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Courage, Capacity, Earth-Diving: Riting Safe(r) Spaces Down in the “Muck”

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Dossier / Présentation

Courage, Capacity, Earth-Diving: Riting Safe(r) Spaces Down in the "Muck"

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> *If you have no capacity to do the hard and often uncomfortable work to meet artists working outside the Eurocentric paradigm – don't get into a relationship with us because you are only positioning us for failure and trauma. Do not use us for photo ops when you have no capacity to get into the muck and do The Work. Do not create facades of support when you have no real commitment or the courageous capacity to execute.*
>
> Kim Senklip Harvey, "Beyond the Script"[1]

Aaniin! Kwei! Tanshi! Way'! Bonjour! Hello!

Julie: This thematic issue of *Percées* on Indigenous protocols of engagement began as a conversation between the two of us before it was extended through an open invitation to the many contributors who offered their resonant work. The invitation included the urgent words of the Syilx-T'silhqot'in playwright-director Kim Senklip Harvey so it seems fitting to have them as an epigraph as we continue this dialogue, writing each in our own voices, and witnessing each other.

Jill: Jill Carter n'dishnikaaz. Gichi Kiiwenging / Dze Tkaron:to n'doonjibaa. Anishinaabe ekwa Ashkenazi kwe n'daaw. I extend my gratitude to the Creator of all life who has placed me here on such beautiful lands, so carefully stewarded over millennia by the Petun, Erie, the Attawandaron (or so-called Neutral Confederacy), the Wendat Confederacy, the Seneca nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Michi Saagig Anishinaabeg of the Three Fires Confederacy. I am grateful to do life in Treaty 13 territory – on the lands wherein Indigenous life still orders itself around the Dish With One Spoon Treaty that was ratified between the Seneca people of the Iroquois Confederacy (the keepers of the Western Door) and the Michi Saagig Anishinaabeg in 1701. I extend my gratitude to Julie Burelle who invited me into this conversation and to each of the incredible artists whose wisdom, ideas, and activations have been shared and documented in this issue. Finally, I send out greetings, gratitude, and good intentions to you who will read their words, be transformed by them, and begin your own projects of remediation and transformation.

Julie: My name is Julie Burelle and I am a white francophone settler Québécoise. I grew up alongside the Tenàgàdino Zibi (Gatineau River) on the unceded territory of the Anishinabeg (currently known as Gatineau). I now live as an uninvited guest on the beautiful unceded land of the Kumeyaay nation in what is presently referred to as San Diego, California. I enter spaces carrying these inherited and present stories as well as many others, woven through time, and I do so with an ever-growing awareness of their power. I am deeply thankful to the extraordinary Jill Carter for the gift of her presence and incisive clarity, and I echo her gratitude toward the artists and thinkers who offer their important research and stories in this issue of *Percées*. I come to this digital space with good intentions, wanting to do transformational work, and yet, I am also keenly aware that my good intentions are not enough (and can become a deflection) and that, receiving the contributors' gifts calls for reciprocity, that is to say, the transformation of intentions into meaningful actions, with humility, and "the courageous capacity to execute" (Harvey, 2021), to borrow from Harvey.

Jill and Julie: We begin by introducing ourselves and where we come from, and by stating our intentions because it matters to the project of creating safer spaces for Indigenous artists and researchers, a call that has been issued for a very long time by Indigenous artists, marginalized artists, and artists of Colour. In turn, we ask: What are your intentions as you prepare to read this work? What capacities have you committed yourself to develop?

The time is now. The "reckoning" is upon us.

The artists with whom you are preparing to engage within these digital pages have issued a Call.

With what actions will you answer?

Preamble

Jill: On 22 October 2021, the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR) hosted *Curating Safer Spaces and Devising Protocols That Welcome: New House Rules in the Domain of Story*, a virtual Long Table[2] to kick off what is intended to be an extended conversation that, we hope, will result in the curation of safer spaces for racialized and otherwise marginalized theatre artists in state-sponsored spaces of training, within the domain of community theatre and throughout the various sites of the "castellated Abbey" (Poe, 2010 [1842]) that is professional theatre in the West.

Admittedly, the participants in this event arrived "late to the table," having witnessed and perhaps retweeted expressions of outrage from the Black Lives Matter movement, which has been gathering momentum since its inception in 2014; from April Reign's 2015 #OscarSoWhite campaign; from the 2020 We See You, White American Theater's crusade; from the digital gauntlet cast in the teeth of Canadian Arts Leaders in June 2020 by Harvey; and from the increasingly urgent expressions of institutional refusal from Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (IBPOC) and otherwise marginalized artists and artists in training.

