Placefull Spaces: Queer Women and Non-Binary Artists
Resisting an Emptied Stage

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies
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Abstract

For marginalized queer artists, inequitable distribution of and access to performance space impact both the development process and production of artistic works. While a lack of ongoing or resident performance space for women’s productions in Canada has been documented (see, for example, Rina Fraticelli; Rebecca Burton; and Michelle MacArthur), less research has been conducted on queer women’s and non-binary artists’ experience of space in the industry. Theatre and performance scholars (see, for example, Gay McAuley, Una Chaudhuri, Jill Dolan, and Laura Levin) have provided the groundwork for exploring the relationship among theatre sites, identities, and productions; and queer geographers such as Natalie Oswin, Julie Podmore, Catherine Nash, and Kath Browne have developed invaluable theories and methodologies to unsettle the assumed neutrality of space. However, few scholars have brought these fields together, particularly in the context of performance in Canada. This doctoral project applies queer and feminist theories of geography to queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance to explore how insecure and inequitable access to physical space affects both experiences of finding one’s place in the theatre industry and articulations of an imagined place on stage.
The germinal Western conceptions of the stage as placeless or “empty” (Brook) work to neutralize the theatre space by assuming all creators, performers, and audience members are easily oriented within it. For marginalized bodies, which are simultaneously hyper-visualized and unseen in dominant cultural spaces, the necessary conditions to access placelessness may be unobtainable, or may be experienced as a form of violent erasure of histories. Through a process of “unmapping” venues and close description and analysis of performances, this doctoral study questions how an intentional engagement with space and place on stage can actively destabilize the presumed universality and neutrality of performance space and combat broader gendered spatial inequities. Focusing on performances and events in Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia, this project develops a theory of “placefullness” as a means of understanding how artists actively resist spatial inequities in the theatre and performance industry in Canada.
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awe-inspiring creativity. Thank you for giving me the privilege to explore queer women’s performance through your practices and insights.

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Dedication

To my ancestors and elders for instilling within me the power to resist and fight

May their memory be a blessing
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Orientation/Situation

In Place of a Preface

The room you are in as you read these words is full—beyond the furniture, technology, books, etc. This room is an assemblage of histories and stories, presences and erasures, privileges and oppressions. These are present as a constant hum—an oft-unheard undertone, so steadily iterated its magic dissipates, unnoticed and unremarked—embedded in and yet still escaping the structures that hold this room together. The room you are in is comprised of what is not seen, just as much as what you can hold. This room cannot be emptied.

I begin here with a placefull act, practicing an intentional articulation of place and habitation that builds on Sara Ahmed’s notion of orientation, articulated in Queer Phenomenology. I start this project with an inquiry into how we are situated, contemplating where I sit, and inviting you to engage where you sit, as an entry point into our discussion of precarity and queer performance. I invite you, too, to consider the shape of your body within the room, and how this room resonates within and through the space your body takes up.
Chapter 1

Unmapping Queer Performance

Introduction

While theatre can indeed take place anywhere (outdoors, in the street, on the bare earth),
the point is that it must take place somewhere.
– Gay McAuley

Gendering operates in how bodies take up space . . . . To become accommodating, we
take up less space. The more accommodating we are the less space we have to take up.
Gender: a loop, tightening.
A world can shrink when we shrink.
– Sara Ahmed

In July 2015 Buddies in Bad Times Theatre\(^1\) announced that Evalyn Parry would take on the role of artistic director in the upcoming season. The news was met with great support and attention from popular media. Theatre reviewer J. Kelly Nestruck noted that prior to this announcement, only one other woman had held such a position in a *venued* theatre in Toronto—Nina Lee Aquino, who was named interim artistic director with Nigel Shawn Williams at Factory Theatre in 2012, and took on sole artistic directorship of the theatre in December 2014. The distinction Nestruck makes, between vened and unvenued theatre companies, is vital. One of the ways in which the precarity\(^2\) experienced by women and marginalized artists in the

\(^1\) Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is the oldest and longest-running LGBT/Queer theatre in the world (“About”).

\(^2\) I use the term “preciary” throughout this research in keeping with Judith Butler’s conception of the term. In her discussion of precarious subjects, Butler notes that precarity refers to a “politically induced condition,” wherein particular subjects and populations experience increased likelihood and risk of oppression, suffering, or violence. This may refer to “populations that starve or . . . near starvation” or to sex workers who experience police violence or violence on the street. Butler explains that her notion of precarity directly relates to gender norms, “since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence. Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law or, more specifically, the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home” (“Performativity, Precarity, and Sexual Politics” ii). Precarity is inherently a spatial concern. Thus, in this research, I consider the precarity of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance in relation to the erasure and undervaluation of their subjecthood in political, social, and cultural life.
theatre industry manifests itself is through spatial organization and designation. As Rebecca Burton notes in her 2006 report on gender equity in Canadian theatre, *Adding it Up*, there is a direct correlation between obtaining long-term spaces for development and production and the gender of a company’s artistic director. A lack of a regular space for rehearsal and production of artistic works impacts the resources, support, and development time allotted to creative practices. Parry’s appointment is all the more noteworthy because not only was she one of just two women in such a position, but she was also the only queer woman in a leadership position for a venued theatre company. Self-identifying as both a woman and queer presents particular challenges and potentialities for artistic creators. Recognizing the dearth of research on queer women and non-binary theatre creators in Canada, this thesis investigates the specific intersections of those whose experiences are marginalized because of both their gender identity and sexual orientation.

The spatial experiences and geographies of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance are complex and multi-layered subjects of inquiry. Rather than simply writing about the transience of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ work, a fact that is easily discernable from a survey of Canada’s artistic programming in the last few decades, my interest here is in how such transience and spatial precarity are erased through conceptions of performance space as “placeless” (Relph) or “empty” (Brook), concepts that I explore more fully in chapter 2. Such ideas of place discount the politics and norms that shape the space from which we perceive a performance. However, our orientation within space directly impacts our perception of place. The concept of an empty or placeless place problematically assumes that universal and equitable access to space is available to all spectators and performers who enter it. The conception of emptiness assumes theatre and performance spaces to be ahistorical and depoliticized environments. Consequently, this presumed neutrality of space erases inequities that shape and map gendered experiences in the industry. While much work has been written on the empty or placeless stage since Brook’s germinal work *The Empty Space*, this conception of theatre space as a vessel waiting to be filled still informs much of the work produced in Canada today. Even alternative work that intentionally engages space and place often does so in relation to (or

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3 Burton’s survey found that while forty-nine percent of all companies surveyed reported possessing “a regular or resident performance space,” only thirty-eight percent of the companies with female artistic directors had such spaces, in contrast to fifty-seven percent of those with male artistic directors (Burton 79).
negation of) Brook’s empty stage. The idea of the “placeless” stage is shaped by and helps to shape how a theatre programs its season, how it allocates resources, and how funding is distributed.

If the empty and placeless stage is a point of contention, it follows that one way to address precarious access to theatre space is by drawing attention to it and rejecting the fallacy of spatial neutrality. Following in the tradition of Richard Schechner’s conceptualizations of spatiality in *Environmental Theatre*, I consider “the fullness of space [and] the endless ways space can be transformed, articulated and animated,” (1) and engage all of the places used in performance as both temporally and spatially significant, unfixed, and in flux. With this in mind, I borrow from Schechner and apply the idea that “[t]here is no dead space, nor any end to space” (2). By accentuating the space within which a production is staged, queer women and non-binary artists actively de-neutralize space. That is, they reveal that spaces cannot be considered to be the same for everyone everywhere. Power distribution, sociopolitical culture, race, and class always establish access and affect our “conditions of arrival” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 137). Our positionalities and experiences establish what allows us to enter and feel comfortable in diverse spaces. As queer feminist theorist Sara Ahmed explains, “Some of us have more behind us than others at the very moment in which we arrive into the world” (*Queer Phenomenology* 137). The histories of heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, and homophobia result in the privileging of particular subjects upon arrival—they are behind us insofar as they create either sturdy or shaky foundations. And here we may consider how what is behind us changes how we experience what is in front of us: what we see on the stage. Queer women’s and non-binary artists’ intentional articulation of place in theatre has the capacity to reveal what is already behind us when we enter a performance.

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4 Throughout this research I refer often to a collective “we.” This direct address is not intended to assume readership or shared knowledge. Building on Ahmed’s writings, I employ “we” “not [as] a foundation but what we are working toward” (*Living a Feminist Life* 2). Ahmed continues, “By working out what we are for, we are working out that we, that hopeful signifier of a feminist collectivity” (*Living a Feminist Life* 2). I therefore refer to a we that is not yet whole, not yet (or perhaps not intended ever to be) complete, and, at times, a “we” that is contradictory and disrupted. Though this we may never aim for cohesion and unity, it does aim for collective presence. Referring to we in this way is a means by which to make space for what may come, in addition to a collectivity that is already present and in a continual process of becoming.
In order to examine the spatiality of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance, I approach my doctoral research and the three case studies presented in it with the following foundational questions in mind:

• How do queer artists illuminate and resist the inequities of space through performance?
• If space is precarious and unpredictable, how might the articulation and use of space and place in performance act as a form of resistance against heteropatriarchal norms and ideologies?
• And, more specifically, in intentionally engaging space and place, how might queer performers actively destabilize the presumed universality and neutrality of performance space and combat broader gendered spatial inequities?

In this study, I employ Ahmed’s “queer phenomenology” to examine how queer women and non-binary artists negotiate, represent, and perform space in their creative works. Phenomenology here is used to explore everyday human situations and experiences, questioning what is typically unquestioned, bringing to the surface that which is typically concealed (Seamon and Sowers 43). I aim to explore performer and spectator experiences in the space of theatre and question what is conceived of as natural, inevitable, and universal. I discuss histories, studies, and events that make evident the unstable and unpredictable relation that queer women and non-binary artists have to development and performance space.

My interventions on space and place take, as their starting point, gendered inequities experienced through the geographies and spatial configurations of both the theatre space and the broader cities and countries within which they reside. This study foregrounds the practice of

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5 Sara Ahmed’s theory of “queer phenomenology” applies phenomenology’s emphasis on “lived experiences, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” to queer studies (Queer Phenomenology 3). Ahmed uses phenomenology in order to explore what it means to be oriented within space. She explains, “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward. A queer phenomenology, perhaps, might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are ‘less proximate’ or event those that deviate or are deviant” (Queer Phenomenology 3). I explore this theoretical approach and the concept of spatial “orientations” more fully in the following chapter.
placefullness, conceived of as the intentional articulation of place in performance. The case studies reside within and travel through the intersections of spatiality, temporality, decolonization, and queer orientations. The problem is not so much that marginalized queer artists cannot find spaces to work in, but rather that they cannot maintain or secure them for an ongoing period of time. Furthermore, our relationship to space is not simply about whose bodies are currently located and arranged within it, but also whose bodies we anticipate will join us. Anticipation, too, shapes space and our orientation within it. In thinking through both space and time as an assemblage, we may consider the way in which the past and future construct our sense of place in the theatre. These are the stories and images that fill space, and enable some spectators and artists to access representations of place on stage freely. As such, this project incorporates theories of temporality alongside spatiality and geographies of performance.

In my analyses chapters (chapters 5–7), I theorize modes and practices of resistance, which implicitly reveal and respond to spatial precarity. In keeping with queer theory’s project to deconstruct and dismantle normalized power relations, I present case studies that consider the ways in which engaging space in performance can actively de-neutralize and combat inequitable spatial distribution. Alongside recent events in the theatre and activist community, I analyze works by d’bi.young anitafrika, Jess Dobkin, and the Queer Arts Festival in order to consider how distinct experiences of transience in performance, which often go unremarked, are spatially and temporally significant to both the development and production of works, and how they are received. I propose a practice of placefullness, which I conceive of as acknowledgement and engagement with place and space during and through the performance event. Such a practice is a performative act that refuses the neutrality of space and challenges the precarious and inequitable access queer women and non-binary performers have to space. Rather than engaging with site specificity, I consider instead how all sites are specific. Such a theorization should not presume

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6 Placefullness relates to how physical bodies, their histories, and their exclusions fill spaces presumed to be empty. I take liberty here in allowing the word “placefullness” to take up space through my choice of spelling. Encompassing more than an articulation of land, geographies, and venues, placefullness makes room for the emotional, the historical, the political, the social, and the temporal. Placefullness makes visible that which has been expelled or buried—that which is not supposed to take up space or is perceived as crowding space. I thus elect to employ a spelling of the word that also takes up more space than we might suppose it should.

7 In conceptualizing anticipation as a queer temporal state, I borrow from Jasbir Puar’s anticipatory temporality, which involves “not only or primarily anticipating the future, but also recording the future that is already here, yet unknown but for a split second” (xx).
singularity, but instead specificity in the accumulation of a multitude of simultaneous stories and histories that exist within the theatre space.

I apply queer theory and intersectionality to my analysis. In a practical sense, such a framework means consciously reflecting on my own citation methods and the scholars I reference in this work. Citationality is significant to this research because it informs which theorists are considered valuable and necessary collaborators. Ahmed describes citationality “as a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies” to the exclusion of others (“Making Feminist Points”). Citation politics are spatial politics and temporal politics. In a blog post entitled “White Men,” Ahmed considers citationality as a relational form directly connected to whiteness and patriarchy. She writes: “[S]imply put, if academic fields remain organised around white men, then to be respectful of history, to cite right, to cite well, can in practice translate into a requirement to cite more white men” (Ahmed, “White Men”). This cyclical system works to naturalize a cannon of literature, theory, and philosophy monopolized by “foundational” texts written by white men. Due to the ways in which the canon has been normalized, “it takes conscious willed and willful effort not to reproduce an inheritance” (Ahmed, “White Men”). Not giving space to oppressive opinions and exclusionary theory is of equal importance. In Ahmed’s discussion of trans-exclusionary feminists, she insists that she will not legitimize their points of view by including them in her publications. She writes “For me, being a feminist at work is also about what or who we do not cite, recite or incite. No citation can be a feminist policy!” (Ahmed, “You are Oppressing Us!”). In an effort to critique and dismantle dominant normalized assumptions and practices queerly, I am conscious of the theorists I cite and the histories I create or perpetuate through citation. Making space for queer women and marginalized scholars brings to the forefront the intersectional queer ancestors and elders who taught us to critique the power structures in the world that oppresses us. Their work is not only absent from much research, but also coopted and erased by more privileged writers.

My spatial reading of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ experiences must acknowledge how race and settler colonialism dictate who is granted privilege, mobility, and power in my two regions of study. In examining the spaces used for queer women’s performance in Canada, it is imperative to recognize that all theatre spaces in this country are located on colonized land. Assuming an innate and universal right to more space for all queer women and non-binary artists’ performance would only further this colonial project. In calling attention to
the designation and dynamics of spatial organization, this research does not seek to claim rights to space or demand additional rights to spaces; instead, it seeks to deneutralize spaces used for performance and to recognize the ways in which those spaces are regulated and restricted in the country. With this in mind, I begin by acknowledging that I am conducting this research and writing this study on Mississauga Anishinaabe territory. This space has been the home and hunting space for many peoples, including the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. I also travelled to conduct research on the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish people, in particular the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. In conducting my study where I did, I am obligated to question continually and persistently the ongoing implications and impact of settler colonialism, particularly in regard to spatial organization, power, and equity.

Rationale and Context

Absent, Invisible, Essentialized: Evaluating a Gap in Scholarly Research

I situate this study in two cities in Canada: Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia. These cities were selected because they have active queer communities, theatres, and performance spaces. There are vibrant and complex histories of queer women’s performance in each of these regions in Canada. In Toronto and Vancouver, lesbian and queer women’s festivals and performances have increased visibility and opportunities for marginalized performers and creators, though their stability and longevity have been precarious and unstable. Though each of these regions is unique, with distinct spatial organization, the impact nomadic practices have on queer women’s performance is undeniable. One of the aims of this study is to construct a methodological and theoretical framework for investigation that can be applied to other cities in Canada and internationally. In this way, the locations are merely two of the multitude of places that could have been chosen for this research. Heterosexism, patriarchy, racism, and gender oppression are widespread phenomena that manifest differently across diverse geographies. Applying my methodology and mode of analysis to other performances outside of Canada will provide insight into the range of performance tactics and practices that illuminate and denaturalize inequitable and precarious access to place and space.

My case studies were all produced between 2016 and 2017 in Canada. The research
presented in my literature review (chapter 3) is also centrally focused on contemporary publications, primarily written between 2006 and 2017. I begin my study and review in 2006 because Burton’s aforementioned report, *Adding it Up*, completed in that year, provides a strong foundation from which to begin. Burton surveyed the role women play in Canadian theatres and found minimal improvements from Rina Fraticelli’s landmark 1982 study *The Status of Women in Canadian Theatre*. Though there has not been a substantial study conducted in the twelve years since *Adding it Up* was released, the impact of Burton’s report is clear. As Moynan King notes, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre’s 2009 season was almost entirely written and produced by women: “The impetus behind this women’s focused programming came from a desire to address historical inequities brought to light by the Canada Council for the Arts report ‘Adding it Up’” (“Foster Children” 199). Yet this response was short-lived. Following the 2009 women-focused season, Buddies in Bad Times did not produce any new Canadian work by women for almost three years. King’s piece, entitled “The Foster Children of Buddies,” notes the way in which women’s inclusion at Buddies has historically been contingent on women being granted space by those more privileged within the theatre. A lack of female leadership has meant women are at times undervalued in the theatre.

While limited comprehensive quantitative data has been collected on queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performances and their experiences of performance space in Canada, valuable research has been presented on gender inequalities in the theatre industry (such as Fraticelli’s aforementioned 1982 report, *The Status of Women in Theatre*; Burton’s *Adding it Up*; and, most recently, Michelle MacArthur’s *Achieving Equity in Canadian Theatre: A Report with Best Practice Recommendations* [2015]). Although there was steady progress in the number of plays by women produced on Canadian stages from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century, statistics from the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 theatre seasons, compiled by the Playwright’s Guild of Canada, show a five percent regression in the number of plays by women on Canadian stages when compared to the results from 2006. As MacArthur notes, “It’s been over thirty years since Fraticelli’s landmark study and women are still underrepresented in major artistic roles in Canadian theatre. While there was an increase in representation between Fraticelli’s and Burton’s reports, recent data shows regression” (7). It is significant to note that statistics for the 2015/2016 season indicate a small increase in the number of women’s plays staged in the country (Playwrights Guild, “Annual Theatre Production Survey 2015/16”). While a positive turn might
signify a change in the theatre community, historically, improved equity in one year is not indicative of an influx of women’s work in seasons to come. Indeed, the 2016/2017 report from the Playwrights Guild illustrates stagnation. Men continue to dominate in the number of plays produced on Canadian stages (sixty-four percent), and women’s plays continue to account for only twenty-six percent of work produced (Playwrights Guild, “Annual Theatre Production Survey 2016/17”). Overall, the disproportionate number of men’s plays produced in Canada demonstrates patriarchal systemic inequalities. These gender inequities, reflected in Canadian statistics regarding artistic directors and theatre directors as well, are only exacerbated by the additional marginalization that comes from occupying marginalized positionalities (MacArthur 29).

There has been limited research in Canada that directly investigates the relationship between non-binary and queer women artists’ performance practices and the spaces in which they develop and produce their creative works. The absence of intersectional quantitative theatre research and the assumption of fixed binary identity categories make it difficult to account for the specific ways these practitioners experience space in the arts. In this research I only begin to touch on how non-binary artists’ invisibility cyclically results in less scholarship and fewer studies on their artistic works. While some research has been done on non-binary people and queer women's spatial invisibility, precarity, and transience, what is unique and original in this dissertation is the application of queer geographies and queer theories on lesbian and queer women's spatiality to theatre and performance in Canada. Where the transience of women's bars has been theorized and discussed at length, the impact this has on the performances

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8 I use these statistics to note the quantifiable—but, throughout this research, am also wary of what is not quantified. The data available for women in theatre demonstrates their precarity and absence from leadership roles. But these statistics are undeniably incomplete. Studies on gender equity in theatre, such as those by Rebecca Burton (2006), Hill Strategies (2014), Equity in Theatre (2015) and others rarely consider the intersections of identities. Where there is research on women, people of colour, Black, Indigenous, and disabled artists, I have found no data to date that adequately accounts for those who inhabit multiple marginalized identities. Our experiences exist in the intersections, yet these statistics silo our experiences and ultimately erase the additional obstacles faced by those who inhabit multiple minoritized positionalities. Furthermore, those who do not fit neatly into binary gender categories are not represented in these studies at all. Thus, the Canadian statistics available are at odds with the intersectional methodological and theoretical approach I take in this project. Though quantitative studies might demonstrate precarious access to funds, resources, and visibility, we see from these studies and statistics not only a body count, but also whose bodies count.

9 See, for example, Hankin (2002); Chenier (2004); Podmore (2001); Podmore (2006); Skeggs (1999); and Casey (2004).
programmed in those spaces has been discussed much less frequently. Similarly, while discussions of gay villages and the centralizing of white gay men has been examined at length, the resulting absence of queer cultural and artistic spaces for women has been far less discussed. The dearth of research on queer women’s spatial experiences in theatre and performance suggests an opportunity to apply queer geographies to artistic practice, cultural community building, activism, and theorizations on identity formation. Additionally, these artistic practices influence not only practitioners in the field but also audiences that attend practitioners’ works and the cities in which they reside. By conducting an interdisciplinary study that borrows and translates theories and methodologies from queer and feminist theory, performance studies, and human geographies, my doctoral project seeks to address this gap in research through an exploration of the spatiality of queer women’s performance, their personal experiences, and their embodied creative practices.

Methodology: Scavenging Narratives, Unmapping Space

By “unmapping” performance spaces, a process that Sherene Razack explains “denaturalize[s] geography” and unsettles the assumed neutrality of space (5), my work investigates not only how spaces in which queer women and non-binary artists develop, rehearse, and perform their work mediate their artistic experiences, but also how these spaces change the broader cultural and geographic landscape of a city. Unmapping is essential to this project, and arguably to queer geographies more broadly, as it attempts to confront the violence that mapping itself produces. Drawing lines and coordinates on a page or a screen tells a particular story through the lines’ erasure of other stories. These lines do not simply show us what roads to follow; they pave over what was there before and the conditions of arrival that enabled their construction. Maps naturalize land in order to tell an origin story of where we came from, and also act as a performative object in that they show us where we can be. Unmapping provides us with tools to acknowledge that the map itself is shaped through self-perpetuating systems of settler colonial heteropatriarchal power.

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10 For a comprehensive overview of literature on sexuality and space in relation to gay male-centred geographies, see Julie Podmore’s critical commentary on “Sexualities landscapes beyond homonormativity” (2013).
Addressing a marginalized community often excluded from other investigations, my methodology incorporates a variety of research methods and is gathered together through a critical feminist queer phenomenological approach. I borrow and build upon the methods outlined by Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray in their article “Lesbians in the City: Mobilities and Relational Geographies” to explore the geography of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance through an exploration of physical landscapes, narratives, and embodied practices. Nash and Gorman-Murray take a three-step approach to interrogating lesbian mobilities and geographies: mapping physical geographies; narrative explication; and embodied practice. These three phases will be employed in each of the core chapters in my dissertation to explore the ways in which various spaces are experienced in the performance industry. I expand upon my application of these methods below.

Mapping Physical Geographies

Nash and Gorman-Murray explain that their research begins “with a mapping and description of actual physical movement; the physicality of that movement is quite broadly interpreted to include the corporeal movement of people as well as the flows and networks of knowledge, goods, values, and information” (177). In so doing, they analyze how movement is comprised of “linkages and disconnections,” and how these shifting and fluctuating patterns construct “particular relational geographies, that is, the stretching of material and social relations across and through spaces” (177). I borrow from their methods of mapping to investigate the neighbourhoods and histories of the venues used for the participants’ performances. I ask who has historically resided and currently resides within the areas where the venues themselves are located, and what the cultural, political, and social compositions of these neighbourhoods are. I unmap these geographical areas, deneutralizing their locations and populations, but not because they are necessarily or explicitly referenced in the performances I analyze, nor because they have extraordinary or unique historical placements (though arguably, they are significant to the kind of works produced and the audiences invited in the space). My main concern in unmapping and unravelling the histories of these spaces is to consider “the conditions of arrival” (Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology 137) that enabled these productions to take place. In Queer Phenomenology,
Ahmed explains that our orientation in space, like “a well-trodden path”\(^\text{11}\) (17), appears to have already existed by the time we arrive—a preordained or natural placement in the world. Ahmed asks what makes such arrivals possible—how do the conditions of arrival at a particular orientation fall into the background, unnoticed and unremarked (*Queer Phenomenology* 37)? Both the bodies that enter a space and the space itself store memories and pasts that are brought to a moment of arrival. As Ahmed explains, bodies that pass through space and arrive in space bring with them histories that enable their movement: “Think of a sticky object; what it picks up on its surface ‘shows’ where it has traveled and what it has come into contact with. You bring your past encounters with you when you arrive” (*Queer Phenomenology* 40). So, too, spaces possess inheritances; they “acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them” (Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness” 156) and “take shape by being orientated around some bodies, more than others” (Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness” 157). Bodies are sticky objects that carry with them maps of paths they have travelled; but some bodies are also sticky in that they “stick out.” When objects cling to these bodies, they become hyper-visible. We see them enter a room and question where they have been, where they come from, why they are here. Certain bodies (read: white, able-bodied, straight, cisgender) easily find comfort and mobility within a space because they are unnoticed; they appear to “fit in” and extend the space because they do not disrupt its shape (Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness” 158). Other bodies are seen as out of place—as visitors who make “familiar spaces seem strange” (Ahmed, “Phenomenology of Whiteness” 159). In order to explore the conditions of arrival, particularly regarding productions that use rented theatre spaces, we must examine the histories of colonialism, white supremacy, heterosexism, and patriarchy that mark and shape the space, influencing not only who gains entry, but also who is seen.

Unmapping spaces, and examining their histories, dismantles the presumed neutrality of theatrical space and moves us toward accountability: How did this space enable the arrival of some bodies and not others? Who is welcomed as a visitor in the space and who is perceived as the rightful inhabitant? How might some queer bodies act “as a practical, if accidental, agent of neocolonial expansion . . . serviceable both to modern nation building and to transnational flows

\(^{11}\) Ahmed’s conception of the well-trodden path will be further explicated in chapter 6, which focuses on Jess Dobkin’s *The Magic Hour*. 
of capital” (Pérez 6)? With these ideas in mind, I unsettle the neutrality of theatre spaces by considering the spatial organization and geographical histories of the places in which the case studies are produced and developed.

Narrative Explication

The second method used in this project examines how narratives help to shape and are shaped by practitioners’ movements through space. This phase presents the

[s]tories we tell about the how, why and where of geographically and historically specific mobilities. As Creswell (2006) notes, the stories we tell about our mobilities are socially and culturally constructed and are specific to the people and landscapes marked by such movements. The nature of movement can be presented as voluntary or forced, transgressive or compliant. (Nash and Gorman-Murray 177–78)

For the purpose of this study, these narratives, focusing on artistic development and production, have been collected through interviews with artists and theatre practitioners conducted for this research, as well as from previously published interviews. Throughout my chapters of analysis (chapters 5–7) I note the particular importance of storytelling to the queer communities and subjects being discussed. Michel De Certeau, explicating the role of narrative structures in mapping practices, notes that “[p]laces are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain and pleasure of the body” (108). He explains: “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice” (115). Though memories of a place might not always take material form, we feel space and place in our bones. By no means does this argument suppose that stories are auxiliary to geographies or landscapes. Nor does de Certeau assert that stories translate or transpose spaces into words. On the contrary, stories are constantly developing spaces, constituting them through narrative: “They organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it” (de Certeau116).

Stories are consequential. They perform and enact change. In this way, theatre and performance, as narrative forms, shape not only the narrative space of the performance, but also the physical space of the performance and that of the surrounding area. The walk one takes to get inside the venue from the subway, the line that forms outside the venue, the proximity of the public to
performers in the space and who or what is within reach all shape the space of the performance and likewise are shaped by the performance.

In adopting both feminist and queer theory in my work, I use narratives in keeping with Lynn Huffer’s exploration of narrative performance. Huffer notes that while there is often a perceived tension between “a feminist investment in narrative coherence and a queer embrace of performative disruption” (13), such a binary is not productive or necessary. Narrative explorations can embrace contradictions as productive moments to interrogate the efficacy of queer theory’s disruption of linearity, and the utility of feminist theory’s emphasis on personal and intimate narrative. While the two have often been conceived and implemented for divergent purposes and objectives, in recognizing the performative power of narratives, I, alongside Huffer, aim to “articulate a queer feminist conception of narrative as performance in order to bring out the political work that stories do” (22). In this way, the stories I gather through interviews and ethnographic case studies are performances and performatives, mobilizing histories, presents, and futurities through their (re)tellings. I therefore use narratives to challenge the simplistic binary readings of research subject and researcher; spectator and performer; and performance and lived experience.

I am cautious about making the informal formal. I do not want these narratives to fit neatly within academic prose, as I want the contradiction of auto-theory to spill through my analysis and trouble a conservative and patriarchal form that wants queer women and non-binary performance to fit into a particular frame. My aim is for a soft disruption—to queer my otherwise-formal methodology with personal and performer narratives about performance and the city space, without trivializing the personal or the subjective, acknowledging that this is how space is travelled and how space is made. By including narratives as a primary method of research and analysis, I want to expose and emphasize storied footprints, unmapping the geography of performance spaces through the performative narratives told about them. Stories are part of a resistance and an archive that create and re-form spaces through their telling.

**Embodied Practice and Performance Analysis**

The third method of my research consists of close description and analysis of the performance events themselves. In this way, the project “engage[s] with the direct experience of
various mobilities in light of the actual physical movements and the accompanying narratives or representations” (Nash and Gorman-Murray 178). This takes the form of ethnographic observations of works being produced by artists or their companies. As a spectator at these events, I take field notes and observe aspects of development and production that inform my analysis of the interviews, theory, and histories researched and engaged for the study. In attending these productions as a spectator, I am conducting a set of ethnographic case studies that take queer theory as a jumping-off point. Ethnography and queer theory do not at first seem compatible. Indeed, as Allison Rooke notes, queer theory’s “tendency towards philosophical abstraction and textual criticism, its employment of an under-developed concept of the social, and its lack of engagement with the material relations of inequality” (“Queer in the Field” 26) seem from the outset to oppose ethnographic work. However, critical ethnographic data can ground queer theory in materiality and “counter the tendency towards high abstraction and a reliance on theory that had characterized queer” (Rooke, “Queer in the Field” 26). As Rooke further elucidates, ethnography “offers the possibility of reshaping and fine-tuning theory by offering knowledge of the world of practice: the way that people make sense of the understandings available to them. It is a way of grounding theoretical comprehension in a located social context” (Rooke, “Queer in the Field” 27). The obstacles to conducting a critical feminist queer ethnographic study are multiple and complex. As Anurima Banerji notes in her discussion of ethnography and dance:

The postmodern turn in anthropology has resulted in an abundance of literature about the genesis of the discipline as the handmaiden of colonialism, the myths of objectivity and positivism which have sustained it, and the acknowledgment that all representations of the Other are ideologically charged, subjective and non-totalizing. (37)

Critical ethnography begins to address these challenges by questioning a simplistic relationship between the researcher and participant, but the power dynamics still remain problematic. As Banerji further explains, “[A]lthough innovative models and joint research approaches do exist, the ethnographer reigns as the authoritative and dominant figure” (38). For the purpose of my own research, employing this methodology necessitates the acknowledgement and subversion of the dominant normative gaze, the recognition of personal biases as observer and researcher, and openness to multiple subjective interpretations, analyses, and discussions. As Rooke explains, queer ethnography is not simply an ethnographic study of queer subjects or experiences; rather,
queer ethnography challenges the inherent assumptions and norms often embedded in this approach. “[T]his includes addressing the assumed stability and coherence of the ethnographic self and outlining how this self is performed in writing and doing research. To queer ethnography, then, is to curve the established orientation of ethnography in its method, ethics and reflexive philosophical principles” (“Queer in the Field” 25).

Chapter Breakdown

In this introduction, I presented my research questions and methodologies, as well as provided a brief overview of statistical findings on gendered theatre experiences and inequities. In the following chapter, I outline my theoretical approach and begin with an explication of useful terms and theories. I then present my own original theory of placefullness. Each subsequent analysis chapter builds upon the theories outlined in my theoretical approach, developing the ideas and expanding their reach through application to diverse performance traditions and communities. Placefullness is not intended to characterize all queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performances. Nor is it conceptualized as a single analytic frame. Placefullness is just one form of spatial resistance, and I intend to demonstrate how it has a performative capacity to change space and place through audience and performance engagement.

In the literature review in chapter 3, I outline previous research on queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance, in order ultimately to illustrate the gap in research on and the dearth of scholarly engagement with queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performances in Canada. Through an interdisciplinary approach, I include a review of studies conducted in both theatre and performance studies, as well as queer geographies. The literature review is a brief overview of the vast works that have been produced on space and theatre; mobility and performance; queer performance; feminist performance; and queer geographies.

Chapter 4 presents an investigation of recent queer events in Toronto and Vancouver that aims to contextualize the subsequent performance analyses within the current political and social culture and climate of Canada. The chapter particularly considers the monopoly cisgender white queer men possess within the performance industry and broader queer community in the country. Histories of queer theatre neutrally categorize white gay men’s work as essential to a queer
performance cannon, while queer women’s and particularly queer women of colour’s performance is relegated to margins of specificity—necessitating a label and a name where white gay’s men’s theatre requires none. I demonstrate how place and space manifest and are perceived and shaped by these events, with specific consideration of who is included as an insider to queer experiences and who is invited into a space as a guest or visitor.

Chapters 5 through 7 are comprised of my primary analyses. Each of these chapters provides a close description of a production or event in Toronto, Ontario or Vancouver, British Columbia. These analysis chapters are presented in order of their production dates, with the earliest productions analyzed first, followed by each subsequent performance. Based on interviews and performance analysis, I explore the ways in which productions resist spatial precarity through placefull performance. By unmapping performance spaces, interviewing artists, and executing ethnographic studies of their productions, I destabilize the concept of the placeless or emptied stage and assert that the spatiality of a performance is inseparable from the kinds of works produced and the creator’s artistic experience and process. I begin with an analysis of d’bi.young anitafrika’s 2016 Orisha Trilogy, considering her staging of the opening of each production. I ground my study in essential readings in queer of colour critique, Black diasporic studies, and queer geography. Considering sequences in each production that reference the political and social space and place, I argue that these works ensure audiences engage the content within the current political moment, specifically in relation to anti-Black racism in Toronto and the ramifications of such inequities.

Chapter six builds upon theoretical inquiries introduced in the previous chapter in order to explore the relationship between spatiality and temporality—considering the temporal characteristics and implications of where theatre “takes place.” Throughout this chapter, I use Ahmed, alongside José Esteban Muñoz and Jill Dolan’s theorizations, in order to explore the intricacies of placefullness through an analysis of time and utopia. Arguing that queer women’s access to space is typically experienced as rushed or hurried, I consider how taking one’s time in performance may be an act of intentional spatial resistance. Through a close analysis of Jess Dobkin’s The Magic Hour, presented at the Theatre Centre in Toronto, Ontario, I consider the ways in which performance time can be performative—demanding time on stage directly draws attention to and resists the inability to take one’s time in a particular place. As queer women continually struggle to conform to the conventions of women’s theatre, which typically work
with cisgender straight women, and to those of queer theatre, which privilege white cisgender men, their time in place is unstable, most often producing works for festivals or one-off productions. *The Magic Hour* did not simply take up time in performance, but also in its development and production process. This chapter ultimately explores how a refusal to rush through space enables an articulation of place that illuminates the spatial precarity that is already and always present for queer women and non-binary artists.

The final analysis chapter moves to discuss the Queer Arts Festival (QAF) in Vancouver, British Columbia. Through an analysis of the annual Queer Arts Festival, which takes place at the Roundhouse Arts Centre, this chapter considers the relationship between Indigenous performance and placefullness. QAF is an artist-run multi-disciplinary summer arts festival with work ranging from visual arts to spoken word and poetry, music, and theatre. QAF began in 1998 as Pride in Art (PiA). It has had landmark success since its commencement and is now recognized as one of the top five festivals of its kind in the world (QAF). The 2017 festival is of particular interest given the theme: UnSettled. Curated by Adrian Stimson, the 2017 festival focused on Two-Spirit artistic creators. Through an examination of this year’s festival theme, I explore how placelessness and the emptying of space is a result of settler colonialism—more explicitly, here, I unpack the relationship between *terra nullius*, or the assumption of empty space pre-colonization and settlement, and the empty stage. Throughout this chapter, I explore the relationship among spatial precarity, colonialism, heterosexism, and gender oppression. I ask how placefullness might then be a response to colonization’s erasure of place and space.

Considering the format of the festival, I also analyze the double-edged sword of one-off events. While increasing visibility, this form simultaneously damages the landscape of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance. The festival takes up space for a specified amount of time each year, but given its structure, artists are not given the same kinds of resources that they would be able to accumulate if productions were part of a theatre company’s annual season. Short-run festivals have proven to be both beneficial and detrimental to performers, who often conduct unpaid labour for a one- or two-night performance. The transient nature of the festival format makes the “UnSettled” theme all the more significant—what does it mean to unsettle temporarily? What is unsettling about a ten-day exhibition, and what happens after the event, when the dust “settles”? Taking up space and making a place for these performances for a short-term festival demonstrates the lack of regular and secured spaces available to these artists.
The conclusion of this dissertation does not attempt to package one specific set of findings from this research neatly, as I reject a universal or essential reading of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ engagement with space and place. I opt instead to reflect on the events analyzed, the experiences of spectatorship, and orientation within space. I present in this conclusion what may be irreconcilable contradictions: Artists can simultaneously contribute to the gentrification of the city through the production of their works, and also challenge the neutrality of space; spectators may be encouraged to recognize their place in the theatre, and at the same time they may be whisked to an imagined place on stage; artists can (and do) experience privilege and oppression in one single moment and across time and space. In my conclusions, I draw connections among the case studies and consider what their similarities might indicate about the broader geographies of performance in Canada. My conclusions embrace these contradictions. I note also here how this research may be employed in different geographical landscapes and the ways in which artistic funding structures may be further analyzed in order to consider how queer space is shaped through class, economies, and politics of rural areas. I conclude by returning to an underlying theme present throughout this work: queer precarity. Asking where precarity sits spatially, and what queer means in its absence, I ask what happens when we move beyond centring queer subjects, and consider precarity as an aesthetic and politic, teetering in a space of fragile transience and militancy.

Conclusion

This project does not seek to analyze performances that overtly or necessarily grapple with space in the content or approach of a single production (such as site-specific work or environmental theatre). On the contrary, I seek to unravel how performances can implicitly mark place and space through their refusal to erase the dynamics already at play. As Michael McKinnie notes, “Theatre studies has tended to be more interested in spatial case studies when they appear to demand attention explicitly, as in the analysis of theatre architecture or environmental performance” (McKinnie, City Stages 15). However, space and place necessarily affect all theatre productions, in terms of development, production, and reception. By focusing on the ways that placefullness can be an active form of resistance in performances by queer women and non-binary artists that do not overtly address space, this project unearths that which
is already present. Just as a production must “take place,” so, too, performers and audiences are placed and displaced through theatrical events.

In discussing queer women’s and non-binary performers’ uses of creative spaces in the city, I do not aim to construct a comparative analysis between those spaces deemed “straight” and those deemed “queer.” Instead, this work aims to shed a light on queer women’s and non-binary artists’ experiences without necessitating a comparison of “straight” or “mainstream.” I analyze particular productions and events throughout this research to examine how productions can engage a placeful resistance in order to illuminate the politics of place and space that limit the ongoing and secure access enjoyed by non-binary and queer women performers.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Approach: A Queer Orientation

“How We Reside”: Experiencing Space and Place

In this chapter I introduce the terminology and theories at the foundation of this research. I use queer and feminist theorists throughout this research, with a particular focus on Sara Ahmed’s conceptualization of space through bodily orientation and disorientation, as articulated in *Queer Phenomenology*. As Ahmed aptly writes: “If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with” (*Queer Phenomenology* 1). She further explains that “spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body” (*Queer Phenomenology* 9). With this in mind, in this research I question the complex relationship between performance space and the subjects who reside within it. As Corie Hammers notes:

> The very production and use of space is by and large determined by those with means, be it in terms of economic, symbolic, or political power (Bourdieu, 1979, 1989). For example, feminists have highlighted the ways in which the public sphere was and is male, an area demarcated and organized around men’s needs to serve men’s interests (see, e.g., Duncan, 1996; Segal, 1994). (758)

If spaces predominantly cater to those with the most privilege and resources, perhaps, through their artistic practices, queer women and non-binary performers have the capacity to denaturalize spaces and alter the geography of the city by bringing these systems of demarcation and mapping to the surface.

Whereas Husserl’s phenomenology asserts that the starting point for perception is based in the body and where it is situated (Ahmed, “Orientations” 545), Ahmed asks us to avoid the assumption that perception is derived only from a perceiving subject. Ahmed argues that bodies, inseparable from the spatiality of their sexuality, gender, and race, are not detached from the space from which they perceive—that is, the space of the body from “which the world unfolds” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 8); rather, they are “shaped by their dwellings and
take shape by dwelling” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 9). Queer bodies, bodies of colour, differently abled bodies, and those who inhabit multiple social locations marked as Other navigate typically white heterosexual spaces and struggle to orient themselves within them. They experience what Ahmed refers to as a sense of “disorientation.” As Ahmed explains, “If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 11). This notion of disorientation applies not only to gender and sexual orientation; it also exists and manifests through the intersections of our identities.

In the theatre, queer white bodies are naturalized as insiders in the queer community, a process I discuss further in chapter 4. We may note how, in addition to heterosexism, white privilege and white supremacy are fundamental to considerations of spatial orientation. Through a process of repetition, practices and spatial dynamics are normalized, and certain bodies become invisible and neutral, despite the amount of space they take up. We “unsee” them, while other bodies are unable to find solid footing, seen as outsiders and “Other.” Ahmed asserts, “If whiteness allows bodies to move with comfort through space, and to inhabit the world as if it were home, then those [white] bodies take up more space” (“Phenomenology of Whiteness” 159). These white bodies move freely between public and private spaces, and feel relative comfort in their mobility. The way whiteness passes through space shapes the space as one that supports and holds up white bodies. The repetition of this “style of embodiment” accumulates and allows like bodies to inherit a similar relationship to the space—it thus not only shapes the space as one that holds white bodies, but also teaches white bodies to feel held. Conversely, Ahmed argues that it “makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space” (“Phenomenology of Whiteness” 157). Here, a paradox of visibility emerges. As Rinaldo Walcott asserts, “[B]lackness in Canada is situated on a continuum that runs from the invisible to the hyper-visible” (*Black Like Who* 44). Black bodies are *seen* in predominantly white spaces when they are *seen* as Other. When it comes to attaining privilege, resources, rights, and visibility, their presence is denied, despite the over-articulation of presence as a body that is non-white. Agentive mobility is thus affected in a state of both invisibility and hyper-visibility.
Defining Terminology

“Queer Women” and Non-Binary Performers: The Fallacy of Unified Gender Identities

In unmapping spaces used for queer performance, I am cognizant of the threat of solidifying and perpetuating binaries of heterosexual/queer; woman/man; and cisgender/transgender. Using these terms as stagnant and solid categories fails to apply adequately one of queer theory’s primary undertakings: the rejection of fixed conventions and the persistent engagement with the constructedness of categories by external cultural, political, and social ideologies and powers. Researching queer women’s experiences and employing categorization and labels based on gender identity can perpetuate a binary that I deem, throughout this research, to be falsely oppositional. It is from the intersections of our unique experiences that we orient ourselves—and are oriented—within space. At the same time, unconditionally disavowing the use of identity categories would mean rejecting the social location “woman,” in order to include those who live outside of a gender binary. This would result in the erasure of the experiences of those who pass as women, are perceived as women, and/or live and identify as women. It would be to invisibilize further the particular oppressions that women have endured; and it would be to ignore the violence and misogyny that exist, particularly in relation to women and those who do not identify as cisgender men. Importantly, I begin this project by asserting that women cannot be qualified as any one single identity or experience. When I talk about women in this research, I include those who identify as women all of the time, those who identify as women some of the time, and those who identify as women “kind of/sort of.” Gender is messy, changing, and performative; it is not a static identity category that can be defined simplistically or narrowly. As my research primarily focuses on the experiences of women, I include all women in this category.

As I began conducting research, I realized that beyond all those who identify as women, those who do not identify with a particular gender, or who experience gender creatively and independently, also had a place within this research. This is particularly so because they are disenfranchised not only by normalized misogyny and patriarchy in their creative fields, but also by cissexism, and an oppressive and rigid gender binary maintained in the arts. While women
(broadly understood) provide a framework and lens for this research, I open up the conversation to include non-binary creative practitioners as well. Throughout this research, non-binary refers to all people who do not fit neatly into the constructed gender binary, whose gender identity may be fluid, or who may be entirely outside of the conventional understanding of these categorizations. I use “non-binary” as an umbrella term, but also recognize that subjects may choose to use different language to describe identities that exist outside of the man/woman gender binary. I only begin to address their specific experiences in this study, and attempt to identify how their experiences differ from queer women’s experiences in the industry, rather than conflate them as single or essential. Further research is needed to consider adequately their unique experiences in the arts. Just as all women experience oppression differently, so, too, non-binary performers and creators experience diverse forms of erasure and oppression. The commonality that exists between these identities is that they do not, by and large, experience the privileges granted to cisgender men in the industry, even within queer arts communities.

