Bathory has said about the dance, “it’s sexual because it’s important to celebrate our base humanity. All different genders are there: male, female, both. It’s in between, it’s neither, and it’s something to celebrate—that’s a very deep value” (qtd. in Smith). In Williamson Bathory’s explanation, the dance’s sexuality is a means to explore ‘base humanity’ and not titillate the audience or only explore sexuality. This point is even clearer from Williamson’s Bathory’s description of *uaajeerreq* in the show. She explains that the red lines on her face and the wooden balls in her cheeks that are key parts of the *uaajeerreq* mask symbolize genitalia. She then explains that they are, “Right there on my face so that I can push through everybody’s boundaries and look inside and find that celebration of us all being sexual beings. Of us all having respect for ourselves and respect for everybody else around us.” While *uaajeerreq* is partly a celebration of sexuality, another key part of the dance is the focus it places on interpersonal boundaries and respectful relations. Indeed, while a surface-level engagement might read *uaajeerreq* as sexually aggressive, the dance is deeply grounded in interpersonal respect. Williamson Bathory reveals of her performance, “I make sure I move through an audience in a way that they accept and consent. It’s very much not a verbal thing, but it happens once we make eye contact. It’s scary for everybody. A lot of mask dance is the reaction of the audience as I work with them” (Smith). While the specifics of these interactions vary every time, using its sexual probing of boundaries as a navigation tool *uaajeerreq* gets up close and personal in a one-on-one reckoning, and allows us to deal with the fear that such encounters may provoke. Williamson Bathory says on this subject, “*Uaajeerreq* teaches us about

fear. It is important to know how to quell your panic in order to be able to live through dangerous situations” (Archival footage). This fear can be understood in many ways: fear of the unknown, fear of transgressing boundaries, fear of embarrassment or exposure. For example, when Williamson Bathory climbs into a row and into an audience member’s lap, grinding above them suggestively (though usually with limited physical contact) and moaning sexually, fear manifests in the breaking of taboos, the public nature of this seemingly sexual act. The recipients of the dance might be afraid that other audience members are looking at them, possibly judging them. Nearby spectators might be afraid of what Williamson Bathory will see when she looks over at them, and whether they will be chosen; of what the unpredictable performer might do next. Crucial to the performance’s effect is the felt immediacy these moments cultivate. Regardless of what is actually or ontologically shared or exchanged in these moments, the experience of them feels incredibly intimate, calling on an immediacy that far transgresses Western societal standards for interacting with strangers.

Just like the map exercise described earlier, the show doesn’t offer the *uaajeerneq* experience on its own. After she removes her makeup, Williamson Bathory spends time highlighting its history as a tactic of resistance against colonialism and expression of consummate artistry. She describes *uaajeerneq* as a “cocksucking pussylicking act of defiance,” and explains some of the “details and actions and meanings” that go into the dance, including the symbolism of the colours and features of the mask itself. (For example, “The blackness across my face is a symbol of how minute we are in the entirety of the universe.”) Right before this, between Williamson Bathory’s explanation and the dance, Parry recounts another kind of history: that of the forced relocation of Inuit people by the Canadian government, also known as the “High Arctic relocation.” Beginning in the 1950s, in a bid for Arctic sovereignty in the Cold

War, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police forcefully moved many Inuit communities, some formerly located in Quebec, to establish settlements in the high North. Many Inuit brought their wood stoves for heat only to find that the places they were forced into were above the treeline, with no trees to burn. The RCMP shot sled dogs so they couldn't leave.