CATR enters these conversations late – albeit no later than the mainstream theatre companies and professional training institutions in which its scholars work and about which they write. Educators and theatre companies have striven to "diversify" their programs by seasoning their curricular and cultural offerings with plays by IBPOC artists and / or by an occasional instance of "colour-blind" casting. And this is perhaps a well-intentioned beginning. But conversations toward such a beginning have been going on for far too long. And to what end?

Julie: Similar conversations have taken place in Québec's theatres, training institutions, and professional associations, as well as in society at large, albeit at a different, much slower pace, and with the added layer of resistance brought on by Québec's own "wounded attachment" (Brown, 1993: 390) to a narrative as a minoritarian, colonized community within Canada. As scholars (Burelle, 2019; Cornellier, 2015; Giroux, 2020; Leroux, 2019) have argued, this narrative has long served to stall or deflect Québec's reckoning with its own ongoing role as a settler colonial force vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples, its own complicity in systemic racism. In the theatre of everyday life, this was made painfully evident by Québec's politicians who, in the wake of the tragedy of Joyce Echaquan's preventable death in a hospital in Saint-Charles-Borromée, Québec, in the latest of many irrefutable examples of the violence enacted on Indigenous peoples by public institutions such as the police and the education and health care systems, continued to debate, with multiple knee-jerk reactions, whether or not systemic racism even existed in the province. On theatre stages, there have been more openings, more residencies for Indigenous artists at major theatres – notably le Centre du Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, l'Espace Go, le Théâtre Aux Écuries – and at the National School of Theatre, and these are important steps forward, but much remains to be done, particularly at the level of the training of artists (and their teachers) at the post-secondary level.

Jill: As early as 2016, I was sitting in a black box theatre with a crowd of acting instructors from across Canada. All of them were speaking with painful sincerity about decolonizing their studio classes. And they had all hit upon the same solution: dump the Sophocles and Shakespeare. Bury the dead White writers, and substitute scripts by racialized writers for scene study. At one point, I remarked, "Take a look around! What do you see? You're all White! Your processes are European; your training is European; your cognitive frameworks are European. So, what," I asked, "do you

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actually hope to affect by substituting Soyinka for Shakespeare or Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble for Beckett?"

The intentions of these artists who train artists were undeniably laudable. They hoped to subvert an oppressive canon. They hoped to open spaces that would allow the stories of the othered to live and breathe. But what, did they hope, would actually shift within the realm of theatre? What shifts have occurred since that 2016 gathering? Not enough, I contend, as recent events and activations have come to show. Across Turtle Island, the spaces of actor training are still terribly unsafe for racialized and otherwise marginalized students. That is, if they even gain admittance to these spaces at all…

Julie: Again, Québec here lags behind with very few programs in Indigenous studies in general and even less, none actually, specializing in Indigenous theatre… And there are no performance spaces dedicated solely to Indigenous theatre in Québec as there are in Toronto, on Manitoulin Island, or at Trent University, despite the fact that new Indigenous theatre companies based in Québec (Productions Onishka, Menuentakuan, and others) have joined the rank of Ondinnok (founded in 1985) in the last decade.

Jill: Without question, it is desirable (and necessary) that the stories of all the Peoples who share these lands – IBPOC and those otherwise marginalized – are given ear, are treated with the same respect, are accorded just as much importance as the stories that have been conjured up by Western artists and thinkers. But switching up stories won't disrupt canonical custom – the canon of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that govern Western storytelling custom and praxis. Indeed, such a strategy (when practised as the sole means to a "post-racial" end) carries with it the dangerous promise of extraction: without our bodies in the room, our stories become fodder for the settlers' hungry gaze – another resource to be used in service of colonial entertainment or edification.

Although a gradual shift has begun, entry requirements to a Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies (DTPS) Program (where practical training is offered) remain much as they have always been: perhaps, by way of auditioning, a group will be brought in to play theatre games, but what if you have never played such games before? What if the traumas you carry prevent you from playing "trust" games or silence you in the face of loud voices or aggressive language (embodied or vocal)? What if you are asked about the best production you have attended in the past eight months? And what if you have never been to a theatre in your life? You just know you want to be a storyteller, but you can't point to your favourite script or favourite production, although you may have participated in performative ceremonies from birth and you are prepared to read, to work, to visit, to witness, to try…

What if your body doesn't perform like other bodies? What if you need supports that others in the audition room do not require? What if the auditioner just cannot see you in the final performance – because of your skin tone, or because of the way your body takes or doesn't take space, or because the auditioner cannot read the signifiers you perform through subtle facial movements, vocal intonations, or myriad other *gests*, which could be read by one from your own culture?