I primarily employ the term “queer women” throughout this research to refer to the creators and artists analyzed in my case studies. Though all categorizations and labels are undeniably complex, I opt to use the word “queer” both for inclusivity and flexibility. However, I am cautious of the potential consequences of using such a broad umbrella term. *Queer* refers to all of those who identify within this category, typically, though not exclusively, referring to those who do not identify as heterosexual. Queer may refer to a sexual orientation, a gender identity, or gender expression. The term is fluid, in flux, and necessarily changing. Plummer argues that in using the term *queer*, “it becomes impossible to see the roots of women’s subordination to men” (204), as women’s marginalization is easily subsumed within a queer male narrative. I am conscious of Kath Browne and Eduarda Ferreira’s assertion that queer geography can at times erase the particularity of women’s experiences (5). Identifying minoritized genders in this research “operates as recognition of the ways in which heterosexual and patriarchal power relations (heteropatriarchies) continue to need to be contested” (Browne and Ferreira 5). As Huffer asserts, radical queer inclusivity and universality set up a false logic. She explains:

12 Importantly, the majority of the theatre creators discussed here currently identify as women. While the bulk of the case studies focuses on women’s experiences, the non-binary artists who are included in this research offer valuable perspectives on the particular inequities they experience. The spatial inequities that are experienced by women and by non-binary artists should not be conflated. Future research could examine the spatial experiences of non-binary artists in further detail.
“[B]ehind queer theory’s seemingly infinite possibilities of unconstrained local performances lurks the age-old trap of universalism: its subsumption of difference into the sameness of a seamless ‘we’” (63). Throughout my research, I therefore stipulate that queer women and non-binary artists confront and react to a universalized queer male “we” that monopolizes the mainstream image of “the queer” and through which specificity of experiences becomes imperceptible. Confronting how identity categories are complex and interrelated, my approach to geography allows for multiple, and at times contradictory, analyses of spatial experiences, complicating a simple reading of queer subjects’ relationship to space.

Following Jill Dolan, I acknowledge that “there is no single ‘Woman’ position that encompasses all women, though the white, middle class, heterosexual model is the one established by the dominant powers in this culture” (qtd. in Austin 140). By recognizing that, historically and currently, the “woman,” alongside the universal queer subject, is representative of a non-existent unified experience, I attempt to complicate queer subjectivity by considering voices and experiences of queer women artists who do not all fit into privileged positions. In selecting subjects of diverse race, age, and artistic practice, I intend to draw attention to, rather than ignore, the social locations that influence their perspectives. As Browne and Ferreira note, studies in lesbian geography are complex and do not represent a universal experience. However, “what binds discussions in this area together are considerations of how gender and sexual normativities continue to marginalize lesbians and queer women” (2). I extend this statement to include those outside of a gender binary, and challenge the notion that an individual can be identified solely by one marker or social group. We are all “members of more than one community at the same time and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege” (Association for Women’s Rights in Development 2). In my discussion of intersectionality, I further expand upon this simultaneity. In contrast to trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) and Gender Critical Feminism (GCF), which theorize women’s identities and spaces to the exclusion of transgender women (see the recent publication The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture [2016] by Bonnie J. Morris for one such example, as well as the writing of Sheila Jeffrey [2014]), this research does not restrict “women” “lesbian” or “queer women” subjects in terms of anatomy, sex, or gender identity. Rather, this project focuses on gender and sex as constructed experiential identity markers, and works to include those who have identified or do identify themselves as women. Recognizing that there is no single unified
experience of women, I acknowledge that gender identity and sex are merely two of the multiple identity markers that shape and influence women’s experiences. “Woman,” therefore, is intended to be an experiential identity marker and gender performance constituted through contextualized struggle and detached from anatomical sex. As Sara Ahmed aptly notes, “No feminism worthy of its name would use the sexist idea ‘women born women’ to create the edges of feminist community” (Living a Feminist Life 14).

The Body

In this research I consider how the bodies that pass through spaces influence the way that space is perceived and experienced; and, similarly, how bodies are changed through the spaces within which they reside. The ways in which certain bodies are unseen and remain part of an imagined universal queer contingent or society, and other bodies are Othered, also impacts the ways we experience spaces. Throughout this study I use the term body in accordance with Elizabeth Grosz’s description of it as “a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality” (32). I consider the body, distinct from other organisms, as that which desires, has agency in its corporeality, and is influenced by external social and political norms, dependent on the society and space within which it exists. Following Richard Schechner’s conception of the body, as articulated in his discussion of environmental theatre, I explore the “actual relationships between the body and the spaces the body moves through” (Environmental Theatre 2). Schechner explains further: “The human tissue does not abruptly stop at the skin. Exercises with space are built on the assumption that human beings and space are both alive” (Environmental Theatre 12). Schechner’s discussion of space considers the relationship between audience and practitioner, but his sentiments ring true in this discussion as well. The bodies that move through space are in dialogue with it, each changing based on the presence of the other. Bodies shift orientation and direction, based on how the space is organized (where a box office is, where a stage is, and where the seats are located), and also on the degree of comfort felt in the space, including familiarity with surroundings and familiarity or perceived kinship with other bodies in the space. In Queer Phenomenology, Sara Ahmed writes:
“Absolute space” is invented, as an invention that has real and material effects in the arrangement of bodies and works . . . . We need to complicate the relation between the lines that divide space, such as the equator and the prime meridian, and the “line” of the body. After all, direction only makes sense as relationship between body and space. (Queer Phenomenology 13)

Importantly, Ahmed points to the ways in which bodies do not simply exist within space but also work to divide space. The space that a performer’s body takes up in the theatre creates new lines and borders in the venue. One cannot walk through the physical boundaries of the body. How bodies are gendered changes the way they are able to take space. Ahmed extends her conversation of the spatiality of bodies in Living a Feminist Life. She explains that the performative conditions that construct girlhood and womanhood are directly related to how bodies are formed and form space (25). She uses an experience familiar to many commuters and city-dwellers: on a subway, men may extend their legs in front of their own seats, and impose on the space others are able to take up. Conversely, women may sit with little space in front of them. As Ahmed writes: “To become accommodating, we take up less space. The more accommodating we are the less space we have to take up. Gender: a loop tightening” (Living a Feminist Life 25). This experience is applicable to theatrical and creative spaces as well—where women may accommodate others at their own expense. We may consider here how performance not only functions to take up space, but also to guard space, as a boundary against other bodies gaining access. The lines the body draws in space physically direct our gaze, and register where we are permitted entry. Likewise, in a broader sense, the body has a physical presence in the city, a relationship that is both active and shifting.

There is a significant relationship between the city and the bodies that move through it. Contrary to previous theorists who argued that the city was merely a reflection of the body’s construction of it, Grosz argues that the body and city possess “a two-way linkage which could be defined as an interface, perhaps even a cobuilding” (34). Rather than a holistic view, Grosz’s argument asserts that the body and city are disparate—systematically uniting and dividing temporarily (Collie). The ways in which spatial practices are used as power to moderate, manage, and restrain gendered bodies exemplifies the link between the marginalized body and city spaces. Similarly, sexual categories attributed to the body are interwoven with real and imagined spaces. Gender, race, class, and ability affect how people experience space, as well as their ability to observe it freely. We physically walk through space guided by images, signs, and stories. Just as
we leave a footprint trailing behind where we have been, so, too, these images act as footprints, creating a path for us to follow. With this in mind, I return to Ahmed, who explains that if we imagine ourselves walking a path, we see footprints in front of us, which reveal the road most walked upon, where the way is clear. We follow the path as a guide, as a means of safety, familiarity, and mapping. She states:

A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. 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. (“Orientations” 553)

These lines also act as heteronormative “straightening devices” and, as Ahmed points out, create “happiness scripts” (Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness* 91). She explains, “Happiness scripts are powerful even when we fail or refuse to follow them, even when desires deviate from their lines. In this way, the scripts speak a certain truth: deviation can involve unhappiness” (Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness* 91). The geography of the city, the way in which these physical as well as metaphorical signs are displayed, and the images that are plastered across them impact the ways bodies reside in space. To experience space queerly is, then, to go off the path, or feel unsteady upon it. It is to be unable to follow comfortably the happy path paved before you. We may think of familiarizing ourselves with the paths ahead of and behind us as a means of unmapping performance. Drawing attention to the physical ways in which footprints and paths make it easier for us to find our way brings us closer to understanding how performance spaces are navigated. Muñoz further analyzes the concept of linear and heterosexual paths and connects his understanding of these concepts to feelings of loss. He writes, “To accept loss is to accept queerness—or more accurately to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authorization, and entitlement. To be lost is not to hide in a closet or to perform a simple (ontological) disappearing act; it is to veer away from heterosexuality’s path” (73). Like Ahmed’s description of the path, for Muñoz, queerness is defined in terms of its instability, walking on nonlinear and unpaved trails. The potentially normative spaces in which queer women and non-binary artists, as performers, create, develop, and produce their work generates a kind of disorientation as they shape new spatial and temporal relationships. To unmap queer performance spaces (or the experience of queer individuals in performance spaces) is, then, to reflect upon and investigate the effects of this experience of Otherness. What can we learn from the footprints that are left
before us, that make it easier for some of us to enter a theatre space? We may think of the imprint that the white heterosexual male footprint leaves behind: heavy and well-trodden, their way is clear. Fewer obstacles exist in their paths. Their footprints contribute to a map that is easy to navigate, as we have been there before and know our way. For women and non-binary practitioners who have fewer visible histories and past productions, the path is experienced as someone else’s, a rocky or swerving experience in which we might not even be able to find the door to a theatre that fits our needs.

Place and Space

The nature of this research means that my definitions of place and space are essential to the theorizations of placefullness in theatre. There are multiple and mutually contradictory definitions of place in academic writing that distinguish the concept from space, though do not necessarily isolate one from the other. Whereas Michel de Certeau distinguishes between “place” as a location or coordinate on a map and space as practiced place—“like the word when it is spoken” (117)—geographer Tim Cresswell notes that space is an abstract term. He explains: “When we speak of space we tend to think of outer-space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them” (Place 8). He further notes that the term, colloquially, tends to be used without accounting for what the exact reference is to—it is often employed interchangeably with locale or landscape (Place 1). Michael McKinnie suggests in his introduction to City Stage that “space is not an independent, ahistorical entity—space does not simply exist but has to be made through social practice” (5). Spaces shift and change over time. We may consider the physical appearance of a space—how particular images or advertisements signal who is an insider to the space and whom it is catering to. In a theatre, the structure of a space may stay the same for extended periods, but smaller alterations nonetheless change the space’s character: new headshots come to hang on the wall, with different smiling faces welcoming patrons in to the theatre; accessibility needs change and are responded to differently; what was once overlooked may now be a priority (with changes in the geography of the city and its policies deeply affecting these alterations).

Cresswell argues that place is “a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world” (Place 11); he notes that though seemingly simple and used in everyday speech, “place” is a
complex subject. While places are often thought of as static, they are not always or necessarily experienced as such (7). However, they almost always have a “concrete form” (7). He explains:

Even imaginary places, like Hogwarts School in Harry Potter novels, have an imaginary materiality of rooms, staircases and tunnels that make the novel work. As well as being located and having a material visual form, places must have some relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning. *(Place 7)*

Places, whether imagined or lived, can create a sense of belonging and ownership, insiderness or outsiderness. Edward Casey notes that places are distinct from notions of space and landscape. He connects places to the lived experiences of bodies and histories. Although place is located within space, for Casey, place is “the immediate ambiance of my lived body and its history, including the whole sedimented history of cultural and social influences and personal interests that compose my life-history” (Casey 404). He further explains that there can be “no place without self, and no self without place” (406). I thus use *space* to refer to the lived and constructed physical environment and *place* to refer to represented and embodied experiences in the here and now of the theatre. Here, I agree with McKinnie’s evaluation of de Certeau, and his promotion of geographer David Harvey’s notion of space/place. McKinnie explains that space can only be known through the transformations and forms it takes over time. “Those forms,” he explains, “include ‘place’ in a broad sense—as a socio-spatial product created in difference—and more precisely, the specific shapes that places assume” (5). Thus, while the distinction between place and space is significant, one cannot consider them separately. It is, in this sense, a dialectical relationship. They persistently influence each other.

The precarity of the space to which women and non-binary artists have access is, in many ways, related to being “out of place” or to the devaluing of place. Nicola Shaughnessy notes that, as “various feminist critics have argued, place is too readily equated with the maternal, the unconscious, the imaginary and nature (Grosz, 2002; Haraway, 1989; Irigaray, 1992; Massey, 2005; Rose, 1993, 1996), while the production of space and spatial knowledges is associated with masculinist authority” (100). Philosopher Jeff Malpas notes that the world “presents itself” (6) through place and that “being and place are inextricably bound together in a way that does not allow one to be seen merely as an effect of the other; rather being emerges only in and through place” (6). In this way, places shift as bodies pass
through them and reside within them. These definitions demonstrate the ways in which place and human experience construct and shape each other. Doreen Massey explains that the concept of “place” is unique in that it is not essentialized or “pre-given.” She explains that “what is special about place is precisely that thrown togetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now.” Such a negotiation, she argues, involves the intersections of place and both human and nonhuman experience and presence (140).

Whereas many scholars draw a clear distinction between space and place, valuing one over the other, I, alongside geographer Edward Relph—whose text *Place and Placelessness* has had a significant impact on geography, sociology, and multiple other fields of study—conceive of space and place as interconnected and “dialectically structured in human environmental experience” (Seamon and Sowers 44). Building on the ways in which bodies are oriented within and with place, Relph contends that people may experience insideness and outsideness. Similar to Ahmed’s notion of orientation within space, insideness results in feelings of safety, enclosure, and ease (Seamon and Sowers 44). As a result of feelings and experiences of insideness and outsideness, people experience the same physical spaces differently. While there is no universal experience of insideness and outsideness, and I by no means intend to maintain a binary of any kind, this conception of insideness and outsideness is essential in considering how people are shaped by space and place. I would argue that each person is capable of experiencing simultaneous insideness and outsideness in individuated ways. Identities and positionalities are complex, and thus orientation within place can be contradictory and complicated.

Scholars, practitioners, and spectators often talk about where theatre “takes place.” I am also interested in how and where theatre “takes space.” To “take space” somewhere might point to the embodied ways in which individuals reside within, move through, and are expelled from space. “Taking space” thus rejects the possibility of disconnecting place from the bodies and identities that pass through it. To take space somewhere is actively to dispel the myth of the neutrality of space, to bring to the forefront how heterosexism, hetero/homonormativity, and settler colonialism are performed through space, and to recognize how bodies shape spaces and spaces shape bodies. My definitions and engagement with place and placelessness are further explained in the literature review to follow.
Theoretical Lens and Framework

Performing a Critical Queer Feminist Approach

Given the multidimensional nature of this research, I study, translate, and incorporate theories drawn from interdisciplinary perspectives such as critical queer theory, feminist intersectionality, performance studies, and queer geography. These theoretical perspectives are particularly valuable for their focus on performance, situated knowledge, and the understanding that marginalized groups are socially constructed. As Annamarie Jagose argues, queer theory and feminist theory are braided together, incorporating shared values, perspectives, and discourses (160). Thus, I use feminist theory in conjunction with queer theory, for its emphasis on gaining knowledge about marginalized groups from their lived experiences.

In using queer theory as a framework and theoretical approach in conjunction with feminist intersectionality, alongside Smith (2010) and Arvin, Tuck and Morrill (2013), I reject an antisocial and anti-relational queer standpoint, made popular by Lee Edelman in his book No Future (2004).13 His anti-relational approach to queer theory rejects the association of “queer” with “reproductive futurism,” and indeed with any notion of “the future” at all. Though popular with many queer theorists, anti-relationality often perpetuates and furthers a colonial project of white privilege contributing to and furthering the “ascendancy of whiteness” (Smith, qtd. in Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 24). As Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill note in their discussion of decolonization, “proposing to invest in ‘no future’ seems not only irrelevant to Indigenous peoples, but a rehashing of previous settler colonial tactics” (24). Such an argument can be applied to other marginalized individuals and communities, whose stake in the future is continually and purposefully threatened. Instead of engaging this school of queer theory, I use a relational and social approach, which demonstrates the capacity and possibilities within queer futurities and explores the ways in which such futurities might always exist, as Muñoz asserts, “in the horizon” (Cruising Utopia 11). Slightly out of reach, queerness always lives the future and the past in the present. I use queer theory not only because of its stance on the fluidity of gender and categorizations, but also for its inability to possess any single or universalized stance.

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13 Edelman’s argument will be discussed in further detail in chapter 6, which focuses on temporality in The Magic Hour.
Queer theory is constantly in flux, reforming, reshaping, and reconsidering its own existence. As Jagose notes, queer theory is committed to a “refusal to specify its project intrinsically connected to the sense that its political efficacy depends on its ability to remain open to its own potentiality, to its unknowable manifold futures” (159). As Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz explain in their introduction to What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now: “That queerness remains open to a continuing critique of its exclusionary operations has always been one of the field’s key theoretical and political promises” (3). Disturbing the impulse to normalize or naturalize the “respectable” queer, for whom normativity is the ideal and the objective, my use of queer theory considers those who have been deemed outsiders and, as Michael Warner suggests, rejects “a “minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner, qtd. in Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 3).

Queer subcultures have a persistent investment in the continuous act of “queering” themselves. Unlike homonormative LGBT cultures, which, Lisa Duggan explains, increasingly seek acceptance in mainstream communities through the acquisition of rights and inclusion within the conventional state (50), queer subcultures keep questioning and challenging pervasive normalizing practices. As David Halperin explains, culture and subculture are in significant opposition, whereby subcultures resist and defy dominant culture (423).

In addition to using queer theory throughout this research, I employ critical feminist intersectionality in constructing my framework and methodology for research. Intersectionality is a theoretical and methodological orientation that developed through Black feminist and women of colour traditions, theories, and knowledge (May 3). As Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall explain:

Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics. It exposed how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice. (787)

As they further articulate, intersectionality’s focus on difference and sameness has been effectively employed by diverse disciplines in order to consider political and academic discussions that take into account axes of power and different subjective experiences (787). As Vivian M. May notes, “from an intersectional orientation, no one factor is necessarily given explanatory or political priority: multiple factors are treated as enmeshed” (ix). This is of particular significance to this research in terms of the diverse genders, races, orientations, and
classes of the peoples interviewed and performances analyzed. Ambiguity and simultaneity make identities possible. Rather than assuming static and fixed identity categories, intersectionality prompts us to unpack and problematize single-axis models of representation, equity, or solidarity.

Furthermore, my interrogation of geographies in terms of marginalization and gentrification necessitates an intersectional approach—essentialist thinking would make it impossible to consider how a space can accommodate marginalized queer women and non-binary audiences and performances, and at the same time also contribute to a process of gentrification and continuing colonialism. Gentrification, throughout this study, refers to the social and political policies and regulations that transform communities, previously inhabited and used by marginalized subjects, to conform to middle-class needs and desires. Such a process expands the reach and orientation of privileged people, and necessitates the displacement of residents and community members in order to benefit these privileged subjects. Without contributing to “hierarchies of identity or oppression” (May 3), an intersectional approach enables an analysis that considers how subjectivities can experience marginalization and at the same time oppress others. Intersectionality responds to and problematizes the absence of critical race theory in many foundational queer theory texts, as Hiram Pérez explains:

Queer studies, despite its critique of normativity and its calls for nonexclusionary politics, remains susceptible to forms of race unconsciousness—that is, subject to a racial unconscious shaped by nation, empire, and the dispositions of global capitalism, as well as resistant to the self-reflexive analytic standpoint that critical race theory advocates as “race consciousness.” (1)

The failure to articulate and problematize the overwhelmingly white and privileged spaces from which queer theory emerges undermines its stated objective to trouble normativity. It not only perpetuates the “transparency of whiteness” (Pérez 10), but in many cases refuses to address the hierarchies of privilege and oppression that enable the conditions of its arrival. Walcott explains that within the Canadian context, “national historical narratives” invisibilize racialized geographies and “many people continue to believe that any Black presence in Canada is a recent and urban one spawned by Black Caribbean, and now continental African, migration” (Walcott, Black Like Who 43). Thinking of the erasure of Black histories, and the ways in which queer Black women’s experiences are often discussed in queer/Black or
Women silos, we may consider how productions can resist placelessness and the assumption of neutral spaces through articulations of multiple positions and experiences of spatial oppression and privilege in performance. The use of intersectionality as a theoretical framework alongside queer theory throughout this research attempts intentionally to draw attention to that which has been erased in queer theory and artistic practice. Intersectionality thus reveals the ways in which white privilege in the queer community enacts and solidifies white supremacy and, more specifically, queer stakes in capitalism and colonialism through gentrification of space and place in Canada. As Pérez argues, “If queer is to remain an effective troubling of the normative and its attendant regimes, it must painstakingly excavate its own entrenchments in normativity” (101).

Similar to Jagose’s explanation of queer theory, intersectionality is a “form of resistant knowledge developed to unsettle conventional mindsets, challenge oppressive power, think through the full architecture of structural inequalities and asymmetrical life opportunities, and seek a more just world” (May xi). Hence, I use both queer theory and intersectionality throughout this dissertation as forms of radical activism. Indeed, detaching these frameworks from practical application would exploit these terms and approaches as ornamental features—only gesturing toward a social justice-based approach, instead of enacting one. As May further explains, “symbolic uses of perfunctory readings of intersectionality flatten its complexity and ignore the interpretive and political demands it places on us as knowers,” and depoliticize the objective and goals of such a framework (226-27). Here, I point again to the citation politics that inform my research practices. Making space for the works of queer women, people of colour, and scholars who experience other forms of marginalization is a means of further resisting spatial inequities in academic works. As Ahmed explains, “Citations can be feminist bricks: they are the materials through which, from which, we create our dwellings” (Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life 16).

Using and incorporating an intersectional approach as my theoretical framework also emphasizes the narrative and the anecdotal as more than simply personal. Alice Ludvig writes, “[I]t is through narration that the axes of identity and subjectivity become explicit. When we acknowledge that subjectivity is the way people make sense of their relation to the world, it becomes the modality of identity” (qtd. in Huffer 54). Intersectionality stories the past and
makes visible experiences that are at times absent from the historical archive. With this in mind, personal narratives are a primary tool for research gathering throughout my study.

When I began writing this chapter, I struggled with the notion that focus on and consideration of difference have the capacity to perpetuate the constructed inequitable categories of identities that I am seeking to denaturalize and confront. How does a spotlight on difference assume unified experiences and binaries, which universalize “the Other” as a single entity? How does a focus on difference maintain and propagate categorical and systemic oppression? As Madhavi Menon notes:

> Identity is the demand made by power—tell us who you are so we can tell you what you can do. And by complying with that demand, by parsing endlessly the particulars that make identity different from one another’s, we are slotting into a power structure, not dismantling it. . . . Critiquing identity politics, then, is not a dismissal of lived reality, but, rather, a response to the oppressive demands that identity itself make under the guise of progressive politics. (2–3)

The very impetus to focus on identity through difference might thus reinstate the hierarchical systems of power and oppression that many performance scholars and creators attempt to problematize and contest. The simple notion of “diversity” establishes a binary between whiteness (as an invisible and neutral norm) and the “diverse” (which oversimplifies and generalizes the category of “Other” as single and unified). Using an intersectional approach might seem to compel us to move beyond an essentialized view of binaried difference. However, intersectionality still necessitates categorization and emphasis of difference, which, as Lynn Huffer notes, “runs the risk of perpetuating precisely the problems intersectionality had hoped to alleviate” (18). Intersectionality, therefore, has the capacity to reinscribe, sustain, and disseminate power dynamics by giving credence to constructed concepts of identity that, as Huffer argues, intersectionality itself attempts to debunk. And yet, while I recognize these obstacles, the lived reality of categorization and resulting oppressions and hierarchies is undeniable. To refuse difference, in practice, might be to ignore the axes of oppression and privilege —the problem intersectionality had hoped to alleviate. I thus opt to use an intersectional approach to theatre equity here, in order to analyze and explore critically the limitations of boundaries, while persistently considering the disparate and messy oppressions and privileges queer artists experience both historically and currently.
Demystifying “The Empty Space”: A Theory of Placefullness

*I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage.*

– Peter Brook

The terminology and theoretical underpinnings outlined thus far are tools and frameworks I apply to my own theory of placefullness, which posits that there is a direct and inextricable relationship between the place of the venue and all aspects of development and performance (including administrative support, technical production, and audience reception). Contrary to this position, many works on place and space in theatre have previously argued that the stage is placeless. I expand on the prior scholarship on placelessness and non-places in my literature review. Here, I provide a brief introduction to contextualize and present my theory of “placefullness” in queer women’s and non-binary artists’ works. Ultimately, I argue that the feigned neutrality of placelessness in performance inherently displaces those already deemed “out of place.”

I define placelessness throughout this research as places that are either lacking in distinction or considered outside of the boundaries of perceived place—those that are conceived of as isolated from the experiences of lived place and thought to be ahistorical, apolitical, and atemporal. The placeless place lacks specificity and is conceived of as a blank slate—a building comprised of bare locations and empty of meaning (until, in the case of the theatre, fictional meaning is placed within it). Due to the assumption of an absence of depth, placelessness often seems to assume a kind of inherent neutrality that would allow equitable engagement with physical surroundings because of its lack of discernibility. In the theatre, such a conception of placelessness creates opportunities for utopic imaginaries, which I agree offer opportunities for performative place-making. Placelessness allows space to be layered, allows for an assemblage of places to build one on top of the other. At the same time, placelessness often minimizes the place in which bodies reside—a body may experience out-of-placeness, or, alternatively, experience oppressive placement as a hyper-visual and surveilled body.

In geography, placelessness can be traced to Edward Relph’s 1970s work *Place and Placelessness.* He explains that his use of the term refers to the casual eradication of distinctive places and the deliberate making of standardized landscapes and the weakening of the identity of places to the
Yet, if we think of places and bodies as mutually constitutive and shifting, placelessness is complicated and problematized. While places may not appear distinct in their construction, “the same bland possibilities of experience” seems to oversimplify and universalize experiences that are undeniably different from each other. Even those places that have been intentionally constructed to shed distinctiveness (for example, chain stores that are designed to look the same regardless of locale) nonetheless create a different sense of place when conceived of in terms of their historical and current relationships to the bodies passing through them.

In the context of theatrical production, this notion of a placeless place can be traced back to Michel Foucault’s work on utopias and heterotopias. For Foucault, “heterotopia” refers to unstable places that lack meaning because of a lack of contextualization. He uses a reflection in a mirror to describe the “mixed, joint experience” between utopias and heterotopias:

> In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. . . . The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (“Of Other Spaces” 4)

Building on this notion of a placeless place, theatre practitioners and scholars have borrowed and developed this concept to consider the placelessness and emptiness of the stage space. Importantly, throughout this research, I do not reject Foucault’s conception of placeless places. Indeed, theatre does, as I will discuss in relation to Chaudhuri’s work, enable the “layering” of places—where we can simultaneously imagine a fictional imagined place on stage, and also experience our own embodied space. However, as I will further explicate, the articulation of space, and the placement of spectators within their own physical experience, has a unique capacity to illuminate spatial dynamics and resist the neutralization of space. Such neutralization is apparent in Peter Brook’s seminal work *The Empty Space*. In this well-known gesture, it is the simple act of claiming and naming the empty space that transforms it into a stage. In its attempt to be neutral and capable of representing any place, the stage space comes to be conceived of as a
“non-place” (McAuley, Unstable Ground 16). Out of necessity, the stage is thought to be a place of potential and possibility detached from the geography in which the theatre resides.

Miwon Kwon relates this notion of placelessness to nomadism, noting the ways in which the ability to travel and produce art and research in various spaces increases our work’s success and viability (One Place After Another 156). The ability to travel, whether the artist enjoys the experience or not, is rewarded. As Kwon writes, “Our very sense of self-worth seems predicated more and more on our suffering through the inconveniences and psychic destabilizations of ungrounded transience, of not being at home (or not having a home), of always traveling through elsewhere” (One Place After Another 160). The image of an unfixed, fluid cultural work “on the go” is romanticized, according to Kwon (One Place After Another 160) and “qualities of permanence, continuity, certainty, groundedness (physical or otherwise) are thought to be artistically retrograde. . . . By contrast, uncertainty, instability, ambiguity and impermanence are taken as desired attributes of a vanguard, politically progressive artistic practice” (One Place After Another 160). Artists who have the privilege of engaging a placeless place can develop their work anywhere (and indeed are rewarded for it). Jane Goodall explains this absence of spatial distinctiveness as she writes:

A stage is a place that has to be freed of local identity, so that it can be any place. In order to be available for creation of imagined locations of diverse kinds, it must be cleared of the associations belonging to its particular locality. (112)

Goodall importantly notes that placelessness is an active clearing. It is not that spaces do not hold histories and stories, but that, for Goodall, they must be “freed” in order for audiences to engage the performance. There are important implications embedded in the clearing of stage spaces that reach beyond narrative representation. The associations that must be erased or buried affect how spectators engage not only the performance, but also the other bodies in the space, the theatre venue, and the neighbourhood and city more broadly. When we clear an area, it becomes more difficult to see what was there before. Furthermore, only some bodies that are not affiliated or attached to that which is erased will be able actively to engage this clearing process.

Racialization, sexualization, and gender dynamics that privilege some identities as unremarkable and ahistorical influence who is able to free (and be freed from) particular localities. The romanticized notion that an artist should partake of a transient lifestyle ignores the way in which space is organized to enable some bodies to access mobility more freely than others.

While the represented place on stage might invite spectators to suspend disbelief and see
themselves (or the action) where they are not, such a configuration of the stage assumes first that all audiences are equally invited into the space, and then that the spectators (and even performers) occupy the physical place of the theatre with similar affective response and presence. I assert that even as the lights dim in the theatre, the stage space is inextricably linked to the locale of the theatre and the geography in which it resides, influencing the production, the audience, and the creators. The spatial organization orients each body within the venue in distinct ways based in race, settler colonialism, sexuality, and gender, among other social locations and experiences. We can think here about the performers who are given the most time on stage, and how their appearance can be an orientation device, situating particular audiences as insiders to the experience. We may also think about how much time spectators spend in a space and where they choose to sit. Though simple acts, these choices point to how bodies are oriented in space. If we feel like an insider to an experience, we may opt to come early to get the best seat. If we experience disorientation and discomfort, we may opt instead to come right before the production begins. We may internalize how much space we ought to take up based on the way in which we draw a connection between spatial precarity and placelessness because of the ways in which the concept of “emptiness” facilitates the erasure of precarious relationships to space and place. The suspension of distinctiveness of place and its histories is directly implicated in the erasure of settler colonial and white supremacist patriarchal histories.

The non-place of the stage is contingent on certain feelings of belonging afforded to only particular (read: white and privileged) bodies. This non-place is contingent upon non-identity: Those able to free themselves of labels can more easily free themselves of place. The ability to be nowhere thus requires a similar ability to be everywhere. Kwon expresses suspicion about the romanticization of destabilization and mobilization: “To embrace such conditions is to leave oneself vulnerable to new terrors and dangers” (*One Place After Another* 160). Placelessness assumes an ability to move, to erase one’s surroundings and to travel. In her article “Filling the Empty Space,” Kirsten F. Nigro considers Brook’s *The Empty Space* and writes that although his spatial argument attempts to make the theatre accessible and egalitarian, “these empty spaces have not [historically] been available to just anyone. Indeed, the modern theatre as an institution has been notoriously male-dominated, driven by box-office success and eager to please middle-class tastes” (1). The ability to disregard the geography of the theatre requires a degree of power, comfort, and safety not attainable to marginalized practitioners or spectators. Such an understanding of theatre space introduces noteworthy questions: How do the intersections of
race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation influence spatial experiences in the theatre for both spectators and practitioners? How are normative and commercial theatre spaces conceptualized and marked as white heteronormative spaces through the assumption and privileging of mobility? While the Western settler-colonial theatre experience might want to offer spectators otherwise-unattainable imagined possibilities and travel, these are contingent on real-life experiences of privilege and access. As such, we might ask: How does a non-normalized experience of the body influence the experience of the placeless and empty stage?

Bodies that are read as privileged and universal may enter a space unnoticed, seeming to “fit in.” Such a spatial experience allows individuals to move throughout the space, and experience unremarkably all of the possibilities available to them as insiders to the experience. Those who do not “fit” within the implicit expectations of the space are made aware of their surroundings and may, to return to my previous reference, “stick out” (Ahmed, On Being Included 41). Ahmed explains that, like a “sore thumb,” “bodies stick out when they are out of place . . . sticking out from whiteness can thus reconfirm the whiteness of the space” (On Being Included 41). In the context of the theatre, we might ask who the artistic director of a given company is, who is on theatres’ boards, and whose headshots line their walls. What do these individuals tell us about the theatre space, who shapes it, and who is welcome? We might push this farther to ask how bodies that are Othered are, in being noticed, stopped in their tracks. Sticking out might feel like getting stuck. Racialized, crip, queer, and otherwise marginalized bodies may be immobilized within the theatre, inextricably attached to their corporeal forms, identities, and the spaces they inhabit.

All of this is not simply a metaphor claiming that all commercial stages are white because all stages are no places; rather, thinking of the stage in relation to straight white mobility has significant implications for who is able to most easily access the space. When spectators view a mainstream or conventional performance, they are asked to step outside of their corporeal bodies and to allow themselves, within the dimly lit theatre, to be overwhelmed by the performance on stage.¹⁴ They are taken, as it were, on a journey. But such a journey is restricted to particular

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¹⁴ I do not assume that all theatre necessitates such a suspension of disbelief or detached engagement with space. Many queer and feminist projects, as well as environmental theatre, immersive theatre, Brechtian theatre, and participatory theatre productions (among many other forms) reject the isolation of narrative place from spectator positionality. However, here, I refer to those mainstream productions that engage a conventional Western theatre practice of dislocation: The clearing of geography in order to facilitate spectators’ mobility.
bodies only—bodies able to travel without surveillance—and to those who can attain safety and comfort by finding familiarity and orientation within a given space; Those who are denied safety and comfort, or those from whom such privileged expectations are withheld, find themselves placeless.

The idea of the “placeless” stage is shaped by and helps to shape programming, resources, and funding distributed to diverse populations. Other performance theorists propose that placelessness is not a simplistic process of erasure. Many of Una Chaudhuri’s conceptions of theatre space are applicable to my work, particularly theorizations on theatre as “a remapping of possible terrain of subjectivity” (Staging Place xv). Remapping subjectivities here points to the ways in which identities are spatialized. Like Ahmed’s conception of bodies that are shaped by the spaces they inhabit, Chaudhuri’s remapping demonstrates how the representations of place on stage influence identities and perceptions. I hope to extend Chaudhuri’s consideration of placelessness as “the combination and layering, one on top of another, of many different places, many distinct orders of spatiality” (Staging Place 138) to my theorizations of placefullness. Chaudhuri’s layering complicates the “empty” space, and notes the ways in which represented place and physical place can be experienced and engaged simultaneously. This form of placelessness, conceived of as the “layering” of multiple locations, still necessitates an ability to move between spaces, which I assert is contingent upon and influenced by positions and experiences of privilege. Chaudhuri’s work is invaluable to this project, and my extension of the theories of represented place exist within the question of lived orientation: How unstable access to spaces for development and performance relates to experiences of place represented on stage, particularly for those queer body dubbed outsiders.

In her discussion of the “utopian performative,” Jill Dolan describes utopia as a “placeholder for social change, a no-place that the apparatus of theatre—its liveness, the potential it holds for real social exchange, its mortality, its openness to human interactions that life outside this magical space prohibits—can model productively” (63). While I by no means reject Dolan’s notion of a “no-place,” I question how lived experiences of marginalization and Othering might make such erasure more difficult for particular bodies, whose embodied presence

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15 I return to Dolan’s utopian performative in the second case study, discussing how her concept of utopia in relation to temporality is a productive tool for grappling with the temporal/spatial queering of queer women and non-binary performers’ works.
is always seen and perceived as Other. Ever-present and aware of the space that they take up, marginalized theatre creators (and spectators alike) are unable to escape the place or geographical location of the theatre itself. Though spectators and practitioners might all be located in the same physical space, their perceptions and experiences are determined in part by the already established norms and ideologies that shape the space.

When we erase place through configurations of the stage as empty and placeless, we also erase the transience and the precarious funding and resources to which marginalized artists are subject. The ways in which theatre spaces are conceptualized in order to dismiss the locality and spatiality of the theatre space itself belie systemic oppressions constantly at play for racialized bodies, establishing the theatre space as already white, straight, and male, prior to spectators or performers even entering that space. Placelessness is a way in which to neutralize the strategic ways in which space is organized. The mobility that characterizes mainstream theatre experiences and the suspension of disbelief define the spatial structure as one that caters to and welcomes particular privileged individuals. As the lights darken in a theatre, spectators are asked to forget their surroundings. But it is only when the conditions for comfort, safety, and belonging are met that we are able to do so, to leave our bodies behind, and to suspend our disbelief. If such sentiments are unattainable—when we feel out of place, or experience insecurity or “disorientation,” we become aware of and bound by our corporeal form, relentlessly conscious of how it takes up space.

Placefullness: An Extension of the Placeless

Placelessness assumes a form of disembodiment—in which we can exist within the mirror’s reflection, even if only momentarily, outside of the space and place within which we physically dwell. While this form of a placeless space might be valuable to some theatre-goers and artistic creators, it assumes not only that we are all sharing the same mirror (to extend Foucault’s example), but also that we are all viewing the same reflection staring back at us. Though I recognize its efficacy, particularly in relation to performance reception, such a conception of space threatens to invisibilize the organization and distribution of space, and the ways in which our physical bodies are constantly constituting and changing space. The placeless stage assumes a universal spatial experience that inherently depoliticizes spatial histories and the bodies, stories, and acts of violence that enabled their arrival. Throughout this research, I focus
on the impact and influence of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ presence in the theatre, something that necessitates a focus on place rather than on its erasure. As a response to placelessness, placefullness recognizes the landscape\textsuperscript{16} and histories of the city that have affected and enabled the productions’ staging.

Placefullness does not have to accentuate the history of a theatre space—the geography of the space is significant to producing a placefull performance, but I would argue that it is not necessarily essential to overtly grapple with the site of the venue in the performance. On the contrary, in my articulation of placefullness, I assert that place, as a represented, experienced, and potential location of belonging and/or outsidersness (all of which, indeed, can be experienced simultaneously), can be emphasized by refusing neutrality—by drawing attention to the ways in which places are organized, the historical and current politics of power that have allowed some bodies to orient themselves within a physical space; and to the ideologies and powers that privilege some voices in space over others. A placefull production is not a single kind of performance, but an umbrella for a powerful resistance to spatial neutrality—which I regard as a form of spatial violence.

In \textit{Place and Placelessness Revisited}, Robert Freestone and Edgar Liu suggest moving away from an essentialist spatial ontology, and instead toward an engagement of space as an “‘assemblage,’ where place and placelessness are not binary opposites but are intertwined, where each becomes or folds into the other” (262). With this in mind, placelessness and placefullness are not in constant and isolated opposition. Placefullness aims to fill in a gap that placelessness opens in its conception of mobility and layering of multiple places. Placefullness asks us to unpack the assumption of essential or universal access to place in order to assess transience, (hyper-)visibility, and absence in relation to marginalized queer artists and audiences. It asks what perceptions and assumptions inform the represented place on stage—what histories of space influence our orientation within the place of the narrative. In many ways, my theories of

\textsuperscript{16} Importantly, landscape is quite different from place, and requires brief definition to demonstrate the interconnected relationship, as well as the distinction, between the two concepts. Cresswell explains that the concept of landscape has its origins in mercantile capitalism in Renaissance Venice and Flanders (10). It is attached to the notion of optics and visual experiences of “that which can be seen” (10). In conceptions of landscape, “the viewer is outside” (10). While theatrical landscapes represented on stage influence how place is experienced, it is distinct from lived realities of how audiences and performers are (dis)placed within the venue and how they experience their own sense of place in the theatre.
placefullness are extending the notion of platial theatre practices, put forward by D. J. Hopkins. Hopkins explains that platial theatre

engages with the elements that compose a particular location: architecture, local history, community. If environmental theatre is conceived "in terms of spatial relationships" between audience and performance (Aronson 2), then community theatre is conceived in terms of the relationships of performance and place: the theatre event and the specific (urban) locations in (and of) which the event "takes place." (280)

Platial theatre, like my concept of placefullness, “draws audiences to specific, non-neutral locations.” Hopkins’ analysis considers spaces used for performance “that contradict their intended use (e.g., the attic of a vo/tech school becomes the site of theatrical performance)” (280). He argues that employing a space for something other than that for which it was built “takes that place off the map—productively—and alters the social cartography in which that place is anchored, maps it differently in the individual and collective subjectivity” (280). Like platial theatre, other theoretical inquiries into place, space, and artistic practice explore “how these relationships emerge in and are challenged by performances that transform unconventional places into theatrical spaces” (Davis-Fisch 89). Importantly, my theory of placefullness departs somewhat from these theorizations. Most notably, placefullness is not contingent on the transformation of “unconventional” spaces. Rather, the theatre space itself is remapped and reconfigured in order to draw attention to the place that was erased when placelessness was assumed. A placefull theatre practice can thus take place in any locale or venue. It entices the audience to engage the place of the theatre—with all of its histories, geographical locations, and dimensions of oppression and privilege that are at play—and to recognize the conditions of arrival that impact how audiences are oriented within and perceive a performance. These conditions are present in all spaces, including conventional theatre venues and alternative spaces temporarily transformed for a production.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an outline of major theorists who are essential to this study. Building on their works and theoretical foundations, I further developed my own theory of placefullness as a concept that enables audiences to see and engage the inequities of cultural, political, and social space through representations and references to their own embodied place in
the theatre. In this way, placefullness acts as a bridge between everyday experiences of space and the presumed disembodied place represented on stage. Before applying this theoretical concept to case studies in Toronto and Vancouver, in the following chapter, I provide a brief overview of relevant literature and scholarship. Specifically, I consider works that have been produced on queer women’s geography and queer performance, with a particular focus on Canadian works where possible. Critical research in lesbian theatre and in lesbian geography exists in discipline-specific silos and may perpetuate generalizations and a monolithic image of queer communities and experiences. My literature review seeks to identify the ways in which some theorizations silence or erase difference in their attempts to create more equitable scholarship on queer populations. In reviewing literature from diverse disciplines, I aim to identify the gaps that exist at the intersections of these areas. My own work attempts to fill these gaps by employing multiple theories and methodologies from diverse disciplines that are often isolated from each other in their research practices and methodologies.
Chapter 3

An Interdisciplinary Review of Literature

*It is the partition of space that structures it. Everything refers in fact to this differentiation which makes possible the isolation and interplay of distinct spaces. From the distinction that separates a subject from its exteriority to the distinction that localizes objects, from the home... to the journey... from the functioning of the urban network to that of the rural landscape, there is no spatiality that is not organized by the determination of frontiers.*

– Michel de Certeau

Introduction

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this study, this literature review covers diverse fields in queer geography; spatiality, theatre, and performance studies; and queer theatre. I begin with an overview of influential works focused on space and theatre, then outline prior scholarly works in lesbian Canadian theatre, and conclude the review with an overview of research in queer and lesbian geography. By no means is this a comprehensive or complete review of all of the literature in these fields; however, by highlighting significant research and including multiple fields of study in this literature review, I attempt to ground my own investigation into foundational research in these fields, while also suggesting that the intersections among them need to be more thoroughly explored in scholarship and practice, a gap I aim to fill through my own interdisciplinary approach and research.

Spatiality and Performance

The Theatre Space

Performance studies scholars and theatre theorists have produced ample work on space and performance. In his well-known work *Places of Performances*, Marvin Carlson reflects on “how places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre experience” (2). Gay McAuley’s *Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Space* pushes this argument farther to explore the interconnectedness of the spatial, the social, the political, and the cultural through a discussion of theatre in Australia. McAuley notes the distinctive spatial dimension of performance,
asserting that while the “co-presence” of performer and spectator can take place in many kinds of venues, “the point is that performance must literally ‘take place’” (Unstable Ground 15). In overtly grappling with histories of occupation and diverse spatial organizations, McAuley’s collection of essays reveals the dynamic interplay among history, place, and performance. As McAuley notes, we cannot think of space as “simply the background or neutral container for actions” (15). Similarly, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz trace the political and spatial history of the theatre in Performance and the Politics of Space. In their edited volume, contributors address the architecture of a theatre space and theatre’s topology. Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz explain that topology refers to properties that enable objects (such as a theatre space) to change form but still maintain “the continuous establishment of representations and their ascription to categories such as inside and outside, open and closed, or joined and separate” (4). Applied to the theatre, topologies reveal how performance spaces can be altered “stretched, compressed, bent, or contorted” (4); however, spectators and performance cannot “be cut into two completely distinct halves or merged into a single one” (4). The authors further apply this notion of topology to the relationship between a theatre and its immediate surroundings, and to how “the historical significance and function of theatres in society can frequently be identified by their geographical locations” (4–5). Carlson, McAuley, and Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz’s works challenge the reader to engage the spatial organization of performance critically.