This story provides an important context for the dance. As with the audience participation map exercise, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* is interested in not just the encounter itself but what shapes these relations—how individuals come to the encounter. Ahmed refers to her objects not just as objects, but as ‘arrivants’: “To say the object is an arrivant is to signal not only that it is nearby but also that its nearness is not simply given” (*Queer Phenomenology* 39). When encountering an object (whether that be a map or another body), Ahmed asks us to think of the forces that shaped arrivals on both ends. For Ahmed, objects “take the shape of a social action, which is forgotten in the givenness of the object,” in other words, by trying to ‘bracket’ the associations one has with an object, one obfuscates the context that is so critical for understanding it (41). In Williamson Bathory’s explanation of *uaajeerseq* and Parry’s recounting of forced relocation, the performers are asking the audience to think about the forces that shaped the arrival of the dance they have just experienced, as a context for the moments of radical intersubjectivity it supplies. When Williamson Bathory observes that *uaajeerseq* “teaches us how to deal with fear,” I understand (from Parry’s context) that the fear I deal with and was brought to face up to in *uaajeerseq*’s encounter—fear more concerned with social anxiety than anything else—is not the same fear as that faced by an Inuk person participating in the performance, and more importantly, the fear experienced by Inuit communities forcibly displaced from their land. This act of contextualization is critical to the process of relationality laid out in the show.

Conclusion: a new poetics of encounter

Barry Freeman's *Staging Strangers*, drawing on Ahmed and others, also explores the ethics and politics of the encounter. After dedicating several chapters to problematizing various ways that strangers are staged on Canadian stages, Freeman's case studies in the final chapter "stage strangers in such a way that calls up a meaningful encounter with difference" (130). This meaningful encounter is derived, in part, from the performances setting up "uncertain terms of encounter," and as well as by "allowing space for the difficult and indeterminate" (130). By utilizing participatory strategies, his final cases studies represent "a pendulum swing toward theatrical poetics and practices that interweave the aesthetic and the relational, the represented and the 'real,' and which offer something more than cloying appeals to empathy with strangers and a patronizing politics of care" (131). Such an approach is taken by *Kiinalik* which models the kind of "new poetics of encounter" that Freeman calls for (131).

As mentioned earlier, *Kiinalik*'s approach to encounter aligns with Sara Ahmed's "strange encounters" of international feminism (*Stranger Encounters* 163). Discussing the space and relationality of an international feminist conference, Ahmed observes the conference's inability to overcome unequal relations among the delegates, relations that were constructed by and a product of Western feminism's othering lens. Ahmed notes that the mere meeting of these women from all over the world was not enough to rectify the inbuilt inequities that, for example, privilege the voices of Western feminists over women who inhabit spaces other than the West. She observes that "[t]he face-to-face encounters within the impossible event, while they were enabled by the overcoming of physical distance, did not overcome distance as such. Getting closer does not, then, abolish the distance which installs the very necessity of the event of getting closer in the first place" (164). Indeed, Ahmed's exploration, just like Shigematsu's, complicates

notions of closeness and distance by pointing out that it's not just distance from 'the other' in which the harm of Western feminism resides, but in a reckless collapsing of it. In fact, collapsing distance, Ahmed observes, can often become an appropriative strategy, such that "'proximity' (in acts of consumption, becoming or passing) can involve a technique for getting closer to the other in order to maintain a distance" (157).

The solution then, then is to find the delicate balance between 'too close' and 'not close enough' or 'the right kind of close,' through what Ahmed calls a "politics of encountering." Ahmed describes this politics thus: "[b]eginning from an 'in-it-ness', a politics of encountering gets closer in order to allow the differences between us, as differences that involve power and antagonism, to make a difference to the very encounter itself" (180). While this politics of encountering is demonstrated throughout the show, the *uaajeernej* section not only models this politics, but gives the audience a chance to experience it themselves.