What if you have been traditionally raised and cannot invoke certain words (in certain seasons or at all) or tell certain stories (in certain seasons or at all), or place your instrument into service of a violent story when you haven't had time or space to process and heal from a similar story that happened in your own life?

What if madness to your instructor and scene partners looks like divesting yourself of all possessions and travelling naked through the storm? What if madness to you looks like dragging all of your worldly possessions out into the storm where they will become saturated, weigh you down, get stuck in mud or on tree roots, and attract electricity from the skies?

What if you are told that what you are creating is “not theatre” and therefore unworkable?

Disrupting the “canon” is a laudable initiative. But this is not enough to erase the continuing historical practices of humiliation, diminishment, and exclusion (We See You, White American Theater, 2020) through which White privilege remains supreme. Despite the handwringing, fervent conversations, occasional attendance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) workshops and epic online performances of solidarity, “We [still] see you. [...] We [are still watching] you pretend not to see us” (*idem*). Is it any great wonder that so many Indigenous, Black and artists of Colour have been stepping away from the very institutions to which they once sought admittance? To do otherwise is to put body and soul in harm’s way and to accept the continuing “violence (spiritual, physical, emotional, and cultural)” (Harvey, 2020a) that has been inflicted upon othered bodies throughout the colonized world.

Curating Safer Spaces was devised as the first in a series of conversations through which to imagine the reconfiguration of the westernized *theatron* – this violent space of othering, voyeuristic consumption, re-traumatization, and re-wounding – into a space of self-actualization, *communitas*, healing, and transformation. Unfolding in an online space within the boxy confines of Zoom, it nonetheless afforded participants some performative mobility, allowing Long Table guests the freedom to move between their seat at the “table” as an active speaker to a “seat” on the outskirts as an active witness to a historic conversation. Beginning with an invitation to whet our appetites by sharing sample memories of what it is to know that you have been welcomed into a class, a rehearsal hall, or a conference session, the three-hour session moved rapidly into accounts of exclusion, humiliation, and harm. And the three hours allotted to this session were not really sufficient to take us beyond these painful testimonies. Certainly, as curator and hostess of this event, I had not anticipated otherwise. Re-worlding, after all, is “process, not arrival” (Tiffin, quoted in Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996: 11). And this process will require a descent into the churning mess of pain received, pain inflicted, pain ignored. It will require many honest conversations – many more hopeful, difficult encounters across a liminal divide – before the real work of repair begins.

This process began over four centuries ago with the ratification of the Two Row Wampum Treaty between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch. In this moment, I like to imagine two Peoples facing each other across that liminal divide and filling that space with their best intentions and highest thoughts. I like to imagine two Peoples with open faces, open stances and open hearts calling out and responding, each to the other. I like to imagine two Peoples believing in a process – a process of re-worlding that they were just beginning to devise together. I like to imagine two Peoples with the will and the “capacity to get into the muck and do The Work” (Harvey, 2021) of regular, ongoing relational repair and stewardship. Talking Treaty. Then, talking again… And again. And again…

I like to imagine…

But the newcomers to Turtle Island interpreted such early transactional encounters as respectful acknowledgement of and humble acquiescence to the fact that they had *arrived*, bringing with them a “New World” – a world that they would usher into being with one stroke of a pen, one hearty handshake, or a single dispensation of cheap trinkets, blankets, or weapons. Conversely, their Indigenous hosts regarded such exchanges of gifts and wampum as the first of a series of processual steps in the project of adopting new kinsfolk, building new relationships, and collaboratively re-worlding. That this process has gone terribly awry is inarguable. And the current mistrust held by Indigenous Peoples for Canadians has been hard won by its leaders throughout

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this nation's short life through innumerable frauds and treaty violations, through land – and child – theft, and through a sustained campaign of genocidal policy. This is Canada's legacy – a legacy that continues to slyly disavow its own existence even as it augments itself on performed penance and prevarication.