Laura Levin writes extensively on the influence of space and environment on performance in Performing Ground. She notes that “humans routinely establish their identities through a complex process of morphological and environmental mimicry, a process wherein the visual markers of identity are transformed in response to the forms found in their settings” (6). Here, Levin suggests that identity is shaped through a process in which spatiality physically impresses expectations and norms on the body and how it is structured. Her notion of mimicry, related to her book’s broader argument on camouflage, points to the ways in which we transform and change due to or in relation to the spaces in which we perform. She indicates that this can take the form of camouflage, not merely as dramatic costume, but also as a means of self-preservation. She refers to this process of camouflage as “a psychic and morphological process of negotiating self (figure) in relation to an external visual field (ground)” (Levin 7). Most importantly to my doctoral research, this process, according to Levin, demonstrates “how identity is, both consciously and unconsciously, constituted through space” (Levin 7). These
valuable ideas argue that the spatiality of the theatrical experience extends beyond one’s immediate experience in the theatre, and influences not only those within the space itself, but, in a larger sense, the social, cultural, and political fabric of the city.

Studies of landscape, though only peripherally relevant to my analysis of place, further demonstrate the spatial organization of the theatre space. The visual representation and perspective of the audience, particularly in relation to where they are located within the theatre and how the stage is positioned and set, has an undeniable influence on how audiences and performers are placed and how they experience place. John Wylie argues that landscapes are phenomenologically lived and visually experienced. In Landscapes, Wylie notes the ways in which the “body and environment fold into and construct each other” (144). Likewise, Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri’s edited collection Land/Scape/Theater demonstrates the influence of landscapes in theatre and spatial backdrops, which influence how characters are received and conceptualized by audiences. The term “landscape” is difficult to define (Chaudhuri, “Land/Scape/Theory” 12)—but, in the context of the theatre, we may use such a concept to think through the psychological impact of the visual perspective of the stage based on the “actual position of perspectival staging” (Chaudhuri, “Land/Scape/Theory” 20).

In Performance and the Global City, editors D. J. Hopkins and Kim Solga compile a selection of works that tackle the complex relationship between spatiality and performance. As Hopkins and Solga explain, Performance and the Global City emerges out of the earlier volume Performance and the City, and applies the theoretical foundations and methodologies that developed from the first text to an international context (7). Their later volume complicates a “West and the rest” binary by denaturalizing Western centrality and shifting focus to other nations, geographies, and landscapes. Through discussions of mobilization, social justice, theatre, and the performance of everyday life, the contributors explore the ways in which performance can both reinforce and challenge notions of mobility, transience, and urbanization in global cities. This is of particular interest because the prevailing concept of the placeless or empty stage, which assumes a universally accessible mobility in the theatre, neglects to attend to the pervasive influence of race and marginalization in the spatial organization of performance.

There is also an important relationship among spatiality, temporality, and historical narratives addressed in theatre and performance scholarship. Theatres are continually in flux,
constantly reconsidering, reforming, and reacting to their immediate environments. The spatial organization of a theatre is time-based, changing not only with the artistic director or season, but also the broader shifting politics of geographies. These changes in turn influence how a space is remembered and imagined. As Joanne Tomkins articulates in *Theatre’s Heterotopias*, “The venue itself provides traces of what has gone before” (8). A venue and space tell particular stories of the past, which then influence how spaces are used in the present and the possibilities for its future. This presents particular challenges to queer women and marginalized folks in the industry, whose precarious relationship to space often results in the erasure of their contributions to the industry. The inextricable linkage between space and time is an essential element of this doctoral study and is expanded upon in my analysis chapters. Michael McKinnie emphasizes this idea in *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City*. He explains that “without a temporal register it is impossible to mark geographical transformation historically” (5). Likewise, Linda Fitzsimmons, in her piece “Archiving, Documenting, and Teaching Women’s Theatre Work,” analyzes the gendered aspects of spatiality and temporality. She writes:

> The ephemerality of all theatrical performance is exacerbated in the case of women’s theatre. . . . Companies specializing in women’s work have mostly been under-funded and their status therefore precarious—and it would seem that the more explicit their feminist politics the more precarious their status—with few or no facilities for preserving an archive of their activities. (114)

Here, we might also think of Michel de Certeau, who writes: “There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can ‘invoke’ or not” (108). Whether we may *choose* to invoke spirits or not, their presence, for de Certeau, is undeniable. Such an understanding of space points to the ways in which history is constructed through the narratives we create around and about a space. Our histories and memories of particular spaces do not always leave physical artifacts in their wake (though they may). As de Certeau further explains, “Memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not locatable . . . . It is striking here that the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences” (108). Place is layered with memories, and while some may be personal and intimate, others are cast widely as foundational narratives of the past. If we can choose to invoke the haunted ghosts of our spaces, we must then ask whose ghosts are invoked most readily, and whose are buried deeper beneath the surface. The narratives of the past are presented within the stage space, as well as through the construction and geography in which it is situated. In other words, stages are not empty. They are
Theatre Architecture

Although my study does not focus on the architecture of buildings used for theatrical performance, these play a fundamental role in theatrical performance and spectators’ expectations and reception of performances. Much work has been done on the study of architecture as it relates to theatre practice. *Theatre Buildings: A Design Guide*, edited by Judith Strong, is a practical examination of the design of theatre buildings, focused on the planning and development of physical structures. With considerations of funding and budget, alongside front-of-house, auditorium, stage and backstage construction, the spaces described in the guide demonstrate the details involved in building an intentional and rather large-scale theatre space. Strong’s book has little to do with theatre practice, and presents limited information that would be useful to a theatre practitioner; the target audience for the work is most assuredly the architect. This publication seems to assume theatre performance and architecture to be disparate areas of study. Conversely, Julie Rufford’s book *Theatre and Architecture* dispels this assumption and examines not only the ways in which these subject matters are connected, but why it is essential to study them in tandem. Her book is framed through an introduction that maps the historical ways in which the architecture of theatre space not only influences actors and producers, but also audiences. Beginning with an overview of Greek amphitheatres and moving on to a discussion of Elizabethan theatres and more contemporary theatre spaces, the book considers the impact of historical and cultural shifts in indoor and outdoor theatre spaces. In *Dramaturgy and Architecture: Theatre, Utopia and the Built Environment*, Cathy Turner considers dramaturgy as architectural by examining the intersections and productive linkage between the two seemingly unrelated forms. Turner notes that while dramaturgy seems to be invested in temporal narratives, stitched to the ephemeral nature of performance, and architecture seems solely interested in the spatial, this book resists “reductive sets of assumptions” in order to “reclaim the concept of dramaturgy for its useful application to spatiality in performance, by considering it through the lens of architecture” (2).

In “Collective Head,” Fred Moten cites his teacher, Masao Miyoshi, in his discussion of performance and architecture. Miyoshi writes:
Architectural discourse, like that of city planning, is inescapably utopian. Possibly because a completed blueprint no longer belongs to its architect but rather to its buyers and users, architecture is only fully itself while it is a blueprint under construction and thus still addressing a future condition. . . .

[T]he future of a building and/or a city is necessarily negotiated with the dominant powers, those who manage and administer as well as own and dictate. (Miyoshi, qtd. in Moten 165)

Architecture is thus closest to achieving its intentionality and fullest potential in the moments prior to its completion. The temporal specificity expressed in this sentiment, wherein architecture is defined as process and not product, is particularly relevant to my theorizations of placefullness and experiences of spatiality through temporality. Though the architectural project may reach completion, its existence is only in its relation to futurity. In thinking through space and place as queer objects—always becoming and existing in a horizon of consistent change and creation—we can consider how orientation in space is perpetually “addressing a future condition,” existing within an assemblage of time that refuses linearity. Though my research does not focus on the architecture of the theatre sites and buildings used in the case studies, thinking through architectural discourse as the utopian “in-progress, the in-playness of the thing” (Moten 166), allows entry into fruitful discussions of how time influences our lived experiences and access to buildings and cities, alongside representations of place on stage.

Nomadic Theatre Practices

Multiple scholarly works have also investigated the transience of queer (or otherwise marginalized) theatre and their long histories of dislocated and nomadic practices. As Ric Knowles notes in “Survival Spaces: Space and the Politics of Dislocation,” nomadic spatial practices are both advantageous and disadvantageous:

The upsides of dislocation have to do, first, with the guerrilla practice of shifting ground, continually and purposefully refusing to settle into entrenched positions and taken-for-granted places or starting points; and secondly, with the need, always, to ask questions about how this (new) cultural, social, organizational, or physical space can be made to work this time. (31–34)

The need to reorient one’s body in space encourages self-reflection and diversity in both approach and audience appeal. Furthermore, owning a space introduces legal and financial obligations for which a “nomadic” artist may not be accountable. And yet the “choice” to pursue
a transient practice needs to be problematized. Miwon Kwon writes that in celebrating the ability to employ nomadic practices, we might be engaging in

a reprise of the ideology of “freedom of choice”—the choice to forget, the choice to reinvent, the choice to fictionalize, the choice to “belong” anywhere, everywhere, and nowhere. This choice, of course, does not belong to everyone equally. . . . [T]he ability to deploy multiple, fluid identities in and of itself is a privilege of mobility that has a specific relationship to power. (One Place After Another 165–66)

In acknowledging that choosing a nomadic practice is a site of privilege that not all artists are granted, we must also unpack how diverse artists come to be nomadic, and the differing impacts this experience has on creative practices. Social locations such as race and class have innumerable influences on who has access to ongoing space. Considering the spaces that nomadic artists are invited or welcomed into may further complicate our understanding of ephemeral creative performance. In Reading the Material Theatre, Ric Knowles notes that nomadic theatre companies are not challenged simply by the need to find rental spaces, but also by a lack of control over the spaces when they are found. Furthermore, the exhaustion that results from a lack of funding, resources, and regular spaces for development and production present additional obstacles to trying to locate new spaces for transient performances (Reading the Material Theatre 89). The labour exerted to account for transience and movement is a recurring subject addressed in my case studies, and one of the fundamental ways in which queer precarity inequitably influences marginalized queer artists.

**Queer Theatre**

**Queer Performance in Canada**

In Jill Dolan’s Theatre and Sexuality, she charts a history of queer performance, focusing primarily on avant-garde performance rather than commercial theatre. She notes that “earlier views of the story of LGBTQ theatre in the USA, the UK, and elsewhere have focused almost exclusively on commercial theatre, where white men tend to be most visible and successful” (5). Increasingly, scholars and performance practitioners are conducting much-needed research on queer performance in Canada, tracking its production history, reception, and, indeed, its spatial
organization. Yet this scholarship is nonetheless relatively scarce in comparison to the vast creative contributions from queer and LGBTTIQQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered, Intersexual, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirit) artists. As Paul Halferty notes:

The relative dearth of LGBT2Q theatre scholarship is not commensurate with the vitality of the work in the country today nor does it reflect the history of LGBT2Q theatre and performance in the contemporary period. The politicization of gender and homosexuality that began in the 1960s, undertaken by the heterosexual and lesbian women of the Women’s liberation movement, and by the gay men, lesbians, bisexual, trans and Two-Spirit people of the gay liberation movement, has had significant impact on theatrical production in the country . . . but [their] histories remain largely uncharted. (“For the Future” 2)

Additionally, by and large, much of the research that is available in this field of study in Canada focuses on the more privileged queer populations, primarily white cisgender gay/queer men. As theatre practitioner Moynan King describes it, the queer woman artist “remains ‘Other’ even within alternative and politically identified institutions such as women’s theatres and gay theatres” (King, “Foster Children,” 191). This is not to deny the need for and significance of theatre companies and spaces mandated to produce non-women’s work and non-queer work. These spaces are integral to the vibrancy of the theatre community. Yet, as King argues, “queer women’s work often gets less press, less stage time and less money” (“Foster Children,” 191) than that of artists of other demographics. Research on Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, and transgender queer women artists is even more limited, erasing their significant history in and contributions to the field.

Queer Women in Theatre and Performance

There have been notable works on queer women in Canadian theatre that begin to address some of the void in scholarship. Rosalind Kerr’s *Lesbian Plays: Coming of Age in Canada* (2006) specifically brings lesbian playwrights to the fore. The volume includes multiple works that help to chart lesbian histories and experiences through lesbians’ creative achievements throughout the country, and it “contributes to the creation of an alternative canon which no longer conforms to the naturalized heterosexual imperative that we take for granted” (v). In her

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Introduction, Kerr notes the anthology’s “lack of inclusion of artists writing from diverse race, ethnic, age, ability, education, economic, and regional backgrounds” (iii), and expresses the need for a second volume. In the following paragraph, Kerr nonetheless discusses the “diverse lesbian playwrights” who have been included in the volume for their influence on Canadian culture. While this is a very important anthology, it is necessary to note the lack of inclusion and the mention of “diversity,” as this too legitimizes and canonizes only some lesbian playwrights as contributors to Canadian culture. Susan G. Cole compiles lesbian scenes and monologues by notable lesbians in Canada in Outspoken: A Canadian Collection of Lesbian Scenes and Monologues (2009). This work is not only a testament to the valuable contributions lesbians and queer women have made to the performance industry in the country, but is also a significant means through which to document and disseminate their written works—contributing to an otherwise lacking historical archive.

In TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work (2012), for example, Judith Rudakoff assembles diverse chapters on playwright-performer Nina Arsenault, a transgender woman whose distinct and innovative performance art engages what it means to be “beautiful” and feminine. Moynan King’s 2011 issue of Canadian Theatre Review focuses particularly on queer women and transgender artists in Canada. Contributors from across the country examined the creative contributions and challenges queer women experience in the industry.18 Again, while these contributions are significant, the voices and perspectives are primarily those of privileged white artists. The recent 2016 “Equity in Theatre” issue of Canadian Theatre Review, which I co-edited with Rebecca Burton, includes multiple contributions from queer women in the theatre industry, including d’bi.young anitaafrika, Kim Katrin Milan, Gein Wong, Michele Descottignie, and Sara Garton Stanley. In editing the collection, we were cognizant of including voices that are often neglected or unheard. In selecting scholars and practitioners for this publication, we actively attempted to shift what is considered of value in Canadian theatre, by prioritizing women of colour, white women, and queer women, specifically those who have successfully filled leadership roles in the industry and whose contributions are trivialized or overlooked by the mainstream press. Finally, Moynan King’s anthology Queer/Play, a compilation of lesbian and queer women’s plays, increases the

18 See, for example, Barker and Shawyer (2012), Newman (2012), Gilbert (2012), and Gillespie (2012).
visibility of lesbian and queer women’s theatre in Canada and includes interviews with the playwrights and creators, as well as scholarly analysis of the texts. This work responds to Kerr’s aforementioned call for another volume of plays devoted to lesbian and queer playwrights.

The City, Space, and Place

Situating this research within two Canadian cities, I aim to unmap performance spaces beginning with their place in the broader landscape of the city. Cities are often thought of in terms of citizenship and borders, which are normalized through their depoliticization. We remember the histories of wars and colonization, but often forget how this affects our day-to-day experience of place. In discussing the place of the city in this research, I start from the understanding that the existence of cities is not innate, but imposed through the human construction of boundaries and maps. As de Certeau notes, one of the definitive qualities of the city is its presence as a “universal and an anonymous subject” (94). He continues, “‘The city,’ like a proper name, thus provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties” (94). The city does not merely create a grid within which to walk, but sets rules and practices by which to abide and multiple binaries through which to live (these may include inside/outside; citizen/immigrant; white/“racialized”; and public/private). It is through these binaries that we experience the city space and learn to act as good (sexual) citizens. The invisibility of the systems and processes used to create maps and cities produces, as Alison Rooke explains, “an illusion of coherence that hides another reality: that the entity that is the city is, overall, an imagined space” (“Navigating” 233). The very notion of a unified city produces and justifies norms and conventions whereby certain bodies and actions are prohibited and others permitted. As Wendy S. Walters explains, “Mapping is always an act of distortion, and the fact that some of us live off roads not yet written down means that we do not exist. Alternatively, it means that we exist as placeholders for someone else” (Walters, “Post-Logical Notes on Self-Election” 150). Thus, while I want to note the distinction between space and place, I do not conceive of either as objective or innate. Both space and place fulfil political and social functions, upholding systems of power and recreating norms through boundaries, street signs, geographical conventions, and visibility.

As Doreen Massey explains, space is not established through static areas of emplacement, but rather is “the product of interrelations . . . [and is c]onstituted through interactions, from the
immensity of the global to the intimately tiny” (Massey 9). Such space is never complete and always “in process.” Massey’s anti-essentialist politics are integral to this doctoral project. The interrelations of which Massey speaks are committed to considering “the constitution of the identities themselves and the relations through which they are constructed” (Massey 10). She continues:

Rather than accepting and working with already-constituted entities/identities, this politics lays its stress upon the relational constructedness of things. . . . It is wary therefore about claims to authenticity based in notions of unchanging identity. Instead, it proposes a relational understanding of the world, and a politics which responds to that. (Massey 10)

Liz Millward applies a similar notion of relational geographies to her work on lesbian space-making in Canada as she explains that attaining a sense of belonging in lesbian spaces (whether physical, emotional, or conceptual) is a complex process (33). Millward explores this complexity in her work, analyzing the ways in which Canadian lesbians created spaces after the Second World War, as lesbian women began to congregate more intentionally in beer parlours and on softball diamonds (30). Such spaces were integral to socializing, and worked to “[reconfigure] the significance of the division between public and private” (30)—a division that I will shortly explore in terms of its constructedness and artificiality. However, while “these were spaces of becoming, reaffirming, bolstering and solidifying” lesbian identities (31), not all women felt included or secure in these spaces (33). Class, race, and socialization in bar environments directly influenced who “would be better able to ‘read’ and be ‘read’ as belonging in a downtown beer parlour . . . but most women, regardless of their milieu, would struggle to assert their entitlement to public space at all” (33). Thus, the spaces created by and/or for lesbian women helped both to transform geographies and to establish norms and expectations for lesbians themselves. Never fixed, these spaces were constantly changed by the subjectivities that moved through them. Refusing a static and unchanging understanding of space means also refusing fixed spatial binaries such as established distinctions between public and private, straight and queer. Both binaries assume universal invitations to some bodies—for example, conceptions of “public space” typically assume accessibility to all, without considerations of gender, race, class, or ability (Ruddick 133). Furthermore, a binary between straight and gay or queer space assumes a general and essentialized view of what these spaces entail and who is welcome in them. The regulations of space are oversimplified. If space is temporally shaped and
in flux, then it follows that a static binary is unattainable. In the context of this research, such a binary is faulty, as it does not provide opportunities to complicate the use of heterosexual space for queer performance.

Shaughnessy notes that despite the fact that place is frequently attributed to security and distinct spatial borders (she gives the example here of the phrase “there is no place like home”), there is also a history and factors that distinguish those who experience belonging from those who experience the place as outsiders. She argues that these distinctions make it essential to discuss displacement and placelessness alongside place, site, and space (104). Significantly, different scholars in a range of disciplines define these terms differently. This makes it more difficult to construct an interdisciplinary discussion on place, space, and placelessness without clearly defining the parameters of the terms and their histories.

**Placelessness and Non-Places**

Various theorists from a range of disciplines have explored and worked to define place and placelessness in their writings (Sandin 67; Arefi 180). Such a project involves demarcating not only the limitations of place, but also what might be excluded from its parameters. Having a clear overview of previous work written on placelessness is essential to any consideration of how queer women and non-binary performers might create a work that is placefull (one that engages the distinctiveness of place in order to resist its constructed neutrality). Placelessness diverges from experiences of being out of place. To be out of place might not make one feel like one is displaced, but like the place itself is destructive, violent, or suffocating. It might feel like an over-exaggeration of one’s body’s place—like the body is being simultaneously confined and exorcised within/from the place. We are at once imprisoned within and hypersensitive to place, and left with no place to exist within it. Hyper surveillance can make us feel out of place within an otherwise clearly defined place. Or perhaps, for those who are indigenous to places and spaces, it might feel like a different kind of violation—a home invasion.

Importantly, the notion of placelessness is defined differently by scholars in theatre and performance than by those in geography, philosophy, and other fields within the humanities—placelessness is a flexible, if not indefinable, term. It may refer to the “layering of multiple places” (Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*), or a lack of identifiable characteristics or histories in
stabilized places (such as strip malls or box stores along the highway) (Relph). It may be conceived of as an emptiness or a “non-place” intended “to be passed through . . . measured in units of time” (Augé, 104), or, as Knopp argues, “as something active, something practiced, or as an embodied and material form of agency” (130). In this view, placelessness creates a desirable space and place of familiarity, transience, and anonymity for queer folks—offering a kind of “emotional/ontological security to such individuals, particularly if they are marginalized or oppressed” (Knopp 130). Placelessness may be conceived of as an ahistorical “non-place,” wherein the politics, cultures, and narratives of a space are erased in favour of a new and non-specific sterility (Moran 117). Within all of these definitions, I argue that placelessness necessitates a simultaneous active shaping and erasure. It is not the absence of history, culture, or politics in a place—indeed, every place has a history; instead, placelessness is, perhaps, the labour and active removal of these things. Peter Brook’s empty space must be emptied of its past, present, and perceived future prior to the practitioner’s arrival; the generic and indistinct strip mall must, too, bulldoze the space’s colonial pasts, its prior existence as an independent family-run business, its histories of peoples and wildlife, etc. When we layer places, we may gain access to different perspectives and possibilities, but we also bury what was there before.

Importantly, while placelessness and non-places share attributes, they remain distinct categories. Marc Augé’s well-known book *Non-Places*, conceives of these commonplace sites as homogenous environments “produced by the accelerated movement of people and goods in advanced capitalist societies” (Moran 94). However, Joe Moran notes that the concept of the non-place also “needs to be understood as a site of cultural politics” (94). Similar to my own argument regarding placeless stages, Moran argues that Augé’s conceptualization of the non-place assumes and perpetuates the notion that a space can be freed of historical, political, racial, and gendered dynamics. Though Augé’s notion of non-place is incredibly valuable, and I do not deny the existence of such places or the need to produce geographical interpretations and explorations of these places of everyday life, at the same time, it is important to note the way in which these spaces are constructed to create only certain kinds of belonging for certain bodies and people who pass through them. There is a focus on how spaces are governed in terms of the contractual agreements between consumer/citizen and supplier/state, but Augé does not seem to move beyond these contracts and spatial organizations to consider how non-places are politicized, how they are funded, and how they are organized (Moran 106).
Relph explains that while place and placelessness seem to be a dualism, the paradox is actually that they are intertwined (Relph, “The Paradox of Place”). A place is considered distinct, easily discernable from the place next to it. A placeless place is indistinct and non-specific. The suppression of place within the theatre is somewhat different from Relph's conception of these interconnected terms. Mass production, capitalism, and (post)modernism—particularly from after the Second World War until the early 1970s—reconstructed place to “wipe the slate clean” (Relph, “The Paradox of Place”) and remove the distinctiveness of space. However, in the context of the theatre, this shift and resurgence of place may not follow other patterns. The distinct qualities of the theatre space can make it more valued and adored (unique architecture, painted murals, and landscapes are all desired features; this is in stark contrast to movie theatres, in which placelessness and non-distinct landscapes are more frequent). However, what I am most interested in is the removal of place within the stage space, wherein the distinctiveness of place and its histories are erased in order to facilitate a suspension of disbelief. We can think about how place and placelessness always exist alongside each other in this way. Whereas the setting of the theatre may be distinct, and the architecture, the history, and the building may very much be placed (and the history may even be written on the walls, the website, within the narratives of the staff and personnel), the stage itself may nonetheless be conceived of as placeless—an empty place, a placelessness that enables the transformation into other places, into fictional settings. It is as if the organization of the space both assumes and makes it possible that spectators will walk into the theatre space and will be able to shed the conditions of their arrival.

Queer Women’s Geography

As a field of academic research, the area of sexuality and space has grown exponentially over the last few decades. Research on queer space, much like queer theory itself, continues to morph and change as previous theorizations are challenged and reworked. Early theorizations in sexual studies and queer geography began by uncovering spaces of belonging and moved to destabilize a rigid heterosexual and homosexual spatial binary. By the early 2000s, research focused on “the emergence of a central power dynamic among ‘queers’ whereby neo-liberal capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism and racism worked to empower some queer subjects and

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further marginalize others in the assimilation process” (Podmore, “Critical Commentary” 264). More recent studies have shifted focus to marginalized communities, rather than centralizing homonormativity, and have simultaneously worked to dissect the binaries such a project introduces by “attending to the important and neglected intersectionalities” (Podmore, “Critical Commentary” 264). Following this lead, my work focuses primarily on lesbian geographies and on queer women and non-binary subjects, rather than the monopolies other queer subjects have maintained. I note here too that there has been a wealth of studies devoted particularly to lesbian geographies, with significantly less work on non-binary or gender-fluid persons. As this research continues, more focus on the geographies of non-binary identities is necessary.

According to leading theorists and geographers Kath Browne and Eduarda Ferreira, lesbian geographies are about how those who identify as queer women and lesbians form communities and navigate space in their work, their lives, and their social and leisure experiences. They write:

> It is about how these people find each other in certain places and also how they negotiate places where they are not welcome, subject to abuse and where they feel unsafe. It is also about how the possibilities for finding and creating spaces have changed as a result of social, political and legal changes, especially since the post-war period in the 1950s. (1)

They continue by noting that lesbian geographies are important to both activists and academics not only as a way to increase the visibility of lesbian spaces, but also as an avenue through which to evaluate how patriarchy, homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism intersect (Browne and Ferreira 1). They note that significant foundational research has been conducted that demonstrates the link between gender and spatiality. As they write:

> Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose (2000) took theories of performativity and used them to rethink the concepts of space and place. Seeing place and space as something that we “do,” rather than something that simply “is,” . . . they enabled authors to think about how gender and sexualities both made place/space and were themselves made in and through place and space. (4)

Recent inquiries have further interrogated how spaces allocated for queer individuals create communities of belonging, while other works argue that these spaces reinforce a hetero/queer
binary, further ghettoizing marginalized populations. Pérez discusses the inherent spatiality of queer identities, referencing the metaphor of “coming out of the closet” as indicative of the movement and mobility necessary to inhabit such a positionality (106). He writes that “being gay requires some kind of travel, actual or imagined . . . needless to say, the mobility that modern gay identity requires is not universally available” (Pérez 106). The ability to “come out of the closet,” a canonized spatial and temporal metaphor that has come to denote agency and liberation for queer bodies, is “premised on the property of whiteness” (Pérez 106). Though Pérez focuses specifically on cosmopolitan gay male identities, the mobility that characterizes gay experiences is complicated through gender, as well as race, ability, class, and settler colonialism. Through queer geographical theorizations it is evident that modern gay identity is vastly different for those who inhabit marginalized social locations.

Nash and Gorman-Murray consider the complexities of lesbian geographies in their article “Lesbians in the City.” They write that for lesbian women, “the intersections of gendered experiences with social, political, and economic relations mean they are both connected to and distinct from gay male geographies” (Nash and Gorman-Murray 187). Indeed, many works in lesbian and queer geography have noted the ways in which gay villages, existing in most cosmopolitan Western cities, tend to cater to cisgender white male populations. Of particular interest in Nash and Gorman-Murray’s work is their finding on the prevalence of mobilities and movements in lesbian place-making (182). Lesbian geographies, distinct from the (often homonormative) gay villages in metropolitan cities, tend to be transient and/or community spaces, shifting based on politics, economics, and ideologies (182). In a discussion on whiteness and criminalization of LGBTQ youth in queer spaces, Rae Rosenberg argues that gay villages often act as anchors for homonormativity (Duggan). Rosenberg writes, “Much research has linked the spatialization of homonormativity to both the explicit exclusions and the more subtle undercurrents of sociopolitical rejection that manifest in gay villages, often targeting people of color, women, and homeless, transgender (trans), and gender nonconforming people” (1). For some marginalized people, the ability and freedom to move through whitened spaces of feigned

20 For select theorizations on both topics, see Brown (2013); Bain, Pain, and Isen (2015); Nash and Gorman-Murray (2015); Taylor and Falconer (2015); and Oswin (2015).

21 For example, Binnie and Skeggs (2004); Nash (2011); Podmore (2006); and Pritchard, Morgan, and Sedgley (2002).
“multiculturalism” is contingent on performing as a respectable gay citizen in public space. The gains of the gay community, and particularly of those members who inhabit positions of relative privilege, come at the expense and oppression of others (Rosenberg 3; Huffer 147). While the exclusion and displacement that gay white men perpetuate through their monopolies over queer spaces cannot be justified or excused, as Sarah Schulman notes in her discussion of the intersections of AIDS and gentrification, these historical and current spatial dynamics “would not have been possible without tax incentives for luxury developers or without the lack of city-sponsored low-income housing” (39). She further explains that the impetus to create gay spaces and communities is a result of oppression. Again, though such a lens does not account for or justify racist and classist processes of gentrification, it allows an intersectional theory to develop which notes that “if all gays could live safety and openly in their communities of origin, and if government policies had been oriented towards protecting poor neighborhoods by rehabbing without displacement, then gentrification by white gay men would have been both unnecessary and impossible” (Schulman 40). Thus, the complex systemic structures of capitalism, race, and gender that enable gentrification and the monopoly of white cisgender gay men in urban city spaces complicate a simplistic understanding of privilege in queer geographies.

In an article that critically analyzes and rejects notions of “queer space,” Natalie Oswin does not merely call for a reshaping of the concept of “queer space,” but insists that we move beyond it entirely. Oswin provides a historical context for “queer space,” which emerged in the 1970s and gained prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s. She writes:

In the work of Bell, Binnie, Valentine, and others queer space is . . . established as a concrete space that is carved out by sexual dissidents (read: gays and lesbians). As a reterritorialization of heterosexual space, it purportedly enables the visibility of sexual subcultures that resist and rupture the hegemonic heterosexuality that is the source of their marginality and exclusion. (90)

Oswin goes on to note that queer spaces such as gay villages essentialize a universal queer identity and purport to exist as a space for all queer people, while in reality only representing and accommodating a privileged few (92). Following this rationale, my conception of queer space is not limited to ghettoized or established gay villages, but recognizes the potential queer in all spaces—considering how queer people might engage all space and, more importantly, what spaces they are actually engaging, rather than assuming their activity is restricted to particular coordinates on a map. Though I by no means contend that there is an essential or fixed binary
between “straight” and “queer” spaces, I do argue that neighbourhoods are branded as and cater to particular demographics, normalizing specific identities and creating spaces of inclusion and “belonging” for individuals who identify with certain communities. The queer city, as an imagined and lived space, at times challenges traditional norms by considering the experiences of Othered bodies and how they navigate city spaces in terms of experienced exclusion and belonging, as well as created alternative communities and spaces. At the same time, however, I propose that constructed queer spaces can simultaneously function to uphold normative binaries by perpetuating an “us and them” dynamic, in which the queer subject is always seen as Other to a naturalized heterosexual subject. With that, even Westernized city spaces deemed “heterosexual” cannot be homogenized as one particular kind of space, but should be perceived as constantly shifting and changing environments, where power dynamics can be affirmed or resisted.

As Phil Hubbard notes, although there are variations in how sex is understood and represented, “collectively the organization of space in Western societies serves to naturalize heterosexuality” (Hubbard 367). Thinking of how categorizing spaces naturalizes a constructed binary as well as how Western spaces are marked as heterosexual, my discussion of queer performance space does not simply refer to a commercial, hyper-visible pride parade or a drag performance in an urban gay village. Rather, I focus on the everyday practices, routines, and movements of queer bodies in diverse cultural, economic, and social spaces. In this way, the queer city becomes a lens through which to view how queer women negotiate space daily. Furthermore, the queer city is not synonymous with queering the city; by this I mean that the queer city might necessarily involve queer subjects, but in fact may not challenge heteronormative or mainstream ideology. Even within marginalized communities, such as the queer community, certain imaginings of individuals have been deemed acceptable and normal, while others become marginalized and Othered—establishing some behaviours and identities as more privileged than others and encouraging individuals to conform to newly established “homonormative” assimilationist politics (Oswin 92). Typically, these narratives promote the image of the universalized white, middle-class, able-bodied gay man. Gorman-Murray notes that while there has certainly been material published with gay content in mainstream spaces, these spaces have been fashioned in order to conform to “appropriate” expectations of gay life, “where the only difference from the mainstream norm is same-sex desire; other than that, GLB subjects
aspire to the same life goals as heterosexuals (supposedly do)” (17). Thus, where a queer city might only include appropriate and accepted queer experiences in the city space, to queer a city necessitates continually queering the queer as well.

Moreover, queering spaces refers to queering conventions based not only on gender or sexuality, but also on race, class, and ability, recognizing how, in addition to being coded as heterosexual, spaces are inscribed as white, able-bodied, and middle-class. In considering most of the constructed queer spaces in Toronto, Oswin notes that where class and gender are often addressed in geographical research on queer spaces, these studies typically omit the reality that the spaces discussed are “implicitly white” (93). Most empirical research on lesbian and gay spaces has primarily featured white, middle-class participants (Chalmers 137). Since queer identities and experiences are (like all identities) diverse and changing, any consideration of queer individuals should not propose a universal experience, but instead can take an intersectional approach, exploring how queer subjects can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression in a space, based on their multiple social locations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified some of the scholarly works that currently exist in queer geography and queer theatre performance, as well as their limitations. In the following chapter, I continue to develop my theory of placefullness, as articulated in chapter 2, alongside the research presented in this literature review. Specifically, I consider the current state of queer performance in Canada. The lack of visibility of marginalized queer artists in scholarly publications, identified in this review, has a reciprocal impact on these artists’ visibility on stage and in queer spaces. Indeed, the cyclical absence feeds into a continuing spatial monopoly that white privileged queer artists have on both the stage and scholarship. In chapter 4, I consider recent events in queer performance communities in Canada, in order to identify the spatial dynamics currently organizing queer performance politics in the country and to contextualize the case studies to follow within this paradigm. The aim of the following chapter is to demonstrate the ways in which spatial inequities practically influence and shape queer communities in Canada and to note how performance, whether in a theatre or on the streets, has the capacity to take and make space. Considering incidents at Toronto’s Pride Parade alongside queer performance events, including the production of *The Gay Heritage Project* in Toronto, and a queer theatre symposium in
Vancouver, the chapter explores the intersections of space and race, gender, and sexual orientation.
Chapter 4

The Universal Canadian Queer: Demanding to Be Seen

Introduction

*Maybe our theatre past, present, and future don’t look anything like what you’ve built because your inheritance plan was only for others like you, and our inheritance is Indigenous and immigrant and colonized and decolonized and multi-national and borderless and so much more exponential than anything you could imagine. So maybe you can keep guarding your power, maybe you can fossilize there, and we’ll be over here at the party with the better food, the louder laughter, the throatier songs, and the wilder dancing.*

– Anoushka Ratnarajah

At times, the queer theatre community can feel incredibly small, especially in the context of Canadian performance. In many ways, this can create a false assumption of a universal experience—cohesion and unwavering kinship. The monolithic concept of “queer theatre” becomes grounds for the radical exclusions (or more often erasure) of works that do not fit within the histories of white gay cisgender men’s theatre and performance. The notion that queer theatre is one kind of theatre or community problematically subsumes the experiences of marginalized queer people into a neutralized, white-dominated experience and erases the distinct oppression they must combat. Rejecting this monolith is focused not on seeking inclusion within white queer theatre, but on increased visibility, funding, and resources for those who exist outside of Western whiteness. As I began research on the topic of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance, the dearth of research, archival documentation, and press publications was increasingly evident. This absence would seem to demonstrate the consequence of producing these kinds of performances in festivals, cabarets, and one-off events. A lack of programming in mainstage theatre seasons and full-length productions contributes to the continuing invisibility of these works and their comparative exclusion from narratives told about queer theatre history. Indeed, as current Buddies in Bad Times artistic director Evalyn Parry notes in an interview conducted for this project, women often develop and perform works for one-off events and festivals, which, though advantageous in terms of development and experimentation, offer few resources, and little access to documentation, time, technology, and space. In the context of queer
theatre in Canada today, this kind of destabilization, and ultimate erasure, influence programming, as works by marginalized artists receive less visibility and fewer resources—increasing the difficulty associated with receiving ongoing support, particularly beyond first productions. This is all the more true for QTIBPOC artists, whose work is marginalized not only because of gender identity and sexual orientation, but also because of the incredibly forceful ways in which white privilege functions in Canada. Queer women and non-binary artists whose experiences exist at the intersections, those who inhabit both marginalized gendered and racialized identities, experience increased challenges. Whereas productions such as *Black Boys*[^22] respond to the lack of queer black narratives on Canadian stages, and Festivals such as Hysteria[^23] focus on queer women’s performance, Black and Indigenous queer women and non-binary artists are often absent from these efforts to increase visibility. Employing an intersectional approach necessitates an analysis of the intersections—where queer women and non-binary artists are not considered in isolated silos, but alongside margins of difference that significantly influence how queer theatre and performance are experienced. In this research, I attempt to dismantle these isolated silos, and consider the intersections of identities in queer performance communities.

In this chapter, I introduce and contextualize current concerns and prevalent issues in queer artistic communities in Canada, in an effort to create a foundation for this study and to situate the interviews and case studies within the social, cultural, and political climate of queer performance communities in Canada. More specifically, I reflexively consider the role white privilege and patriarchy play in programming and artistic scholarship in the dominant (read: white) Canadian queer theatre community. My analysis of experiences and events in queer theatre in Canada reinforces previous research on the universalization of whiteness in queer communities—where whiteness is unnamed and presumed neutral, and Blackness, Indigeneity, and racialization necessitate naming and identification. This neutrality influences how spaces are allocated, allowing white bodies to enter and develop works in any space deemed universal, whereas those who do not reside within this category are to be relegated to moments of

[^22]: Stephen Jackman-Torkoff, Tawiah Ben M’Carthy, and Thomas Olajide collectively created and performed *Black Boys* at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in November 2016. The production specifically focused on the diverse experiences of Black gay men in Canada.

[^23]: Hysteria: A Festival of Women was a ten-day festival produced by Moynan King at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre from 2003 to 2009. For more information on its history and eventual cancellation, see King’s article, “The Foster Children of Buddies.”
specificity. In relation to the theorizations I present in this research, placefullness in performance
draws attention to the realities and inequities of place and space in order to demonstrate that the
stage was never empty at all: it is filled with histories and presents that shape how bodies are
oriented within the space; it is filled with physical material and ephemera that signals to some
bodies that they are “home” and others that they are visitors; it is filled with the other bodies of
spectators and performers, whose presence within the space further perpetuates experiences of
insiderness and outsiderness. Placefullness has the capacity to illuminate what placelessness
erases—it puts pressure on the ease with which space is assumed to be traversed. I begin my
analysis with this contextualization and discussion of recent events in Toronto and Vancouver, so
we can be clear: alongside patriarchy and gender-oppression, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia,
settler colonialism, and racism in the queer community continue to exist and need to be
combated actively, especially in discussions of space-making and space-taking.

It is clear that Toronto’s queer and LGBT communities have acquired general visibility
and specific rights since the 1960s. However, homonormative activities are only viewed as
acceptable when they conform to particular ideological expectations. Julie Podmore notes that
while “a new era of ‘equality’” may have developed after full marriage rights were awarded to
same-sex couples in Canada in 2005, “these forms of sexual legitimation have been socially and
spatially uneven” (Podmore, “Critical Commentary” 263). In the context of the performance and
theatre community, while white cisgender gay men’s works may have increased visibility and
popularity on Canadian stages, the underrepresentation and lack of acknowledgement of
marginalized queer artists in Canada complicates the vision of acceptance and inclusivity Canada
purports to cherish. Indeed, as recent statistics collected by Equity in Theatre (EIT)24
demonstrate, Canada is far from achieving equity on its professional stages. Indigenous peoples,
transgender people, people of colour, those with diverse abilities, and/or women are consistently
underrepresented in the theatre and performance community (MacArthur 4). As lead researcher
Michelle MacArthur asserts, little has improved for women and marginalized artists in Canadian
performance since Rebecca Burton’s 2006 national study (MacArthur 4). MacArthur writes,
“The situation is worse for racialized, immigrant, aboriginal, and disabled women, who have

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24 Alongside Rebecca Burton, I founded Equity in Theatre in 2014. The aim of the project is to promote
dialogue, awareness, and increased visibility for women in theatre through a multi-pronged approach and mutli-
stakeholder structure.
limited access to artistic opportunities despite Canada’s celebration of diversity as a cornerstone of its identity” (29). The 2011 Hill Study also indicates that Indigenous artists, as well as visible minorities and immigrant artists, all earn less than artists in other categories (Hill 40). Though the queer community is certainly still a marginalized group whose works may also be underrepresented in mainstream programming, the works of historically and currently minoritized groups and performers, particularly disabled artists, Indigenous artists, and women and transgender people of colour, remain very much under-performed and under-researched in queer theatre (Halferty, “For the Future, the Past”). As Hiram Pérez notes in A Taste for Brown Bodies, though queer theory (and I expand this to queer theatre communities) works to develop vocabularies and understandings of the relationship among desire, erotics, and power, it simultaneously “has participated at times in securing the transparency of whiteness, jettisoning questions of race as retrograde and provincial” (10). The need to interrogate how we perpetuate oppressions, through the very identity categories for which we are oppressed, is essential to dismantling white supremacy, settler colonialism, heterosexism, transphobia, and patriarchy. In this chapter, I examine the spatial implications of the false notion of a monolithic “queer theatre” community, and the neutralization of the privileges many queer folks possess due to their race, class, ability, gender, or settler identity.

Throughout this discussion, I hold myself and other white academics and practitioners accountable and consider how queer theatre is implicated in the erasure of multiple identities and experiences through the universalization of patriarchy, whiteness, and settler colonialism. My objective in this chapter is threefold. First, I aim to interrogate how whiteness is strategically unnamed and positioned as neutral within theatre spaces. Next, I examine how the universal queer subject is often used as a means of both “diversifying” work and representing queer history, resulting in a lack of recognition and further erasure of multiply marginalized queer artists’ contributions in performance. Finally, I argue for a need to recognize and confront the necessity for new forms of leadership in order to initiate long-lasting systemic change. I include three brief case studies of recent theatrical events. The first event discussed is a production that took place in Toronto at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Entitled The Gay Heritage Project, the performance unapologetically shaped a history of gay identity that markedly included only a white cast and white dramaturge. The production was problematic, despite an acknowledgement during the performance of the actors’ white privilege. The second event discussed took place at
the 2016 Pride Parade, which was led by honoured guests Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO). In this case study I consider the ways in which queer women of colour are invited as spectacle and visitors in an otherwise white male queer space. I consider here how spatial reconfigurations—which demand visibility and voice, and debunk the idea of the empty and equitable outdoor space of Toronto—are perceived as threats. The third event analyzed is the Q2Q Theatre Conference, which ran in Vancouver in the summer of 2016. Invited scholars and practitioners from queer theatre communities in Canada came together to discuss the past, present, and future of queer performance. Although much of the conversation was productive, there were several instances in which it became clear that different participants were located and placed differently within the conference. Whiteness and patriarchy were key factors, which shaped the space and influenced how queer women and non-binary participants were oriented within the space.


I begin this analysis with a discussion of the vocabulary used to describe productions and the ways in which they are marketed. I argue that the language used (or avoided) in performance demonstrates normalizing tactics, which erase whiteness and situate marginalized bodies as distinct and Other. What does it mean to remain unnamed and outside of the expectations of classification? Difference necessitates a label, but with privilege comes the assumption of a universal and the avoidance of classification. As a white theatre academic and practitioner, I am rarely expected to identify my race, and my work is rarely seen as representative of my race. In this sense, I have the privilege of remaining unspecialized, neutralized, and invisible. I can remain neutrally “queer” without the need to fit my work into more specific categories of difference. Likewise, straight theatre creators rarely feel pressure or the necessity to disclose their sexual orientation, which is presumed to be neutral, whereas queer becomes a marker of difference. Theatre creators and audiences might cringe at the prospect of naming a company that primarily produces works by men a “men’s theatre,” yet the label “women’s theatre” is seen as necessary. This is not an attempt to devalue women’s theatre or to call for the removal of such a label (indeed, labelling a company as such can be quite important). However, a refusal to allow men’s work to go unlabelled and an effort to draw attention to the monopoly their works hold in the Canadian theatre industry would positively influence equity on Canadian stages by revealing the dynamics already in play. Therefore, following Valerie Sing Turner and legal scholar
Constance Backhouse, I note the need to declare whiteness, straightness, and male-identified practitioners as such. As Backhouse asserts, “The transparency of ‘whiteness’ is misleading and contributes to an erasure of the privileges that attach to membership in the dominant race (9)” (qtd. in Sing Turner 25). We can extend this to other forms of privilege as well. Those who are perceived to be insiders within a creative space are granted nameless and invisible belonging, while those who are outsiders are required to name themselves or be named. This is a kind of spatial surveillance and patrolling, which safeguards privileged spaces by ensuring that those who are invited are consistently hyper-visible. It is only when we name privilege that we can begin to see the physical space it takes up.