By triangulating these two Ahmed texts, I can highlight how *Kiinalik's* treatment of a politics of encountering relates to and rounds out the production's observations about relationality. The opening of *Queer Phenomenology* explicitly connects Ahmed's observations around orientation with those she makes about encounter in *Strange Encounters*. She writes that "the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies," and that "orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others" (3). Accordingly, "A queer phenomenology, perhaps, might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are 'less proximate' or even those that deviate or are deviant" (3). *Uaajeernej's* probing of social boundaries, through its explicit sexuality and its implication of fear, serves a queer phenomenological function by requiring that spectators direct our energy towards the performer

in ways that transcend typical socio-spatial boundaries and rules about contact with strangers, especially as expected in a ‘traditional theatre’ production. The fear that is evoked through *uaajeerreq* is, in part, the fear that arises from negotiating new relationships and coming into relation with someone or something. By drawing from the “in-it-ness”—produced by its theatrical situation and contract between performers and audience—*uaajeerreq*’s closeness allows audiences to suss out the differences between us, including those that involve the notions of power and privilege explored in the production, which act then changes the nature of the encounter itself. The result is what Ahmed defines as an “ethical communication” which is “about a certain way of holding proximity and distance together” (*Strange Encounters* 157):

Indeed, Ahmed’s description of this almost perfectly matches my experience of *uaajeerreq*:

one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across. In such an encounter, ‘one’ does not stay in place, or one does not stay safely at a distance (there is no space which is not implicated in the encounter). It is through getting closer, rather than remaining at a distance, that the impossibility of pure proximity can be put to work, or made to work.” (157)

Such a complicated and embodied experience can’t just be intellectually understood, and what the *uaajeerreq* section of the show offers is a way to feel this distance out, through the negotiated process of radical intersubjectivity.

Between the story it presents and its performer-audience relations (in particular its use of *uaajeerreq* mask dance), *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* models a form of relationality grounded in shared knowledge of commonalities and differences. *Kiinalik* demonstrates that this relationality, built on a politics of encountering, is the way to approach not only close interpersonal relations, but systemic relations like those between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and human relations with the environment. Thinking about *Kiinalik*’s relationality through a ‘politics of encountering’ adds another layer to the show’s understanding of relationality. It demonstrates that relationality

is not just about encountering the other being (person, place) where they are and acknowledging the way each of you got there, but that this meeting is about a balance of closeness and distance, one drawn from mutual respect. Accordingly, *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools* can help settler spectators like myself to find the productive space between the “fantasies of absolute proximity or absolute distance” (166) that Ahmed observes in Western models of global feminism which seek to absorb and appropriate the ‘other’ they are reliant on. The show can help us move from being ignorant of, or extractive towards, the land on which we live, to being in respectful relation with it. Uaajeernej, then, is a gift to the spectator, modelling in its strangeness and sexuality, the way to a more connected and equitable world.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have discussed direct address as a dramaturgical and relational device employed in the context of theatre in Canada, one that has the ability to further discussions of the complexities of interculturalism and intercultural relations in this multicultural nation, and extend how interculturalism is theorized and understood in theatrical contexts. My case studies have demonstrated how understanding and analyzing works' use of direct address can substantially enhance comprehension of them and their theatrical effects. My dissertation has also tested out some conceptual frames through which to understand the work that direct address can accomplish, in particular thinking of how it mobilizes affect and immediacy, playing with concepts of proximity and distance to achieve its effects. As a device that operates "where the rubber meets the road," between performer and audience, play-world and 'actual' world, and at the intersection of the local and the global, direct address is well positioned to work through what Yana Meerzon calls the "irresolvable dialectic between the individual body and the body politic" (25), bringing the interpersonal into complex interrelation with the individual and the intercultural.

Many contemporary social issues, including the function of global capitalism and social justice movements, depend on the relationship between the individual and larger collectives. Direct address is a very useful tool for exploring, challenging, and rethinking these kinds of relationships. The performer's address is felt by spectators on the individual level, and often encourages self-reflexivity and consideration of how we engage with and are implicated by our interactions with the addressing character/performer. At the same time, the situation of the individual spectator within a larger audience may prompt reflections about the relationship between the individual and the collective, and the spectator might also be invited to see how their

particular reactions connect to the larger themes and issues of the play, both inside and outside of the theatre space.