It was in the spirit and with the intent of beginning a process of rebuilding trust and of collaboratively authoring "new house rules" to ensure the safety of all culture workers in the spaces of performance that *Curating Safer Spaces* was conceived. Graduate students and senior scholars alike spoke of the necessity of "being seen," of "being met" and of being welcomed and acknowledged as and where they are. The considerable weight seeded in early life and "watered" by countless micro and macroaggressions was also discussed. This weight, borne by racialized and otherwise marginalized individuals, is often imperceptible to those for whom the violence of systems and institutions have not been part of quotidian experience. It is a weight that must be fully recognized, freely acknowledged, and assiduously addressed. At the table, we agreed that "compassion and generosity must be the norm in cultural spaces." I suggest, too, that courage – the courage of self-reflection – must animate generous and compassionate intention, if those who hold cultural spaces are to honestly re-examine the power they hold and re-imagine the ways in which they might distribute the resources under their purview (Harvey, 2022 conversation).

But speech was slow and halting at this table. We were tiptoeing through the "muck," swollen with hopeful intention but unable (or not yet willing?) to open ourselves to each other. Perhaps in the case of the non-racialized participants there was a hesitancy to take space – a sincere desire to *listen*. But in a space largely dominated by the non-racialized body, there was no discussion around or reflection upon "whiteness." And in the absence of such address, I suspect, distrust sprang in to fill the void because, as Harvey has observed, the refusal to address whiteness signals the impossibility of "real change" (Harvey, 2020b). Little wonder then that few of the racialized and otherwise marginalized scholars and culture workers in attendance took the opportunity to speak. Perhaps I was hosting an event where nobody felt truly safe.

This, admittedly, I should have foreseen. Indeed, I have been acquainted with and taken to heart a key lesson offered by Métis scholar-curator David Garneau around the work of collective re-imagining and re-worlding: "occasions of separation" (Garneau, 2016: 23) are essential throughout various moments in this project. In the relative safety of the "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" – in which "Indigenous people can refute the lie of 'reconciliation'" (*idem*) – they occupy during such moments of separation, Indigenous people might work through difficult knowledge and determine processes of repair, while those who regard themselves as allies or accomplices in this endeavour might do the same.

This project should have begun first with a series of separated Long Tables. Here, in "irreconcilable spaces," racialized, otherwise marginalized, and allied individuals might have spoken freely with those who share their experiences… about whiteness, about harm, about the weight of unacknowledged guilt and shame, about the weight of repeated humiliations and suppressed rage. Eventually, these groups would be able to come together and meet those hard truths with compassion and generosity. And then, having submerged ourselves in the "muck" of it all and survived, we might finally be ready to face each other across a table and begin the project of designing and maintaining safe(r) and more welcoming spaces for all.

This project will certainly continue. But I believe at this point that it will be necessary for all of us to step back from each other – to retreat to "irreconcilable spaces," to spaces of condolence – before we are sufficiently equipped to productively treat (devise new protocols of engagement) with each other.

Julie: You name this imperative with such clarity, Jill. I was at the Long Table and I struggled with what to say, and how to say it, even if these questions are at the heart of my research and practice. This is difficult and uncomfortable but ultimately generative work, and it remains ahead of us. White settler scholars and artists, these "irreconcilable spaces" are opportunities for us to do the hard work of talking through this discomfort, of being deeply unsettled, of sitting with the history and structures (be they institutions or structures of feeling) we have inherited and that we perpetuate, to contemplate that we are complicit, whether we like it or not. This is where it begins. This submerging ourselves in the "muck" and finding ways to emerge – without avoidance – on the other side is crucial if we want to become better interlocutors. For too long, we have turned to IBPOC interlocutors to educate us, reassure us, celebrate our minimal efforts, and in doing so, we have perpetuated the logic of extraction that organizes settler colonialism and positions Indigenous material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual resources as white possessions. We have used our aversion to discomfort to deflect accountability and our good intentions to placate those who challenged us. We need to figure out, urgently, how to come to the table differently and for that, we need to think of the work we must do on our own as well as the work we can do together. We must carve separate spaces where we can come together first and do this mucky work with vigilance, accountability, and care. In these spaces, we can learn from our own ancestors, their stories – the shameful ones yes, but also the ones that can inspire us to do better. We might then be able to return to the shared table to listen and witness openly and generously and offer something brave and concrete in return.

Curating an ethical digital space

Jill: Within the digital space inhabited by this special issue of *Percées*, we have had the opportunity to work within Garneau's conceptual space of the irreconcilable, the "undercommons" (Harney and Moten, 2013), and those spaces inhabited to which the unwelcomed and the too oft silenced have been relegated. Here, we have been afforded the opportunity to foreground the Indigenous voice within the digital Talking Circle we have attempted to curate. We have attempted here to envision a future in which David Garneau's "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" might, someday, reshape themselves into a space that holds the spirit and carries forth the intent of Willie Ermine's "Ethical Space[s] of Engagement" (Ermine, 2007: 193). But the curation of such a space – a safe(r) space of encounter for IBPOC culture workers within a distinctly Canadian industry – requires that the institutional gatekeepers who train us, who publish our words, and who contract us to grace their stages with our stories and our bodies collectively acknowledge and understand "how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring" (*ibid.*: 202-203).