The erasure of whiteness and male gay privilege becomes apparent in the words used to describe people of colour, as well as diversely abled and gender-variant artists, on stage. Whereas reviewers and audiences will often refer to “cross-gender” or “colour blind” casting when a director casts a performer deemed racialized or gender-variant in a predominant role, such verbalization is seldom used to refer to the choice to cast a white or perceived gender-normative actor. As Carrie Sandahl writes:

> Rarely is an actor of color, a woman, or a disabled person cast against type to play a character from a more dominant social position. Actors from marginalized groups must battle on two fronts, then: to be cast in roles that resemble their own identities and to be cast in roles that do not. (236)

The language used to express particular artists’ inclusion in (or exclusion from) a performance functions to normalize and universalize white and privileged identities. It is not seen as necessary to name privileged bodies in performance, because whiteness, able-bodiedness, and hetero/homonormativity become the standard expectation to which all else is compared—it is only when someone opts to introduce a racialized, dis/differently abled, or gender-variant body on stage that it is deemed a choice at all. As Meera Sethi further explains:

> The visual production of women artists of colour in Canada is received within a hegemonic framework that takes as its starting place the centrality of white male artists, thus building onto that a discourse that situates women artists of colour outside its normalizing boundaries. (3)
By universalizing masculinity, whiteness, able-bodiedness, and straightness as the absence of artistic choices, the racialized, crip,25 Indigenous, and queer body is perpetuated as the visitor or outsider in a queer space. The absence of identity categories for those who are considered neutral points both to a paradox of visibility and the transparency of privileged identities. We may think of the paradox of visibility as the ability of white gender-normative bodies to pass through space unseen, unremarked upon, and as part of an “in crowd,” literally permitted access to any space. At the same time, these identities are able to maintain the kind of visibility an “in crowd” obtains to secure privilege and access to resources. We do not see whiteness, though we consistently see white people. Conversely, people of colour remain hyper-surveilled, always seen as outsiders in dominant Canadian institutions and theatres, and yet remain invisible when their rights are not met and equitable support is not provided. In this way, queer women of colour and those who are diversely marginalized may be welcomed onto conventional or queer stages, but it is rarely as insiders to the experience. Their presence on stage is through extended invitation, not equitable inclusion. The absence of a label and refusal to name white work as white work illustrates Ahmed’s notion of invitation, wherein marginalized groups are invited as temporary outsiders and guests in the privileged practitioner’s home (Willful Subjects 148). It is clear that this issue is not one limited to queer theatre, but I intentionally highlight it in relation to queer performance practice, because of the capacity for marginalized theatre companies to create radical change and because of a presumption that queer necessarily equates to inclusive or radical simply by virtue of its “queerness.” Queer theatres can lead the charge to deneutralize white and otherwise privileged artists by naming them as such. In making this claim, I do not intend to centralize white able-bodied men further, nor do I intend to trivialize the accomplishments of marginalized theatre practitioners. We should indeed be celebrating and supporting this work. However, considering mainstream and commercial theatre programming, we might note, as I seek to demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, the ways in which works and practitioners are Othered in the very ways in which they are included. This is not, by any means, a new

25 Crip, like “queer” has a history of pejorative uses, but has been reclaimed to refer to studies on “how bodies and disabilities have been conceived and materialized in multiple cultural locations, and how they might be understood and imaged as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization” (McRuer 33) As Sandahl explains, crip includes not only those with physical impairments, but is also expanded to “those with sensory or mental impairments as well” (qtd. in McRuer 34).
conversation. It has been an important, though undeniably controversial, aspect of queer theoretical discussions, as well as queer theatrical deliberations, for some time. However, as Pérez states in his consideration of race consciousness and white privilege in the queer community, “After a decade (or longer) of hearing ‘the same thing,’ it might be time for queer theory to start listening” (Pérez 109).

It is not simply a matter of the works that get produced on Canadian stages, but also how those works are evaluated and what work comes to be included under an umbrella of “artistic excellence” within queer (and mainstream heterosexual) performance. Though arguably there is increasing acknowledgement of white privilege in the arts community, and perhaps more so in arts communities that cater to marginalized and oppressed artists and audiences, the issues around inclusion and representation are still evident in valuations of artistic excellence through awards, programming, and funding. These accolades extend the time and space allocated for productions, by influencing what plays are published, what plays are remounted, and what plays have increased visibility. Although artists of colour created incredibly strong work in Canada in the 2014/2015 season, the Jessie awards, which celebrate professional theatre artists in Vancouver, were, as Sing Turner aptly notes in her article, dominated by white artists’ work. She explains that this outcome is anything but surprising because all of the members of the ten-person jury were white, as were those on the six-member jury for the Original Script award (Sing Turner 22). While white queer or gender non-binary practitioners were nominated for awards, their works have the capacity to perpetuate white supremacy and erase more marginalized and oppressed groups from Canadian stages and theatrical archives. “Queer” identities become ubiquitous markers of difference, without consideration or acknowledgement of simultaneous privilege. Similarly, on Tuesday, January 26, 2016, Canadian Stage in Toronto announced its upcoming season. Out of the thirteen shows the theatre produced that season, all of the directors, choreographers, and playwrights were white. Despite this glaring and oppressive exclusion of marginalized artists of colour, prior to the season announcement, Artistic and Managing Director Matthew Jocelyn announced “the diversity” of the season’s casting. The question here was not simply how an artistic director in Toronto could make such a gravely erroneous statement, but also about what he believed “passes” under the umbrella term “diverse.” Though roles might have been cast with minoritized or racialized performers, white theatre practitioners occupied all of the major production roles. “Diversity” was used strategically here to produce a particular
kind of artistic image and reception. In *On Being Included*, Ahmed suggests that the term “diversity” is a means of “accruing value”; a hollow place-holder, aesthetic, or speech convention wherein “what is named as diverse becomes less significant than the name ‘diversity’” (*On Being Included* 58). Perhaps, for Jocelyn, it was the white gay men in the season who were assumed to diversify the season’s programming choices. Indeed, artists such as Daniel McIvor and Jordan Tanahill were among those being produced that season at the theatre. In this instance, the universalized white gay man may come to represent inclusion, radical progress, and diversity in these programs. When this happens, racial privilege that comes alongside whiteness and gender privilege is further neutralized and naturalized. The absence of queer artists of colour, queer women artists of colour, trans artists of colour, and other racialized queer theatre practitioners is invisibilized. The impact of nominations and programming extends beyond productions in a single season of artistic creation. It maintains a precedent that white men produce the most esteemed works, which limits queer women (and especially queer women of colour and/or transgender women) to the margins.

**Leaders and Followers: Who Holds Queer Power?**

The problem of “invitation” and “diversity” is deeply rooted in the distribution of power and control. Though major queer theatres in the country have programmed multiple works by and with people of colour, much of the time, the artistic directors and those doing the programming for the season are white, and often men. As Meera Sethi argues, the “mainstreaming of dissent” (6) enables major artistic institutions actively to construct categories of racialized outsiders, employing discursive practices that establish and solidify a white Canadian sense of belonging through the categorization and isolation of “culturally diverse” artists (Sethi 7). Though Canadian cultural institutions appear to provide support and visibility to communities of colour, they refuse to give decision-making power to these communities (Sethi 5). Thus, while Canada claims to produce multicultural work, it is primarily white theatre spaces that manage and regulate such productions. Ensuring such supervision and restriction is a means of maintaining a consistent power relation, in which primarily white male artistic directors and institutions control and program spaces for predominantly white audiences. As Sethi further explains, these institutions position marginalized women artists of colour as “both the beneficiaries and burden of the state” (Sethi 2–3). A lack of operational funding also ensures that
these companies, festivals, and projects are financially unable to secure permanent spaces and thus are dependent on theatre owners or managers, who are mostly white men (Burton 40), to approve and program their projects.

Companies that do cater to “culturally specific” communities are also often ghettoized or tokenized. With a designated company in place to program a particular culture’s or community’s works, mainstream theatres can evade accountability for programming diverse works—a “queer” theatre can remain “queer”—with a monolithic and universal queer subject as the centre of the programming. They can assume that other companies, with particular mandates related to supporting racialized artistic creation, such as Watah Theatre, Obsidian Theatre, b current, FuGen Theatre, or Native Earth, will program works by marginalized artists. The fundamental problem with this rationale is that we lose the work that exists in the intersections. If queer theatres program primarily white queer men’s work, and women’s theatre’s program primarily heterosexual women’s work, then those who exist in the various intersections of oppressed positionalities are not allocated space or support for development. As Deborah Leslie and John Paul Catungal argue, rather than being portrayed as citizens of the city, “Immigrant and First Nations artists frequently find their work ghettoized in ethnic-based artistic communities, and subject to Orientalist representations that construct it as ‘exotic’ and ‘other’ (Said 1979)” (Leslie and Catungal 117). Over the last ten years, the city of Toronto has seemingly emphasized and promoted a reputation of inclusivity and diversity in its approach and priorities through its support of “ethnic” and queer festivals and cultural productions (such as Caribana and Pride) (Leslie and Catungal 113). Such an investment is seen as a potential source of economic growth through tourism and an enhanced culture and creative environment—yet, according to Leslie and Catungal, these events ultimately cater to and benefit only an elite class (114). The works produced are valuable and provide opportunities for many creative practitioners to showcase their productions, but at the same time, they also exploit the presence of marginalized and struggling artists to develop an image of diversity and inclusion in the city. Leslie and Catungal note that redeveloping neighbourhoods and investing in “multicultural diversity” ultimately supports “gentrification and rising real estate prices, which can lead to the displacement of low income populations” (114). Thus, while such festivals offer short-term visibility and opportunity for artists, an elite class of developers and policy-makers obtain long-term benefits by emphasizing the city’s cultural attractions and diversity.
Whose Heritage Project?

As Paul Halferty notes, while there are many works that explore and exist at the intersections of gender, sexuality, and race, relatively little research in Canada focuses on this work: “The performance histories of queers of colour, an area that has generated some of the most vital interventions in queer performance studies in the US, are meager in the Canadian scholarly context” (“For the Future, the Past” 6). A scholarly investment in charting and analyzing these works would have the capacity to change not only our current conception of the theatrical landscape, but also what is remembered, archived, and historicized. Moving beyond scholarship and academic theorizations, we can consider the way in which queer and LGBT histories are enacted in performance on stage—what is valued as historically relevant? What is brought to Canadian stages as integral to the construction of communities, legacies, and cultures?

One example to consider is the development and production of Buddies in Bad Times’ The Gay Heritage Project (2015; 2016), a work that, while acknowledging whiteness, continues to memorialize and glorify a single, universalized gay narrative. The collective creation, starring Paul Dunn, Andrew Kushnir, and Damien Atkins, delivers personal narratives from the three creator-performers, which begin from their own personal heritage, and works toward answering the question, “Is there such a thing as a gay heritage?” (“The Gay Heritage Project”). The use of the definite article The in the title of the production implies a single heritage that all gay individuals presumably share. Those who do not have access to the gay heritage are therefore not included within its history—they are outsiders to the historical experience of being authentically gay. All three of the creators involved in the production are white. The recognition of whiteness and white privilege occurs on one occasion in the production. However, such a disclaimer does not excuse one from critically addressing and dismantling privilege. Furthermore, such popular representations of queer histories do not simply disseminate white gay and lesbian Canadian history; they actively participate in whitening history, excluding (and thereby erasing) the multiple histories and narratives of queer people of colour from “gay heritage.” I borrow here from Lynn Huffer’s discussion of feminism and apply it to queer theory. Huffer argues that “liberal feminist successes have been achieved at the expense of other, less privileged women. . . . [T]his deeper admission puts forward the challenging claim that increasing inequality between women is a result of the gains of liberal feminism” (147). We can similarly note the ways that white gay men’s experiences come at the expense of significantly more vulnerable and oppressed
queer people. The assumption that a space is more equitable because it is a gay space erases the ways in which gay space is organized and allocated. Whereas Queer of Colour critique explicitly considers the relationship between race and sexual orientation, Hiram Pérez points to the all-too-common resistance to thinking through and theorizing about race critically in queer theory (98). He emphasizes that this “defensive posture helps entrench institutionally the transparent white subject characteristic of so much queer theorizing. Queer theorists who can invoke that transparent subject, and choose to do so, reap the dividends of whiteness” (98). With this transparent white subject in mind, we may ask how the erasure of particular histories and the continual propagation of dominant white narratives continues to benefit the white queer men’s community in Canada. By naming privilege and being accountable to the ways in which it allows particular bodies to be seen, we refuse its transparency and can begin to address the ways it shapes space and place in creative practice.

In addition to audience reception and historicization, there are economic considerations associated with mounting a production in an established theatre space. Who is reaping the benefits of this single story of gay history, and whose stories are not being told? The Gay Heritage Project received development and production support from Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and BMO Financial Group (“The Gay Heritage Project”). The allocated resources, which supported the development of this project, streamlined funds into the already privileged sectors of queer communities. The production was developed with funding in Toronto, at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. It was given a stable space and resources for development. Following a successful run and remount, it toured across the country, presenting the project at major theatres in Vancouver, BC, Victoria, BC, and Edmonton, Alberta. The production was thus participating in both the perpetuation of the monopoly of white cisgender men accessing ongoing space as well as the ease of travel in opting to move artistic creations across geographical boundaries. It received the benefits of ongoing security for development, as well as mobility.

According to its webpage, the production aims to “discover [the performers’] connections to queer people and events in the past” (“The Gay Heritage Project”). Here, we see the ways in which particular histories are able to travel through space, to disseminate specific narratives of the past, and to travel through time to justify the ways in which they occupy space. The narrative of The Gay Heritage Project unapologetically deems gay heritage to be a white and Western phenomenon. This representation, alongside the production’s access to resources and support,
demonstrates the complexities of the temporality of space, a topic I will continue to address throughout this research. This depiction of the past points vitally to the relationship between temporality and the ways in which space is constituted and experienced through depictions of the past and anticipation of the future. As I have argued, this is true of both the history and place represented on stage, and the production and development process. When they are allotted spatial privilege and access, creators can take their time developing the production and subsequently move through space with relative ease during the run and tour. Thus, the way space is experienced in terms of artistic practice and audience reception is not isolated to a single moment, but can be analyzed and experienced temporally.

Hijacking and Threatening: The Racist Rhetoric of Dangerous Queers at Toronto Pride

Despite the narrative presented in The Gay Heritage Project, queer communities in Canada are diverse and divergent. There is no single form of performance or creative practice that can define queer works in the country. Annually, in Toronto, however, all of these communities are intended to unite to celebrate the city’s Pride Festivities, which purport to construct an inclusive festival of events for LGBTQ2SA community members and allies. In keeping with a mandate of inclusivity and diversity, in early July 2016, Toronto celebrated Pride through marches and parades, with selected honoured group Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO). The designation as honoured group came after BLMTO’s successful protest at Toronto Police headquarters, which lasted nearly fifteen days. The protest erupted after several racist actions occurred in the city. The Afrofest Music Festival was downsized because of complaints due to noise; a twenty-one-year-old man, Alex Wettlaufer, was shot by Toronto Police; and the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) released its decision regarding Andrew Loku’s murder. Loku was a South Sudanese refugee and father of five who was shot and killed by police. The SIU decision determined that the officers acted in self-defence, and no action was taken against them, nor were their names released publicly. Following the political action, and increased publicity in the media, BLMTO was asked to lead the parade at Toronto’s annual Pride Parade, as well as at the Dyke March. During the festivities, when BLMTO performed in the parade, Black queer leaders took up space and insisted their rights and voices be more than a tokenized image of Toronto’s “diversity.” Their float was led by trans and cisgender Black queer
women and allies in the Black community. During the parade, they unexpectedly stopped their float (and subsequently the parade of floats behind it) and had speakers make demands of Pride Toronto, with the aim of creating a more inclusive and safe environment for those not currently equitably represented in Pride festivities. Many of these demands related directly to visibility on and accessibility to Pride stages and to the performance spaces curated during the festival. Almost all of the demands pertained to spatial equity—the resources and support needed to take up space and residency, the limited amount of space granted to particular groups, and the space granted to police in marches, parades and spaces, were all contested in their demands. Where there could have been support in response to their protest, there was disdain and defensiveness and attacks using the rhetoric of “threats” and “hostage-taking.” In this instance, many members of the queer white community demonstrated, once again, that anti-Black racism is still prevalent in Canadian queer culture. Following the parade, BLMTO received hate mail and threats for interrupting the Pride parade. Comments online in articles and on social media demonstrated a clear rupture in response. The particular language used to describe their presence in the parade is coded with racial violence and racist rhetoric. The notion of hostage-taking assumes that Pride exists outside of the Black communities in Toronto—as BLMTO spokesperson LeRoi Newbold explains:

In terms of holding the parade hostage, I think there's a lot of implied sentiment within that that says the Pride parade itself does not belong to us. We are part of the community and Pride is political, Pride is an opportunity to make political advancements for the LGBT community since its conception in 1969. So it is an absolutely appropriate

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26 The demands, as articulated on BLMTO’s Facebook Page were as follows:

1. Commit to BQY’s (Black Queer Youth’s) continued space (including stage/tents), funding, and logistical support.
2. Self-determination for all community spaces, allowing community full control over hiring, content, and structure of their stages.
3. Full and adequate funding for community stages, including logistical, technical, and personnel support.
4. Double funding for Blockorama + ASL interpretation & headliner funding.
5. Reinstate and make a commitment to increase community stages/spaces (including the reinstatement of the South Asian stage).
6. A commitment to increase representation amongst Pride Toronto staffing/hiring, prioritizing Black trans women, Black queer people, Indigenous folk, and others from vulnerable communities.
7. A commitment to more Black deaf and hearing ASL interpreters for the Festival.
9. A public townhall, organized in conjunction with groups from marginalized communities, including, but not limited to, Black Lives Matter–Toronto, Blackness Yes, and BQY, to be held six months from the day the demands were made. Pride Toronto will present an update and action plan on the aforementioned demands.
environment for people within the community, which we are, to try to gain those political advances. We can't take something hostage that belongs to us, that we created. (Krishnan)

Rhetoric around “hostage-taking” and threats to and disruption of the celebration of Pride Toronto are all means of othering particular communities and establishing a clear distinction between the “invitation” to be present as an honoured group, and ongoing inclusion and equity for the community. Pérez discusses a similar situation in *A Taste for Brown Bodies* in which he details a conference on Gay Shame he attended, wherein “brown bodies were allowed ‘access’ [to participation in the conference]—if it can be called that—only as spectacle for the consumption of the gay cosmopolitanism” (101). The conference invited people of colour to participate as performers and artists, but not as theorists and academics. Their inclusion was predicated on their ability to perform, not their contributions to scholarship. This form of inclusion demonstrates a form of objectification through a dominant white male gaze. Pérez further recalls how, following the conference, when attendees discussed the problematic inclusion, others had registered “complaints that Gay Shame had been ‘hijacked by identitarian politics’” (101). The similarities between these situations and the impact of the rhetoric used to describe each of them is clear. Where Black performers had been invited into both spaces as spectacle, their articulation of ideas and perspectives was perceived, in both instances, not only as out of place, but as dangerous. Pérez explains that this form of racialized language and racist rhetoric is inextricable from conceptualizations of belonging to and in the nation-state (101). The threat being internalized by queer people in dominant white communities is the perceived risk of constructing and dismantling the monolith—a false unity that perpetuates and benefits white supremacy and patriarchy in queer communities.

I argue that it was not the demands of BLMTO that received such a crass racist response from Toronto’s queer community, but rather the insistence that their voice and presence within the Pride Parade be ongoing—where they were invited to be seen momentarily, they had demanded to be heard and to take up space beyond a single moment. The whitening of space and corporatization of pride are spatial and directly connected to gentrification. As Schulman notes, such a process is invested in controlling and regulating presence and behaviour: “permits are suddenly required for performance, for demonstrating, for dancing in bars, for playing musical instruments . . . the relaxed nature of neighbourhood living becomes threatening, something to be eradicated and controlled” (Schulman 28). Corporatization of pride, as an event and festivity
rather than protest and assembly, results in gatekeeping, as if the peace and unity of space could be easily disturbed by the mere presence of perceived outsiders. Schulman further explains: “If all art, politics, entertainment, relationships, and conversations must maintain that what is constructed and imposed by force is actually natural and neutral, then the gentrified mind is a very fragile parasite” (Schulman 28). This sentiment provides one frame through which to understand the white gay response to the perceived disruption at Pride. It was not that the demands were unreasonable, but that the reclamation of space was seen as threatening. I make this argument because, months after the parade, when Pride Toronto held its AGM and voted on the demands that BLMTO had brought forward, all the demands were met. The original non-violent action was met with racism, hostility, and oppression, yet six months later, in January 2017, members at Pride Toronto’s Annual General Meeting endorsed all of Black Lives Matter Toronto’s demands. This outcome is worthy of great celebration and is a direct result of the significant work BLMTO has undertaken. However, this accomplishment should not be seen as progress for the whole queer community at large. It is clear that the underlying problem with racism in the queer community is not a QTIBPOC problem; this is a problem specifically in queer white communities that needs to be addressed. And while the vote to endorse the demands makes some progress toward a more equitable queer community, much work still needs to be done for real systemic change.

The following year, prior to the 2017 Pride festivities, BLMTO did not register to march in the parade. There was much discussion around this decision (see, for example, Rizza [2017], Herhalt [2017], and Reddit Forum [2017]), with critics on social media stating that such a choice demonstrates hypocrisy or a refusal to connect with the organization after causing chaos. Yet their choice seems to demonstrate not a lack of relationship, but a lack of support for an organization that continues to tokenize and depoliticize an inherently (or at least originally) political event. At the 2017 parade, BLMTO did indeed arrive, holding signs as they walked through the parade: “May we never again have to remind you that WE built this.” Their refusal to register was a refusal to allow Pride Toronto and the City of Toronto to regulate and allocate space—instead, it was choosing to take space back as a political act of resistance. One of BLMTO’s organizers, Rodney Diverlus, explained that BLMTO was not reclaiming or appropriating the event: “Pride is actually ours . . . Queer and trans people of colour actually started this” (Ahmed, “Who Owns Pride?”). The assumption that BLMTO was “taking over” was
an implicit assertion that Black queer people remain outside of political resistance, despite the historically fundamental role Black transgender, lesbian, and gay activists have played in combating homophobia and transphobia. Both the refusal to register in the 2017 parade and the halting of the 2016 parade demand recognition as disruptions of spatial organization. These acts not only draw attention to who is seen as belonging to particular spaces, and who is given rights to particular spaces, but also resist the mechanisms that whiten and depoliticize historical events.

Thinking through the events at Pride Toronto’s annual parade over the last two years, it becomes clear that the allocation and designation of space is a fundamental issue in combating anti-Black racism within the queer community. Here, we may think of the broader questions of spatiality in performance—who comes to represent “queer theatre” is a direct result of who is most visible on theatre stages, in classrooms, and in publications. Who is performing on the Pride main stages? What audiences are given access to space? What performers are given the most resources? These are questions of spatial orientation that the conception of a neutral or placeless place erases.

Not My Histories: Whiteness at Vancouver’s Queer Theatre Symposium

Some of the greatest barriers raised by assumptions of unity in queer communities were revealed during a queer Canadian theatre conference in Vancouver, British Columbia. In July 2016, Simon Fraser University and the Frank Theatre Company co-sponsored Q2Q: A Symposium on Queer Theatre and Performance in Canada. The event ran from July 20–24, 2016. The symposium aimed to bring together performers, practitioners, scholars, and community members to discuss the current state of queer theatre in the country, its histories, and where the industry is heading. The symposium included performances, panels, roundtables, and networking events. It was the first gathering of its kind, and invited professional theatre practitioners and scholars currently working in Canada to share contemporary standpoints and lived experiences of queer theatre. The symposium offered an opportunity to discuss the multiple histories of queer theatre in Canada and performance futurities and created a much-needed space outside of a dominant straight norm for the queer community to connect, evaluate practices, and discuss how queer theatre fits into the broader theatre landscape—how it complicates or challenges normative dynamics and how it replicates and perpetuates them.
Throughout the symposium, the persistent oppressive practices and ideologies still present in queer theatre became abundantly evident. While many of the discussions provided an important opportunity to begin to identify and confront these realities, it came at a cost to those most marginalized, who were often tasked with educating white gay men about their internalized racism and sexism and the presumptions they made as a result of them. I discuss the symposium here not only because it provided a meeting ground and forum for emerging and professional practitioners and academics, but also because it was a space of contestation, a space of growth, and a space of oppression, advocacy, and change. One of the most interesting and compelling experiences I had throughout the symposium was the ways in which the assumption of a monolithic “queer theatre” was simultaneously reified and challenged. Through discussions of divergent histories, oppressions, and silenced or absent voices, the very notion of a monolithic “queer theatre community” was questioned, exposing the ways in which certain privilege is afforded to white theatre practitioners who inhabit or identify with queerness. At the same time, there was a clear desire to share space at the symposium, to learn together, to listen, and to reflect on the multiple diverse histories and experiences within the room.

The symposium began with a valuable QTIBPOC space for discussion, planning, and knowledge-sharing for those who identified as Black, Indigenous, and/or people of colour. The day resulted in the following four recommendations for the symposium participants, disseminated by the QTIBPOC delegates:

1. Acknowledge that Two Spirit people have been performing on this land since time immemorial and should be looked to for leadership in the creation of queer futures on these lands and waterways.

2. Build meaningful relationships with QTIBPOC artists and engage us in decision-making roles

3. Active collaboration with QTIBPOC artists from the Deaf, Disability, Mad (crip) communities

4. Educate yourselves about white supremacy and join QTIBPOC artists in the pursuit of equity.

(Rana 110)

This was an incredibly powerful way in which to start the symposium. However, in many ways it remained tokenistic, as many of those present at Q2Q did not follow the recommendations and
were rarely held accountable to do so. Indeed, on two occasions people of colour experienced such oppression and discomfort that they left the sessions, exiting the rooms in the midst of presentations. As Vancouver-based theatre creator and performer Anoushka Ratnarajah explains, even when QTIBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Intersex, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) participants make up one-third of the conference attendees, “[we] find ourselves once again struggling for space, voice and legitimacy . . . even in queer spaces the hierarchies established by patriarchy, white supremacy, cis supremacy, etc. were obviously still in place” (Zisman Newman, boudakian, and Ratnarajah 33). There were distinct barriers, particularly regarding experiences of race, age, and gender. Where some believed the event should celebrate the accomplishments of queer theatre in Canada, others felt there were issues and obstacles manifesting during the conference that needed to be addressed immediately.

While there was acknowledgement of whiteness, settler colonialism, and patriarchy at the symposium, there was little recognition of the whitening of history: how queer performance not only subscribes to a normative historical narrative, but also perpetuates it. lee boudakian, “a mixed-race, queer, non-binary trans artist” who attended the conference, asserts that queer spaces can be “exclusionary, impenetrable, very white, and very cis-gendered” (Zisman Newman, boudakian, and Ratnarajah 33). In conversation about the Q2Q conference, as well as the broader queer theatre community, boudakian suggests that there is a need to destabilize and debunk the myth of cohesion and representation in the queer community. They write: “It is important to recognize that ‘queerness’ is not inclusive or intersectional simply because it is ‘queer’” (Zisman Newman, boudakian, and Ratnarajah 34).

Near the conclusion of the conference, a prominent (arguably founding) member of the queer theatre community, who has been a leading figure in the queer performance scene since the late 1970s, was asked to step down from moderating the final roundtable event, “Queer Theatre to Come.” The participants in the roundtable did not feel, given some of the conversations that had ensued around race and marginalization at the conference, that this individual, a cisgender white gay man, was an ideal moderator, and hoped that through collective moderation they could create a more inclusive, open space for discussion. Hurt by the decision and the way it was relayed to him by the event organizers, the moderator left the conference prior to the roundtable. Following the roundtable participants’ statements and presentations (which I will shortly discuss), during the Q&A of the session, one of the conference organizers stood up and
announced to the group that the designated moderator of the roundtable had left because of the change in set-up. He stated: “I just want to add that context and I want to capture it on the film that we are documenting. Because it makes me feel fucking terrible and I do think that it is wrong that he is not here with us.”  

This was an essential moment in the conference in the context of space and who is supposed to be oriented and included within it. The organizers’ desire to announce and to document this individual’s absence makes it clear that even when cisgender white gay men are not present in the space, they nonetheless are able to take up space. As the discussion continued, multiple Black and POC participants as well as white allies voiced concerns with this announcement and the necessity to note the moderator’s absence on video. Actor, playwright, and theatre creator Tawiah Ben M’Carthy asked the conference attendees to reflect on who would be remembered as having attended the conference, and who would be forgotten: Who will be a part of this historical narrative? I contributed to the conversation and responded directly to the organizer’s plea for recognition of the selected moderator’s choice to leave. I argued that while the impetus to stand up and demand that this exit be documented was likely coming from a place of concern, no one had spoken up or felt the need to document the exit of five Black and POC artists who had left the room earlier in the conference.  

In my statement, I tried to articulate that the discomfort that this individual felt when he exited the room was perceived as “terrible,” because it was assumed that he should be easily oriented (and perhaps even revered) within a queer theatre space. Not only had it not been considered “terrible” by many of the participants and organizers when five Black participants had walked out earlier, but that exit remained entirely unacknowledged. It was as if their absence from the space was anticipated—as if the space had not been disrupted by their exit. Conversely, the attendees saw the moderator’s exit as a rupture. A rupture in the space might show us what was always lying buried at its structural foundation. Such anticipation demonstrates how a

Note that all of the panels and Q&A discussions, including those mentioned in this chapter, are archived on the Q2Q website online and available on YouTube. This form of documentation is advantageous, as it provides an archive not only of the prepared panels and roundtables, but of difficult conversations and experiences of learning. While I want to note explicitly the growth and development that existed within the space, I do not intend the valorize or justify these conversations. Many of those who were most vulnerable and marginalized in the space expressed experiences of oppression, violence, and discomfort. The ability to grow and learn as privileged white queer theatre practitioners cannot come at the expense of those more marginalized in queer communities.

In the first panel of the conference, after insensitive, and arguably racist, comments were made during the discussion, at least five Black audience members exited the conference space. Discriminated against through the articulation of racist ideologies and oppressive language, they left the panel and did not return until later in the day.
normalized past – the histories we are taught to value and remember – influence our expectations of the future. Through the cracks and gaps that are left behind, we notice what was already there and already anticipated: queer universalism, queer male privilege, and assumptions about ownership and rights to be in and feel comfort within queer space.

Prior to discussion that ensued during the Q&A, lee williams boudakian, spoke, as a roundtable participant, about queer theatre and performance to come, reflecting specifically on the conference and how we, as conference participants, had arrived at these final moments. They called on the participants to look at which artists and what stories were welcomed in this space, and which artists and stories were absent (boudakian, “Queer Theatre & Performance to Come”). They called into question “the box of ‘queer theatre’,,” stating that it was too narrow and limiting for many of the participants in attendance at the conference, as well as those who were unable to attend for various reasons. boudakian explains:

there is no space inside of [the box] for me because from where I am sitting, queer theatre can never only be “queer theatre.” It is also and can be Indigenous theatre; Black theatre; People of Colour Theatre; Women’s Theatre; Femme Theatre; Trans and Gender Variant Theatre; Deaf Theatre; Sick, Crip and Disabled Theatre; Mad and Crazy Theatre; Poor Theatre; Theatre of the dispossessed; Theatre of the Marginalized; theatre of those whose stories are vital vital vital to our being here, but whose stories have not stood centre stage or who have rarely even supported centre stage and who remain still unheard. . . . Queer theatre has a responsibility to interrogate itself and the intersections it is linked with, beyond the L, G, and B of our acronyms. (boudakian, “Queer Theatre & Performance to Come”)

boudakian continued by urging the conference participants (and the broader queer community) to question how privilege is playing out in queer performance space. During the roundtable discussion, several white queer theatre artists and academics expressed fears of “forgetting ‘our’ histories.” There was a sense that the older generation of queer theatre creators felt underappreciated by young creators, as they expressed that their efforts and achievements were being trivialized. Anoushka Ratnarajah, another participant in the panel, responded to this perception of history and noted that she does not share histories with whiteness or patriarchy: “[T]hat is not my queer history. I don’t share that body; that experience; that narrative. My queer historical legacy is that of brown women” (Ratnarajah, “Queer Theatre & Performance to Come”). Without acknowledging the ways in which power and privilege enable particular queer
identities to take up space (both physical and metaphorical), queer theatre will continue to confine itself only to particular histories, creative practices, and audiences.

Throughout the conference, much of the work actually to enact and engage intersectionality was left to QTIBIPOC attendees, with the expectation that they would educate allies, ignoring the ways in which such an expectation can be experienced as both a violence and a hardship. Teaching those who oppress you how to respect you is in and of itself an act of oppression. I wonder how to create safer spaces that do not put the most marginalized members of queer communities in the most vulnerable positions. It seems that at times our attempts to achieve equity still centre the needs of white folks and put the onus of educating on QTIBIPOC artists.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have worked to identify some of the ways in which privilege functions and to hold white and/or male theatre practitioners and scholars accountable in queer performance and activist communities. Moreover, I have begun to consider how queer “diversity” and equity are presented on mainstream and commercialized stages, and asked whether such productions are, as Sara Ahmed aptly notes, by invitation only (Willful Subjects 148). I do so in order to dismantle a monolithic queer theatre industry and demonstrate the ways in which certain privilege is afforded to white male theatre practitioners who inhabit or identify with queerness. I end by asking again how we might complicate the umbrella term “queer theatre.” In a recent article, Jack Halberstam questioned who “we” are after the Orlando nightclub massacre. Halberstam writes, “It might be time to break up the fantasy of the LGBT monolith. . . .” Within the performance industry, there is a need to recognize that different practitioners experience identity, labour, and performance differently—with vastly different access to funding, resources, support, and leadership roles. Queer conferences, anthologies, and theatrical seasons need to prioritize and not tokenize those who have historically been erased from queer-identified theatre stages and publications. If only the publications and seasons that focus on “diversity” or on a particular marginalized group are held accountable to achieving this level of inclusion and equitable practice, then we will continue to contribute implicitly to a neutralization and universalization of whiteness as that which does not need to be named. Again, this call necessitates that space be acknowledged as durational. Although companies may commit
to prioritizing particular marginalized groups for a season (or even several years), or may ensure that marginalized subjects contribute to or edit a special issue of a journal, these positive turns must be accompanied by structural shifts and commitments to ongoing change.

In no way is this call an attempt to ignore or erase the performance achievements of many queer communities throughout the country or the strides made by theatre companies in the last few years. On the contrary, these radical works and theatres are integral to the changing performance culture and aesthetic in the country. Yet we are still far from equity. I assert here the need to expose the naturalization of whiteness in queer performance and name white work as white work in order to step back, learn how to be better allies, and support the changes needed in the theatre and performance industry. This chapter is a way of slowing down and making space for the uncomfortable narrative that continually demonstrates and perpetuates particular spatial dynamics within the queer artistic performance communities in Canada. Articulating and archiving the response to queer people of colour taking up space makes the invisible ways in which they are already excluded from space more apparent. When we notice how these spaces are constructed and who has access to the place of the stage, we fill the “empty space” with what was already always there.

I do not describe these events simply as a means of situating this study, but also to demonstrate the ways in which land, space, and place are central to many of the current conversations unfolding in queer communities in Canada. In Toronto, the Gay Heritage Project demonstrates the degree to which white privilege enables particular bodies to claim and rewrite histories. This insistence on being seen ensures that white gay male bodies are not only seen on stage in the present, but are also seen in historical narratives and the spaces they occupy. The stories constructed and shared about the past shape how bodies are oriented within space in the present, and what is anticipated for our futures. These narratives dictate who has rightful ownership, who has struggled, and who is “authentically” gay. Similarly, the events that surrounded the Pride festivities in the last two years demonstrated the ways in which queer space is implicitly seen as white. The erasure of queer people of colour’s leadership and contributions to queer rights and activism, and their consequential “invitation” to participate in these events, demonstrates not simply invisibility within space, but their removal from historicized space. Such a removal is founded upon the erasure of place and space and the assumption of its inherent “neutrality”—an assumption founded in white supremacist ideologies. I mark the importance of
decentralizing and problematizing the potentialities that exist within emptiness—as a theory that lies at the foundations of settler colonial tactics such as *terra nullius* and reproduces the transparency of whiteness. I call for recognition of the politics of inclusion that exist within space-making. Recognizing how tokenization can result in particular forms of inclusion in the performance and theatre industry, we may complicate equity practices that perpetuate transience through invitation to festivals and one-off events.

In Vancouver, the discussions that took place at the symposium were explicitly spatial. They demonstrated the anticipation of the orientation of queer white cisgender male bodies within space and how the disruption of such orientation is seen as historically relevant, necessitating documentation—*we must remember what happened in this moment. This must not be unseen*—and the parallel ways in which the exclusion and disorientation of Black queer bodies within space is anticipated—so much so that their exit remained unnoticced, unacknowledged, and, until the final roundtable, undocumented. We may think of this anticipation as a kind of conditioning both in the moment and toward the future. We anticipate the privileging of whiteness, so it remains unremarked upon (or perhaps tokenistically gestured to without attached action to dismantle it). As we anticipate, based on our past experiences, the invisibility of Black bodies, so, too, are we desensitized to their exit from the room. Our anticipation of Black and POC marginalization and invisibility is built on a past of white supremacy that cyclically recreates itself and enables a simultaneous hyper-surveillance and invisibility of those bodies that do not inhabit whiteness. At both Pride Toronto and Q2Q, white queer bodies were momentarily disoriented, as their implicit privilege and rights to space were questioned. The fact that such disorientation was deemed remarkable, and that white queer theatre practitioners, in both instances, felt threatened, reveals the spatial dynamics that were already regulating and shaping these queer events.

One of the attendees at the Q2Q Symposium was theatre creator, performer, and artistic director of Watah Theatre d'bi.young anitafrika. anitafrika’s work has had international success and continues to push the boundaries of inclusion, representation, and artistic creation. She directly engages with Black Lives Matter Toronto, and uses her performance practice as a means to combat racism, sexism, and homophobia in diverse cultures and geographies. In the following chapter, I specifically consider the staging of anitafrika’s 2016 *Orisha Trilogy*, and consider the how her works challenge the spatial organization and politics of inclusion through their style,
form, and aesthetic. I further argue that anitafrīka’s works draw attention to the spaces within which they are situated. I develop my theories of placefulness through an analysis of the opening sequences in each of the productions in the trilogy, and consider the ways in which space is organized through a discussion of bodily mobility and transience. Through an analysis of both the spaces in which the performances are produced and the ways in which place is articulated and represented on stage, this chapter considers how spatial organization and inequities can be combated practically through representations of and engagement with place in performance.
Chapter 5

The Orisha Trilogy: Queer Space from the Inside Out

Introduction

The way we appropriate a space designated for one use for another reveals our out-of-placeness, perhaps rootlessness and our ability to re-create a familiar zone of use around us and others like us.

– Anna B. Scott

Most maps don’t make clear why the colors picked to represent the individual states, municipalities, and communities fail to bleed into each other

– Wendy S. Walters

In theorizing what contributes to and shapes a placefull production, my aim is to demonstrate how some productions provide the opportunity both to engage space as lived and to situate a production within the space in which it is staged. Such productions do not necessarily take place in any one particular locale or site-specific location. They do not necessitate a direct acknowledgement of the theatre, city, or geography, but rather orient and position their audiences wherever they are in order to reject the concept of spatial neutrality. Placefullness draws attention to the unique dynamics that were always already there, shifting over time, but nonetheless affecting performers, audiences, and programming. A placefull production refuses inevitability, universalization, or normalization by emphasizing distinction. It notes the ways in which bodies connect to and shape space. Here we may consider Wendy S. Walters’ quotation, above. When we note the ways maps (fail to) bleed, we note the ways in which they are embodied and internalized, or how the absence of bleeding colours also marks the erasure of histories of violence. This is not the personification of an inanimate object, but the recognition that such an object is inscribed and shaped by bodily presence. While there are multiple ways in which such a spatial resistance can be asserted, throughout this chapter, I use
d’bi.young anitafrika's *The Orisha Trilogy*\(^{29}\) as a case study by which to examine placefullness in queer performance. I argue that in this trilogy, unique and diverse Black queer women’s diasporic experiences of space are articulated through the openings of the productions, which accentuate a slippage between inside and outside, refusing them as binaries and instead seeing the ways in which they are constantly informing one and the other. Ultimately, this chapter considers both the ways in which public spaces can be queered through theatre performance and the ways in which theatre spaces can be queered and denaturalized by more overtly situating the venue within its place in an intricate system of spatial belonging contingent on historical and present dynamics of power and orientations. This chapter considers the ways in which the trilogy moves across the city through productions in various venues in Toronto, and the ways in which each performance moves from outside to inside the conventional performance space.

Combining narrative recollections and reflections as a spectator at this event, alongside published interviews with performer and creator d’bi.young anitafrika, this analysis considers how spatial queering can shape an artistic production and audience reception through a spatial and temporal placefull practice. I argue here, and throughout this dissertation, that placefullness can be an intentional form of resistance against the precarity and transience of queer women’s spatiality. Placefullness is not necessarily a queer performance practice, but it is one way in which to *queer* performance practice, and in the case of anitafrika’s trilogy, to perform placefullness from the standpoint of a Black, diasporic, queer woman. I present one possible reading and approach to these productions and by no means propose a universal assumption about how queer women or non-binary artists use space. However, d’bi.young anitafrika’s own emphasis on space and place allows for an entry point into analysis that is productive and useful

\(^{29}\) *The Orisha Trilogy* is rooted in teachings, rituals, and stories from the Yorùbá spiritual tradition. These traditions have had a marked influence on and presence within Watah Theatre, and in the development of anitafrika’s Sorplusi method\(^{29}\) (King, “d’bi young anitafrika on performance”). The significance of Yorùbá spiritual traditions is particularly evident in *The Orisha Trilogy* and immediately shapes our spatial engagement within the context of Black diasporic performance. The Orishas, named in the title of the trilogy, are the intermediaries between human beings and Olodumare (a name which is often translated as “God”), who are tasked with helping humans with their personal obstacles and with maintaining order (Falola and Genova 2). Falola and Genova explain that, unlike other spiritual narratives, the “Yoruba gods and spirits are ‘living beings’ . . . with their own breath and feelings, even their personal weaknesses” (4). Throughout the trilogy, as will be discussed, several of the Yorùbá gods are invited into the space and, as such, are a significant part of an analysis of space and place in these performances.
in considering transience, precarity, and reclamation.

I begin this chapter with a brief history of d’bi.young anitafrika’s work and her theatre company to contextualize the trilogy and the space it takes and creates in Toronto’s theatre landscape. I move to apply the theatrical concept of the “empty” or “placeless” stage to Black queer diasporic performance and consider the ways in which placefullness responds to the implicit erasure of histories of oppression, colonization, and systems of power at play in all theatre spaces in Canada. I use this concept of placefullness to explore specific moments in The Orisha Trilogy that situate and reorient spectators and performers through their engagement and movement through space. In Esu Crossing the Middle Passage (performed at Storefront Theatre), anitafrika encourages the audience to consider the continuing impact of the Middle Passage and the violent ways it continues to manifest in the West; in the second production, She Mami Wata and the Pussy Witch Hunt (performed in the Backspace theatre of Theatre Passe Muraille), anitafrika complicates a simplistic reading of diaspora, demonstrating the ways in which Jamaica already exists on Toronto streets. In the final production, Bleeders (performed as a workshop production at SummerWorks Festival at the Theatre Centre), the division between the spectators and performers dissipates, as they too become participants in an activist revolution.

Rather than indulging in the empty, neutral, and invisible, anitafrika’s trilogy reorients spectators by staging the opening of each production outside of the conventional performance space. The audience is refused the opportunity to detach the experience inside the theatre from the world outside. In this way, the theatre experience is queered—the space of the theatre is grounded through the very oppressions associated with its place in the city. In my reading of the three performances, the works appear to engage this placefullness in a different way, unsettling expectations by ensuring that audiences that have attended each event do not become complacent, do not experience this phenomenon as pattern, but instead as active engagement.

The way in which The Orisha Trilogy moves venues for each production demonstrates both the advantages and disadvantages of a nomadic and transient artistic practice. The trilogy’s movement is significant in terms of the individual productions’ movements—from outside on the street to inside the theatre space—and also in terms of the movement through the city’s geographic landscape. Each part of the trilogy queers a different neighbourhood in the city by literally inserting itself into the neighbourhood and changing (even if momentarily) the
geographical landscape of the city. The queering of space is executed through the literal presence of queer bodies in space and the destabilization of space use—performing outside in the street and taking up space typically not used for performance. The movement throughout the city may also have attracted diverse audience bases, with the first show having taken place in a small theatre in the west end of Toronto, the second in downtown Toronto at Queen and Bathurst, and the third in the quickly gentrifying Parkdale area in a repurposed library, now the home of the Theatre Centre. I unmap these geographical areas and analyze the sequences in each performance in order ultimately to argue that the articulation of place and space construct a placefull stage, a stage that illuminates the oppression and inequities that organize all spaces.