Contemporary issues are also in part defined by the abstraction of global relations under capitalism, including the abstraction of intercultural relations. Direct address works against this abstraction by making visible a relationship, the individual's to the performance, that is in operation in all 'traditional' theatre pieces but is usually hidden through the erasure of the spectating body encouraged by the fourth wall. By refocusing our attention on the often-obscured relationships among people and between things, direct address can serve to personalize larger or more abstract problems, while at the same time mostly avoid, "the danger of atomization," which occurs "in cases in which narrative and characterizations present individualized accommodations to systemic social problems" (Freeman 17).

It is these abilities which make direct address as theatrical device distinctly relational. A key intervention of this dissertation is my application of the construct of the relational to think through the kind of work that direct address accomplishes in intercultural theatre. While I discussed relationality in greater depth in my introduction and chapter four in particular, to close off this dissertation I will take a moment to more explicitly unpack what this framing of the relational contributes to understandings of direct audience address more broadly.

The relational as a framework can shape how we think about direct address as participation, and participatory performance more broadly. Tying the work of this dissertation into contemporary discussions of participation and the social turn of performance, my case studies have further affirmed Claire Bishop's critique of 'relational' (by Bourriaud's definition) art practices being seen as inherently and automatically progressive. Bishop writes that, "intersubjective relations are not an end in themselves, but serve to explore and disentangle a

more complex knot of social concerns about political engagement, affect, inequality, narcissism, class, and behavioural protocols” (39). To address this, Bishop proposes that we, “[examine] each artistic practice within its own singular historical context and the political valencies of its era” (40), in order to determine its impact and effectiveness. Taking this idea even farther, my study has demonstrated the need firstly to recognize direct-address-based theatre pieces as relational works, as well as to go beyond Bishop’s proposed contextual analysis and investigate the often-particularized conditions of reception just as we analyze the conditions of production. Applying the lens of the relational to direct address theatre works draws attention to the integral (and yet mostly ignored by theatre scholars) role of the situated spectator in such meaning-making processes.

While the focus of my study has been reception, more specifically particularized reception, and the lens of the relational emphasizes this particularized response, I will offer a few, more general thoughts on direct address as a mode of theatrical performance. The first and most important point is to state that the experience and expression of direct address is always varied. The particular effects of this device vary by play text, production, and instance of performance. The audience may serve a different role in each situation. We may be ‘hailed’ as ourselves or a character; our function in the story and relationship to the speaker may vary quite a bit the way in which we are addressed (as what/whom and on what terms). Furthermore, how we receive the address may have significant impact on a production’s meaning-making processes. Sometimes the direct address in a production might rely on instigating a particular kind of relationship with an audience. For example, *Empire of the Son* relies on Shigematsu’s close and intimate relationship with audience, in which they stand in as surrogates for his father. For audiences uninterested in the kind of relationship Shigematsu invites, the play may come

across as trite. In other cases, a show's address may accommodate a variety of responses while still achieving its dramaturgical aims. Recall *Huff* dramaturg Karin Randoja's gleeful encounter with an audience member who hated the show. Does that spectator's strong negative reaction, quite different than my positive one, mean that *Huff* has failed, or rather that the spectator was reacting against the show's success at making them feel complicit in its events?

As a whole, like postdramatic theatre, direct address ruptures the (presumed) discreteness of the dramatic universe on stage, extending the place of performance out into the audience, and through them, the world at large. Like any "open" or "writerly" texts (Jüres-Munby 6), a piece that strongly features direct address is only fully complete with the addition of the audience, and yet plays or productions that successfully employ direct address will often enlist it strategically in support of larger dramaturgical aims. For example, direct address often serves to prompt self-reflexivity on the part of the spectator, inviting audiences to think critically about the characters we are interacting with, and our relationship to them. This makes direct address a particularly useful device to explore the complexities of intercultural encounters, which are often defined by uneven power dynamics, problematic assumptions, and misunderstandings. Strategies of direct address that encourage reflexivity can often accommodate for some heterogeneity of audience response and open the door for relational thinking. They also resonate with recent scholarship on contemporary performance pieces that navigate ambivalence in uncertain times.

Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford borrow Lehmann's formulation of a key postdramatic element, "indecidability [sic] whether one is dealing with real or fiction" (Garde and Mumford 151), to discuss how several contemporary performance pieces mobilize this form of "destabilisation," in order to "generate a 'productive insecurity,' one that invites fresh ways of engaging with people and related phenomena that are unfamiliar" (148). In *Insecurity: Perils and*

Products of Theatres of the Real, Jenn Stephenson draws on this concept of productive insecurity and investigates how it is explored by theatres of the real (that is forms such as autobiographical, documentary and verbatim theatres which invoke and mobilize ‘realness’), to interrogate the ways in which reality is constructed in our post-truth age. Helena Grehan, in *Performance, Ethics, and Spectatorship in a Global Age*, coins the somewhat related concept of ‘ambivalence,’ which investigates how contemporary performance pieces capitalize on a sense of ambivalence to unsettle spectators and embroil them into nuanced ethical questions of our global age.

What all three of these authors have in common, summarized by Stephenson in the introduction to her book, is that they explore how “unsettlement in the audience, whether activated by an uncertain landscape of reality or by the uncertainty of real-world action, is productive” (*Insecurity* 16). They are all interested in the productive power of a reflexive audience in constructing theatrical works. In line with these thinkers, this dissertation has explored how direct address can productively encourage self-reflexivity in audience members, though not exclusively through strategies of unsettlement. Unlike many of the pieces discussed by the above authors, the theatrical address I examine is often not explicitly postdramatic, but as observed in my discussion in the first chapter, jumps between performative and dramatic modes, which can achieve particular artistic effects and may destabilize the artificial binaries between these modes of performance.

In my dissertation, the reflexive power of the audience has been particularly mobilized to think about relationality. As I briefly addressed earlier in this dissertation, despite my framing of direct address as participation, the particular kinds of encounters and participations that direct address in my case studies invites are not necessarily about concrete action or production. This is in line with Liz Tomlin’s framing of spectatorship and participation in her recent book *Political*

Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship. Tomlin chooses not to include “dramaturgies of participation” in her investigation, “principally due to the centrality to [her] study of Jacques Rancière’s theories of emancipated spectatorship that address the autonomy of the critical interpretation of the spectator, not the autonomy of the material contribution of the participant” (7); in much scholarship on performance that invites audience reflexivity, the material contributions of participants are seen as less interesting than the kind of thinking that they invite. In my case studies the calls to reflexivity that direct address invites help audiences to navigate nuanced spaces of encounter (such as intercultural encounter), where parties may shape themselves and respond to each other in much more subtle and perhaps not as clearly differential manners as conventionally theorized participation. In these examples, the relational as construct asks us to relate to each other from where we are, and to allow the differences between us, as Sara Ahmed has theorized to make a difference to the encounter itself (*Strange Encounters* 180). Finally, the relational thinking encouraged by direct address in the works I study may also forge productive alliances in knowledge. This relationality present in the shows I’ve explored facilitates the productive encounter of epistemologies that are often in tension. Whether it’s Shigematsu and his father’s differing understandings of interpersonal intimacy in *Empire of the Son*, or Huff’s challenge to colonial structures of viewing and deconstruction of the mind-body split, or *Kiinalik: These Sharp Tools*’ radical relationality fostered through embodied encounter, my case studies demonstrate how these artists have used performance to challenge dominant Western understandings and ways of being and doing, and explore alternate possibilities. This brings me back to a key benefit of relationality as framework: its point of connection with systemically marginalized cultures and epistemologies that value relationality as a primary way of knowing—including Black and Indigenous communities. It is thus that I hope that this

dissertation opens up further pathways in theatre studies to benefit from important but often overlooked fields of knowledge including Black and Indigenous studies. I hope that, like the work accomplished by the performances that are my case studies, this dissertation itself might enter into some productive encounters of its own.

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