Engaging with the editors of this journal, Julie and I have managed to negotiate – for this moment – an "ethical space" wherein the dialectic between editorial conventions and Indigenous discursive protocols played itself out and resulted in the exploration of new / "(k)new"[3] (Edwards, 2009: 43) modes of working.

Julie: In gathering participants for this Talking Circle,[4] we circulated an open invitation, in French and in English, to a broad group of mostly Indigenous contributors working inside and outside theatres and academic institutions. We envisioned this as a rare opportunity to gather across the colonial language divide which often acts as a compounding isolator for Indigenous artists / scholars. We invited contributions that spoke to the necessary project of shifting and re-working the protocols of engagement within colonially run cultural institutions if they are to ever become safe spaces for IBPOC artists and the communities for whom they do their work. We proposed as a provocation (or starting point) two recent interventions that call for and perform this relational shift: a text by Jill, addressing the Director's Lab North, that describes Indigenous

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theatre today as "increasingly bound up in the curation and activation of 'irreconcilable' spaces of refusal on the page and on the stage" (Carter, 2019: 186). Drawing from what Garneau calls "irreconcilable spaces," Jill argues that "a relational shift is required if settlers and Indigenous peoples are to co-develop an alliance in which all of its members – human and other-than-human – are respected and upheld" (*idem*). The second text was the artistic treaty that Harvey devised and signed in 2018 in conversation with prominent theatre companies in Western Canada to establish the conditions necessary for the creation of a recent Indigenous matriarchal play. Harvey's treaty offered a window into a "mise en action" (an enactment) of the relational shift envisioned by Jill but the treaty, as we would come to hear later, was not respected by her interlocutors. The text is no longer publicly available. The treaty offers both an inspiration and a stark reminder of the complexity of the work needed for respectful encounters to take place and for trust to be built after centuries of broken promises and empty words.

While contributors did not have to directly respond to these two texts, we invited them to visualize their work as part of a constellation of voices orientated toward any or all of the following questions: What strategies have Indigenous artists employed to centre Indigenous protocols either inside or outside settler institutions? What shifts are required either within or outside settler institutions, media, funding agencies, and / or training programs to ensure that Indigenous protocols are upheld and respected? Have collaborations been forged in which settler co-conspirators have "refused the role of occupier" and, following Jill's invitation, worked to create a "new treaty relationship" (*ibid.*: 194)? What themes, topics, and forms are centred in these new forms of art-making, these new protocols?

We received beautiful, thought-provoking, shape-shifting proposals that, in turn, acted as a provocation for our own thinking as co-editors. Indeed, they offered us an opportunity to reflect more specifically on and begin to address the nature and limitations of the invitations that are made to Indigenous artists and scholars by settler institutions / hosts in this age of so-called reconciliation. Indeed, dominant institutions are not just arriving late to the table (to echo Jill), but they are also often attempting to dictate the rules, the length, and the outcome of the event they just joined. In other words, such institutions are attempting to correct course, to get with the program if you will, with urgent requests on Indigenous folx – on their labour, knowledge, and artistry – that are often onerous, but rarely reciprocal.

In our case, in asking contributors to think about Indigenous protocols of engagement, how were we also thinking about the protocols that organize academic publications, their rigid delineation of what counts as research and what does not, their peer-reviewed process which can become a form of gatekeeping, their curation (or not) of safe spaces for Indigenous contributors? What is the work that journals can do to curate safe spaces and to break down research paradigms that have privileged a certain kind of knowledge and obscured and devalued forms of research that take place in the body, on the land, through community, and through a communal voice? We found receptive interlocutors at *Percées* who were willing to engage with these questions as well as others pertaining to translation and access, and search for solutions. We extend our gratitude to Catherine Cyr and Jeanne Murray-Tanguay in particular for their leadership and care.

The contributions assembled here are the result of long research processes within and outside of academia, through methodologies that sometimes fit and often don't fit Western ideas of research. Weaving storytelling, communities, relations in their research, many contributors echo what Shawn Wilson (2008) argues in his work, namely that relationality is at the core of Indigenous knowledge and that consequently, to do research is to enter in relation with knowledge, which is a living entity, in sustained ways and while following protocols specific to the community. This may mean, in some cases, that the community chooses in the end to not share this research in an open-source settler journal if it collectively feels that it is not – or not yet – a safe space.