Positionality

*And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them . . . that we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own. For instance, “I can’t possibly teach Black Women’s writing—their experience is so different from mine.” Yet, how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust? . . . [I]t is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.*

— Audre Lorde

I write this chapter as a Jewish queer white settler woman. I am not an authority or specialist in Black Afro-Caribbean performance. Yet I believe that I have a responsibility to learn and read and write about queer theatre and performance practice outside of a white-settler normalized Canadian cannon. As a woman with immense racial privilege, I do not pretend to understand the lived experience or knowledge embedded in the breaths and gestures of anitafrīka’s performances. What gives these theatrical creations life and existence on stage is outside of my realm of understanding. I write about them from a distance, with a desire to continue the dissemination and dialogue about queer women’s work in Canada. I write them with respect, and a desire to learn and to listen. As much as possible, I have cited the words of the creator d’bi.young anitafrīka, and used sources in which she was interviewed.

My exploration of space and gentrification throughout this chapter does not aim neatly to describe a process or phenomenon, but instead to note irreconcilable contradictions and
complexities always at work in place-making and space-taking. An intersectional approach, which uses a queer lens, allows for specificity and simultaneous fluidity. In some ways, my geographical unmappings of space, focusing on displacement and gentrification, seem to contradict the need to make space for queer women of colour. Particularly regarding settler colonialism, which I discuss more fully in chapter 7, which is focused on the 2017 Queer Arts Festival, conversations of diasporic performance must be nuanced and complicated. We cannot easily separate categories of experience, particularly because each of us inhabits multiple positionalities. Just as not all queer women were assigned women at birth, so too not all people of colour and Black people are indigenous to this land. Taking up space for queer women of colour and non-binary persons of colour is essential in a world where their spaces are precarious and erased. In Canada we must simultaneously and continually consider the impact of colonization and the ways in which taking space can implicitly and explicitly displace others. It is essential to recognize how each of our experiences is unique to the ways we identify, the ways we are perceived, and the ways we transform and shift over time.

Watah Theatre and African Diasporic Performance

*My elders taught me that in the absence of what I need, I must create from what I have.*

– d’bi.young anitafrika

Before analyzing the particular ways in which the trilogy engages space, I begin by contextualizing the productions and theories developed through an overview of d’bi.young anitafrika’s theatre company, and how the company contributes to a tradition of Afro-Caribbean women and dub theatre in Toronto (Knowles, “To be Dub, Female, and Black” 78). anitafrika identifies as a “Black, queer, African Jamaican, Canadian and Caribbean mother” (Luhning in Knowles, “To be Dub, Female, and Black” 91), and her work draws links and bridges between her multiple positionalities and experiences of diasporic space. Her distinct employment of the word “queer” to describe her identity is connected to her insistence on remaining fluid and her refusal to allow her orientation to be “confined by static categories of sexual orientation alone—especially if these are based on parochial presumptions about sex/gender transparency and stability” (Gill 114). Influenced by Jamaican oral traditions, d’bi.young anitafrika’s work
approaches theatre space as a shared sacred space (Simpson 347). anitafrika writes, “The storyteller should honour the storytelling space. The story-telling space is a sacred space and a space that is given to us by the community” (qtd. in Simpson 347). Knowles notes that anitafrika, alongside other women of colour in the industry, is using her art forms to develop “a Toronto within the city that functions for them as a transformative space operating at the intersections of nations, sexualities, and performance forms to queer traditional theatrical hierarchies. . .” (To be Dub, Female, and Black” 97). anitafrika’s work, alongside that of other Afro-Caribbean playwrights and artistic creators, such as Rhoma Spencer and ahdri zhina mandiela (both of whom are also discussed in Knowles’ article), actively creates space and challenges its neutrality and organization. Knowles explains that their work creates

a space that enables them at once to womanize and queer “the revolushun,”
building on Caribbean performance practices such as carnival, ‘mas (masquerade), calypso, pantomime, satirical musical reviews, agit prop, and crucially, dub, to create expansive new performance forms and theatrical hybridities in diasporic space. (“To be Dub, Female, and Black” 79–80)

anitafrika is the Artistic Director of Watah Theatre, previously “anitafrika dub theatre.” She began the theatre in 2008 and incorporated as a non-profit in 2014 (anitafrika, “Black Plays Matter,” 27). Watah runs out of an ongoing rental space—something that is incredibly uncommon for marginalized artists in the city. The studio can house many activities, but does not currently operate as a typical black box theatre space; though this is the long-term goal, a lack of funds has made it impossible to do so. Through year-long residencies, productions and workshops, Watah aims “to provide artists with tools for self-actualization, create relevant art, and uncover crucial mentorship skills for each one to teach one” (anitafrika, “Black Plays Matter” 27). While Watah does not have racially and economically restrictive selection practices and is open to supporting artists regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or class, the focus and inspiration is on Black theatre and “cultivating and sharing a unique African-Caribbean-Canadian theatre aesthetic,”

heavily informed by the radical performance tradition of Jamaica’s dub poetry and dub theatre. The company insists on challenging systemic barriers that exclude Black theatre artists, thereby giving Black arts practitioners a local, national, and international platform to showcase and celebrate their work. (anitafrika, “Black Plays Matter” 27)

A lack of space to create and develop marginalized performances has contributed to Watah’s commitment to radical artistic creation and mentorship, particularly for the future of “Black
artivists.” Watah responds to the increasingly apparent violence and oppression targeted at marginalized peoples, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples. The literal displacement and exclusion of Black people from spaces and the resulting fewer Black people in post-secondary education and on the job market are directly confronted through Watah’s programming (anitafrika, “Black Plays Matter” 29). As anitafrika asserts, “Watah exists as a meeting place, a growing place, a healing place” (anitafrika, “Black Plays Matter” 29). Creating a place for the articulation and celebration of Black works is not simply about inviting particular peoples into a physical space, but inviting the articulation of body and voice into the space, a presence and performance that have the capacity to change space by transforming our expectations of what can and should take place within it. Decentralizing white theatre, as d’bi.young anitafrika notes, by celebrating Blackness, is essential to this practice. Rather than exploring Blackness “in opposition to whiteness,” Watah theatre reformulates expectations by articulating the “intrinsic humanity” within Blackness (anitafrika, “Black Plays Matter” 27).

The lack of ongoing space allocated to Watah Theatre and the limited operational funding and resources awarded to the company necessitate rental venues or one-off events for their productions. Yet carefree movement from space to space necessitates a certain degree of privilege. While theatre venues may be supportive of anitafrika’s work, particular attention must nonetheless be paid to the distinct challenges she faces as a Black queer woman in the industry, specifically regarding access, surveillance, and movement. Much scholarly work has been produced on the relationship among mobility, marginalization, and race. In Black Body, Radhika Mohanram explains, “Whiteness has the ability to move” (4). Mohanram argues that in contrast to the mobile and unnoticed white body, “Blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing” (4). How poignantly this applies to notions of placelessness in the theatre. Mohanram writes:

> The ideal body can be achieved only by placing “the body” outside of history, by ignoring historical events such as colonialism and slavery, and facts such as racism and sexism; in short, by ignoring the cultural and historical constructions of the body. (32)

As Mohanram notes here, the ideal body is not spatial. It is “placed” outside of time and space, within an emptiness. It is this emptiness, like the empty stage, that itself is the very place of privilege. This emptiness is where privilege easily orients itself and resides. In the context of the conventional mainstream theatre, the white straight body is both catered to and perpetuated through the erasure of place. The space, when emptied of history, power,
heterosexism, and colonialism, becomes the neutral and unnamed. The marginalized woman’s body is not granted such neutrality.\textsuperscript{30} We must (and do) name her. By pointing to the “diversity” of a cast, or a season of all women’s work, we name these choices remark-able and hold them up against what is deemed unremarkable—patriarchy, heterosexism, and white supremacy.

As I repeatedly reference resistance in this chapter, I do so as a reclamation of agency, not in relation to whiteness, but independent of it. As anitafrika explains, “Even while responding to the insidious unfairness of racism, it is imperative that we do not place whiteness at the centre of the art we create. Blackness does not exist in opposition to whiteness” (“Black Plays Matter” 27). While white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonization take space and enforce spatial systems that normalize the precarity of women’s ongoing access to spaces, resistance against these forces should be contextualized not through a lens of victimhood, but rather one of reclamation of self, space, culture, and community. These works reposition Black performers as the storytellers, not in relation to whiteness, but on their own terms as creators. In so doing, Black queer women insist on presence and resist and reposition those in power through performance (Black Like Who 85). In The Orisha Trilogy, the characters, plot, and form are not responding or in opposition to whiteness. To assume such a response would be to predicate the performance, necessarily, on dominant white culture. The trilogy exists on its own terms and addresses a multitude of interconnected systemic issues.

A Precarious Space and Transient Practice

anitafrika’s artistic practice has long been characterized by transience. anitafrika travels internationally to produce her works and to host workshops and residencies. She has resided in over a dozen countries since 2001, and uses her mobility as a form of resistance and activism—a politically charged choice to demand space across borders and take space for creative works (Dupuis). A paradox emerges in considering anitafrika’s transient practice: it may be desirable to move between spaces—to have the opportunity to circulate work and to promote it in new

\textsuperscript{30} Following Mohanram, I focus on Black bodies because, as Walcott explains, “what is ultimately at stake is the space and place that bodies, both actual and symbolic, occupy in the nation’s imagination” (Black Like Who 54). The body makes a physical impression on place and space; so, too, bodies are formed by their surroundings. The physical body of the Other is seen as a threat and outside of space, whereas the imagined body of the Other is often not seen (or imagined) at all.
locations. At the same time, it is disadvantageous to lack a regular or steady space for development and production (as it can be difficult to secure ongoing funding, development time and space, and to devote sufficient energy and time to marketing). Regular or resident spaces, with security and relative longevity, are inequitably accessible. Yet mobility is a privilege, a working condition, and a condition of possibility that is not afforded to all artists, due both to monetary constraints and the surveillance of marginalized bodies. This is particularly true for migrant and diasporic subjects. In many ways, it seems as though the refusal to remain stagnant is a queer activist endeavour. anitafrika explains her relationship to space and desire for simultaneous security and transience:

I have moments when I crave stability, like after we’ve spent 24 hours on a plane. . . . But when I’ve been in a new place six months, I start to get itchy. I don’t want to say I get bored easily, because you can find excitement in everything, even the most everyday activities. But being in new spaces and talking to new people is the most exciting thing ever. (Dupuis)

While movement is essential to her own artistic practice, anitafrika also demonstrates her need for a stable and ongoing space through her work as artistic director of Watah. While their rental studio provides a space in which to develop work and host residencies, rehearsals, and readings, a lack of operational funding has meant that time and energy must shift toward campaigning and fundraising to pay rent on the space in Toronto’s Distillery District. Maintaining the rental space has been difficult, and Watah has been at risk of closing for quite some time. The financial strain is by no means the result of a lack of interest or visibility in the theatre community. The work coming out of the company is highly respected and well-attended. It is Canada’s only professional theatre company that provides full-year artists’ residencies, which are tuition-free “to Black and diverse artist-instigators” (anitafrika, “Founding Artistic Director”). The company’s past productions have received multiple accolades, including Dora Mavor Moore nominations and awards. In 2016 Watah received one Dora award as well as three nominations (Rothman), and the Audience Choice Award at the SummerWorks Festival. anitafrika explains:

We’re not at a loss for artists in residence, for product. If you look at the artistic output we’ve generated in two years, anybody would think we are a moneyed company. What we need is security around where we house these ideas. None of [this] would be possible if we did not have a home. We need to have our home not jeopardized. Because when you have a home, it changes people’s emotional, psychological and spiritual relationship to creating art . . . it’s only because we have a home that we feel empowered to create. (Rothman)
Space is essential not only to their everyday operations, but also to developing a community, to creating a home base and, through it, a sense of security, and to demonstrating the value and purpose of the work that is being done. A lack of support from national and local agencies and arts councils points to what is valued in the industry. This lack of continual space for Watah Theatre is a direct result of racial, gendered, and heterosexist dynamics in the theatre industry. Furthermore, a lack of space necessitates, as I have argued, mobility and a nomadic artistic practice, which take time and energy away from the creative work that the company is doing. With less time and fewer resources to devote to their own projects, seeking a space for productions and fighting to maintain their studio space have direct implications for the kinds of work and process in which Watah can engage.

On a GoFundMe page on which a campaign was set up to attempt to garner funds for the theatre through crowdsourcing, anitafrika explains that while Watah provides a service to the theatre community through tuition-free programming and residencies for marginalized artists, it has never received operational funding and has been denied four consecutive grants. For anitafrika, the lack of support from national, provincial, and local agencies and artists’ funds “makes it impossible to cover the cost of rent, not to mention running tuition-free programming” (anitafrika, “Save Watah”). As she further explains:

[T]he pervasiveness of this deeply institutionalized system of racial discrimination oozes itself into every facet of life. First Nations, Black and POC arts initiatives and companies routinely receive disproportionately less or no funding resulting in a shorter life-span and forced closure. This reality makes building and sustaining an institution for Black people very very very very very very difficult! (anitafrika, “Save Watah”)

When asked about the impact Watah Theatre has on theatre communities and audiences, anitafrika responds: “[We’re] creating this unique, equitable, loving, self-actualizing space for Black, queer, LGBT and People of Colour artists . . . to produce work that is impacting the Canadian cultural landscape” (Rothman). While Watah offers a distinct service for community members, particularly those who are marginalized and have fewer resources at their disposal, the theatre’s relationship to space remains unstable. This instability cannot be understood as a result of broad obstacles in the arts and institutional funding structures. Rather, it must be considered through an intersectional lens of systemic racism, patriarchy, and homophobia. When we investigate the ways in which space and place are produced, represented, and allocated, the myth of neutrality and emptiness is illuminated: Who is entitled to move through space at will? Who is required to move? And who is given a space of belonging to produce work?
Immobility and Policing of Black Queer Women’s Bodies

Mohanram notes that some bodies experience transience through spaces differently from other privileged bodies. She writes, “A lot of Black women cannot be perceived beyond the body. The literal aspect of nomadism—the ease of and the right to mobility—is reserved for women with strong passports” (82). Resistance against this immobility surfaces time and again throughout anitafrika’s trilogy, and is at the foundation of my argument against the erasure (and subsequent neutralizing) of space and place. The productions in the trilogy reference mobilities in distinct ways: the forced movement of Black women’s bodies through slavery in *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage*, the movement of queer Black bodies to safer spaces due to homophobia in *She Mami Wata*, and the dystopic movement through histories and futures to seek out truth and solutions to human-caused environmental disasters in *Bleeders*. All three of the productions, through such movement, emphasize the policing of marginalized peoples. Rather than situating such surveillance within the context of the fictionalized theatre performance, the productions each use unique theatrical practices through which they reference the politics of place that manifest in the theatres in Toronto and demonstrate the ways such policing is not detached from the theatre experience, but rather seeps into the artistic work. The theatre space within Toronto, Canada, within a white privileged anti-Black colonial landscape, becomes integral to how audience read and perceive the works. The repeated referencing to anti-Black racism and the Black Lives Matter Movement in both *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage* and *Bleeders* situates the productions within the current social and political climate. Though both productions are set in different time periods, the first in the past, following the crossing of Black bodies through the Middle Passage, and the second in an unknown future, the connection to the present creates opportunities for reflection and affinity-building for Black audience members and draws white audience members’ complicity and accountability to the surface.

Beyond broad social and political issues, the productions relate directly to d’bi.young anitafrika’s own experiences of space, borders, and race. In March 2016, one month before the first production in the trilogy opened, anitafrika was stopped at the airport, trying to return to Canada from Trinidad with her Jamaican passport and Canadian citizenship card, as well as an expired Canadian passport (anitafrika, Facebook). She was kept waiting for hours in the airport before being notified that she would not be allowed to board the plane. anitafrika explained the events that occurred at the airport on her professional and personal social media pages:
I am stranded in Trinidad. So of course I started talking about racism and classism and shadeism in our Caribbean countries, loud enough for everyone to hear me. Then they called the police who let me know that I would be carried off to jail if I continued to “harass” the people with me loud talking . . . lol . . . I am writing this with a smile on my face, because it is so ridiculous. Indeed this is the face of imperialism, the long-lasting effects of colonization . . . this is the shit legacy that we indeed have inherited. (anitafrika, Facebook)

The anti-Black racism that fuelled anitafrika’s stilted travel “home” was referenced not only on social media and her press for her production, but also in reviews of the production in mainstream media, as well as during the talkback following some of the performances of *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage*. In investigating the need to demystify placelessness, to situate the theatre within a place of spatial inequities, we cannot detach experiences of space, belonging, and place within the nation-state from discussions of space, belonging, and place within the theatre space. The ways in which bodies are oriented within the city influence the kind of access and orientation artists and audiences have within creative spaces. The direct reference to anitafrika’s experience, and the discussion of restraints on mobility with audiences online and in the press, change the ways in which audiences view the performance of the trilogy.

**Esu Crossing the Middle Passage: Bringing the Outside In**

**The Opening**

*I am standing in the lobby of the Storefront Theatre. It is getting busy and I am trying to find a space to stand so I don’t take up too much space. I am excited, but somehow irrationally nervous. Why aren’t they letting us into the theatre space? The show is about to start. The lobby is fairly small, and as the name of the theatre indicates, it is a storefront, on a corner of Bloor Street. It doesn’t quite feel like your typical theatre. It feels like part of the city, part of daily life. I walk around the room. Everyone seems as confused and disoriented as I feel. In the moment I think we will finally be permitted entry, we are instead turned around. We are all escorted outside onto the street. Movement, from inside the confines of a theatre space back out to a more public sphere. We line up. We wait a moment. We re-enter the lobby. A creature sits in the centre of the room. She pulses. The birth and rebirth of a human. The sounds of voices and singing herald a circular movement of bodies. They escort us, the spectators, out of the lobby. We enter the theatre.*
This is my experience of the opening of *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage*, a Dora-nominated play, the first in anitafrika’s *Orisha Trilogy*. *Esu Crossing* is set on a slave ship. Moving between past and present, guided by the spirit of Esu—the trickster God of Ifa— the play uses sound, voice, poetry, and movement to perform the “contemporary crossings of Black bodies” (anitafrika, “The Orisha Trilogy”). The description here is explicitly spatial, drawing our attention not only to the placement of bodies in space, but their movement through it. The play begins outside of the theatre space. A placefull approach to a production does not necessarily draw attention to or directly reference the geography of the venue during performance, nor does it limit a production to a particular locale; placefullness is distinct from site-specificity in this way. However, an analysis of placefullness and the way in which it is received should involve an investigation of the specific geographies of the venues used in order to contextualize the significant ways the space influences audience perception and insights, who is able to access the space, and to whom the experience is catering. Analyzing the spectators’ and performers’ movement through space as a means of articulating place in performance, I consider, in the following sections, how *Esu* compels audiences to consider mobility, not only in terms of a character’s journey through the Middle Passage, but also as an embodied reflexive experience by which audience members may consider their own orientation within space.

**Storefront Theatre**

I shift focus here, away from the theatre company and trilogy, to consider the geographical location in which the first production was staged. I do so in order to contextualize the production within the broader frame of the city’s landscape. *Esu* was produced at Storefront Theatre, a space that was located in Toronto’s west end in a neighbourhood in Palmerston Little Italy (Trinity Spadina) until 2017. Four years after acquiring the rental space, the Storefront Theatre was evicted. They released a notice on their website and social media in January of 2017: “After four years of protracted negotiations with the owners of the 955 Bloor location regarding a long term lease for The Storefront Theatre, the company is being asked to leave the location in order for the owners to lease the space to another commercial enterprise” (Storefront Theatre, “Book the Storefront”). The removal of the company is another indication of

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31 Ifa refers to “divination with all its sacred texts,” practiced by the Yorba people (Falola 3).
independent artists’ inability to maintain and secure ongoing theatre spaces for development and production of new works. There is a marked interest in independent artists using alternative spaces for their creative works, both as a response to expensive rental costs, and as a means to refuse institutionalization and corporatization. Opting for alternative spatial arrangements is one means of rejecting the mainstream capitalist structure of theatre and art as a commodity. Doing so creates space for independent artists who would otherwise not have access to professional production opportunities. However, avoiding a simplistic reading of Storefront’s closure, it is important to consider the processes of gentrification in the area and the ways in which Storefront Theatre’s presence might also have contributed to their eventual eviction.

The space in which Storefront Theatre was run was “zoned for commercial and residential use.” Prior to the theatre renting the space, the building was used as a drugstore and, before that, a beer store (Six-Eighty News). The theatre space was developed as an initiative to provide “accessibility in the independent arts field through affordable venues, groundbreaking productions, collaborative discourse and community-centric support” (“About Storefront,” Facebook). As they further describe on their Facebook page, “As the premier independent production company for contemporary creative enterprises, The Storefront Initiative will inspire a new and a viable job market for a variety of skill sets by defining a unique and radical style of art and creation” (“About Storefront,” Facebook). Artistic endeavours and gentrification have a layered relationship. While artists need space to develop and produce their works, and are drawn to urban sites where other artists congregate, gentrification and the increasing cost of rental spaces make it difficult to obtain the conditions for artistic creation (Schulman 81). While alternative and innovative artistic communities such as Storefront make neighbourhoods more appealing, ultimately such appeal can result in a change of demographic and desirability that result in the artists’ inability to keep up with expenditures and rental costs.

Certainly Storefront did not propel the neighbourhood into gentrification. The area has seen major changes in the last fifteen years in the demographics and income of residents in the area, pointing to the impact of gentrification in the neighbourhood before the theatre’s arrival. Such gentrification was thus an impetus for bringing art into the space, but also a reason why Storefront, and other independent and low-funded artistic communities, might struggle to secure a regular or resident space. Areas that are still in the process of gentrifying, or have been recently gentrified, tend to maintain, at least for a short period of time, lower rent expectations. For
emerging and struggling artists, access to central and inexpensive spaces is essential to creating work. At the same time, in Toronto’s rental market, such spaces are often only available in areas that are gentrifying. The theatre space is not, as I will discuss in the following chapter, detached from this process of gentrification, but a key part of it. Sarah Schulman writes:

The literal experience of gentrification is a concrete replacement process. Physically it is an urban phenomena: the removal of communities of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, languages, and points of view from central neighborhoods of cities, and their replacement by more homogenized groups. With this comes the destruction of culture and relationship, and this destruction has profound consequences for the future lives of cities. (Schulman 14)

Here, Schulman demonstrates the spatial and temporal impact and processes of erasure that characterize gentrification. Gentrification shifts who presently occupies space, and how we imagine and plan for space to be used in future. The impacts of gentrification trends in Storefront’s area of Toronto are apparent in the city’s census results, which indicate a change in the demographics of the area. Gentrification is perhaps most apparent through the rise in income of family households in the neighbourhood, indicating not only that the residents of the area are changing, but that expectations regarding expenditure on leisure activities such as arts, culture, and recreation will increase as well.

Recently, alternative artistic spaces such as Storefront Theatre have been under increased surveillance and experienced a rise in evictions, in part as a result of a fire at Oakland, California’s Ghost Ship Artist Collective, a converted warehouse space that was used as a living and work space for artists. The space was unsafe for residence and not up to code before the fire, according to Josette Melchor, executive director of Gray Area Foundation for the Arts. However, given the limited access artists have to affordable spaces in many cities, people involved with the space were hesitant to report any concerns, because the collective was such a necessity in their

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32 In 2011, sixty-three percent of residents in the area had been born in Canada, with twenty-nine percent reporting immigration before 2001, and only two percent having immigrated to Toronto between 2001 and 2005— with a slight increase to three percent between 2006 and 2011 (City of Toronto). In the 2011 census, the number of Canadian-born people in this neighbourhood was fourteen percent higher than the reported number in Toronto overall. The change in the neighbourhood is also visible in the languages spoken by the population. In 2001, the total population in this area whose home language was identified as English in the Toronto Census was 55.45 percent; in 2006, the percentage of primarily English-speaking households rose to 70.64 percent, and in 2011, the percentage rose still higher, to seventy-nine percent (City of Toronto). In 1996, the average household income in Palmerston Little Italy was $47,179; in 2001, that figure rose to $61,568; by 2011, the average income in the neighbourhood was $70,718 (2011).
lives—many would have nowhere else to work or live if the space were closed (Grinberg). On December 2, 2016, a fire broke out in the space during an electronic music night aimed at covering rent costs, and killed thirty-six people. Subsequently, many other artists’ collectives around the United States were evicted, with landlords expressing fears that similar occurrences would take place on their properties. This event also incited nervousness in Canadian property owners and was one reason cited for the closing of Storefront Theatre in Canada (Maga). A representative for the owner of the property noted that the space was built to suit retail requirements and codes, but not codes intended for a performance space. Certain structural changes would need to be made to the building for it to receive approval for audiences to attend performance (wider exits, sprinklers, fire protections) (Maga), but with little funding, these changes were not a possibility. The rising costs of space in the city introduce incredible obstacles for artists, which are exacerbated for marginalized theatre creators and producers.

Spaces such as Storefront Theatre bring accessible professional and alternative artistic creation to communities outside of the downtown core and provide opportunities for grassroots and non-conforming theatre creation. At the same time, these artistic communities tend to be a factor in the gentrification of an area, though artists themselves may not intend to do this. Their works increase interest from corporations and condo developers, who see the presence of artists as attractive to the cultural character of the neighbourhood. Thus, while the creative presence is beneficial to artistic communities, it also inadvertently contributes to increasing rents, thereby displacing long-time residents from the neighbourhood to areas even farther from of the city centre.

The Production: Esu Crossing the Middle Passage

Alongside composers and musicians, Tuku Matthews and Amina Alfred, d’bi.young anitafrika performs a spatial spiritual crossing, not in a historical context, but as present now—in this moment, in this space. The performers call on the Orishas throughout the production in song and movement, invoking them in the space and protecting the audience through the inclusion of masks and drums in the theatre. The weight and sacredness of the production are apparent through the content of the piece and the intentional engagement with space, crafted and shaped by set designer Rachel Forbes. Place, space, and mobility are essential to the production. The synopsis of *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage* on anitafrika’s website indicates that the play takes
place aboard a slave ship and follows the protagonist’s story of crossing into the slave trade. The trickster god of Ida, Esu, guides and informs the journey (anitafrika, “The Orisha Trilogy”). Esu’s role in the production is not that of an ordinary fictional character, but of an invoked deity. In the Yorùbá tradition, Esu personifies the co-existence of good and evil (Awolalu 30). Esu’s presence and guidance are intrinsically spatial because of his mobility and ability to travel. As a result, “Esu becomes part of transatlantic history, but more so of the tension between relocation and history, between the violence that led to the forced migrations of people and the long healing process of reconciliation with living in strange lands that later became new homelands” (Falola and Genova 3).

While the play itself does not address LGBT subject matter, I analyze the production through a queer lens and framework not only because the creator and writer, anitafrika, identifies as queer, but also because it enables an exploration of space that denormalizes what are considered fixed coordinates on a map and complicates a linear understanding of past, present, and future. d’bi.young anitafrika’s experiences of diaspora and subjecthood cannot be understood through a single lens of Blackness, diaspora, womanhood, or queerness. A queer intersectional analysis of anitafrika’s work enables an investigation into the production that considers multiple standpoints simultaneously. Queerness thus does not need to be named in the production for it to be present throughout the work. In “Black Queer Studies, Freedom, and Other Human Possibilities,” Rinaldo Walcott asks, “What constitutes Black queerness? Is Black queerness the body, culture, race, ethnicity, disease, all of the above, or only one of the above?” (154). In his discussion of Black queer representation, he notes that the images are never settled, singular, or monolithic, “But all these images echo relation—a homopoetics of relation and an ethics of the singular care of the self-producing plurality and community” (Walcott, “Black Queer Studies” 154). I attempt to consider and engage this plurality throughout this analysis of The Orisha Trilogy, considering how communities are not isolated into silos, but experienced simultaneously—not as queer or Black bodies appearing on stage, but as queer Black women’s bodies that experience space through the intersections of identities.

Thresholds and Crossroads: What Moves Us

In the same way that crossing the threshold of the theatrical space—into the orchestra—transforms you into “an actor”, so passing through one of the doorways from outside the theatre into the auditorium transforms you into “a spectator”. The theatre is a
I argue that *Esu* queers both the place and space of the theatre, as well as the spectator orientation, through the incorporation of spatial and temporal specificity and performative shifting of inside and outside in its opening sequence. The audience’s movement through space, which I articulate in more detail below, is significant in establishing what I argue is a placeful theatrical and spatial experience. As performative gestures, these movements actively shift and transform the space. In the opening sequence, the audience encounters four physical movements: First, we enter the lobby, awaiting entrance into the theatre; then we are instructed by the ushers to go outside to wait on the street; we are brought back into the lobby, where the performers are now situated; and then, after a brief performance, the doors are opened and we enter the stage space.

The first physical movements the spectator performs are experienced by them as individuals, rather than collectively. It occurs (as it does with most traditional theatre productions) as individuals enter the theatre lobby to obtain their tickets for the production. The intimate lobby space at the Storefront fills prior to the production, as bodies enter the space, awaiting admission into the performance. With Unwin’s definition of theatre as “a composition of thresholds,” we can conceive of the theatre space as a performative space—upon entering the venue, each individual transforms into a spectator. In the second movement, in which spectators move from the lobby back outside onto the street, the boundaries that condition our behaviour and expectations of the theatrical event are blurred—the temporal aspects of the performative shift from person to spectator are destabilized. Rather than entering the space and forgetting our surroundings as we find our seats in the theatre, the simple shift from inside to outside (and back inside) is a rupturing of anticipated theatre conventions. These movements urge the audience, even if subtly, to connect their bodies and lived experience to the events on stage. The spatial movement obliges the audience members to carry the present moment and their place in it with them through the crossroads.

Chaudhuri discusses a similar theatrical staging in her theorizations on *Roads*, a production that begins with a brief event outside of the conventional theatre space in the street and then another in the lobby. These events are “so slight and fragile” that Chaudhuri refers to
them as “performance trace[s]” (45). The significance of her analysis of Roads to my theorizations lies in her conclusion that the movement through the “unexpectedly filled spaces outside the play proper, is subject to a discourse of difference—of [the spectator’s] own difference, which has the final effect of putting [the spectator’s] ‘seeing’ of the play deeply into question” (52). Just as Roads ultimately challenges a theatrical assumption of place by showing how emptiness is in fact already filled, so, too, anitafrika’s opening insists on engagement with place and space through active movement, necessitating reorientation. Audience members are not encouraged to disengage the theatre space from reality. They are never asked to clear the geographical locale of the theatre and resituate themselves aboard a slave ship or transport themselves back to the Middle Passage. The Middle Passage is, rather, shown—through form and content—to be in this present moment, inextricable from Western politics and everyday life.

In the third movement, when spectators return to the lobby from the street, there is a large, beautifully crafted creature crouched on the ground, in a Helmet Mask (called a Mukyeem), in the centre of the room, taking up space and requiring that spectators walk around the perimeter of the room, unable to cross directly through the centre. Two performers, Alfred and Matthews, sing together as the creature at the centre of the room contracts and pulses rhythmically through the space. As it moves, anitafrika emerges from within the mask. The doors are opened, and the spectators then complete the fourth and final movement, into the theatre, guided by the performers to take their seats. Some of the audience members are directed to chairs along the side of the stage, and others to raked seating in front of the performance area. The seating creates a semi-circle, enveloping the performance space. It feels as though we, as spectators, are witnesses within the space, part of the ritual. Alfred’s and Matthews’ melodic singing softens and anitafrika speaks, her wrists held together as if constrained and detained:


The opening monologue uses a loose acrostic pattern and style—literally crossing through the English alphabet as the journey begins. Sequences through alphabetical crossways lead to a meeting place, situating the audience in a place from which the performance will develop.

It is not an erasure of place in order to transport audiences to an imagined somewhere, but instead a recontextualization of our present place in the world. Anitafrka states, “[I]n this mythic mystic marketplace of messy moments melting down, Esu, melting down down down Esu to the meeting point” and the “point of no return.” The travel alluded to and shaped through this sequence invokes Esu in the space and creates a place for the deity in the theatre. This crossing is spatial and temporal. Toyin Falola describes the ways in which Esu has historically survived multiple shifts through time “from the transatlantic slave trade, through the abolition of slavery, colonization, post-colonization, and now globalization” (17). This engagement with history and time manifests throughout the performance of Esu, as time periods shift and impacts and linkages among historical periods are explored. Falola further articulates the Yorùbá practitioner’s relation to Esu and the practice of worship:

As Èsú travels in time, the individuals that negotiate with the deity have to deal with confusion, changing definitions of self and society, unpredictability and cultures that undergo changes and mutations. When living is rough, one can turn to Esu. When the road that one travels upon keeps widening and narrowing, Esu may be called upon to provide solutions before the path ends or closes altogether . . . Esu is useful in understanding transatlantic relocations and changes and also in handling the complications that arise from differences between races, genders, and classes. (17)

The engagement with Esu, both in the staging of the Middle Passage and in the subsequent references to anti-Black racism and police violence, calls upon the deity for both guidance and answers. As the first play in the trilogy, this production brings the Yorùbá tradition into space not through memory, but through worship. Without sacrificing engaging theatrical spectacle, Esu continually and forcefully reminds its audiences that the slave ship is still in motion—the power structures, surveillance, violence, and slavery are embedded in current politics in Canada and the United States. The production’s slippage between past and present time makes explicit links between the slave trade and power structures that marginalize, oppress, and kill Black people in North America today. Walcott notes that the histories of violence experienced through the Middle Passage still influence and shape Black subjects in the diaspora (143). He argues that this ongoing legacy of slavery and oppression means “the question of death should be central to the analysis of Black diaspora cultures . . . Black people die differently” (143).
Throughout *Esu* and throughout the entire *Orisha Trilogy*, death is grappled with in relation to anti-Black racism, homophobia, and environmental collapse. Audience members are not compelled to detach from real-world experiences to enter *Esu Crossing* and recall the deaths of those who were enslaved, but instead are asked to bring Esu into their current placement, into the theatre, into the neighbourhood, into the city and country—where Black lives continue to, as Walcott so effectively asserts, “die differently.” This is achieved through a subversion of the politics of place: the histories of slavery are matched by presents of violence. The crossing from inside to outside the theatre, back into the space of the performance, physically accentuates the significance of inside and outside, the diasporic performance of bringing the outside inside.

The crossroads are embodied as the play shifts through various times, spaces, and poetic forms, demonstrating not only the history of slavery, but also the perpetuation of slavery through the prison industrial complex, anti-Black racism, and police violence. The play explicitly draws these connections through direct reference to Black men and women murdered by police in North America and exposing statistics that reveal the significant correlation between race and prison sentences. Approximately twenty minutes into the production, d’bi.young anitafríka performs a violent removal of Black peoples from their land into the transatlantic slave trade. Her body transforms, constrained, with her hands tied over her head, as she stands on a platform and is sold as a slave. In this moment, Esu is invoked for his powerful refusal to forget history and his ability to “talk about memory, loss, suffering, remembering and resistance” (Falola 18). Esu is brought into the stage space to connect the place of the performance with the histories of anti-Black racism, not to indulge a neutral setting, but to connect a journey among the past, present, and future. As anitafríka stands on the small wooden platform, a disembodied voice reads out laws from the 1600s and 1700s, dehumanizing and stripping Black peoples of their rights. anitafríka repeats each statement. Beginning in the early 1600s, the voice eventually reaches 1787:

“1787: the law says that enslaved Africans count as three-fifths of whites.”

d’bi repeats the words slowly and deliberately.

“1787: the law says that enslaved Africans count as three-fifths of whites.”

The three women on stage stand together as the disembodied voice continues.

Enslaved Africans are forbidden to arm themselves for either offensive or defensive purposes. Punishment: twenty lashes on one’s bare back. Enslaved Africans are forbidden to leave the plantation without the written permission of the white oppressor. Punishment:
twenty lashes on one’s bareback. Enslaved Africans are forbidden to lift up their hand to any Christian. Punishment: thirty lashes on one’s bare back.

There is a brief pause here before the voice says, “2016.” anitafrika repeats the year.

African Canadians count for two percent of the population, yet make up six percent of people incarcerated in federal correctional facilities and seven percent of those serving time in the community.

With each statistic that follows, the disembodied voice repeats “2016.”

African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites. 2016. Together, African Americans and Hispanics comprise sixty percent of all prisoners. 2016. One in three African American males born today will spend time in prison during his lifetime.

The quick shift from past to present works to resituate audiences, to disengage from a historical narrative and reengage with experiences outside of the theatre walls, again accentuating the ways in which the inside of the theatre plays off what is outside of the walls. Here, the past bleeds into the present. Through narratives of violent histories, we are able to identify the continuum of oppressive and violent white supremacy. This is a historical narrative that engages with experiences of racism and patriarchy present today outside the theatre walls, seeping into the narrative. We are not detached from the story being told. Esu is called upon in this moment to “deliver justice, which may mean that Esu is asked to support resistance movements or to administer vengeance” (Falola 17).

A little later in the production, d’bi.young anitafrika steps back on to the small wooden platform and says:

Why. How. Where. When. You policing we. Police still refusing to protect and serve we. Police . . . Police. We don’t need no desubverting of the street . . . Police we are going to dance upon your headquarters. We are going to sing and shout upon your headquarters. . . . Police. We’re not going nowhere Police. We are going to stay right here. Through the hail and through the storm and through the rain and through the sunshine. We’re not going nowhere. We’re staying right here. TentCity upon your head Police. Until you learn to change. . . Racist. Classist. Homophobic. Transphobic. Ableist. Misogynist. Anti-indigenous. Anti-people. Anti-life. Anti-animal. Anti-planet. . . . Right here upon your headquarters police.

This moment is not about the past or future, but the present. When the production was staged in Toronto in early April of 2016, Black Lives Matter Toronto had already been present at police headquarters for ten days. The tent city was erected at police headquarters following an
announcement, on March 20, that the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) would not charge the officer who had murdered forty-five-year-old Andrew Loku the previous year (Battersby). The ongoing impact of anti-Black racism and the perpetuation of white supremacy are engaged and illuminated through this segment. The audience is reminded of its place in Toronto, rather than removed from the happenings outside of the theatre. With her hands still in the air, anitafrika begins to recite the names of Black people murdered by police. One after the other, the list grows. Following each person’s name, said with increasing urgency and pain, anitafrika, Matthews, Alfred and eventually the audience respond: Ashe.\(^{33}\) This is a moment of resistance and activism. This is a moment of strength, resilience and memory. The space of the theatre becomes a memorial. A protest. A revolution. The audience is not explicitly invited to respond with the performers. There is no indication that they should join in the words of respect and condolence. But the shift in energy makes it clear. At each performance I attended, the audience partook in the repeated refrain: Ashe. The audience seems in this moment to be present in the space, not participating as performers or as spectators, but as human beings acknowledging present violence and loss of human life. After a moment of silence, the voice of one of the performers fills the space. She sings, “We cannot live without our lives.” The other performer joins in the repeated verse. They sing together. Building on the idea of “dying differently,” Walcott explains that for Black diasporic subjects, the Middle Passage is not simply a legacy of the past, but that “Death is not ahead of Blackness as a future shared with other humans; death is our life, lived in the present” (“Black Queer Studies” 144). The spatial, as I will discuss in the following chapter, is inextricable from the temporal. How space is lived is durational—and as Walcott notes, how space is experienced in death is as well. He continues:

Death is a marker of Black diasporic life—not a conclusion, but its origins or foundations. It is indeed a poetics of diasporic subjecthood across a range of conditions, expressions, and desires, and thus foundational to our histories. . . . Such “histories” or intimacies condition Black diaspora lives and our or their relationship to dying and death become the conditions for life and living. (“Black Queer Studies” 146)

The opening sequence of the production and subsequent references to Toronto in Esu Crossing the Middle Passage do not work to isolate or disconnect the inside from the outside, prioritizing

\(^{33}\) Ashe (or ase) is a concept alluding to the spiritual energy and life force that animates all creation. As a responsive term, it may connote something akin to “so be it” or “it shall be so.”
one over the other. Rather, the shift from outside to inside is a kind of crossing that enacts the perpetual and unending relationship among space, performance, and daily life/death. This articulation of outside and inside blurs boundaries and raises the stakes of the performance. The production becomes a performative gesture toward political action and change.

When we acknowledge the histories of space and place—when we refuse to present work through the forced neutrality of empty stages—we begin to unearth the systems of power and oppression that are embedded within the city and that structure the use of space for theatrical performance. While *Esu* was not about queer experiences, the queer opening of the performance, the queer temporal linkages between past and present, and the presence of queer Black bodies on stage all worked to fill space with the politics of place, rather than extracting and abstracting them. This is a form of resistance.

**She Mami Wata and the Pussy Witch Hunt: Bringing the Inside Out**

**The Opening**

*We line up outside of the Backspace theatre at Theatre Passe Muraille. I start to feel a theme: Inside and outside—bringing the inside out. The theatre performance unconfined by the theatre space. I wait for it to begin—I am sure it will start before we enter the stage space. The doors to the theatre open and two performers walk outside, church greeters welcoming us to Pastor M’s service. Their arrival transforms the street into a stage. The performance is beginning. It takes a moment of re-orientation—a moment of listening—to resituate ourselves within the narrative place. The greeters are singing to us, interacting with us, inviting us into the theatre. The church greeter smiles, welcomes us: “Good afternoon, congregation! Look at you beautiful people. You come to church early; come to see Pastor M with his sermon? You know that today is a special Sunday service! Oh, good afternoon! . . . You remember the Bible story, Noah? With the animals going two by two? Make your way two by two. Sister Ochun, I’m begging you to help them inside two by two!” We follow their outstretched arms and walk into the theatre. As we make our way inside and start to sit down, the two performers follow us. They sing: “The Lord told Noah to build him an arky, arky. Build it out of gopher barky, barky, children of the Lord.” The audience begins to sing along.*
This is the opening of *She Mami Wata & The Pussy Witch Hunt*, the second play in *The Orisha Trilogy*, which begins outside on the street in front of the venue. The plot follows four friends, all played by d’bi.young anitafrika, who grow up together and experience the challenges of friendship, of identity, and of sexuality in a rural community in Jamaica. Composer Amina Alfred provides musical support, performing alongside anitafrika during the production. While *Esu* moved audiences over thresholds in an unconventional pattern, from inside to outside and back inside, in *She Mami Wata*, the performers’ presence outside is what disrupts the typical spatial organization of the theatre experience. The performers’ movement out onto the streets challenges notions of diaspora and belonging articulated in the performance themes, and performatively alters the way space is perceived. As the audience moves inside, members bring this experience with them. I consider this opening movement and its relation to black queer diasporic performance in the following sections on *She Mami Wata and the Pussy Witch Hunt*.

**Theatre Passe Muraille**

*She Mami Wata and the Pussy Witch Hunt* premiered at Theatre Passe Muraille. Theatre Passe Muraille is the most researched and highly discussed venue dealt with in this chapter. Works by Robert Wallace and Michael McKinnie have outlined the history of the theatre and the ways in which it has successfully “finance[d] experimentation and attract[ed] a popular audience” (Wallace 83) at the same time. Its ability simultaneously to push boundaries through new works and continue to foster mainstream appeal is unique among Toronto’s venues (Wallace 83). Michael McKinnie provides a Marxist analysis of Theatre Passe Muraille’s spatial economies in *City Stages*. While I do not intend to reproduce his in-depth analysis here, in order to contextualize the production of *She Mami Wata and the Pussy Witch Hunt* I note some significant historical changes that shaped the spatial organization of the theatre. I do so to demonstrate how this production continues the theatre’s legacy of disrupting the naturalization of space, and also to outline how the spatial dynamics of the theatre are constructed.

Jim Garrard founded Theatre Passe Muraille in 1968 at Rochdale College (McKinnie 77). The theatre was from its inception concerned with space—as the name indicates, it is a theatre “through (or “without”) walls” (McKinnie 75). With this in mind, Theatre Passe Muraille aimed to dismantle barriers between audience and actor from its beginnings. It operated out of various
rented venues and spaces in Toronto for its first eight years of existence (McKinnie 78), and was the first of Toronto’s “alternative”\textsuperscript{34} companies to own a former factory (McKinnie 75). The factory space was purchased in 1976 (Wallace 74), and is located near Bathurst and Queen at 16 Ryerson Avenue, where the theatre is still housed. The venue was built in 1902, and operated as a commercial bakery. Gentrification and a changing urban landscape enabled the theatre to purchase the building. As McKinnie explains:

Asserting monopoly control over space as property owners is only possible, however, when certain historical conditions are met. . . . The possibility of buying a property like 16 Ryerson Avenue was contingent on changes in Toronto’s urban political economy. Theatre Passe Muraille could only purchase 16 Ryerson Avenue because manufacturing industry was abandoning the downtown core. (McKinnie 79)

The resulting changes in spatial organization affected the company’s labour and artistic approach and practice. Whereas it had previously employed transience as a means of articulating and embodying the absence of walls and physical barriers, after purchasing the building, the company understood its artistic “flexibility to be the ease with which a single place could be used” (McKinnie 83). The previous limitations of rentals, in terms of a lack of control over spaces and how they could be transformed for a production, were overcome through property ownership. However, new obstacles arose regarding the limitations and implications of permanence (McKinnie 83). It is also important to note that there were significant attempts to maintain the artistic approach originally designated within the theatre’s name. As Wallace argues, even after purchasing the factory, the theatre’s investment in rejecting boundaries between inside and outside and between performers and audiences “survived the move; indeed, Garrard’s demand for a theatre without walls should be regarded as a figurative, not a literal, direction” (74). Interestingly, the refusal to maintain a binary of inside and outside, audience and spectator is furthered through d’bi.young anitafrica’s performance in the space.

\textsuperscript{34} The line between “alternative” and “traditional” theatre is not always clear, and these cannot be thought of as absolute or static categories. In this context, alternative theatre refers to companies that aimed to move away from conservative theatrical practice and to create art that advanced theatre with a focus on exploration and experimentation.
The Production: She Mami Wata and the Pussy Witch Hunt

*She Mami Wata* and the Pussy Witch Hunt addresses issues of queer sexuality more overtly in its content and storyline than either of antiafríka’s other two *Orisha* productions. What is interesting to me about the production is, once again, the opening sequence, which differs from the first work’s opening, but still blurs the distinction between inside and outside the theatre space. The production begins outside, with the audience lining up on the sidewalk in front of the Backspace theatre. After a short wait in line outside, the audience sees d’bi.young antiafríka, as a church greeter, come out onto the street with fellow performer Amina Alfred. She engages in conversation with the audience outside of the theatre space, on the street. Here, the performance is brought directly into the outside space, unlike the previous production. The audience’s movement is not what transforms its orientation, but instead it is the presence of the performers on the street that complicates simplistic and passive perception of space and place. The welcoming of the audience outside the space is performative—it does something. A strict and fixed binary between outside / inside and actor / spectator is shown to be false and illusory. Though the structure of the play and the format of the script do seem, at first, to employ something more akin to the dominant conception of a placeless stage, the opening sequence destabilizes a simplistic engagement with the physical space and represented place. The performers are not simply welcoming the audience into the theatre, but inviting members to bring the city in with them, pointing to diaspora and difference, rather than a simple journey to another place on stage. Once the audience—newly transformed into a congregation—enters the doors of Theatre Passe Muraille, members are guided to their seats and sit down.

Beginning the performance on the street has particular spatial implications in terms of the relationship between audience and performer. Richard Schechner discusses the differing environmental expectations on the street in his reflections on the six axioms of Environmental

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35 The Yorùbá myths associated with Mami Wata are recited and retold in this performance, as the powerful spirit of womanhood is conveyed through each of the characters’ narratives. The strength of the water as creator is expressed through the tale of protagonist Niki’s conception and origin story. Within Yorùbá culture, Mami Wata (or Maame Water) exists in the waters and is incredibly respected for her powers. She is sometimes illustrated through mermaid imagery with a snake, and associated with the colour blue. Mami Wata is significant to a Black diasporic experience; as Henry John Drewal writes, “The countless millions of enslaved Africans who were torn from their homeland and forcibly carried across the Atlantic between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries as part of this ‘trade’ brought with them their beliefs, practices, and arts honoring Mami Wata and other ancestral deities. Reestablished, revisualized, and revitalized in diaspora” (60–61).
Theatre. He writes of interactions on the street that “[m]ovement and the exchange of space mark everyday life. Street demonstrations are a special form of street life involving keen theatrical sense. [The] ever-increasing use of outdoor public space for rehearsed activities ranging from demonstrations to street entertainers is having an impact on indoor theater” (Schechner xxix-xxx). The use of outdoor space not only brings the performance outside, but also transforms the audience into performers by allowing them to share the same space as the actors at the top of the production. In an online review of the production, Albert Williams conveyed his experience of *She Mami Wata* and wrote:

> The opening scene added so much to the whole experience for me. Starting outside the theatre and being led in by Sister Kizzie [played by anitafrika]. It set you in the right frame of mind to give of yourself to the play which worked because we [the audience] were another character. It was a refreshing experience. . . . (Williams)

The opening scene makes audiences aware of their surroundings as the performance comes to them—in their streets, in their space, outside of the theatre. The transformation from individual to spectator, perhaps, in this instance, is never completed. Theatrical convention is disrupted. We do not pass the threshold and transform; rather, it is the performers who pass the threshold and invite us to engage the production more actively, as insiders to the experience, literally still standing on the outside.

The manifestations and representations of place in the performance are inextricable from experiences and articulations of diaspora. The emphasis on space and place in this work, and in much of anitafrika’s extensive performance and writing history, is undeniable. She notes the complexity of her own relationship to space and the diaspora:

> Whether we’re talking about toronto, montreal, south africa, jamaica, as an individual I’ve got to locate myself. there are parts of me that would be hard-pressed to survive in jamaica. there are parts of me that would be hard-pressed to survive in toronto. because that’s how complex we are. (Luhning 11)

Through her work she does not simplify these complexities, but allows them to sit with the audience. Bringing *She Mami Wata* onto the sidewalk of Toronto is a subtle way in which to remind us, as the audience, of our locale. Rather than the audience being taken on a journey to Jamaica, the insertion of the opening segment into the street brings the diasporic aesthetic to light—we are in Toronto, and bringing all of those spatial dynamics and baggage with us into the
theatre.

Unlike *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage*, the second installment of the trilogy has a much more conventional linear narrative. Though it differs from *Esu* in significant ways, it continues to explore ritual and tradition through the Yorùbá-Ifa Orishas. As the synopsis explains:

*She Mami Wata* is anitafrika’s continued exploration of divinity, activism and the Black diaspora through the Yorùbá-Ifa Orishas: Ochun (river goddess of childbirth and erotic love), Yemoja (mother goddess of the sea), and Oya (goddess who defends and protects womxn). (anitafrika “The Orisha Trilogy”)

Just as there are spirits on the land, so, too, according to Yorùbá tradition, there are spirits in the rivers and seas (Zauditu-Selassie 383). Ochun (also called Osun) is a healer through water, a goddess of fertility (Awolalu 47), beauty, and “the orisa of culture and fresh water, and keeper of his secrets” (Hunter 210). Ochun appears on stage through Amina Alfred’s performance, first as “Sister Ochun” in the church and then as “DJ Ochun” in the strip club. The goddesses who appear and are referenced in the production are especially significant to diasporic Black women. As Kidogo Kennedy explains, myths are powerful and have the capacity to heal (364): “Without mythology, ‘Black’ women in America have no way to combat the negative invention of ‘Black’ as it is imagined in the Eurocentric eyes of the western world” (364).

About twenty-five minutes into the production, “Jamaica’s finest, Niki Niki” reappears on the stage, a pole dancer in a Jamaican club. After calling for louder applause from the audience, Alfred announces that Niki’s audience is from Toronto. The direct reference to the audience resituates spectators in their own bodies and surroundings. Despite a statement that they are watching a performance in Jamaica, audience members are reminded of their own physical place in Toronto. We are simultaneously whisked away from the theatre to a Jamaica represented on stage, and at the same time grounded in diaspora—a moment in which the inside and outside are productively experienced together. The placeless stage—cleared of the geographical locale—is renegotiated in this instance. The city of Toronto is referenced, repositioning audience members within their own bodies. “I hear Toronto is cold, true? I hear some ‘yes’ and some ‘no,’” Alfred states, “Somebody want a winter hat to go back to Toronto? There, that’s your winter hat” she says, as she throws a bra into the audience. The repeated reference to “Toronto” is significant, not only to remind audiences of their position in the theatre, but also because it
announces difference. Throughout this sequence, African diasporic experiences and aesthetics are declared. The sequence does not simply engage the audience and break the fourth wall, but does so within a spatial context. The audience is reminded of its present locale, and its views and perception of the narrative are contextualized through this framing.

Landscape and place are essential to this production, as well as to the others in the trilogy, in distinct ways. As anitafrika notes:

Each play is set in a different landscape. *Esu Crossing* is set in the past aboard a slave ship in The Atlantic Ocean, *She Mami Wata* is set in present-day Jamaica in a strip club and church, and *Bleeders* is set in future Ontario in the core of the earth. The landscapes reinterpret the triangular journey of Black folks, voyaging from Africa to the Caribbean to North America under the influence and protection of The Orishas. . . . [T]he entire trilogy is drawing attention to the intersectionality of all issues of oppression.

(HyeMusings)

In *She Mami Wata*, anitafrika complicates a singular narrative of homophobia or racism, demonstrating how privilege and oppression are experienced simultaneously. Rather than constructing a production that frames homophobia in Jamaica in simplistic terms as “Other,” primitive, or anti-progressive, anitafrika asks her audiences to contextualize experiences of homophobia there with diasporic experiences of racism, homophobia, and misogyny in Canada. By bringing the outside of the theatre in with the audience, audience members are implicitly asked to acknowledge the lens through which they view the performance. Such an approach refuses white homonationalist engagement with African and Caribbean countries as deprived, violent, and unsafe.

*Bleeders* (or *Lukumi*): Activating the Outside Inside

The Opening

*We are in the lobby of the Theatre Centre. Upstairs, on the second floor. I cannot help but think that perhaps we should be outside. We are not allowed entry into the theatre. We wait in the lobby. And then, the repeated sounds of the cast’s chants enter the space: “Digging digging digging digging digging.” They enter the space with signs protesting a nuclear power plant, demanding safe water. A line of performers weaves through the lobby. As they continue to chant, an abrupt shift marks a change in circumstance: The invisible bodies of violent police force the protestors*
to the ground. They respond and yell as they perform their own detainment. The environment is in danger. Our water is polluted. We are in danger. We enter the theatre space. Time passes as we walk over the threshold. We are escorted into our futures.

The workshop production of Bleeders, staged at the 2016 SummerWorks Festival, was located in the Theatre Centre, a repurposed space in the gentrified west end of Toronto. Bleeders is set in a future in which the Pickering Nuclear Plant has exploded, causing mass destruction, infertility, and the establishment of an oppressive new world order—frighteningly reflecting recent political events in North America—enforced by the “One World Army.” As a result of the dangerous ecological impact, “a group of Black womxn” unite and form a council that will work to resist and combat state oppression and the destruction of the earth. “The bleeders,” the women who still bleed, may be able to save our world, if the protagonist, Lukumi, succeeds on a vision quest eight layers below the earth to reach The Ancestor Tree. Each primary character in the production takes on the role of an animal. Lukumi, and through her, the audience, gains insight into the demise of the earth and human accountability through her interactions with one animal at each layer below the earth’s surface.

Though the opening of Bleeders takes place within the theatre building itself, in the lobby, the spatial movement and accompanying shift in temporal orientation has a direct impact on how spectators engage the production. There is a sense that the space created and represented is everyplace and anyplace, but at the same time, through its opening, it is distinctly situated as this place—demonstrating not a universalization of experience, but the global impact of climate

36 In the following chapter, focused on Jess Dobkin’s The Magic Hour, I explore more fully the history of The Theatre Centre, with a particular focus on the ways in which theatre spaces can act as tools for erasure and gentrification, changing space and place through their placement and dislocating and disorienting poor communities that had previously used the space. I choose to unmap the theatre in the next chapter, rather than here, because Dobkin’s The Magic Hour was developed in the space over a three-year period.

37 While the opening of this particular workshop performance is significant to my discussion of placefullness, the 2017 staged reading at Watah Theatre and the final production at Tarragon Theatre in October 2017 had significantly different opening sequences. In the staged reading, the play began with audio recordings from Donald Trump’s presidential election. While Lukumi has not had a full staged production since these changes, it is clear from the public staged reading that the political events that have transpired since the original SummerWorks production of Bleeders play a large role in shaping the development of the production, its direction, form, and content. The full production of Lukumi was mounted at the Tarragon Theatre in October 2017. As audiences entered the theatre space, Lukumi (now played by d’bi young.anitafrika) and Esu (a character not present in the previous iterations of the production) were already on stage, rhythmically moving to live music being played at the side of the stage. While the plot of the production was expanded upon, and the opening no longer took place in the lobby, the focus on women-led revolution persisted in the new iteration.
change. While the opening of *Bleeders* in the lobby of the Theatre Centre directly refers to the Pickering Nuclear Plant, just outside of Toronto, the remainder of the production, which takes place inside the theatre, seems less situated within a particular geography. This lack of specificity might speak to the efficacy of placelessness, as theorized by Chaudhuri. I argue, however, that this utility is further developed and complicated through the emphasis on place in the trilogy as a whole and the blurring of boundaries between spectator and performer in the opening sequence in the lobby.

In this futuristic dub-opera—a form emerging from radical Jamaican traditions of dub theatre and dub poetry—women are in control of the revolution. The woman-centred plot of *Bleeders* is in and of itself a spatial one. As she said of her other works, anitafrika desires to “comment on the status of women in society, the status of women in general, the status of Black women, more specifically, the status of working class women and what happens to them in the system” (Luhning 12). This sentiment can certainly be seen in her construction of womanhood and struggle in *Bleeders*, but the strength and ability to overcome hardship is even more present. A focus on Black women in her performances “recover[s] mythical female figures from African and African-diasporic traditions” (Simpson 351). anitafrika’s emphasis on women forebears and matriarchal leaders provides a means through which to tell stories essential to the creation of diasporic histories and communities, influencing both the constructed archive of queer dub-opera performance and the futures we are capable of imagining.

The Production: *Bleeders*

As a part of the *Orisha Trilogy, Bleeders*, alongside the other two productions, follows a tradition of activism and resistance engaged through Yorùbá traditions in performance. Joni L. Jones explains that in the diaspora, Yorùbá practitioners experience their spiritual practice as a “counterhegemonic political strategy” (325) that “reflect[s] a warrior spirit that is essential for survival. In the diaspora, such a spirit [is] required in order to brace against oppression, to retain cultural and spiritual sanctity, and to perpetuate tradition” (325). Jones argues that such a practice is in itself a means of resisting domination in the diaspora. *Bleeders* continues this resistance, demonstrating how connections with ancestry and spirituality are not only part of the struggle against white colonialism, but also essential to human beings’ survival. The plot of the production and connections between the present and the future draw linkages among the demise
of the environment, colonialism, and anti-Black racism that hold spectators accountable to the
dynamics of space by confronting the power and privilege necessary to travel through it safely.

The workshop production of Bleeders begins outside the theatre space, in the lobby of the
Theatre Centre. It is significant that this introduction outside the performance space takes place
in a different temporal reality from the rest of the production. The cast enters the room in a line,
singing, “Digging, digging, digging,” and some of the key themes of the production immediately
come to the surface. They sing, “Reaping the blood of mother nature, sterilizing the womb,
mining the minerals, poisoning the water, digging digging, digging.” The gendered
focus of the play, with the women’s council working to save and protect the earth, while very
much drawing on notions of womanhood as connected to reproduction, goes beyond anatomy
and sex. It is clear from these opening moments that anitafrica’s notion of womanhood has much
to do with “mother nature” and little to do with a limited definition of what makes a woman.
Arguably, the connection between womanhood and reproduction is problematic, as it assumes
similar experiences of bodies and anatomy shared between women, and seems to disqualify and
exclude women who do not have vulvas or uteruses from the category “woman.” This reading of
womanhood is, however, complicated both by the presence of non-binary and gender non-
conforming performers in the cast, and by the protagonist and ultimate saviour’s impregnation at
the end of the production. Her fertility and conception do not rely on intercourse or insemination,
but on her successful journey to learn from her ancestors. In this way, normalized reproduction
and conceptions of womanhood are queered and destabilized. If Lukumi’s fertility is not
premised on her ability to reproduce through insemination, then the Bleeders in the future do not
embody womanhood in the same way humans do now.

After entering the lobby, the line of performers’ bodies transforms into a rallying call.
They pick up protest signs: “Stop Pickering Power Plant!” “Shut Them Down!” “Stop Polluting
Our Water!” The protesters begin to take up space, weaving through the audience and forming a
circle, constantly in motion. They are rallying against the Pickering Nuclear Plant and for a safer
environment, for access to clean water, and for safe living conditions. There is something very
familiar about the events that unfold. The chants and movements mirror those one would see in
Toronto’s activist community. It feels very much like it should take place outside of the theatre.
These political actions do not require a stage, but a street; not an audience, but activists. In these
moments, it feels as though such a transformation occurs, and Unwin’s notion of “crossing the
“threshold” is once again complicated. The separation between actor and spectator seems to dissipate as we share space together. It is as though the spectators are implicated in the protest. They chant as they walk: “Hey Hey! Ho Ho! Pickering Nuclear has got to go!” After several moments, a shift occurs in the room. The cast members fall to the ground. Signs are ripped from their grasp and they are detained by unseen, but easily imagined, police forces. This violence seems to connect this production with the others in the trilogy—a clear comment on how state power operates and controls Black bodies. There is something very present about this experience in the context of the Western political climate and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Indeed, the play itself draws explicit connections to current political and social concerns. As anitafrika’s website explains, *Bleeders* is about “The descendants of the Black Lives Matter movement [who] have created a matriarchy in the mountains (anitafrika, “The Orisha Trilogy”). This narrative blurs the separation between present and future, fictional space and reality. In so doing, the production fills the place represented on stage with the present. Rather than dislocating the performance, such integration brings us into the work and calls for accountability. Organizers of Black Lives Matter Toronto were present both nights I attended the play during the SummerWorks Festival. The violence against Black bodies in this opening sequence connects the silencing and displacement of Black voices and bodies to the destruction of the earth and the impact of climate change. Demonstrating the intersections of gendered and racialized violence with the corporatization of the planet, *Bleeders* effectively portrays the intricate and complex consequences of white supremacy, oppression, and racism.

The lack of distinction between performer and audience in the lobby situates spectators in an in-between space, where, I argue, placefullness is most fully engaged and embodied. We know, as theatregoers, that we are not yet bound by the conventions of a typical theatre experience. We are aware of our surroundings and placed within the city. And yet we are also captivated by performance, simultaneously watching as outsiders and present as insiders to a lived experience of resistance. Such staging promotes reflexive spectatorship, which is carried into the theatre as the show commences. This transformation (even if it is only momentary) invites audiences into the space of activism, an invitation that brings with it the possibility and promise of agency and empowerment. It has a visceral and embodied impact, facilitated not only by sharing space, but also by movement within that space. Following this sequence, the performers enter the stage space and audiences are welcomed to follow them through the open
doors. I argue that this transformation situates audiences within their own space in the city—some are familiar with these forms of activism, oriented through protest chants and singing, while others are disoriented. We may complicate this otherwise-simplistic binary and notice that regardless, the inclusion of the audience, as participatory (though voiceless) members of the protest, is almost a charge against us and a call to agentive action: *You are with us. You are one of us. Be with us. You are witness: Do something.* Through direct address, as will be discussed, the audience becomes a part not only of the production, but of the implications of climate change in the real world—particularly in regard to equity, visibility, and marginalization. The spatial shift from outside in the lobby into the theatre space is significant—it changes the audience members’ orientation within the stage space.

Throughout the remainder of the performance, much of the guidance that the protagonist, Lukumi, receives on her vision quest seems to be directed at the spectators as much as the characters: “Climate change is coming for you!” chants Coyote, played by Ravyn Wngz. She sings, “Change your ways—we are living in the final days.” It is as if this call is intended to jolt spectators from a disconnected practice of spectatorship to one of accountability. Walcott discusses Sylvia Wynter’s argument in “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman’,” and writes that “Black feminist works occupy the in-between, they re-theorize a universality that shifts us outside the discourse of ontology to dialogues concerning actions/practices and what those practices mean for the continuation of human life” (*Black Like Who 79*). It is by emphasizing the audience’s place within the theatre, and its orientation in space, through the shaping of the in-between space, that audience members are able to engage their place within the place of the performance and be accountable for participating in destruction and revolution.

**Temporality**

*The way to deal with the asymmetries and violent frenzies that mark the present is not to forget the future. The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough*

— José Esteban Muñoz

*We choose not to choose the child, as image of the imaginary past or identificatory link to the*
symbolic future; we would bury the subject in the tomb that waits in the hollow of the signifier and pronounce at last the words we are condemned from the outset for having said anyway: that we are the advocates of abortion; that the child as figure of futurity must die; that we have seen the future and it’s every bit as lethal as the past; and thus what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us, is our willingness to insist intransitively: to insist that the future stops here.

– Lee Edelman

Walcott argues that spatiality and temporality are “crucial to both Black meaning and meanings of Black. This migratory nature of ‘Black meaning,’ of ‘Black practices’ that is, brings with it a specific historicity” (Black Like Who 78). I have begun to address the performance of space in relation to time throughout my analysis of the productions in this chapter. Temporal representations of the past, present, and future influence each of the productions in the Orisha trilogy in distinct ways, but are most apparent and essential in this production of Bleeders. Bleeders is described as an “An Afro-futurist dub-opera” (SummerWorks, “Bleeders”). The temporal orientation within a future world builds the emphasis on time in the larger themes of the trilogy. In Bleeders, the opening of the production in the lobby seems to take place in the present moment. However, as audiences enter the stage space, they also enter a time when the “bleeders bleed no more.” Just as the spatial specificity of the opening is broadened with the movement into the theatre, so too the temporal period in which the production takes place is blurred. The production is not simply about protecting and valuing space and place and the effects of climate change, but also about the relationship between these spaces and times. In the following chapter, I explore more fully the relationship between spatiality and temporality in order to examine how placefullness is influenced and changed by representations of time. While the following chapter argues that a refusal to rush through performance may be conceived of as a radical reclamation of space, here, I assert that the ability to rush toward an unforeseen future in and of itself might necessitate the privilege of being bestowed the promise to a future. What of those bodies and peoples who are not granted a future within the imagined utopic white colonial

38 On d’bi.young anitafrika’s website, the trilogy is described as “tak[ing] us on a journey across the past, present, and future while reinterpreting the triangular journey of Black folks, voyaging from Africa to the Caribbean to North America under the influence and protection of The Orishas” (“The Orisha Trilogy”). All three productions grapple with the intersections of past, present, and future, a blurring of temporal distinction, which, I argue in the following chapter, productively queers time in order to shift normative expectations of place and space.
cisgender heteropatriarchy? For those whose futures were never meant to be, rushing toward it complicates my own theories of extending time as resistance. In Bleeders, the insistence on the strength and resiliency of the future generations of Black Lives Matter activists demonstrates the urgent insistence on existence.

The opening of the production, which takes place in the present, rapidly speeds toward an unknown future as the audience enters the theatre space. Though predicated on the destruction of the planet, and the loss of human safety and ecologies, the presence of the all-Black cast in this future world is significant. It unapologetically makes space for Black women’s bodies in the future, as a swelling of safety, as warriors for the planet, and indeed as the future hope of all humanity. The shift in time ensures that the placefull articulation of queer Black women, staged in the lobby of the Theatre Centre, is not static or atemporal. On the contrary, it expands time to a dystopic future in which these women are the source and embodiment of presence and persistence. Muñoz’s response to Lee Edelman’s anti-relational work No Future is valuable to this discussion. Muñoz explains that Edelman’s argument is a polemic that asserts a need to reject futurity “and embrace a certain negation endemic to our abjection within the symbolic” (Cruising Utopia 91). However, this refusal to invest in reproductive futures is founded upon the assumption of a universal promise for tomorrow—an already neutralized and assumed-equitable vision of what the conception of “future” may be. Edelman erases the ways in which race and other marginalized experiences inform the relationship between temporality and queerness. As Muñoz writes:

Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity. Although Edelman does indicate that the future of the child as futurity is different from the future of actual children, his framing accepts and reproduces this monolithic figure of the child that is indeed always already white. (Cruising Utopia 95)

The promise of the future, which Edelman seems happy to refuse, is one that is not offered to others. For those Black and Indigenous women who remain and continue to be incarcerated, murdered, and missing, the future is not something to refuse, but to demand. Even in a dystopic future in which the earth is in its most vulnerable state, the empowering vision of Black queer women enacting change throughout the world through their struggle is a necessary radical feminist resistance across place and space. As Muñoz asserts, if white reproductive futurity is “winning,” there is “all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable
us to glimpse another time and place: a ‘not-yet’ where queer youth of colour actually get to grow up” (*Cruising Utopia* 96). Indeed, while the performance’s heartbreaking conclusion, in which many of the women’s council are murdered by the One World Army, stages a kind of hopelessness, in the final moment on stage, the cries of Lukumi’s child, gifted to her by her ancestors, break the silence of death. We see here how Muñoz’s conception of futurity is embodied in the articulation of future on stage.

Immediately following the chilling sound of the Lukumi’s baby’s cries, the cast begins to sing, “Black lives matter, matter.” In these last moments, the audience is again brought back to its place in the present. The connection between staged place and the theatre, future and present, is made yet more evident. The efforts of the women on the council, though resulting in their own deaths, secure a new generation. The violence staged at the conclusion of the play is only represented through a disembodied voice and the women falling to the ground. The oppressor is not given physical space on stage. The future, though dark, promises existence among chaos. This dystopic future is not staged as a necessary fiction, but an almost inevitable potentiality, if the audience members do not “change their ways.” Placing the audience members within the activist assembly at the beginning of the production puts the onus on them to choose what comes next. The present moment in the lobby is experienced alongside a futuristic journey, in which the protagonist must visit her ancestral past in order to seek out human histories that will provide guidance toward a more hopeful future. There is a blurring of time that makes this production feel present and essential, pointing to the ways in which our histories are affecting our presents and our futures, and demanding presence.

**The Talk-Back**

Thus far, I have noted the significant ways in which the opening of each production in *The Orisha Trilogy* emphasizes, rather than erases, place, and subsequently how this influences the ways in which the plays are perceived and the diverse ways in which spectators are oriented within the space. However, beyond the openings and the particular moments in the plays that I have analyzed, each of the productions also shares a similar ending. At the conclusion of all of d’bi.young anitafrika’s productions, the cast remains on stage for a talk-back. anitafrika is resolute that this portion of the performance be included at the conclusion of each performance. Questions from spectators are not limited to the particular production, and the space is intended
to invite curious inquiries about the inspirations, processes, productions, and reactions that the cast has experienced. I want to think about this insistence on the talk-back as a placeful one that extends beyond the typical expectations in the theatre—while many productions have an evening with a talk-back, few seem to indulge audiences for every performance. Jill Dolan describes the talk-back, citing Richard Schechner, as an opportunity to engage in a “cool down,” through which the audience and actors can “relax and shift from the ‘ecstatic’ moment of performance back into the grooves of more prosaic life. Staying in that space can be a time of shared subjectivity” (qtd. in Dolan 50). This shared subjectivity offers an opportunity to extend one’s place in the theatre after the performance. Dolan further articulates that through this shared moment, performance has the capacity to bleed into everyday life (Dolan 50). Janna Goodwin notes that in a talk-back, the audience and theatre practitioner must take on active roles (321), through which the practitioner assists audiences in confronting multiple realities that exist beyond the surface of the performance, such as “the dynamics of power, place, and competing interests” (320). Goodwin explains that a productive talk-back or post-show session provides the facilitator with opportunities to tap into local structures of emotion, identity, and belief, [and] to help make those structures visible to participants, coordinating engagement in what John Dewey thought of as a crucial function of art: making the public aware of itself. (318)

In the trilogy, even if audiences were “taken away,” and able to experience the stage as mobile and placeless, this final movement reminds them of their place within the theatre and provides an opportunity to fill the empty space. It asks them to reflect, during every performance, on what they have experienced. Given the difficult and violent subject matter presented in *Esu Crossing the Middle Passage*, in addition to the collective talk-back, active listeners were available for audience members to speak to individually to process the story and the violence.

Perhaps not all talk-backs are necessarily placeful; however, the repetition of the talk-back event after every performance emphasizes reflexivity and creates the potential for dialogue within the performance space. Repetition, as I will discuss in the following two analysis chapters, has the capacity to engage audiences through its insistence on presence. Like Butler’s notion of performativity, it conditions behaviour through its reiteration. The repetition of the talk-back, particularly for audience members who had attended the other productions in the trilogy and thus
anticipated its inclusion, opens up the stage space to include audiences as participants and changes the way they perceive place in the performances. Repetition of the talk-back, in this way, functions as a spatial orientation device.

Conclusion

Racism and sexism are rife and rampant here . . . insisting that whiteness and white theatre epitomize a humanity that Africa, her children, and the rest of the world should emulate (while being excluded). Ironically, this humanity has been built on the backs of Black peoples, First Nations peoples, and people of colour, glued together by our blood. Well-funded Canadian theatre companies and institutions continue to reflect this unfortunate narrative with their choices of artistic directors, acting companies, administrative staff, and play productions, which routinely exclude or tokenize Black people.

– d’bi.young anitafrika

The capacity to erase space and place and strip them of meaning is a privileged position that enables the perpetuation of violent spatial reorganization and distribution. In the case of The Orisha Trilogy, when we erase place, we erase the reality of Blackness in the diaspora, and we erase the transience of the trilogy—a transience rooted in inequitable funding and support for Black queer women. Without an ongoing space in which to produce their work, Watah Theatre is yet another example of the impact of transient and precarious spaces on queer women’s performance. Due to a lack of funding, and the absence of an ongoing production space, d’bi.young anitafrika’s work must move to multiple theatre venues, a necessity that increases the amount of time and energy necessary for production, while limiting the amount of control an artist has over production choices, aesthetics, and scheduling. By drawing the audience outdoors, anitafrika implicitly points to the ways in which space is organized. We recognize space and place, and though we may not think back to the transience of queer women’s performance, certainly in this case we are drawn to think about Black diasporic queer experience in Canada. All of these issues and obstacles are interconnected. Trying to isolate the issue of transience for queer women’s performance from experiences of Blackness and diaspora is an impossible feat, because we lose the unique experiences that arise at the intersections.

In The Orisha Trilogy, anitafrika continually redraws and challenges maps of belonging. Resisting the immobility of the Black woman’s body, the performances physically move from
location to location, defying boundaries of possibility and critiquing essential and universalized preconceptions of Black womanhood. The productions do not simply resist spatial limitations, but also temporal ones. The shifts in temporal period in all three of anitafríka’s productions are significant in terms of how place is perceived. Rewriting Blackness into the future potentialities of performance and human existence, the trilogy resists the spatial precarity that has persisted through the past, present, and imagined future. Articulating Black diasporic place as one of belonging and struggle, and demanding insideness with contextualization, the productions force audiences to place themselves within a complex geography of performance. The blurring of the distinctions among past, present, and future demonstrate how our orientation within space is shaped through time and how space and place are both durational. In the following chapter, I continue to analyze this relationship and explore more fully how representations of time can make space for those who have little ongoing access to it. If transience characterizes queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performances, then the issue is not simply that they do not have space to produce their work, but that they do not have sufficient time within that space. Taking one’s time can thus be an act of spatial resistance
Chapter 6

The Lesbian Rush: Our Time in Space in *The Magic Hour*

Introduction: An Ending

In the final moments of Jess Dobkin’s 2017 solo performance *The Magic Hour*, we hear, at growing volumes, the upbeat sounds of pop music playing in the lobby. We have spent just over an hour in the theatre space watching Dobkin, a performance artist and theatre creator, unravel the story of her childhood trauma. Through episodic movements, she has tried and then tried again and again to tell us a story. We never seem to know exactly what it is she is trying to say. The narrative is jumbled. But the spectacle is *magic*. *The Magic Hour*, developed and produced at the Theatre Centre in Toronto, Ontario, is comprised of monologues, dance, and “tricks”—not quite the convincing illusions we might expect from a magic show, but nonetheless enthralling. Dobkin takes her time to try to tell us something; to remove us from the speedy pace of the everyday; to impart to us trauma and tragedy, humour and joy, and a sometimes-familiar sense of temporal disorientation. The music in the lobby grows louder. We hear Captain & Tennille’s well-known lyrics from 1975: “Love, love will keep us together . . . .” Dobkin moves from her place inside a circle of chairs where we, her audience, sit, and walks toward the theatre doors. Opening them, she motions for us to leave the theatre and return to the space from whence we came. We collect our things and get up to leave. The lobby has transformed during the course of the production. The walls are adorned with retro decorations, and there are tables with snacks and a bowl of punch. A record player sits on a shelf, with milk crates of curated vinyl. While the music continues to play, two small girls, dressed in clothing from the 1970s, dance beneath a giant revolving vulva disco ball. This is what Dobkin describes as “our final trick” (Dobkin). It is a soft ending, a choose-your-own-adventure, where you might eat, you might dance, or you might choose to leave the lobby and exit the performance, perhaps unsure whether it has truly finished.

I begin with an end because time in *The Magic Hour* is not quite linear. Dobkin moves among past, present, and future, embodying a gendered queer temporality and implicitly refusing what I refer to throughout this chapter as a “lesbian rush”—or the distinct ways in which women
might encounter queer temporality. In the context of the theatre industry, a lack of time and ongoing space allotted to queer women and lesbian performance, and the increased amount of labour necessary to tackle this dearth, is informed and shaped by the artists’ experiences as women and simultaneously by their experiences as queer subjects. They come in contact with queer temporality through the precarity of gender inequities. This chapter works to untangle the connections between temporality and spatiality in queer women’s work through an analysis of Toronto-based performance artist Jess Dobkin’s *The Magic Hour*. It specifically explores how the need to rush and experiences of rushing have spatial implications that can be combated through queer women’s performance. Alongside feminist and gendered theorization on time and temporality, I use queer temporality, a concept that denaturalizes the idea that there is an essential experience of time and universal objectives to attain in one’s lifetime. Rather than reclaiming the need to rush and finding a positive outlook on this temporal experience, I consider the negative sensation and implications of rushing the everyday and examine how theatre and performance art can function to combat the spatial and temporal effects of “the lesbian rush.” In so doing, I argue that performance becomes a performative means through which to confront and combat the rush critically—not just in the theatre, but in everyday experiences. Audiences and creators take the time spent in the theatre space with them when they leave a performance. I begin this chapter with an overview of my conception of “the lesbian rush,” and move to outlining the relationship between space and time, demonstrating the need to consider spatial inequities and placefullness alongside considerations of duration and experiences of time. The remainder of this chapter consists of my analysis of *The Magic Hour*. I apply these theorizations of time and space to the performance in order to explore how representations of time, and its intentional articulation as artifice that can be manipulated in performance, can subvert a naturalized compulsion to rush through space.

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39 I make an important distinction here between performance as staged entertainment—often, though not always, through role playing—and performativity, as something that “produces a series of effects” (Butler, “Your Behavior”) in our lived experiences.
In this articulation of a gendered queer temporality, I do not assume that gendered temporality and queer temporality are irreconcilably distinct or isolated concepts. They often bleed into each other. Yet each offers something distinct to the other. If we think of queer time as an interruption, as a refusal or inability to exist in tandem with the expectations of “straight time,” then we can conceive of the way in which women's gendered experiences of time, and the expectations of their time-use, might further complicate their disalignment with normative temporality. We can conceptualize of straight time as the presumed inherent and strictly linear conception of time, which ascribes particular milestones to our everyday experiences (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 25). Straight time, Halberstam explains, is directly connected to capitalist systems, which “produce [an] emotional and even physical response to different kinds of time: thus people feel guilty about leisure, frustrated by waiting, satisfied by punctuality and so on” (*In a Queer Time and Place* 7). Straight time, too, produces a present rush that latches on to the promise of productivity. Who is awarded time and seen as worthy of taking time directly correlates to who is valued. Sandra D’Urso notes, “A lack of time, resources, ‘rights’, public services, and/or space appears to be the guiding logic of austerity thinking” (40). The ability to succeed within a capitalist neoliberal paradigm is contingent upon who has time to spare. Those

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40 Several feminist theorists have noted how gender impacts experiences of time in relation to agency and leisure. Sara Ahmed notes that feminized work such as domestic and caring responsibilities often result in “the lack of time for oneself or for contemplation” (*Queer Phenomenology* 31). Pamela Odih argues that women’s “subordinate position in the public sphere, and their ascribed domestic responsibilities in the private sphere . . . inhibit their power to make decisions about their own time” (11). Carmen Sirianni and Cynthia Negrey argue that time can be structured through gender inequities and relations (59). Their study asserts that men’s and women’s experiences of market time and household labour time must be analyzed with a feminist lens, which takes into account social relations and gender expectations (61). Women can feel rushed because of the character of time and expected time-use, particularly in regard to quality of time spent, rather than quantity (Bittman and Wajcman 168). One of the reasons women experience time as rushed is because of assumptions or expectations that they will complete both paid labour and domestic and caring responsibilities. Where men’s leisure time is reported to be less interrupted, and uncontaminated by unpaid labour, women’s leisure time is “experienced as more harried [with] increased self-reported stress” (Bittman and Wajcman 185). If leisure is fragmented or interrupted for women, and they are forced to multi-task to complete their unpaid and paid labour, their experience of time in everyday life can feel more rushed (Bittman and Wajcman 172).

41 “A queer temporality,” Jack Halberstam asserts, “cannot exist in parallel to a normative heterosexual temporality” (Halberstam in Dinshaw et al. 182). Queer temporality reveals the ways in which temporal expectations are based on normative understandings of power and productivity. Queer lives are often experienced out of sync with normative heterosexual existence. Queer temporality points to feeling strange within the timeline ascribed to you in childhood. It challenges the false notion of a universal desire to follow social scripts.
with fewer resources and less support are forced to multitask and rush to achieve economic stability and perceived success.

I thus ground my discussion of the “lesbian rush” in queer and feminist theorizations of temporality, which demonstrate how the expectations of queer women’s time ultimately result in a different way of experiencing time and space from dominant Western heteropatriarchal conceptions of temporality. Heteronormative, gendered expectations of productivity, reproduction, and patriarchy are at the foundation of straight time. Just as straight time assumes invisible certain privileges of race and gender. As such, I am interested in reading the concept of queer temporality through gendered experiences of rushing to unpack what it means to feel obligated to rush when you already feel unstable within culturally ascribed temporal structures. How does a broad understanding of queer temporality specifically impact lesbian and queer women’s experience of space? And, most importantly to this chapter, how can such temporal orientations be combated through performance?

I use the term “rush” rather than “urgency” or “pacing” in this chapter because of what its double meaning might positively afford us: lesbian and queer women’s experiences can give us a rush. The excitement and urgency, the need and the determination, all work to give us a rush of emotion at the possibility for change and our involvement in it. We experience the rush of politics, the rush of killing joy, and the rush to “U-Haul” and share a bedroom with our lovers. Many of us love this rush. But the precarity of our activism and our lives, and the lack of support and resources we have access to as women, often cause us to be in a rush. Without the necessary artistic resources and spaces to work productively through our projects, queer and lesbian women must rush to do our creative projects, working harder and faster to get the job done. The politics of naturalization normalize rushing as if we should anticipate it and accept it. In daily urban life, rushing has become an expectation rather than an exception, particularly for marginalized peoples who have less of the income that allows them to slow down and take their time. Dobkin’s artistic practice reveals some of the complexities that result from this double sensation of a queer or lesbian rush, and the capacity to resist an ingrained inclination to rush as women and marginalized queer peoples.
The title of *The Magic Hour* makes clear that temporality is essential to the production. Directed by Stephen Lawson, the production runs approximately eighty-five minutes—making, even expanding, time, as *The Magic Hour* extends beyond the boundaries of time that are set in the production’s title. If rushing is a normalized gendered practice, a response to fewer resources available to queer women, and an inability to exist within the naturalized expectations of straight time, then this is one form of rebellion: taking time, moving slowly and intentionally to expand the duration of time beyond the limited amount allocated to women’s work in the theatre industry. For José Esteban Muñoz, performance can act “as a source for a critique of a limited and problematic straight time” (*Cruising Utopia* 83). Dobkin’s own position, as a lesbian woman, does not critique only straight time, but also implicitly the universalization of queer time. In taking her time both in the development process and in the staged production itself, Dobkin’s work illuminates how violent expectations to keep pace in order to succeed (or indeed, to survive) may be combated through performance.

*The Magic Hour* is a one-person performance that “explore[s] trauma and transformation. . . . The work presses the boundaries of what is deemed public and private, hidden and revealed, to make visible what is not seen” (“The Magic Hour”). The production’s repeated (arguably failed) attempts to tell its story, over and over again, refuse linearity and completion. It is not that one story or representation will ultimately be the “correct” articulation of the past or the future; rather, all of the many sequences are necessary to understand the way they impact our present moment in the theatre. In this chapter, I follow Dobkin’s lead. I tell a story about refusing to rush as queer women trying to grapple with our place in and our experiences of time. I tell the story of one performance over and over again: the story of a theatre; the story of gentrification; the story of an artist; the story of slowing down; the story of the past and future melting into the present; and the story of repetition, a refrain we keep coming back to—“Welcome. Thank you all for coming. I’m so glad you are all here.” The story of privilege. Each story I tell refuses to rush the narrative, cycling back to the beginning. I take a new perspective on what it means to refuse the lesbian rush, and take space for a little while longer.

Theorizing Space with Time

*We should not speak of the flow or passage of time, but of the flow or passage of space through time. It is not time that dies; it is the human body, which dies in time. Temporality is an
This chapter moves not only through space, but also time. The two are inextricably linked. I would be remiss to ignore the connections and influence of time on space throughout this study. The concept of placefullness, outlined in the previous chapters, is temporal as much as it is spatial. The concern I have with the conception of the stage space as placeless or as a theatrical no-place resides in its need to, at least temporarily, erase the space and place of the event, something that I argue is especially difficult for marginalized and oppressed peoples, whose bodies are always perceived as out of place in “normative” settings. Feeling out of place is directly connected to experiencing events as out of sync. As Muñoz maintains, conceptions of temporality that fail to consider experiences of marginalization (such as those related to race, class, and gender) implicitly assume a universal white gay cisgender subject who is “weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self or the here and now” (Crusing Utopia 94). Just as the erasure of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ spatial precarity is illuminated through placefullness, so, too, temporal expectations to rush in and out of those spaces can be illuminated through a performance’s expression of time.

As Jack Halberstam notes, “a ‘queer’ adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space” (In Queer Time and Place 6). Queering space and time influence not only how we theorize, but also how we exist and experience the world. Taking your time, like taking up space, necessitates certain privilege. Subverting the normalized expectations of temporality (how one is expected to relate to time) and the gendered duration of placefullness is one way in which to combat the invisibility and erasure of queer women’s spatial insecurity and transience. For example, refusing to move through space quickly resists transience (which precludes marginalized peoples from taking up long-term space) and increases visibility within space. It is not simply that performance necessitates space, but also that it necessitates space for a span of time. In For Space, Doreen Massey writes:

Time and space must be thought together: that this is not some mere rhetorical flourish, but that it influences how we think of both terms; that thinking of time
and space together does not mean they are identical . . . rather it means that the imagination of one will have repercussions . . . for the imagination of the other and that space and time are implicated in each other. (18)

Gendered experiences and expectations of place are affected by conceptualizations and embodiment of time in performance. Few of the theorists who investigate this subject matter approach theatre and temporality from both the standpoint of gendered temporality and queer temporality. I take these approaches together throughout my analysis in this chapter to explore the specific ways theatre space and place are experienced temporally for queer women artists.

I turn again to Ahmed’s queer phenomenology as a framework through which to investigate the temporal implications of spatial precarity in performance. In relation to how bodies are oriented within spaces, Ahmed writes:

If orientation is a matter of how we reside, or how we clear space that is familiar, then orientations also take time and require giving up time. Orientations allow us to take up space insofar as they take time. Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future. (Queer Phenomenology 20–21)

She extends her theory on the relationship between space and time by considering the conditions of arrival. Through an analysis of Husserl’s writing table, Ahmed argues that both our bodies and our perception are formed through how we are oriented in space—what is within reach and what is beyond our grasp (Queer Phenomenology 14). Our orientation in space is significant not only because it determines what we perceive and where we dwell in the moment, but also because it affects what we can reach in the future and simultaneously points to a past that determines what objects were within reach from the start and what we can anticipate in the future. Through her analysis, Ahmed asserts that illuminating the origin of one’s orientation shifts and reorients perception. The histories and experiences that enable some bodies to arrive already oriented within space are determined and naturalized over time. Her notion of

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42 Ahmed refers back to Husserl’s first volume of Ideas, which he begins by describing what is familiar to him from behind his writing table in his room. Ahmed asks her readers to consider how his perception of the space he is in and what objects are available to him to perceive and grasp are determined by his position in the room—though Husserl begins his discussion from his view behind the table, Ahmed points out that “what we can see in the first place depends on which way we are facing” (Queer Phenomenology 29), which facilitates the construction of a background and foreground—what is immediately perceived and what we turn toward (Queer Phenomenology 32). This too is a temporal orientation—how the table arrived and the conditions of its arrival are histories that shape both the space itself and the objects (such as the table) within it.
temporality, though forward-looking, enables us to look back in order to reactivate the past and to locate “other ways of gathering in time and space” (Queer Phenomenology 178). As Ahmed explains, looking back into the past is not a look back to what has been and is now out of reach. The past, rather, is active and influences how we orient ourselves in the now and toward a future. She asserts that “we look back, in other words, as a refusal to inherit, as a refusal that is a condition for the arrival of queer. To inherit the past in this world for queers would be to inherit one’s own disappearance” (Queer Phenomenology 178). The act of refusal is not, for Ahmed, a dead end; instead, it introduces “the condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world” (Queer Phenomenology 178). A look back to the past from the present introduces “the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths . . . so, in looking back we also look a different way. . . . Looking back is what keeps open the possibility of going astray” (Queer Phenomenology 178). The relationship drawn between orientation and temporality—the past, present, and future of how bodies inhabit space and place—are essential to my analysis of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance. This is particularly so because the ways in which women and non-binary artists are permitted access to space is limited by its transience—the disorientation and instability are predicated upon the inability to remain in a single venue for extended periods, pointing to an absence of historical orientation and an inability to imagine a stable positionality within the space for the future. This limited longevity directly correlates to the issue of spatial precarity and transience. A lack of resources and ongoing space for development and production mean that marginalized artists receive less time in a single venue, which results in less visibility and ultimately less likelihood that their work will be documented and historicized.