The concept of relationality in protocols of creation is thus at the core of many of the contributions assembled here. In his text, theatre and film maker Yves Sioui Durand (Huron-Wendat), the co-founder with Catherine Joncas of Ondinnok, the longest running Indigenous theatre company in Québec, offers his own reflection anchored in close to four decades of creation. Drawing from *Le porteur des peines du monde*, Ondinnok's first production in 1985 and the company's 2010 adaptation of *Xajoj Tun Rabinal Achi*, Sioui Durand writes, "We are beings of memory," and the theatre is a space where Indigenous peoples can walk alongside their ancestors who are both the past and the future. Indigenous theatre, he states, is an urgent healing practice. Describing the protocols that subtend Ondinnok's creation process, Sioui Durand traces connections back to pre-Columbian, hemispheric practices that centre the dreamworld, the interwoven existences of humans and other-than-humans, and argues that through the body, Indigenous artists are repatriating ancestral memory to speak to the present and engaging in the project or re-worlding that Jill described earlier.

While still very active, Sioui Durand and Joncas are no longer at the helm of Ondinnok. Dave Jenniss (Wolastoqiyik) succeeded them in 2017. His first work in that role, *Ktahkomiq* (2017), is at the heart of the article I penned in collaboration with Dave Jenniss and his co-creators Ivanie Aubin-Malo (Wolastoqiyik) and Catherine Joncas. This piece of dance theatre, presented at the third Printemps autochtone d'Art in Montréal the same year, brought on many challenges for the three collaborators who, in turn, turned to the protocol of engagement developed by Ondinnok to approach and create from and through the story of the deep-seated conflict that divides their own community of Viger and opposes Jenniss and Aubin-Malo's families. In the interviews that form the basis of the article, the three openly named how they attempted to move through the "muck" when no resolution was / is in sight, how they negotiated with anger, resistance, refusal, and how they found a hopeful territory in the Wolasotqey language where they could encounter one another. The article meditates on how the artists decided to foreground this negotiation on stage, offering it as a starting point perhaps for those in the audience interested in starting a similar journey.

As this issue makes clear, Ondinnok has offered a vital safe space for many Indigenous artists for whom French is a language of expression. Indeed, Sioui Durand and Joncas have served as mentors for many among the new generation of artists who currently create work in Québec and abroad: Émilie Monnet (Anishinaabe) worked with Ondinnok before she founded Productions Onishka in 2011; Marco Collin (Innu) and Charles Bender (Huron-Wendat) continue to collaborate with the company and have also co-founded in 2013 with Xavier Huard, a theatre company called Menuentakuan now in residency Aux Écuries. Atikamekw theatre maker and scholar Véronique Basile Hébert and Atikamekw set designer Julie-Christina Picher, both featured in this issue, have deep ties with Ondinnok as well. Picher credits the company with holding a space where she could fully be herself as an Indigenous artist after graduating from the theatre program at the Collège Lionel-Groulx, noting that this is a rare and precious occurrence in the industry. In the interview featured in this issue, Picher takes us through her journey as a professional set designer and shares her thoughts on what she hopes to offer a new generation of Indigenous artists working behind the scenes.

For her part, Basile Hébert participated in the short-lived but extremely important training program that Ondinnok provided Indigenous actors in partnership with l'École nationale de théâtre between 2004 and 2007. A playwright, director, and scholar, Basile Hébert, now a doctoral candidate at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and a visiting professor at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR), is an exciting and vibrant voice in today's theatrical landscape. Her work is decentring urbanity and focuses on meeting Atikamekw on their land through a theatre with and for the community. Basile Hébert foregrounds the Atikamekw language and the worldviews it encapsulates to guide her dramaturgy. She shares in this issue an excerpt of *Notcimik, "Là d'où vient notre sang,"* a piece created "from a feminine and feminist perspective." This storytelling journey was offered in response to the tragic and preventable death of Joyce

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Echaquan and the finding of missing Indigenous children buried in mass graves at the sites of past residential schools. The play was presented at the Festival international Présence autochtone by a cast and creative team composed predominantly of Atikamekw, Anishnabeg, and Huron-Wendat artists in the summer of 2021, on a large outdoor stage, accompanied by music and drumming. *Notcimik* celebrates the resilience of Indigenous peoples and enacts the simultaneous poetic, healing, re-worlding, diplomatic, and political power of Indigenous storytelling and theatre.