To take space necessitates the managing or manipulation of time, present, past, and future. This connection between space and time, particularly as they relate to performance and marginalization, demonstrates that a lack of ongoing and secure space will have temporal and spatial consequences. Just as queer women and non-binary artists are expected to complete projects in less space than others, they must accordingly create those projects with less support, money, and time. Thus, while some queer women and non-binary artists might experience the rush of the rush, the need to rush illustrates the ways in which certain lives, times, and experiences are devalued.
“I’ve never had that before”: This is a Story about an Artist

Jess Dobkin developed and produced *The Magic Hour* over a three-year period at Toronto’s Theatre Centre through their residency program. Although her performances have received many accolades and maintain a strong following, like many women in the arts, her practice has been primarily nomadic and transient. She explains: “[This] was the very first time I had that much time in a space. And to have [that much] technical support from the theatre—I’ve never had that before” (Dobkin). In contrast to d’bi.young anitafrika’s fight to maintain Watah Theatre’s studio space, performance artist and creator Dobkin’s practice is primarily transient and nomadic. Before Dobkin secured her residency to develop and produce *The Magic Hour*, no major theatre had ever programmed a full-length production of her work as part of an annual season. The same systemic oppressions that preclude marginalized queer women artists from obtaining long-term or steady use of theatre spaces influence their temporal experiences and expectations regarding their time.

Limited access to time and space for Dobkin’s development process throughout her career demonstrates the practical ways in which lesbian women experience a sense of rushing due to a lack of development time in a resident or ongoing physical space. Since the 1990s, Dobkin’s performances and public interventions have had a significant impact on the landscape and histories of queer and lesbian theatre and performance in Canada and the United States, questioning constructions of womanhood, sexuality, and temporality in her very personal performances. Her piece entitled *Being Green* (2009) sees Dobkin, painted entirely green, reproduce the classic Kermit the Frog song, as she is fisted by a drag-king Jim Henson played by Lex Vaughn; *How Many Performance Artists Does it Take to Change a Light Bulb?* (2015) grapples with personal narratives and temporality as Dobkin and forty volunteer documenters explore reproduction, documentation, and the nature of performance in this four-hour piece. *The Artists’ Newsstand* (2015–2016), the most significant work to this discussion of space and transience, repurposed the snack kiosk at Chester Subway Station in Toronto to sell artistic work, mount installations, and stage the occasional performance.43

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43 *The Artists’ Newsstand* is another significant example of a placefull artistic endeavour, worthy of a much more in-depth exploration. While taking up space in a secure location, the newsstand exists in a specific transitory temporal reality. Originally conceived of as a temporary one-year installation, the short-lived *Newsstand* implicitly
In 2010, Dobkin came closest to securing a main-stage slot in a major theatre’s season, as she prepared to stage her first ever full-length production, a one-person show entitled *Everything I’ve Got*, in which, as Moynan King aptly notes, Dobkin is “literally giving us ‘everything she’s got,’ a powerful exploration of the artist’s lived experience of ‘too many ideas and not enough time’” (King, “Foster Children” 200). King argues that in its attempt to give us “everything” in one shot, the performance is an expression of “the increasingly scarce resources of time and space” available to queer women (King, “Foster Children” 200). *Everything I’ve Got* was scheduled for main-stage production at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in 2010, the largest and longest-running queer theatre in the world. However, the performance was switched to a festival slot at the Rhubarb! Festival at the last minute (King, “Foster Children” 200). The repositioning of the production from main stage programming to the festival circuit is indicative of the devaluation of lesbians’ and queer women’s work in mainstream theatre. Although festival productions and one-off events provide opportunities for performance, they also limit the development process and offer fewer resources for production, as well as less publicity, and less likelihood of being included in theatre archives. Those included in festivals and one-off events are invited into an experience as guests; their presence on stage is because of an extended invitation, not equitable inclusion. The last-minute decision to move *Everything I’ve Got* to the Rhubarb! Festival and the production’s subsequent absence from main-stage programming are both spatially and temporally significant. Ironically, the programming change demonstrates the very lack of time and space for queer women’s artistic creation that sparked the development of the production.

shifts the static and ongoing space of the station, shifting the landscape only temporarily and leaving little trace but memories and ephemera in its wake. Not only is it situated in a liminal space, in between stations, but also in a liminal temporal state—with a promise of one-ear of programming, *Newsstand* was an experiment in queer space-making. Like the other works considered throughout this research, the kiosk successfully shifted the landscape through a spatial disruption. By taking up space for theatrical performance within what is otherwise currently considered a “straight” space, the project not only created a physical space for queer women, but also challenged the assumed neutrality and universality of mainstreamed heterosexual space.
Dobkin explained that when she started at the Theatre Centre, she did not know that the residency would actually culminate in a full-length production. The structure of the program was such that the length, structure, and support are dependent on what the artists and the work need:

That is the ethos there. It wasn’t like “this is a three year residency. . . . There are a number of resident projects and each project is on its own path. . . . I don’t think it was until I was about two and a half years in that I realized that the Theatre Centre planned to present this thing. . . . I have been amazed by the amount of support I received. (Dobkin)

One particular spatial experience that may have influenced the development of the work and the way Dobkin related to the space in the Theatre Centre was the timing of the project, which coincided with the physical development of the Theatre Centre space. Dobkin explains,

I felt like my project was following alongside the Theatre Centre’s journey in that building. When I started and went to that [residency] information session, it was at a pop-up down the street, and during my first residency period, they hadn’t even moved into the current building. I feel like as I have been developing this work, the Theatre Centre has moved into their new home that then became the home for this piece. (Dobkin)

In securing the three-year residency at the Theatre Centre, after a long history of transience and failure to secure a full run for her previous production, Dobkin was able to take her time to explore her stories, to work with consultants on ritual, and experiment with the space and her use of it.

“A Colonizing Arm”: This is a Story about Gentrification

The location of the Theatre Centre complicates a simplistic reading of place and space in relation to performance. Heather E. McLean explores the contradictory ways in which art can simultaneously assist in community building and also perpetuate gentrification and displace low-income, racialized, and/or otherwise marginalized populations in the area. McLean writes,

Researchers in both critical urban and performance studies trace the racialized and classed inequalities that elite creative city programming entrenches (Peck, 2005; Grundy and Boudreau, 2008; Parker, 2008; Catungal and Leslie, 2009a; Peck, 2011). In some cases,

44 See the following section on the story of gentrification for a specific consideration of the theatre’s location.
artists and arts organizations are complicit in staging culture-led regeneration initiatives that promote third-wave gentrification” (2157)

There has been ample research over the last forty years to examine the significant role art plays in changing and gentrifying urban low-income and racialized neighbourhoods.\(^\text{45}\) Shaughnessy notes the role that performance plays in displacing residents in a discussion of gentrification and the arts industry, noting that regeneration projects can increase property prices and cause the subsequent displacement of poor people residing in the area (104). This relationship is complex, particularly when artistic work functions to benefit marginalized populations.

The Theatre Centre itself makes notable efforts to create inclusive spaces that work toward equitable standards and treatment, both in the theatre industry and the city more broadly. In September 2016, the Centre announced that it was working to extend the free ticket program for Syrian refugees—an offer that was supported with the help of CultureLink (Ngabo). The pilot program, called The Newcomer Initiative, also aimed to train Syrian newcomers in café management, barista skills, and customer service—with the potential to possibly shadow artistic practitioners at the Centre. The work is admirable and points to the important contributions the theatre is capable of making. However, at the same time, the fact that the theatre is in the gentrifying Parkdale area makes it at least partly responsible for the displacement of lower-income families, whether explicitly or not. Perhaps the most direct way in which the space perpetuated and actively participated in the gentrification of the area was through its fundraising campaign and renovations, which were part of efforts to transform the neighbourhood. Real estate companies and developers had a vested interest in an upscale theatre taking over one of the buildings on Queen West. This process of campaigning and fundraising through governmental and private investors interested in transforming communities is common. Developers and investors often use artists’ cultural capital to change the environment and value of a neighbourhood (Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch 4). As Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch explain, “A great deal of case study work demonstrates that individual artists, artistic businesses, and artistic spaces (e.g. small galleries, theaters, music venues, and art studios) function as a

\(^{45}\) See Ley (1986); Ray (2017); Evan (2003); Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch (2014); Catungal and Leslie (2009); Freeman and Braconi (2004); Deutsche and Ryan (1984); and Shaughnessy (2012).
‘colonizing arm’ that helps to create the initial conditions that spark gentrification” (4). Condo developers, in many ways responsible for much of the gentrification (and subsequent dislocation of residents) in Parkdale, have played integral roles in the development of the building and theatre. Toronto developers Urbancorp and Streetcar Developments were both integral to the Theatre Centre’s capital campaign, and Urbancorp vice-president David Mandell sits on the Theatre Centre’s board of directors (Nestruck 2014). Mandell explains the corporate benefits to investing in the arts in low-income neighbourhoods: “We are a for-profit business and we feel . . . both [cultural and community Section 37 projects’] effect on our bottom line. Cultural impact to the area certainly affects our ability to sell and develop in a ‘hip, cool’ place, and additional density yields additional profits” (Sandals). Such a project exploits the desirable characteristics and creativity already present in these neighbourhoods, and dislocates them in favour of more profitable and less-affordable creative endeavours.

Although The Magic Hour took up space and made space for queer women in the arts, and although its place in the Theatre Centre’s annual season is worthy of celebration, it is nonetheless important to note the ways it, too, helped to facilitate the continuing gentrification of the area. The production implicitly helps to construct and maintain boundaries of belonging—whom the space is for and who should be expelled. We may note here, as I expand upon in the final section of this chapter, the ways in which whiteness and cis-privilege mark a space as one of a particular kind of mobility and presence, orienting upper- and middle-class white audiences in spaces of familiarity. Taking an intersectional approach to this research necessitates that we unpack the layers of the margin in order to consider how success for some artists may come at the expense of others.

“Am I Performing Now?”: This is a Story about Slowing Down

Taking up space in performance—increasing visibility and demanding more equitable access to time on stage—is a political act. The physical location and duration of a performance (how long the development of the production takes; how long the run is; and how long the

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46 Section 37 of Ontario’s Planning Act allows zoning concessions to be awarded to developers who support public projects. Employing this act in their campaign efforts, the Theatre Centre obtained their first one million dollars toward renovation of their current building (Nestruck 2014).
performance itself is) are significant, as are how time and place are expressed and experienced in the stage space. As Rebecca Schneider writes, performance is “a temporal medium in the crease or fold of its own condition” (*Performing Remains* 89). It is not simply durational, but also shapes and changes our perception of time. In the context of theatre, time and temporality are complex and “easily swerved” (*Performing Remains* 89). In *The Magic Hour*, one way these swerves subvert naturalized temporal expectations is through pacing. The juxtaposition of quick and slowed movements makes us aware of both space and time throughout the performance, pointing to the ways in which rushing through space has been naturalized, and rejecting the speed and hurry of everyday life. Dobkin refuses to rush through her elongated breaths and deep and silent moments of pause, which work to take up space (or perhaps more specifically, allow her body to take up space), if only for one moment longer than anticipated. Through a subversion of normalized linear time and pacing on stage, the production implicitly responds to the spatial and resulting temporal inequities women and marginalized artists experience in the arts by refusing a heteropatriarchal linear logic of temporality, and challenging the naturalization of gendered expectations that one will rush.

*The Magic Hour* begins in the lobby of the Theatre Centre. Dobkin notes that the opening of the performance, which begins not in the theatre space, but in the lobby, is an experiment in waiting for the show to begin. Whereas the lobby space is typically not perceived as a performance space, and is typically inhabited as a liminal waiting space, in *The Magic Hour*, that temporal and spatial expectation of waiting are shifted.

Some of it for me is a question of when the performance starts and ends and wanting to bring a consciousness or a tension to that lobby space: What are we doing when we are waiting for a performance to start? [That sequence] is just kind of introducing the possibility of having a lot of beginnings. In that way, too, it is not necessarily to separate from our lives outside of the performance. We can be brought into something and released into something else. (Dobkin)

The opening in the lobby begins to deconstruct how time and space are conceived of in the theatre. In conventional theatre, the performance space, conceived of as placeless, is transformed through sets, lights and props, and the audience is expected to enter and be enveloped by the action on stage, taken on a journey to the setting and time being represented. Contrary to this approach, Dobkin personalizes the lobby, approaching it as an intentional performer, always present, but in costume. Rather than an inanimate or neutral object, she sees the lobby as a
performer, and emphasizes the way she works with it. She explains that “it is already performing, so why not really put its makeup on. When you go into a room and there are some chairs, or not, or what the lighting is like or if there is music, that affects how we feel” (Dobkin, interview). It is not that a placeless stage is being adorned and artificially represented; the place of the theatre, the way in which the audience is already placed within the lobby, is being explored and exploded. While the space had a major impact on the piece, and Dobkin worked with the space of the theatre as a collaborator and performer, The Magic Hour is by no means a site-specific piece. The collaborators who worked on the project discussed how to stage it and documented the blocking and set design so it could be remounted, to create something that did not have to be dependent on a single space because of the technical requirements or set-up (Dobkin).

As the production commences, Dobkin enters the lobby, walks toward a microphone already set up, and welcomes her guests. After a brief introduction, followed by her first “magic trick,” Dobkin invites the audience to follow her inside the theatre space, where a circle of forty chairs has been placed for audience members. Dobkin guides each spectator to a seat in the circle. Once every person is seated, Dobkin glances around the room and walks to the theatre doors, closing them—in effect, closing the circle. She retrieves a long bamboo stick with chalk fastened tenuously to the end and stands, not moving, at the edge of the circle. Anticipation builds through Dobkin’s stillness; this moment feels extended, drawn out. Dobkin stares into the circle and slowly begins to walk to its centre. Once inside the circle of chairs, dragging the chalk against the ground, she draws a spiral on the black floor of the theatre. The line begins as a single thread, and then becomes disjointed, as she dots the ground with short individual segments. Though the performance is not limited to the inside of the circle where the spiral is drawn, it is spatially significant. Dobkin explains:

For me, that drawing is like mapping the performance—that is kind of a bit of my map for the performance. The lines are also the lines that will later be used for the “reenactment.” . . . I kind of think of it as a mapping of what is going to come, setting the space. (Dobkin)

The audience circle is part of the spiral being drawn, and simultaneously that which confines it—marking its parameter and defining its edge. Dobkin’s slow and deliberate steps moving into the centre of the spiral are both entralling and unnerving: the motion is much slower and more carefully enacted than the casual welcome outside in the lobby.
In these opening moments, the audience experiences the interplay between the space of the performance and the swerving of temporality, to use Schneider's terminology. If performance must “take place,” so too must it take time. The careful and slow mapping of space also maps time as something that we can take and demand. Space and time are not pre-set or given, but together with the audience, they are made. Doreen Massey explains that space is never completed. It is not a closed system with a beginning and end. Rather, it is “always in process” and “there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction . . .” (11). We imagine and experience the mapping of the space not as the fixing of detectable coordinates, but as the dynamic interplay of performance, time, and bodies. We cannot extract the construction of the space from Dobkin’s unsettlingly slow pace; they inform each other. Dobkin notes that the spiral points to a cyclical temporality: “We are working with this idea of time as spiral or circle: that there isn’t necessarily a distinct starting place or ending space” (Dobkin).

In her discussion of space and orientation, Ahmed turns her attention toward directions and lines. She argues that spaces are normalized through a temporal process. When we follow the normative “path well trodden,” we arrive without having to notice that, simultaneously, the path was already created and our steps have played a role in creating and maintaining it. In this way, paths are performatively solidified through habit and conditioned behavior—it is the ease of travelling on the “well trodden” path that appeals to use and makes the easy route the route most travelled. This construction of a normalized spatial orientation is a temporal one. As Ahmed explains, “[T]o follow a line takes time, energy, and resources, which means that the ‘line’ one takes does not stay apart from the line of one’s life, as the very shape of how one moves through time and space” (Queer Phenomenology 17). We follow a line because it is set in front of us, but in so doing we also perpetuate that line, and over time that line becomes increasingly defined. Over enough time, Ahmed’s insight suggests, we lose sight of the possibility of other lines, and the risks of changing directions increase. Applying this notion of direction and space to the question of queer theatre, we can conceive of the ways in which dominant white straight spaces are more easily attained and accessed. For example, it takes less time and fewer resources to use a theatre space, with already established tech, marketing, and audience appeal, than a non-theatre space. If we are programmed in these seasons or have the funds to rent the space, less effort is required to complete tasks and prepare for production, because the path is already set. However,
to change course and move through space on a path not yet trodden—or to feel unsteady or out of sync on that path—will require artists to exert additional labour. This movement is directly marked on the body. “What we follow, what we do, becomes ‘shown’ through the lines that gather on our faces, as the accumulation of gestures on the skin surfaces over time” (Queer Phenomenology 18). Combating the demand to rush by an explicitly slow mapping of a new path not only suggests that the spatiality of the place represented on stage is significant, but also the amount of time we are permitted within it. Unashamedly taking her time to take up space, Dobkin directly combats a rush—drawing attention to its force, and an internalized urge to speed up, by taking her time to enclose and encircle the audience. The performance demands time of its spectators.

Here, too, the silence that accompanies the spiral mapping of the performance is significant to the temporal and spatial construction of the performance. Elaine Aston applies Kristeva’s “women’s time” to feminist performance and notes the ways in which women’s inability to exist within the expectations of linear time might alienate them from dramatic forms such as realism that rely on “purposeful interactive speaker-listener interchanges” (51). She argues that the linearity of such dramatic forms represses “the ‘speaking’ of women’s experiences” (51), because such linearity has historically not made space for women. Thus, when we experience performances in which “acts of speaking drive action,” the experiences of those who have historically not been heard remain silenced. The experience of watching the articulation and organization of space and time on stage, without the use of words, can stir emotions. We may experience, as Dolan writes, the reconstitution of our own “subjectivity and . . . sense that time and space can be fluid and malleable” (66). Such feelings, Dolan explains, cannot “be accommodated by more official systems of language and meaning making” (Dolan, Utopia in Performance 66). Taking her time, without articulation of feelings or action into words, disrupts language techniques that do not account for what exists within the silences—what has historically not been said, what is too difficult to say, and what exceeds language.

Following the opening sequence of the performance, Dobkin begins to run outside the circle of audience members, gradually increasing speed as she moves around the space—literally running laps around the audience. As Dobkin runs, she opens up a line of questioning: “Am I performing now? . . . Now am I performing? . . . Now am I a performance artist? . . . Are we there yet?” Then, as her hands rise mid-stride, fog machines, placed at either end of the theatre,
shoot smoke into the centre of the circle, and KC and the Sunshine Band’s sensational 1975 disco pop hit “Get Down Tonight” begins to pulse through the space. She continues to repeat the same questions at louder volumes, competing with the booming music. While the motion of running around the space is an important act of spatial creation—expanding the performance space from the centre of the circle to the outside—the change of pace with the accompanying questions is also significant. As she runs, she continues to bellow the same questions over the loud music, with what sounds like increasing exhaustion from the sprint. The implication of the repeated questions “Now am I performing? Am I performance artist now? Are we there yet?” is that the labour of running, the speed of the movement, and the forceful push toward exhaustion are necessary actions that characterize and qualify Dobkin to be a “performance artist.” The slow pace of the previous sequence, with Dobkin mapping the space carefully and deliberately, is juxtaposed with the running, loud music, and exertion of energy in this movement.

Ahmed argues that privilege is an “energy saving device” that allows certain bodies to pass through space with less effort. She writes that “if less effort is required to unlock the door for the key that fits the lock, so too less effort is required to pass through an institution for bodies that fit” (“Feeling Depleted”). Privilege allows us to take our time because of the ease and confidence with which we pass through space: the steady, stable walk along the well-trodden path. We do not worry about running low on energy; we take the hours, days, and weeks needed to complete the task. We take up space. We take up time. For queer women, and more specifically those who experience additional marginalization, such as trans and cisgender queer women of colour, time is precarious, because energy is depleted when fewer resources are available to complete tasks. So, we rush.

Dobkin’s pace travelling around the performance space points to an internalized demand to move more quickly, to run, and inevitably to push toward exhaustion. As the music ends, Dobkin continues to lap the circle in silence. The sounds of her heavy breathing replace the pounding base of the music that had filled the space moments before. She runs until she reaches the southernmost point of the circle. She kneels. Dobkin exerts her energy on running in order to reach the point of becoming a performance artist. A hurried pace, a rush, results almost inevitably in burnout and exhaustion. In a race to get to where we are going, only to start the next task, we stand until we fall. Ahmed writes: “For some bodies to stand is to withstand. We can be exhausted by the labour of standing. . . . There is a politics to exhaustion. Feeling depleted can be
a measure of just what we are up against” (“Feeling Depleted”). When we consider the lesbian or queer rush, we might consider the rush to complete the task while we are still standing, before the energy runs out—before resources are depleted, before we are no longer able to “withstand.” This rush is not simply about being able to juggle multiple and diverse tasks, an ability often ascribed to women, but also about the (depleting) energy needed to do so. Dobkin’s running sequence jolts the audience by engaging its senses. The loud music, the fog, and the shifts in orientation require us to turn in our seats to follow Dobkin’s accelerating movements. We may experience a sensational rush from these moments. Yet, as she continues to circle us, the rush (and here, the double meaning of the word manifests again) starts to feel overwhelming. When Dobkin finally kneels, out of breath, in the circle, we share the exhaustion. We, like Dobkin, are grateful for the silence, and, finally, to get one uninterrupted slow and deep breath. We can sense in this moment, without words, what Dobkin is “up against” through her depletion.

Another moment in which Dobkin performs a refusal to rush occurs in one of the final sequences of the performance. Dobkin takes an exaggerated breath, echoed and elongated through pre-recorded audio. She retrieves a large roll of pallet wrap, and, with the extending sound of the audio track, an ongoing exhaled “Ahhhhhhh,” Dobkin begins encircling the outside of the chairs, wrapping and enveloping the audience in a wide wall of plastic. The auditory experience of the extension of the “Ahhhh” again demonstrates a lengthening of time—a pushing beyond the typical capacity of breath and a refusal to run out of time or to rush through it. The sound becomes almost entrancing. Rather than building, this sound cue seems to carry on at the same pitch, energy, and capacity as Dobkin circles the audience. It is as if time were stopped or slowed entirely, though Dobkin continues to walk around the circle. Pairing this sound with the explicit solidification of the performance space by wrapping the circle of chairs emphasizes the ways in which Dobkin is manipulating spatiality and temporality. Whereas Dobkin demarcated the inside of the circle in the opening sequence in the theatre by using the chalk to create a spiral within the circle, in this sequence, she binds the outside of the space, as if to create a wall or boundary: defining an inside and an outside without prioritizing one over the other. Both the inside and outside inform and construct each other. Indeed, after enveloping the audience, she performs the remainder of the production within its limits, until she exits the theatre space itself. Here too, I argue that this is a placefull act, in which the audience is made aware of its surroundings and its collective presence in the physical space. This brings the politics of the
space to the forefront by ensuring we are aware not only of the space our bodies occupy, but also of those other bodies in the circle with us. We are drawn to encounter the others present. Put another way, we may be drawn to encounter the Other’s presence. Looking around the circle, we become aware of whom we share space with and how we are oriented within it. The use of the pallet wrap alongside the extended auditory cue is an assertion of agency, reclaiming space and time, despite (or in spite of) their precarity.

For Elin Diamond, alternative theatre and performance art “attempts, futilely of course, the uncoupling of aesthetic space-time; space is what performers inhabit as time simply continues” (Unmaking Mimesis 144). Through what she refers to as “unbinding aesthetic time,” the space of the performance is brought into consciousness, invoking a “nervous” (Unmaking Mimesis, 143) response to the incongruence. The audience in The Magic Hour is never compelled to suspend disbelief, to shift its orientation to a re-creation of a “real” historical past. Instead, our perception is focused on the messy and elusive qualities of time passing. Dobkin maps the space of the performance through her slow, intentional movements. In so doing, Dobkin marks the time we have in this space—and perhaps also time’s limitations. “Unbinding aesthetic time” through a slow and intentional pace in this way becomes a performative response to inequities that result from gendered queer experiences of both space and time.

“You Can Play my Mother”: This is a Story about the Coalescence of Time

“I started to write a play,” Dobkin explains in one of her first monologues. “Well . . . a performance. About my life. Well . . . about my childhood. Where I would play me.” She is surrounded by darkness and showered in a single ray of light emitted from a cellphone she holds overhead. The darkness around her envelops us. It is disorienting at first, but sets an intimate tone for the performance—we move in toward her, leaning forward in our seats, to see beyond the darkness. Just as we cannot quite see our surroundings in this opening encounter, so, too, we cannot quite grasp the play about her childhood. Throughout the production we get shards of memories from Dobkin’s past. Insinuations of trauma and tragedy, songs from 1975, and allusions to her childhood experiences of sexual assault are scattered throughout the performance. The repeated gestures toward an unnamed event in the mid-1970s make clear the
presence and significance of the past in the production. Yet the nostalgic and autobiographical histories staged in this piece are not static or “left behind.” They are embodied and present, an archive that is forever becoming, morphing, and in flux. *The Magic Hour* actively queers gendered expectations regarding rushing, not only through its pacing, but also through the coalescence of past, present, and future—a widening of time that embraces moments that have been and are ahead.

Unlike a linear consideration of time that considers the past disconnected from the present, queer temporality actively disrupts the compartmentalizing of past, present, and future. Elizabeth Freeman writes that queer temporality’s interruptions resist “seamless, unified, and forward moving” time and instead “propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present and future others: that is, of living historically” (xxii). This radical temporal reorganization, created and contextualized through a present moment, facilitates a reading of memories staged in *The Magic Hour* as inextricable from the future. Throughout the performance, Dobkin’s retro-aesthetic, disco lights, and allusions to childhood remind us of what Muñoz calls “a backward glance that enacts a future vision” (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 4). This, too, can be perceived as a response to a naturalized gendered rush. A consequence of continually rushing and being unable to take one’s time is a distorted or disconnected experience of the present moment and an inability to make plans for the future. When there is less “down time” or leisure time afforded to us, we are forced to de-emphasize the present, as well as the possibilities for prospective creative productivity, enjoyment, leisure, and self-care. If there are always tasks yet to be completed, the foreseeable future is not only seemingly unattainable, but also perpetually farther out of reach. Because of this, we are tethered to the present. Yet we are not able to fit within its ideals. Unsteady within the prescribed temporal expectations, the present, for queers—and even more so for queer women—as Muñoz so eloquently articulates,

is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and “rational” expectations. . . . The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds. (*Cruising Utopia* 27)

With this in mind, denaturalizing the presumed necessity of rushing can also be actualized on stage through an extension of time beyond the present moment: a tethering to the past, a struggle to bring it not only into this moment, but also to an imagined future. In a discussion on queer
performance and virtual histories, Tavia Nyong’o notes that “‘navigating’ through time is inherently ambivalent. It is not intrinsically queer, but it can be queered” (44). Creating space for a future queerness, a queerness that is not quite here (Muñoz, Cruising Utopia), through the exploration of a past still present allows for the mapping of space that refuses the linear logic of straight-time. The Magic Hour destabilizes an expectation about living within a single moment, asserting instead the impossibility of isolating one moment from the last/next. Dobkin plays with this three-dimensional temporality in her performance through shifts in temporal orientation that do not isolate the past and future from the present.

The intentional representation of Dobkin’s childhood in the mid-1970s is referenced through multiple theatrical devices and design choices in the production. The lighting (co-designed by Jennifer Tipton and Michelle Ramsay) included disco balls, revolving flashing lights, colourful L.E.D. strobe lights, and a revolving disco vulva. All of these aesthetic choices allude to a particular American disco aesthetic of the 1970s; The costumes, including a colourful children’s leotard, a pink dress with draping sleeves, and a muumuu with large print, are also reminiscent of this particular decade. It is clear that the past is significant to the story Dobkin is trying to tell. Prior to beginning a “reenactment,” Dobkin situates the spectators within a present memory. Rather than asking them to suspend their disbelief and imagine the past, she asks instead for active participation in staging a memory. As Dobkin begins to put on a purple gymnastics leotard, she says:

Ok. I’m going to need your help with this. We are going to perform a reenactment. I guess I’ll play myself. It’s suburban Chicago in 1976 and it is winter. So record snowfall. Like, really deep snow. And it’s bicentennial. Nuclear testing. Space race. Oil shortage. Energy crisis.

She then begins to hand out strings. Each string has a small retro toy from the 1970s tied on one end, such as a troll, a Sesame Street character, or a Ronald McDonald doll. The other end of the string is connected to a parachute folded in the centre of the circle. Seven audience members seated roughly equidistantly around the circumference of the circle receive a string. As Dobkin hands the audience members the toys, she tells them who they will be in the reenactment:

You can play my mother. She is about thirty-two years old . . . smoker, probably drinking a lot of Tab. . . . You can be my older sister, she is nine years old, comb in the back pocket, a lot of denim going on . . . Ok, and you can be my dad. It’s a big part. You’re gonna be great. Don’t worry.
Dobkin keeps the final string, with a Kermit the Frog puppet attached to it. The strings create a physical link between past and present, and through the material ephemera and Dobkin’s memory, the past is brought into the performance space. After distributing each of the seven items, Dobkin instructs the audience members to pull “hand over hand” at the string to which the toy is attached, drawing the string and the attached parachute toward themselves. As they pull, the parachute unfolds, and thick folds of pink fabric slowly open, blanketing the floor in the inner circle of chairs. The seven audience members are left holding an unknown and unnamed memory in their hands.

For Nyong’o, queer performers and theatre artists may be drawn to reenactments because of the potential that exists within the medium (44). Perhaps one of the fundamental pulls toward this form for queer artists is the ways in which the reenactment confronts what has previously been in the “now”—a now no longer here, but to which we tenaciously return through a “presencing of the past” (Nyong’o 46). Even more queer in Dobkin’s reenactment is its failure ever to take form. In this sequence, Dobkin’s past is almost but not quite reenacted, through the casting of familial characters and the distribution of symbolic representations of her childhood. But we do not get to see the story we are actively participating in telling. The spectators never fully or explicitly perform the reenactment. Yet the role each string-holding audience member plays is active, and it connects the audience members with Dobkin’s ephemeral past. Dobkin blurs the line among past, future, and present, as well as the distinction between performer and spectator.

That time is not linear in The Magic Hour should be quite clear. Though perhaps not always utopic, the performance toys with the past and future simultaneously. The blending of past, present, and future here contributes to a tradition of feminist artists’ articulation of experience “using dialectical images to bring past and present into [a] collision . . . [that] turn[s] performance time into a now-time of insight and transformation” (Diamond, Unmaking Mimesis 149). From her place at the centre of the parachute, Dobkin announces that she will perform her

47 Pointing to a more recent past, the puppet is reminiscent of Dobkin’s 2009 performance Being Green. This was performed at a 7a-11d Performance Festival fundraiser (Toronto) and at Cheep Queers (Toronto), as well as at the Edgy Women Festival (Montreal) and the Performance Studies International Conference (Toronto). The performance not only brings various memories of the past into the space of the theatre, but also brings with it the various spaces in which it had been performed.
next trick: the “show-stopping cutting-the-lady-in-half-trick.” Her arms rise, and the parachute is lifted over her head. The title of the trick brings violence to the representation of the past, both captivating in its beauty and violent in its representation of severing a woman’s body in half. The past is not articulated in words, and the movement from childhood toys to the violence of “cutting the lady in half” is not clearly sketched. Simplicity is refused in the representation. During the production, several audience members were visibly confused. They attempted to maintain their grasp on the toys, unsure whether they were meant to release them as the parachute was lifted above them. Without instructions on how to perform, the audience-reenactors too were tethered to a past. When do we let go, and what happens to these objects of memory when we do? The uncertainty of how tightly we might hold onto the past—and whether we should do so at all—becomes an embodied physical question through the spectators’ confusion.

As the performance progresses, Dobkin continues to impart an impression of past, present, and future again. Later in the production, Dobkin speaks from beneath the canopy of the parachute’s suspended fabric, now hanging over the audience’s heads:

Our story starts in the dark. And it starts with two people fucking. One man. One woman. They fuck to make children. Those children fuck to make children. Those children fuck to make children. . . . Those children fuck to make children. And here we are. All in the family. Welcome. We come from someone. From somewhere. Your mother had a child. That child is a child; that child might have a child; That child will be a child and might have a child . . . that child might have a child. . . . That child could have a child. That child will have a child. That child will have a child. Who will have a child who will know the future. . . .

The image of a queer future is a glimpse at the utopian possibilities that both Dolan and Muñoz allude to in their work on queer futurities and Utopia. The narrative of the distant future Dobkin recites is significant to queer theory’s engagement with futurity, and clearly embodies and performs a relational and social queer theory that builds its political efficacy through its reparative stance and overt commitment to community.

Dobkin’s story moves not only outside present time, but also the present space and present planet. Moving beyond this lived moment enables her to move beyond the spatial and planetary boundaries of the performance to envision a future without restrictions. It constructs and predicts a collective temporality of shared and divergent futurities that exists not “just in a
‘space of time,’ but in colliding temporalities” (Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* 150). Just as Muñoz indicates, the field of utopian possibility is one in which we must insist on the potentiality of the “not-quite-conscious . . . if we are ever to look beyond the pragmatic sphere of the here and now, the hollow nature of the present” (*Cruising Utopia* 21). At first, the refrain in Dobkin’s story appears to be reliant on normative reproductive heterosexual futurities, promoting heteronormative sexual citizenship and kinship structures. However, the utopian performative complicates and exceeds a reproductive imperative. The repetition of “the child that might have a child” removes the necessary generational succession from the anticipated lineage. Though the child *could* have a child, or *might* have a child, the final child who can see into the future is ultimately not contingent on her predecessors’ reproduction—we reach the child who sees the future, predicted in the *might have*, not the requirement *to have*. The child who comes is thus not dependent on the child who was (though they might have been). Thus, this queer genealogy is not ultimately contingent on man and woman fucking. It is contingent on time passing to reach a utopian future. Refusing to rush, taking time to conceptualize a future not yet here becomes a way in which to build community—but also a way to question normative cycles of reproduction and kinship. Dobkin encourages us to hold the future as a question. Embracing excess in possibility, the tentative and ambiguous child who *might have a child* queers heteronormative generational structures.

Here, too, we see reminisce of the past—in the darkness where Dobkin says the story begins. Within the lineage of children who “fuck to make children” we may read the presence of the child from the 1976 reenactment—the incarnation of Dobkin’s own memory of traumatic pasts. That child, whose story is told from the distance of a scrambled, unformed narrative, who might seem like the unsolved illusive secret in each magic trick Dobkin performs, might be the child who might have a child, who brings us to the future. Rather than rushing toward the future or recreating a linear past, Dobkin slows time through its unbinding, enabling her audience access to temporal shifts from within the confines of its embodied experience in this moment and in this space. Bringing the past into the present is a placefull act insofar as it accentuates our place in the present. Without attempting to induce a suspension of disbelief, we can remain aware of our own surroundings, of Dobkin’s orientation in *this* space and how our spectatorship informs the performance of memory. We are compelled to situate the past within and through our presence.
In one of the concluding monologues of the performance, Dobkin moves from previous discussions of her own past and childhood to allusions to a more distant past: “I want to travel all the way back to the primordial muck . . . take me to the muck. Evolution is overrated. I will devolve. I will be the scum. Scum of the earth.” The movement through time, from present moment, to childhood, to utopian futurity, is further complicated by the introduction of this prehistoric past: an unknown nothingness. Reminiscent of Muñoz’s description of “queerness,” which he maintains is “always in the horizon” (Cruising Utopia 11), this queering of the prehistoric past embodies the ways in which queer temporality is always slightly out of reach, always living the future and the past in the present. Muñoz writes, “The idea is not to represent [the past] with simplistic strokes. More nearly, it is important to call on the past, to animate it, understanding the past has a performative nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things” (Cruising Utopia 27–28). Dobkin performs the past as a becoming through her desire to go back in the future. The use of the future tense—“I will be the scum”—positions the past within a future moment. Thus, in Dobkin’s monologue, the past is not stagnant, but points to a utopian performative, which, as Muñoz explains, “is often fueled by the past. The past, or at least narratives of the past, enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity, a conjuring of both future and past to critique presentness” (Cruising Utopia 106). Dobkin’s desire to “go back” and her will to devolve exist within an imagined not-yet-here: a future. This temporal and spatial desire to move to a different space and time is rejecting not simply a hurried everyday practice, but also the very notion that space and time are fixed and unchangeable. Filling the place of the performance as participants in the creation of memory, these moments exemplify queer relational temporality and refuse a straight and linear reading of the production.

In the closing moments of the production, an embodied future is perhaps most queerly represented, in the sequence with which I opened this chapter, when two young girls dance in the lobby. Childhood is simultaneously used as a look back and a look forward. The audience returns to the lobby space, outside of the designated performance area, to where the show began, and it is unclear whether this space of performance is enacting a fictional re-creation of the past or representing an imagined future. Entering a new space, a space of hope and futurity, is both a look forward as well as a redemption of what has already passed. Interestingly, this final moment bears some resemblance to the final moment in d’bi.young anitafrika’s Bleeders. The child’s cry
in *Bleeders* and the girls dancing in *The Magic Hour* present the hopeful symbol of tomorrow. These children, their cries and their dances, make space for the future. In both instances, the child is a compelling push forward, beyond the present space and time. It is an articulation and expanding of space and time that enable the audience to participate in a promise of futurity, without removing themselves from their present orientation in the theatre space. Whereas futurity is typically alluded to through children and reproduction, the two young girls dancing in the lobby slip between incarnations of Dobkin’s past and the “child who might have a child” in the future. The appearance of youth points to what is to come: that child who has a child, who is a child of the future. Yet, within this reproductive future, the past is also clearly represented. In this ’70s-styled space of celebration, accented with streamers, a bowl of punch, and a pile of carefully selected vinyl records from that time period, there is something both familiar and strange. It is as if we are gaining access to fragments of memories that, like the generational succession of the child, might have been, but, irrespective of their actual existence, culminate in a future. A queer look backwards, visually expressed in the space through the two young girls dressed in 70s-style clothing, dancing together beneath a giant sparkling vulva, is indeed freeing. It rejects the compulsion to rush and allows us to take time to consider time as an assemblage: the ways in which an image of the past may also be a vision of the future.

“Welcome, I am so happy you came. Thank you for being here”: This is a Story about a Story that Keeps Repeating a Story

“Welcome. Thank you all for coming. I am so glad you are here.” Dobkin begins her performance, similarly to anitafrika’s *Bleeders*, in the lobby of the Theatre Centre, before we enter the theatre space. She walks into the lobby and approaches a microphone stand and speaks directly to the audience. She welcomes us into the theatrical event as insiders: “This is the performance art presentation of theatrical convention to break the artifice and spoil all the fun.” In this introductory sequence, before being welcomed into the theatre space where the majority of the performance is staged, Dobkin welcomes us into the process, as insiders to the experience. She breaks convention not only through her speech, but also through a subversion of theatrical thresholds. She brings her performance, like anitafrika’s *Bleeders*, into the pre-performance space. Starting in the lobby does not speed up our transformation into spectators. It brings it to a halt. We never fully suspend our disbelief; we do not entirely let go of our sense of self and
embodiment, because the performance in the lobby has already jolted us. We know that the conventions of Western theatre do not apply neatly here.

Dobkin steps up to a platform, forcing it to rotate awkwardly as she swivels her knees with evident effort. A trick: a flash of fire bursts from her hands. She steps down and walks toward the theatre doors and holds them open for us. We enter the theatre. The welcome greeting happens five or six times throughout the production, with some minor changes. The approach and timbre of her welcome change each time she greets her spectators. It is not that the show is comprised of false starts—it is clear with the first “Thank you for coming” that the production has begun, and it does not double back on each beginning, as if to erase it and start anew. Rather, time feels cyclical in the production, with multiple beginnings and standpoints expressed with each welcome and salutation to the audience; it is not an erasure, but the introduction of a new feeling—a development rather than a correction. The Magic Hour moves back and forth—Dobkin returns and repeats her introduction, slipping out of the rhythm of normalized temporality and slowing the progression of time, refusing the conditioned compulsion to rush through.

The repetition in the production is a way not only to queer linear narratives, but also to queer the spatiality of the production. The repeated greetings are performing Massey’s conception of spatialization as the “dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far. Space as the dimension of a multiplicity of durations” (Massey 24). If we think of this spatialization as a continuous becoming (Massey 28), then Dobkin’s repeated greeting in the space might also be considered to spatialize time and temporalize space. Jaclyn Pryor notes in their recent book, Time Slips: Queer Temporalities, Contemporary Performance, and the Hole of History, how queer temporality can refuse modes of experiencing time in capitalist culture through “time slips,” which denote moments in which time is “given permission to do those deviant things it is not supposed to—move backward, lunge foreword, loop, jump, stack, stop, pause, linger, elongate, pulsate, slip” (332). Such an experience of time can give us access to the often-concealed “violence of linear time and historical ‘progress’” (332). As Pryor writes, “In other words, time slips are moments in live performance in which normative conceptions of time fail, or fall away, and the spectator or artist experiences an alternative or queer temporality” (332). Through their exploration of time slips, Pryor demonstrates how repetition in performance, like the acts of repetition, the slow pace, and the blurring of past, present, and
future in *The Magic Hour*, can challenge naturalized temporal expectations. In so doing, these performance acts illuminate the myth of universalized time, pointing to the instability and insecurity marginalized subjects experience in narrow heteropatriarchal temporal narratives.

In the second “welcome” sequence, which takes place shortly after Dobkin’s ecstatic and exhausting run around the circle, Dobkin stands on a stage, completely concealed underneath an oversized brown paper bag. From inside the bag, she cuts holes for her arms and her mouth, and then reaches blindly for the microphone, conveniently placed directly in front of her. She welcomes the audience again. *Hello, thank you all for coming. I am so glad you are here.* She performs an intentionally awkward stand-up comedy routine: “What kind of cake makes you cough? A coffee cake. Why did the chewing gum cross the road? Because it was stuck to the chicken’s foot.” There is a marked shift in presentation style and in expression. The comedy, at first poorly delivered knock-knock jokes and riddles, shifts quickly to humour that is not simply dark but painfully violent. The affective tension builds:

So, a man brings his nine-year-old daughter to the doctor, and after waiting in the waiting room, the doctor calls them in and says, “Hello, how can I help you?” And the father says, “It’s my daughter, I want you to put her on birth control.” And the doctor is incredulous, like: “Birth control! She is too young to be sexually active!” and the father says “Sexually active? No! She just lies there like her mother.” Ummm. Okay . . . I read an article in a newspaper the other day about a man paying his daughter for sex! I know, I was disgusted. What kind of daughter charges her own father?

Silence. Dobkin takes a moment then: “Umm. Ok . . . Why did the? Umm. . . . How did the . . . umm. . . .” Each beginning of a joke stops short. “Umm. . . . Knock, knock.” Slowly, Dobkin releases the microphone from her hand and lets the cord slip through her fingers, so we wait and anticipate the reverberations before the microphone hits the floor, watching it descend. This comedy sequence, again beginning with a similar “welcome” greeting and direct address to the audience, begins to tell a more explicit narrative, welcoming us to a seemingly new, but somehow familiar, story. Much of Dobkin’s previous work has started to tell a similar history of trauma. Started to, but never quite finished. Each of the previous shows that Dobkin produced about her own life and experiences provides limited insight or direct description. Yet each adds something significant to our broader understanding of the histories that brought her here and the story she seems to want to tell.
Dobkin’s allusions to trauma in *The Magic Hour* are not explicit. They remain distant through jokes and stories told in the third person. Cathy Caruth notes that the traumatized become “the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (5). In her repeated welcomes, Dobkin tries tirelessly (literally running to exhaustion) to possess that which she cannot escape nor fully return to. Caruth argues that “trauma is repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site” (10). The temporal returns are not simply slowing time, though they certainly do that as well, but also “challeng[ing] us to a new kind of listening” (Caruth 10). To listen to that which is impossible for both Dobkin and her audiences to witness; to listen to narratives that emanate from the ephemera on stage, from the jokes, and from the magic. This kind of listening requires more than being present in a single moment. It requires listening through repetition, through the understanding that memory and the past continue into the present—taking time to sit with these repeated moments enables audiences to act as affective witnesses for that which they did not and cannot see.