Jill: Toronto-based Cole Alvis (Métis) and Yolanda Bonnell (Anishinaabe-South Asian) are the founding artists of manidoons collective. As Indigenous theatre workers, they engage in radical inclusion and prioritize "care over profit" to ensure that they are able to curate safer spaces in which to create works for the stage and in which to witness these works. Their 2020 production of *bug*, written and performed by Bonnell under the direction of Alvis demonstrated that the practices of radical care, which they continue to devise and practise, in no way compromise the excellence of the resultant work. In addition to their operationalization of the principles of artist care, which they outline here in their article "Practices of Care in Storytelling," manidoons upended conventional expectations and protocols that have directed audience engagement with performed publics inside European and North American theatre spaces for decades. *bug*'s audiences were invited to leave and re-enter the house if and when they required it (for physical, emotional, sensory, or spiritual relief). We were also invited to switch our cell phones on, with the understanding that those who had come to witness are often themselves caretakers, and that open communication channels between them and vulnerable parties outside the theatre might be necessary. This speaks, I think, to Bonnell's philosophy that art serves humans – in all their humanness – and that, therefore, the artist ought not to be so "precious" about the work. manidoons also facilitated the safety of *bug*'s audiences by ensuring that Elders and medicines shared space with the production and were fully available at all times to audience members. And finally, with an initiative devised to protect the artists and their audiences, Bonnell publicly requested that Euro-Canadian theatre critics refrain from publishing reviews of the work. Such reviews have caused and might now continue to cause harm to the artists. And they might (as they so often have) mislead non-Indigenous spectators and offend Indigenous witnesses because of their writers' cultural and experiential distance from the story and from the historical events and cosmological understandings from which *bug* was written.

In their contribution to this special issue, Alvis and Bonnell have expanded their thinking around principles of care within the project of crafting public performances. Here they consider the needs of designers and production personnel, inviting such individuals to join them in this reimagining and offering readers tools that could (and *should*) be adopted and perhaps adapted to strengthen trust between onstage and offstage artists and between those who create the work and audiences in the creation of safe and accessible spaces from which to witness.

Likewise, Algonquin scholar and dramaturg Lindsay Lachance expresses concern for the safety and comfort of audiences, asking, "D[o] you feel cared for?" However, while Lachance stresses the duty of the storyteller to the witness of Indigenous works, she also invests that witness with a reciprocal duty of care, as she asks, "Do you feel accountable to the work?" For her, witnesses constitute a crucial bridge, carrying information back to the community, and active agents whose duty it is to respond to the story they now carry with "tangible action [through which to] enact change."

Lindsay Lachance thickens Elinor Fuchs's seminal essay "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play"[5] (2004) by placing the plays with which she works into intimate relationship with the biotas from which their stories and characters emerge. Likening the play to a "river – [...] something always in motion, and with many twists and turns," Lachance widens the circle of care to encompass the other-than-human, which also requires respect, care, and safety.

Philip Geller of Red River Métis and Ashkenazi heritage is a theatre worker and scholar who grew up within a family of "artist[s] and dreamer[s]." He identifies himself as "a reconnecting member of the Otipemisiwak" (The people who own / govern themselves). A product of the meeting of two rivers (e.g., cultural bloodlines), Geller is particularly mindful of the necessity of "good beginnings" for the establishment of good relations between diverse peoples who are sustained by the same biota. Taking us through his own process of developing a BIPOC Agreement through which to ensure his own safety and the safety of his BIPOC company as he directed an adaptation of *Ubu Roi* (1961 [1895]), Geller unpacks a series of mandates and practices devised and undertaken by various BIPOC companies and artists today, theoretically grounding his study in Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2016 [2013]) teachings around reciprocity within a gift economy. Through this work, Geller begins to tease out a process through which to "set out clear protocols, responsibilities, roles, and relations" that might inform the intercultural "journey" undertaken by theatre workers within the training grounds, professional and semi-professional regions of the larger realm of performance in the territories now called Canada.

Lauren Jerke, Rupert Arcand and Rocky Ward's offering documents a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators as they co-created an applied theatre workshop for institutional gatekeepers who sought to decolonize themselves and the organizations they served. Designed for the legal community in Alberta to provide space for reflection around the impact of colonization on legal decisions affecting Indigenous children, this work served as a performative intervention on the dramaturgy (i.e., scripting, timing, length of trial), the casting (i.e., jury selection, assignment of attorneys) and the performance of the Canadian Judicial process – a process built upon and structured by this nation's history of theft, fraud, and genocide.

Throughout this carefully facilitated journey, workshop participants were afforded an opportunity to consider the representation of Indigenous story more deeply – particularly, the representation of Indigenous agency and experience by artists who are outsiders to the culture from whence the story they purport to tell springs. Sifting through Dwight Conquergood's (1985) catalogue of ethical traps sprung to catch up those intercultural artists who are presented with opportunities to speak with and through the words of the Other, they touch the heart of an endemic problem in DTPS today: "We [Indigenous peoples] can speak for ourselves." But we have been barred from those spaces of story – spaces from which to speak. These spaces must be reconfigured – transformed into ethical spaces of meeting that are welcoming and safe.

Syilx artist Mariel Belanger invites readers to discover her narrative thread through a palimpsest of media that perform themselves on the Twine platform. Her "Respons(A)bility: Weaving Words of Responsibility Through Story" unfolds as an "Auntie (anti) essay," which calls for a revisioning of how we approach the act of "reading" (on page or stage) and which argues for the dissolution of violent colonial conventions and frameworks within academia.

We are enjoined to follow Belanger's narrative thread via the "cues" she offers as links and offered opportunities throughout to veer away from the scripted journey and so deepen our understanding. All the while, Belanger reminds us that our congenital "ability" to "respond" to the ideas and visual stimuli, which she has curated, renders us morally responsible to this work and its author. Passive consumption will not be tolerated on this journey. Drawing upon the works of Indigenous thinkers engaged in epistemological revisioning, Belanger pushes past institutional lip-service, virtue signalling, and complacency to demand safe passage for Indigenous, Black and student-artists of Colour. At stops along the way, Belanger suggests a series of do-able initiatives to curate safe(r) spaces for historically marginalized scholar-artists and challenges her readers to honestly position themselves in this struggle: "Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?"

Julie: This special issue was created over several years marked by a global pandemic, amid movements that brought to the fore how structural racism and colonial genocide intersect with health-related, economic, and environmental inequities. Many possible and current contributors

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were deeply impacted by COVID-19, by the disproportionate precarity it brought on already marginalized communities, and by the forest fires and landslides that affected the West Coast in the summer of 2021. Nevertheless, many contributions centre care, compassion, slowing down, joy, humour, taking the time needed to build relationships, trust, and reciprocity in order to avoid easy fixes. As you prepare to enter this collective space, we invite you to take a moment to introduce yourself, acknowledge the land you are on and / or come from, to perhaps begin to name or listen to the stories that are woven deep inside of you and that you carry with you, and to state your intentions in witnessing the work assembled in this issue of *Percées*.

Migwetch, niawenkowa, maarsi, limləmt, sechanalyagh, thank you, merci, for being here.

Notes

[1] Kim Senklip Harvey's blog, on which were published most of the texts we cite in this article, is no longer accessible online as of 2023.

[2] Lois Weaver of Split Britches devised the Long Table as a "dinner party structured by etiquette where conversation is the only course" (Split Britches, n.d.). For more information about this practice, please see www.split-britches.com/long-table (http://www.split-britches.com/long-table) . Here, Weaver has published a guide to hosting one's own Long Table with a detailed list of required "ingredients," and brief manuals on "etiquette" and best practices. During COVID-19 lockdowns (and where virtual gatherings have proven desirable for their accessibility), Carter has attempted to adapt Weaver's Long Table practices to curate a workable online salon.

[3] I first encountered this term in the work of Virginie Magnat who encountered it in the work of Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2016 [2013]). Indigenous knowledges are often "discovered" or adopted by Western scholars who present them as a branch of "new knowledge," regardless of the fact that this "new knowledge" has been known for millennia by Indigenous peoples. Shane Edwards (2009) is credited by Manulani Aluli-Meyer for having coined this term to "describe knowledge as simultaneously old and new" (Aluli-Meyer, 2016 [2013]: 259). The term and its meaning appear in his dissertation "Titiro Whakamuri Kia Marama Ai Te Wao Nei: Whakapapa Epistemologies and Maniapoto Maori Cultural Identities" (Edwards, 2009: 43).

[4] We liken this digital forum to a Talking Circle. Within a Talking Circle, participants speak until they have finished what they have to say without interruption from others. Here, in this special issue, the culture workers who are sharing their hard-won wisdom, struggles, successes, and hopes have been invited to express themselves as they choose: no restrictions or recommendations have been offered with reference to word count, style, or discursive framework.

[5] Fuchs' text is ubiquitous in many theatre programs where it is offered as a generative starting point in courses on play analysis, dramaturgy, design, etc.

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