Repetition challenges the audience to internalize memory, allowing the past to bleed into the present and rejecting a compulsion to experience performance time at a distance. Pryor articulates that repetition of performance scenes encourages audiences to

> [c]onnect the repeating images, characters, and motifs to prior ones within the performance and, in so doing, assimilate the fictional memories into their own memory bank. As such, the distinction between memories that are fictive and those that are real, memories that are one’s own and those that are part of a collective past, begins to blur and blend. (2224)

Dobkin’s story, as I have argued, never quite gets to the stage. Childhood trauma and memory are not recollected in an explicit narrative. However, we are collectively a part of the discovery through a bending of time and cyclical repetition. Memories, like the repeated opening sequences, weave through history and space, constructed through affective movements; we come to experience how memory might feel, but not what the memories are. Just as the participatory action of collectively raising a parachute by holding onto strings of past memories challenges simplistic engagement with time in *The Magic Hour*, so, too, a repeated “welcome” refrain allows audiences to trace memories of a past still present. We refuse to rush when we refuse to move forward smoothly. Repetition rhythmically requires audiences to stumble across and swerve through time. Coming back to the start, reorienting, and trying to grab hold again.
We may think of the repeated starts in the production as attempts to articulate trauma and memory through different performance styles and narrative approaches. The inability to use one narrative form to capture the past in a single, linear story, and the repeated sequences staged to articulate this past, demonstrate a desire to convey the complexities of that which has been and that which is not yet here. Dobkin explains:

It goes back to an assignment I gave myself when I first started writing the piece. It was a question around how to tell the story. I was playing with all of these genres. How would I tell this story if it was a stand-up comedy routine? How would I tell this story if it was a Broadway musical? How would I tell this story if it was an academic lecture? So that none of [the stories] are realized. In a way it is kind of like each one is an attempt or a start. (Dobkin)

Multiple starting points enable threads of history to be considered simultaneously, to take up time slowly and assuredly. The show keeps restarting, but never erasing the previous moments. In this way, *The Magic Hour* simultaneously never reaches its full duration—as each sequence that restarts is less than an hour in length—and yet extends beyond it, beyond the promised hour of the show’s title. The complexity of this temporal representation is an explicit refusal to rush. We experience an hour of magic, which perhaps is magical in part because of its ability to extend beyond an hour and to take up space for just a little bit longer. The blurred starting time and ending time of the performance are explicit and intentional. Dobkin notes of the repetition: “It is kind of extending that joke: If I keep welcoming people, it’s like ‘oh, is it starting now?’ and ‘am I performing now?’” (Dobkin).

Through moments of repetition in *The Magic Hour*, a particular kind of history is conveyed—one that does not necessitate a polished memory, but instead exists within the messiness of the production structure and format. Cohesion and conclusion are denied, as the constructedness of both familiar histories and theatrical narratives is illuminated. In her discussion of theatre history, Rebecca Schneider asserts that theatre, like history, must lift “one time into another, to say something about yesterday today. In both [theatrical and historical] endeavors, time is decidedly porous, pockmarked with other times” (*Theatre and History* 7). This performance becomes a historical archive that refuses a straight lineage and history, recognizing that such normative histories often do not make time or space for queer and lesbian women. Dobkin’s documentation of the past takes its time by narrating recollections from multiple standpoints and perspectives. The moments of repetition make space not simply for
Dobkin herself to be on stage, but also for the creation of a space for a living archive of queer women’s experience. Just as taking up space and taking up time are contingent on privilege, so too are being remembered and being valued within historical narratives. Making space for our stories in history is an act of placefulness. It intentionally accentuates our presence, and in so doing illuminates our absence. In staging queer pasts, Dobkin constructs an ephemeral archive that otherwise might remain unrecorded and forgotten. Each repeated sequence and scene in *The Magic Hour* takes its time and refuses to rush, by cycling back, slipping through time, and historicizing a moment in the past through a visioning of the future.

“Exit Through the Dance Party”: This is a Story Refusing to End

“Asking when something is starting is also about asking when something ends,” Dobkin notes (Dobkin). At the end of *The Magic Hour*, when the audience moves back into the lobby space, the two young girls dancing seem to indicate that the performance is not quite complete—but at the same time, Dobkin has stopped “performing” a text or determined script. She explains:

> In a way, to have the performance end in that lobby and have the space transform . . . is meant as an invitation. The audience has some agency in what that space is going to be. Are they going to activate it or not? People can stay, or as I like to say, they can exit through the dance party. (Dobkin)

The audience, too, is invited to slow down in these final moments in the theatre. We, as queer women, literally take up space for shorter periods of time than other people do. A refusal to do this is a demand for spatial privilege, a demand to take up space for a moment longer than we might have anticipated. Here, too, we can note how anticipation is a condition worth troubling. Muñoz asserts that, like Alain Badiou’s concept of “that which follows the event,” queerness should be thought of as “the thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined” (*Cruising Utopia* 21). Dobkin does not know when each performance will end. There is what seems like unlimited time for the performance to continue and an intentional uncertainty around what comes next. The repetition of greetings and varied genres, or attempts to articulate memory and pasts, shifts to an ending that never quite ends. A look toward what the next greeting might be. This fluidity also shifts the performance to a performative gesture, subverting the spatial thresholds and temporal expectations that normally dictate our roles as spectators in the theatre. We return to Dobkin asking, “Am I performing now?” and turn the question on ourselves as we walk through the lobby, a new kind of performance space. Dobkin imagines that that final return to the lobby is a
space of potentiality—one that is conjured through the ritual of performance: “In my mind, there is this idea that the audience, or we, can create these spaces. What was a lobby, if we kind of imagine it, can be something else. And that party room is my proposal for this imagined world.”

This is Not an Afterthought: This is a Story about Privilege

To experience a double sensation of the rush in our lives is to feel empowered, if only for a moment, within the hurry of the everyday; to receive accolades for succeeding despite what we are up against. To feel a rush when we are in a rush is to experience the joy of possibility and the adrenaline of getting the work done, alongside the struggles that result from oppression and inequities. At times, rushing can feel empowering for women, particularly when their successful rushing is rewarded with commendation: “I don’t know how you do it!” “You are Superwoman! How do you get it all done?” Such responses work to reward women for existing within a system of inequitable practices. It does not dismantle these structures, but instead justifies them by praising those women who are capable of existing within an oppressive environment—those who are able to “withstand.” The concept of the lesbian rush, and the refusal to submit to its normalization, exists within the complicated intersections of oppression and privilege. It is neither solidly positive nor necessarily negative to feel a rush or work at a rushed pace.

As I contemplate this concept of a lesbian rush, in these concluding moments, I question the privilege that permits certain bodies to resist oppression more easily than others. Who pushes us to rush, and who determines pace? I might rush to keep up, to secure resources, to make a living and to support those around me, but I am not “rushing from.” Here, I am thinking specifically about the need to rush coming from behind—those who rush to run from danger, from police, from threats to livelihood. While urgency and rush are not interchangeable in this context, they are undeniably connected. As a white theatre performer, working primarily in the major urban context of Toronto, Dobkin’s experiences, temporary access to space, and support obtained for artistic creation are undeniably influenced by the privilege she experiences because of her race and within the context of Canadian spatial organization and performance dynamics: the many and varied geographies of performance practices. Likewise, my own need to rush as a white queer Jewish woman, though present, has fewer consequences than it does for other lesbian and queer women, whether Black, POC,
Indigenous, transgender, disabled, or those who inhabit multiple social locations of marginalization. Returning to my previous discussion of the powerful reclamation of space by Black Lives Matter Toronto at the Pride Parade in 2016, we may consider how resistance against a rush—which BLMTO embodied in refusing to budge at the parade—can be deemed a danger and a threat. This is frequently the response when Black bodies take space in white-organized events that prioritize whiteness through the erasure of privilege and its assumed neutrality. In the case of the trans and queer Black women who led the parade, we may note, too, how marginalized queer bodies may also be tokenized in order to rush diversity. Black performers were entitled to take up space as an honoured group during Pride, so long as they kept pace with whiteness. The moment they refused to rush was the moment when the neutrality of space was brought into question. The negative response to their refusal to rush demonstrates how protesting inequitable resources and support is a privilege most easily accessed by those who are already valued.

Indeed, part of the reason why Dobkin was able to secure resources, funding, and security for this production—even if it was her first run of a full-length performance—is undoubtedly because of the privilege she holds as a successful, white, cisgender performance artist. While her sexual orientation and gender result in inequitable access to resources and opportunities, the positions of privilege she has access to through other facets of her identity may enable her to slow pace more easily. Not quite “rushing from,” Dobkin may be able to reject a gendered queer rush and refuse precarity in ways that other lesbian and queer women artists may not be granted. And although rushing itself might be a reaction to oppressive patriarchal systems and expectations, rushing, too, requires privilege. Indeed, even rushing to keep up requires the ability to keep pace—to withstand might require that we not only be able to stand, but also that we possess the mobility to run. I note this not to disqualify or minimalize her experiences, nor to detract from my preceding analysis of her production, but rather to note that the power to subvert temporal expectations is easier for some to manipulate than others. This is not an afterthought. This is a soft ending, an invitation to continue the conversation, and to refuse an impulse to rush through the intersections of our identities.
Chapter 7

UnSettling Terra Nullius: The Queer Arts Festival

In the scars of my knees you can see
Children torn from their families
Bludgeoned into government schools
You can see through the pins in my bones
That we are prisoners of a long war
My knee is so badly wounded no one will look at it
The pus of the past oozes from every pore
This infection has gone on for at least 300 years
Our sacred beliefs have been made into pencils
Names of cities gas stations
My knee is wounded so badly that I limp constantly
Anger is my crutch I hold myself upright with it
My knee is wounded
See
How I Am Still Walking

– Chrystos

Settler Colonialism and Placefullness

I begin this chapter with a well-known poem from acclaimed lesbian Indigenous writer Chrystos, because it demonstrates not only resilience through tragedy, but also a blurring of boundaries between body and land, which transforms the Battle of Wounded Knee into flesh and movement. This poetic technique elucidates how we are physically shaped through our histories of violence, land, and ancestry. Throughout this chapter, the linkages among the embodied experiences of orientation, settlement, and decolonization, alongside the allocation of space and place for performance, are a key consideration in revealing how performance space operates. Examining the relationship between precarious access to ongoing and secure spaces for marginalized queer artists and the erasure of spatial specificity necessitates a discussion of the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism in Canada. The neutralization of place and space, as I will discuss throughout this chapter, directly relates to settler colonial ideologies, which enable the continued occupation and regulation of Indigenous lands.
In this final analysis chapter, I explore the Queer Arts Festival (QAF) in Vancouver, which takes place at the Roundhouse Arts Centre. QAF is an artist-run multi-disciplinary summer arts festival with work ranging from visual arts to spoken word and poetry, music, and theatre. QAF began in 1998 (as Pride in Art [PiA]). It has had landmark success since its commencement, and is now recognized as one of the top five festivals of its kind in the world (QAF). For the 2017 festival, the selected theme was “UnSettled,” focusing on Two-Spirit and Indigequeer artists. This year’s festival theme maintains a connection to the land, but it is not reconstituting place. Place has never been absent from Indigenous traditions. I do not intend to conflate the concepts of land and place, but do want to accentuate their relationship to each other. How does a connection to land enable a connection to place? How does a consideration for the stones, the earth, and the universe change how spectators encounter the space of the theatre and the places in which they reside? And, perhaps most important to this research, how might a connection to land highlight the precarious access marginalized queer Indigenous artists have to performance spaces? In order to unpack and confront these questions, I analyze the relationship between Indigenous epistemologies and placefullness. Rather than suggesting that these epistemologies reflect or express placefullness—a theoretical conclusion that risks appropriating Indigenous knowledge into queer theory—I argue instead that placefullness is a response to the erasure and emptying of space that has resulted from settler colonialism. Although this chapter is the last of my case studies as organized by production date, it nonetheless offers valuable insight into what lies at the very foundations of my prior analysis. More specifically, this chapter provides a possible theorization on the origins of placefullness. The need to reconstitute land and place is a need to respond to colonization’s invasive and violent erasure of place. The Indigenous connection to the land is thus not something rooted in a refusal to erase; rather it precedes places’ erasure. Claiming Indigenous epistemologies as “queer” or assuming that they are seamlessly in line with my previous theorizations of placefullness as queer resistance would be to ignore the explicit connections between Indigeneity and the land—a relationship that has been concealed and buried through settler colonial practices, which infuse the arts industry.

When we begin to map sites in new ways, we see the histories that have been absent and more easily see what is not there, when it is not there. The presence of Two-Spirit artists and their works at the QAF festival is not simply a means of increasing visibility for this year’s festival, but also of enabling us to see those artists’ absence. The dearth of marginalized peoples
on Canadian stages has historically been so prevalent that it may be difficult for those inhabiting privileged positions to notice the exclusion of those who are Othered. Privileged white cisgender spectators may struggle to step outside of patterned expectations and behaviours because they are so ingrained in our understanding of theatre creation and artistic excellence. This lack of awareness does not excuse privileged theatre creators or spectators from being accountable, or justify a continuation of dominant white cisgender theatre. It does demonstrate all the more need to support Indigenous and POC theatre in conventional mainstage and queer programming. At times, we see what is not there—in this case, the presence of Two-Spirit and Indigenous Queer artists on stage—only after we know what we are looking for. My aim in this chapter is to consider the ways in which queer women’s and non-binary artists’ works are programmed in festival settings, and also the ways in which these short-term events can be tokenizing, necessitating unpaid labour for development, and providing insufficient resources and support to these artists. This form of programming does not support a sustainable practice for artists or curators, but enables temporary exhibits to stand in for lasting systemic change. By no means is this a criticism of the choice to prioritize Indigenous aesthetic and artistic practice thematically at QAF—on the contrary, my critique is grounded in a refusal to romanticize or valorize this choice. I instead choose to argue that while it is a fitting theme (particularly for the year Canada is celebrating its 150th anniversary), it is not enough. Queer women and non-binary artists use festival spaces as sites of opportunity and contestation. The very staging of their work is often perceived as a coup by the artists creating the work. While fewer resources are available in these instances, I am interested in the ways in which the festivals and cabarets, in spite of their brevity, shape the artists’ practices and influence the space.

Terra Nullius

Amid all of these bodies of our dead are also the bodies of the living. Our bodies. The bodies of those who survived in order to bring us here alive. Our bodies protecting each other. Our bodies loving each other. A kiss that burns their maps away.

– Qwo-Li Driskill

At the foundation of any analysis of theatre and space in Canada, whether or not researchers explicitly acknowledge it, is the impact and experience of settler colonialism. The
very ways in which theatre must implicitly and necessarily take place (and take space) contribute to and/or resist the ongoing colonization of this country. The notion that theatre stages and spaces may be emptied or placeless rests on an acceptance of the land and geography of the country as terra nullius, void of history and story. The notion that any space can be emptied violently erases histories, particularly when expressed by settlers on this land, and contributes to ongoing gentrification and colonization of the land. This is not to villainize theatre creators or academics who do not engage directly with the conversation of settler colonialism in their work. It is, however, a call for accountability in the ways in which work is produced and a call to assess the consequences of an assumption that any place can be a non-place. While queer women and non-binary artists might engage placefullness as a form of resistance against the erasure of inequitable spatial dynamics, in many ways, queer Indigenous performance, which uses Indigenous epistemologies, practices, and ideologies in its development and production, is, as discussed below, already placefull.

Placefullness, as an expansion of placelessness and rejection of emptiness, is inextricably connected to colonization and settler experiences. By this I mean that it is a colonial experience that separated performance, art, and human existence from the land. Following this line of thinking, we can connect placelessness to terra nullius, or the fallacy of spatial emptiness, the erasure of history in order to justify settlement. Terra nullius strips geographies of their complex histories of peoples and cultures in order to justify settlement. In this way, Indigenous performance, whether queer or not, is pre-placefull, pre-placeless, pre-colonial notions of emptiness. In a discussion of theatre place and nomadic practices, Sam Trubridge defines Terra Nullius as that which “describes a terrain with no purpose and no permanent inhabitants—an unclaimed land. This perceived or declared state of emptiness and boundlessness easily becomes the grounds for colonial settlement or exploitation of resources” (145). Similarly, Greensmith and Giwa note that, by labelling territories and lands terra nullius, Settlers can understand themselves as the proper inhabitants and owners of Indigenous lands. As Wolfe so aptly puts it, “Settler colonialism destroys to replace.” Thus, the logic of settler colonialism is sustained through the elimination of Indigenous peoples as a consequence of historical processes that continue to inform the present—“invasion is a structure not an event.” Veracini has suggested that within settler colonial formations, events replace structures through ongoing invasion. (132)

The ways in which settler colonialism functions to create particular spatial dynamics and feelings
of belonging cannot be separated from experiences of the arts in Canada. Indeed, Ahmed’s “conditions of arrival,” which mark and influence how we are shaped by space, are essential to performance reception. Space and settler colonialism mark our bodies. As Métis artist and activist Erin Marie Konsmo notes, “our bodies are not terra nullius” (Driskill 168). Considering the ways in which the body holds and shapes space, the notion that any space is empty necessitates the continuing erasure of the bodies that have created and shaped that space. Thus, in this chapter, my consideration of spatial and temporal situations and performance reads queer placefullness alongside Indigenous epistemologies. I attempt not to layer placefullness on top of Indigenous connections to the land, but to experience them side by side, recognizing a fraught relationship between the universalized conceptions of “queer” performance and Indigenous Two-Spirit and queer performance. This is not always a kind relationship; this is not always (and is seldom experienced as) an equitable relationship. Although they may be experienced simultaneously, queerness and Two-Spirit identities cannot be conflated or understood through a general lens of marginalization. On the contrary, they must be read via a decolonial approach that notes the ways in which settler queer performance and art have contributed to colonization and claims to land and space, seeing Indigenous identities as outside of general conceptions of queerness, and relegating their experiences to specificity and to themes and special festival events.

Decolonization as a Queer Practice

Though queer theory may be affected and influenced by Indigenous epistemologies, these connections often go unnamed and unacknowledged. It is therefore necessary to consider the ways in which Indigenous theories have been, like queer of colour critique, excluded from mainstream (read: white) queer studies. In their article “Everyday Decolonization,” Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes consider the intersections of decolonization and queer theory. They write that “examinations of settler colonialism often remain peripheral to theorizations of queer rights and gender and sexuality more broadly” (155). They go on to ask what decolonization might look like and feel like—how might it practically manifest? Beyond lip-service or tokenization, what might allyship look like in queer day-to-day life? While there has been significant writing and activism produced by
queer Indigenous women, these works often remain unrecognized and underutilized in critical queer scholarship (157). Hunt and Holmes explain:

For over three decades, Indigenous lesbian and Two-Spirit women authors such as Beth Brant (1994), Chrystos (1988; 1995), and Paula Gunn Allen (1986) have illustrated through their poetry, essays, and fiction, the interlocking nature of heteronormativity and settler colonialism, the history of Indigenous lesbian and Two-Spirit resistance and the tensions and possibilities of coalition building between non-Indigenous LGBTQ and Indigenous communities. . . . (157)

And yet, their works are marginalized within the context of both queer theory and Indigenous theories. It is not simply that queer theory and the associated, universalized queer subject erase the presence and influence of Indigenous histories and epistemologies, but more that queer subjects have the capacity to contribute to the persisting oppressions against Indigenous peoples and continuing colonization of their land. As Scott Morgenson argues, queer subjects have the ability to “produce settler homonationalism.”48 He further explains that “queer claims on national belonging stabilize settlement and participate in reinventing its lessons within new imperial projects” (125). Thus, conversations around the marginalization of queer subjects must take into consideration the implicit ways in which the “respectable” queer body normalizes, rather than destabilizes, settlement. In the context of art and performance, queer theatre, often categorized as progressive and radical, can work to naturalize settler colonialism by taking up space for queer bodies without complicating or unpacking their histories and conditions of ongoing settlement.

Indigenous Epistemologies and Decolonial Performance Practice

*Indigenous art reconnects us to the sacred and continued existence of Indigenous Peoples living and dying in struggle; yet, always resurging and creating art to build and rebuild, to learn and re-learn, to recover and remember. Indigenous art unbinds indigeneity from its colonial limits by weaving past and future Indigenous worlds into new currents of present struggle.*

– Martineau and Ritskes

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48 In his article, Morgenson expands Jasbir Puar’s concept of “homonationalism” to consider its implications in relation to settler colonialism. Homonationalism, according to Puar, “is an analytic category deployed to understand and historicize how and why a nation’s status as “gay-friendly” has become desirable in the first place. Like modernity, homonationalism can be resisted and re-signified, but not opted out of: we are all conditioned by it and through it” (“Rethinking Homonationalism” 336).
Engaging Indigenous epistemologies, without appropriating them or viewing them merely as a mystical metaphor, is a method of decolonization that could play a significant role in creating a future for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous ways of knowing.

– Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill

In both “Fugitive Indigeneity” (Martineau and Ritskes) and “Decolonizing Feminism” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill), the authors construct a scholarly and creative framework that addresses not only the active capacity for Indigenous art to create change, but also the ways in which Indigenous epistemologies can be applied to scholarly work in diverse fields. Much scholarly research has been conducted on Indigenous performance, as an epistemology, method, and theoretical approach. These two publications, among many others, demonstrate that dominant settler colonial narratives, though incredibly entrenched in Western culture, are increasingly combated through various strategies, including performance and artistic creations. These projects do not simply expose the constructedness of normalized ideologies, but also reclaim land by actualizing alternatives. By analyzing Indigenous performance in this research, and confronting the ways in which settler artists experience privilege as a result of colonization, the spatial influence settler colonialism has had on artistic practice becomes apparent. Indigenous and decolonial performance and art work to subvert simplified and universalized experiences of spatiality and shift ways of knowing and thinking through their form and content. Here, I discuss Indigenous performance not as something that is passively consumed by spectators, but rather as creative practice intended primarily for movement and change. In this way, performance and artistic works are part of a dynamic process that sees the naturalization of settler colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy as a violence, which needs not only to be acknowledged but also challenged and rectified. Indigenous and decolonial performance subverts simplified and universalized experiences of temporality, and shifts ways of knowing and thinking through their form and content. Indigenous and settler allies use these performances and methods actively to create alternative ways of being and knowing through artistic practice.

49 For select theorizations, see Gaztambide-Fernández (2014); Hogue (2010); Jacobson-Konefall (2015); Lane (2012); Martineau and Ritskes (2014); Recollet (2015); Simpson (2013); and Smith (2010).
Throughout my analysis of QAF, alongside Jarett Martineau and Eric Ritskes, I ask: “How does [the disruption of colonial logics and foundations] occur [in decolonial artistic practice]? How are Indigenous aesthetics both rooted and fugitive, always grounded in place and land, yet highly mobile and adaptive? How does the radical alterity of Indigeneity remix spatial and temporal logics?” (v). To this end, in the remainder of this chapter, I consider the spatial implications of decolonial aestheteTics / aestheSis as a means of challenging and decolonizing through creative practice, and the capacity of storytelling and oral narratives to shape space in performance. I analyze particular performances at QAF and consider the ways in which space is engaged. Borrowing and translating from both queer theory and Indigenous decolonial theory, I approach performance as fluid and changing, with the capacity to question linear conceptions of time—a creative process able to fold experiences of temporality by deconstructing the separation of past, present, and future as isolated entities.

When we think of performance aesthetics within the context of European philosophy and colonization, we can begin to denaturalize artistic practices and recognize the ways in which they are shaped by systems of power. Even artistic works that attempt to subvert and challenge these ideologies exist within a system that reproduces colonial rule and white settler supremacy. Walter Mignolo clearly traces the Western origins of “aesthetics” and the need to deviate from them in an interview published in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, Society*. Here, Mignolo articulates a need to begin from a Western understanding of aesthetics, in order to depart from it, because, as he argues, Western ideologies and epistemologies have become globally accepted as neutral and universal (Gaztambide-Fernández 201). Thus, beginning from the position of Western philosophy acknowledges the pervasiveness of colonization and imperialism, but uses its universality only as a starting point from which to challenge it. In this interview and his previous works, Mignolo makes a significant and valuable distinction between “aestheteTics” and “aestheSis” in which the former is inextricably tied to histories of colonization and Western imperialism and the latter works specifically to untangle and (re)constitute alternatives. He further explains:

Decolonial aestheSis refers in general to any and every thinking and doing that is geared toward undoing a particular kind of aesthesis, of senses, that is the sensibility of the colonized subject. What decolonial artists want is not to create beautiful objects, installations, music, multimedia or whatever the possibilities are, but to create in order to decolonize sensibilities, to transform colonial aestheteTics into decolonial aestheSis. (qtd. in Gaztambide-Fernández 201)
Therefore, the aim of some decolonial art is in large part a transformative option—a creative practice that is purposed towards decolonization. Such a transformation is not necessarily exclusionary or restricted to Indigenous or colonized subjects. It is an artistic practice and option that allies, settlers, and Indigenous artists can engage in diverse ways as spectators and creators. Like placefullness, it draws attention to that which settler colonialism buries. At the Queer Arts Festival, this transformation occurred through various art forms that “unsettled” a settler monopoly, integrating traditional Indigenous creative form and demonstrating that these are not solely of the past, but also the present. A Western settler logic situates Indigenous cultures as something that was, but no longer is. Indigenous art and performance challenge this logic and transform space through an assertion of presence. These decolonial and transformative projects, therefore, are not simply about unsettling space and land, but also about unsettling time. As I will outline in the following section, efforts to decolonize through performance are achieved through the disruption of normativity. Not simply recognizing that history, narratives and aesthetics are rooted in a violent and discriminatory past, but also creating alternatives through creative practice. This is both a methodology and a purpose.

QAF and Roundhouse Community Centre: Historical Overview

The Queer Arts Festival (QAF), produced by Vancouver’s Pride in Arts Society, runs annually at the Roundhouse Community Centre in Vancouver, British Columbia. Pride in Art (PiA) started in 1998 and was incorporated as a not-for-profit in 2006. It rebranded its annual art exhibition as the Queer Arts Festival in 2010, and received charitable status in 2012. As an artist-run festival, QAF curates and presents multi-disciplinary works “favouring challenging, thought-provoking work that pushes boundaries and initiates dialogue” (QAF, “About”). QAF presents workshops, performances, concerts, and a curated visual art exhibition every year, related to an annual theme. The Queer Arts Festival is partnered with the Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre (located at Pacific and Davie), and uses the centre’s space as the primary performance venue. In an interview with the artistic director, S. D. Holdman, and Rachel Iwaasa, the director of development, they noted that while they have a positive relationship with the community centre, it is always hard not to have one’s own space. There are challenges particularly around gender conventions and creating safer spaces that are complicated when you do not have ownership or long-term use of the performance and exhibition space.
The Roundhouse Community Centre is located in Yaletown, an area of Vancouver that has been the site of tremendous gentrification and shifting populations since the late 1980s. Trevor Barnes and Tom Hutton note that in the mid-1980s, it seemed as though Yaletown would be another decaying neighbourhood in the city: “It was home to fork lift trucks and lorries by day, prostitutes and their customers by night” (1249). However, later that decade, a transformation began, in part due to Vancouver Expo, which took place in 1986. Yaletown is now an affluent and popular area. Barnes and Hutton say that “[w]ithin a decade, Yaletown moved from being a backwater, a ‘grungy’, semi-industrial district on the edge of downtown, to an area on the leading edge of the new economy frontier” (Barnes and Hutton 1261). Through this decade and into the 1990s, the area changed drastically, and working-class residences were destroyed, or renovated and repurposed as high-end boutiques (Barnes and Hutton 1250). Similar to my previous articulations of the relationship between gentrification and artistic practice, Yaletown’s transformation began “with an influx of artists and writers in the 1980s” (Barnes and Hutton 1261). After the “Central Area Plan” was approved in 1991, new parks, high-end restaurants and coffee shops, and fitness facilities were erected in the era. As is often the case, as the area continued to gentrify (in part due to artists developing and producing work in the neighbourhood), rent increases inevitably displaced the very same artists who had sought out the neighbourhood and contributed to its increased appeal (Barnes and Hutton 1261). Likewise, low-income families were filtered out of the area through rent and real estate price increases over time.

Though a noteworthy community centre with many programs and services for community members, Roundhouse should not be divorced from these histories of gentrification. It is important to note who has easy access to the centre and its services, and who is seen as an outsider or visitor. While Barnes and Hutton note how gentrification affected the area, and point to displacement as a reality of Yaletown history, the Roundhouse community centre’s webpage on Yaletown History only notes, “The area was home to little more than parking space until the late 1970s and 1980s” (“Yaletown History”). The erasure of the history of gentrification and the

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50 Roundhouse was historically “comprised of a cluster of buildings whose function was to house and service the great steam locomotives of the day” (“Roundhouse History”). Its construction began in 1888 and expansions took place in 1911, 1940, and 1950 (“Roundhouse History”). As the area was rejuvenated, so too was the space, and in 1984, the building was restored and renovated in preparation for the World Exposition (Expo) of 1986 (“Roundhouse History”).
ways in which it affected the people in the area creates a particular historical narrative that increases the ease with which some bodies experience and pass through the space. Orientation in space, in large part, relates to class and economies. Just who is seen as a “member of the community” and can easily get access to services is dependent on geographies, mobilities, and convenience. The impact of gentrification is not simply that low-income families cannot afford to live in particular neighbourhoods, but also that they are seen as outsiders to its services and buildings.

The Queer Arts Festival

An Unsettling Approach

Adrian Stimson,\textsuperscript{51} who was a tribal councillor with the Siksika Nation, curated the visual art exhibition at the 2017 QAF, which included seventeen Two-Spirit artists. Stimson is a residential school survivor, whose artistic practice has helped him confront the trauma they experienced in residential school and histories of living on reserves. Stimson notes that their artistic work “allowed [them] to unpack and work through some of those issues that [they] faced while going through residential school, and the racism within the general public and the world, to create art that hopefully speaks to challenging a lot of those notions” (Merarsi). They further explain that the Two-Spirit focus of this year’s festival works to “expose the issues of historical extermination of Two-Spirit people, the lack of alternative aboriginal sexuality and gender in contemporary Western culture/media, the Two-Spirit movement and future as a part of the reclamation of Two-Spirit identity and practice” (Queer Arts Festival). This historical erasure, and its continuing invisibility, will be discussed shortly in relation to the temporal-spatial systems that the 2017 festival combats directly.

The festival focused particularly on Two-Spirit\textsuperscript{52} performance. Stimson notes that Two-Spirit people have been absent from narratives and artistic works in popular culture—this

\textsuperscript{51} Stimson uses “they/them” pronouns, which, they explain, is “in tribute to the Siksika language, which Stimson says has no gender-specific pronouns” (Merarsi).

\textsuperscript{52} It is important to note that Two-Spirit is not necessarily an identity category, but an umbrella term. It refers to many different roles and identities from the past and in the present within different Indigenous nations and tribes and should not be conceived of as any one thing. Two-Spirit identities exist outside of the Western settler
absence is “embedded in hegemonic practices of colonization” (Queer Arts Festival). We need to think about homophobia, settler colonialism, gender violence, and misogyny alongside historical and current Indigenous oppressions. Stimson notes that homophobia was a colonial concept introduced to Indigenous peoples through the act of colonization (Takeuchi).

Homophobia came with colonization; as the Urban Native Youth Association attests, ‘The religious dogma of the Residential Schools erased a proud and rich history of Two-spirit people in most Aboriginal communities. As a direct result of the residential school experience, homophobia is now rampant in most Aboriginal communities, even more so than in mainstream society.’ (qtd. in Takeuchi)

Two-Spirit peoples were historically not Othered within many Indigenous communities. Frequently, those who inhabited these identities were shown respect via unique roles attributed to them within their communities (though each nation has distinct relations and concepts associated with Two-Spirit identities).

We can think through the theme of “unsettled” in multiple ways. UnSettled, past tense, acknowledges the way that Indigenous peoples have been unsettled from their traditional sacred lands, and, simultaneously, the labour that has already been done by various Indigenous artists and nations throughout Turtle Island to unsettle settler colonialism and our apathetic response to the violent oppressions Indigenous peoples still endure. Unsettled alludes to a decolonial process that seeks to disrupt the erasure and neutralization of settler colonialism, which is specifically relevant to the 2017 festival theme, with the 150th anniversary of Confederation celebrated by Canadian nationals days after the festival’s conclusion. At the same time, “unsettled” might also reveal the unsettling feelings settlers experience in grappling with notions of decolonization. Here, it is significant to define settler colonialism in the context of Canadian settler-Indigenous relations. Citing Patrick Wolfe, Cameron Greensmith and Sulaimon Giwa write in their article “Challenging Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Queer Politics” that settler colonialism differs from colonialism in terms of how it works to erase Indigenous cultures and existence beyond conquest. “[S]ettler colonialism requires the violent elimination of Indigenous peoples and their gender binary (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 3). As Driskill explains, “Two-Spirit is a word that itself is a critique. It’s a challenge to the field of anthropology’s use of the word berdache as well as to the white-dominated LGBTQ community’s labels and taxonomies” (30).
cultures, as well as the expropriation of lands” (129). They continue, using Sunera Thobani’s concept of how Canadian settler colonialism functions through the implementation of policies, immigration laws, and regulations that construct respectable national subjects—citizenship becomes a means by which not only to regulate but to legitimize particular bodies and experiences as properly Canadian. Again, this is a spatial project, orienting settler bodies physically within a Canadian landscape and literally unsettling Indigenous subjects from their land. With this in mind, how can we think of the word “unsettled” in relation to the affective queer settler experience and the Indigenous / Indigequeer experience? The presence of the word in the past tense might problematically imply that both of these processes have been completed and are now out of Canadian people’s control. In this way, the past tense seems to absolve settlers of the need to be accountable, to process the continuing settlement of these lands, and to recognize their own feelings of being unsettled. In the introduction to the curator’s statement on the QAF website, Stimson employs the word unsettled in two contexts:

We live in Unsettling times—the world feels under siege, unsafe, tensions between alt-right and social left, neo-liberalism, ongoing wars, Orlando, Chechnya gay purge, the US Republican Administration rollback of civil and gay rights, fake news, mutual assured destruction, resource exploitation, identity politics, reconciliation and on and on. For Indigenous peoples, specifically Two-Spirited people, endurance of these kinds of fears has been going on for centuries, our resilience and continued presence is a lesson for us all, we have, and will continue into the future to unsettle the colonial project. (“UnSettled: Curatorial Statement”)

Here, though living in “unsettling” times at first evokes a sense of disorientation and chaos, by the end of the statement, it is clear that these unsettling times are devoid of agentive desire, a result of violence and political upheaval, and at the same time an active attempt to destabilize the colonial project. We can see unsettling in this context as a direct response to settler colonial forces, which work to orient only a privileged few, and disorient the rightful overseers of the land. This is a response to spatial disorientation. The thematic name itself, rather than being just a simple acknowledgement of the inclusion of Indigenous, Two-Spirit, and Indigequeer artists, moves beyond recognition to consider what settlement and unsettlement entail for colonizers and colonized subjects.

The festival structure is a double-edged sword for marginalized artists, at once giving them opportunities and increasing visibility on stage and in exhibitions while also providing limited resources and development support for their works. The fact that thematic focus changes
each year can ultimately result in an illusion of ongoing support and recognition, in the way that BLMTO was “honoured” during the 2016 Pride Parade. We must critically question how much a community gains from this short-term visibility and how much an organization does to support it in the following years. If “unsettling” is a festival theme for one year, when the dust settles, so to speak, what remains? How will next year's theme continue an ongoing process of decolonization, beyond land acknowledgment? These are not rhetorical questions. They pertain to both thematic focus and festival leadership and programming. The very fact that settlers have the capacity to choose when to grapple with the impact of settler colonialism raises concerns. The artistic director of the Festival, S. D. Holman, recognized the implicit issues that could arise from a settler curating an event focused on Indigenous artistic creation. As Holman explains, “It was really important for the festival as a whole, rather than being a settler organization, to just step back and give over the entire curation” (Merarsi). Rachel Iwaasa further articulates, “We’re working with Indigenous partners so that it’s not up to us to decide what constitutes an authentic Indigenous, Two-Spirit representation,” Iwaasa says. “It’s important to us that we’re not the voices represented in the publicity” (Merarsi).

Land Acknowledgments

On every page of the QAF website, a land acknowledgement appears. It reads:

QAF takes place on the traditional, unceded territory of the Coast Salish people, in particular the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), sḵwx̱�uese7mesh (Squamish) and səl̓ilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) nations. We recognize their sovereignty, as there are no treaties on these lands, and we are dedicated to building a new relationship between our nations based on respect and consent.

The land acknowledgement is significant, beyond the theme of this year’s exhibition, for its articulation of territory rights and respect for sovereign, unceded land. Placing this on every page of the site also clearly demonstrates a desire to articulate the complex geographies of the festival at the forefront of its online presence. Keeping in mind the value and need for land acknowledgements, I want to problematize their general usage and then discuss the ways in which QAF begins to address these complexities through their approach.

Based on my previous theorization around placefullness and the refusal to erase place in the theatre, it may seem from the outset that land acknowledgements are a primary example of a
placefull theatrical practice—an acknowledgement of the space and geography on which the theatre resides—a resistance against depoliticization and neutralization of space and land. Yet land acknowledgements as the single engagement with settler colonialism must be complicated and challenged. In a Toronto workshop on Indigeneity and decolonizing performance practice, Métis artist Cole Alvis and Anishinaabe-Ashkenazi artist Jill Carter noted:

The land acknowledgement perfunctorily performed by rote will not serve the fraught, complex project of reconciliation; indeed, it may, at the end of the day, render such an endeavor an exercise in futility. How do artists go beyond the learning of names, or geography, or historical fact to begin decolonizing their practice? How do we re-imagine our relationship with this land upon which we create? (SummerWorks Performance Festival)

With this in mind, we may think of the ways in which repetition can be either a performative turn toward change, or simply a means by which to continue the erasure of place through creating uncritical habitual performances of soft activism, rather than activating. If audiences come to anticipate a land acknowledgement as something that happens before each performance, with the same language and presentation, the acknowledgement begins to lose its meaning. We quite simply stop listening. Repetition by rote is thus a dangerous and ineffective way of meaningfully acknowledging histories of violence and oppression.

I do not intend to insinuate that the land acknowledgements should be eliminated from pre-performance announcements. They point to significant spatial inequities. But moving beyond a simple statement is a must. At the Queer Arts Festival, the land acknowledgements developed continually. In addition to announcing the aforementioned acknowledgement posted on the website, festival organizers also had Indigenous elders and community members provide blessings and prayers prior to each event. At several events there was more than one prayer or welcome delivered. There was a clear and explicit refusal to rush toward the performance. Like Dobkin’s performance, such a refusal is spatial. Taking up space, unapologetically, changes how audiences are oriented within the venue. The acknowledgement and welcome were not supplementary to the events, but integral to their construction. The words and welcome blessings encouraged audience members to consider deeply what it means to be on unceded territory and what it means to create art on sovereign land—they asked how performers and audiences can complicate their relationship to the land, be accountable, and work toward reconciliation. The inclusion of Indigenous voices, beyond a land acknowledgement, was one way in which to
respect and centre the diverse Indigenous voices of the area and to orient Indigenous spectators as insiders to the experience.

Storytelling as Spatial Resistance and Decolonization

_Christos_

Dominant settler colonial narratives perpetuate false histories of belonging and land rights through Canadian nationalist ideologies and discourses. Urban spaces are continually colonized through these constructed histories, which make colonization and the oppression of Indigenous and marginalized peoples appear inevitable and situated within a limited historical narrative, one that has, on the surface, been “reconciled.” These mainstream narratives, though incredibly entrenched in Western culture, are increasingly combated through various strategies, including performance and artistic creations, which do not simply expose the constructedness of normalized ideologies, but also reclaim land by actualizing spatial and temporal alternatives. Stories, through multiple forms and aesthetics, actively disrupt colonial spatial organization.

Narratives come to characterize our experience of a space, and influence how that space is lived and historicized. As I have previously articulated throughout my discussion of place and space, maps and geographies are too often detached from the bodies that inhabit them. The lived experiences that enable particular coordinates to be situated and specific roads to be paved are erased through the seemingly natural ways in which routes appear on the page. Maps fails to note the violence and genocide that facilitated their creation. Throughout their article, Hunt and Holmes use storytelling as a methodology, noting that although Westernized research may consider their approach “auto-ethnographic,” they resist using this terminology, and opt instead to value oral narrative forms as valid and significant research. They explain their approach to a queer decolonial practice, and I cite it here because it is useful for framing this discussion on Indigequeer and Two-Spirit performance. They write:
We view “decolonization” and “queering” as active, interconnected, critical, and everyday practices that take place within and across diverse spaces and times. A decolonial queer politic is not only anti-normative, but actively engages with anti-colonial, critical race and Indigenous theories and geopolitical issues such as colonialism, globalisation, migration, neoliberalism, and nationalism (Oswin, 2008; Morgensen, 2011; Driskill, 2011; Dakin, 2012; Smith, 2010b). This politic seeks to queer White settler colonialism and the colonial gender and sexual categories it relies on—to render it abnormal, to name it and make it visible in order to challenge it (Riggs, 2010). (156)

We can connect this decolonial queer politics to queer women’s and non-binary artists’ creative practices and note the ways in which narratives and stories can be used to redefine space and reorient spectators through their articulation of place. Stories are not passive. They are powerful and create change. Stories have the capacity both to perpetuate and challenge the status quo. They may be used as a method of continual colonization by propagating false narratives that suggest that white privilege and supremacy are inevitable. But at the same time, stories can be employed as a means of decolonization, through the expression of lived alternatives and future potentialities. Stories have the potential to expose the histories that settler colonialism sought (and continues to seek) to erase. When queer art is placeless, it is not neutral, but has the ability to cause damage. Placelessness does not influence only how a character or plot is received, but also how we perceive our everyday experiences. We can note how the two previous chapters tell the stories of those who are often deemed “out of place.” As Thomas King warns us, “You have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (10). Perhaps this sentiment begins to point to why some stories are so valiantly erased and made invisible. Stories are threatening. They threaten to reveal what has been silenced. They threaten to bring the individual, the personal, and the thriving into the realm of the mainstream. Stories are change-makers. Whereas colonialism aims to confine and ghettoize Indigeneity to the essentialized realm of “multiculturalism,” stories provide an outlet for urban spatial (re)organization. Creative practices such as stories enable artists to take back land through their own embodied experiences, on their own terms and with their own language. Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes write:

The reclamation of urban spaces through Indigenous presence is a necessary site of decolonial struggle, then. In reclaiming the site of the urban as Indigenous, the communities and relationships that are necessary to support and sustain individual stories, creations, and articulations can be reimagined and reformed. (Martineau and Ritskes vii)
Tarah Hogue also discusses the importance of storytelling in her article “Strategies of Aboriginal Performance Art and the Aesthetics of Diaspora,” and argues that it is a means of reconnecting with severed traditions and healing the wounds and loss that have resulted from colonization and continued oppression. Similarly, Leanne Simpson provides an account of what pre-colonial life was like for her ancestors. She explains that theirs was an active society, based more so in the present than is Western logic. She states, “Creating was the base of our culture. Creating was regenerative and ensured more diversity, more innovation and more life. In essence, Indigenous societies were societies of doing; they were societies of presence” (92). Stories are therefore not a simple form of recollection; they are a way to create, to reclaim, and to decolonize. They are active forces in creating new futures that refuse settler colonialism as the single option. As Simpson writes:

Nishnaabeg and Indigenous artists like [Rebecca] Belmore interrogate the space of empire, envisioning and performing ways out of it. Even if the performance only lasts twenty minutes, it is one more stone thrown in the water. It is a glimpse of a decolonized contemporary reality; it is a mirroring of what we can become. (98)

Thus, storytelling is not primarily about recalling a pre-colonial past, but calling on it to reproduce an alternative future. Storytelling here is not a tool of remembrance or victimhood. On the contrary, it is about survivorship. Stories are not merely accessories, decorating daily life. They are essential to meaning-making, to culture, and to education.

At the Queer Arts Festival, the intersection between stories and space was explored in multiple instances—the visual exhibition included multimedia presentations and audio recordings of personal narratives. One particular event of interest, which storied the space of the festival and the surrounding area, was an artists’ afternoon with media artist and ethnobotanist T’uy’tanat-Cease Wyss (Skwxwu7mesh/Sto: Lo/ Hawaiian/Swiss). Through hands-on engagement and Coast Salish weaving techniques, participants interacted directly with the landscape of the exhibition, situating themselves in the area within and surrounding the Roundhouse through artistic practice. From the description in the program, it was unclear what the event would entail; however, it was evident that both space and storytelling would be essential. The event was described as “Site-specific and culturally-focused teaching through storytelling” (QAF, “Artist Led Afternoon”). When the session began, inside the exhibition space, Wyss welcomed everyone and invited them to look at the weaving she had produced, showcased in the exhibition. We stood in a semi-circle as guests trickled in. Wyss welcomed
familiar faces by name, and shared stories of how they met, hugging those she had not seen over the years, and welcoming new faces. Immediately, the presentation style and approach to artistic creation were shaped through a kind of community-building in which spectators were invited to share an experience, rather than receive a performance as audience. The small groups of people present were part of the experience as active participants. After welcoming everyone and discussing her process and work, Wyss invited conversation and questions about the weaving process, where the materials come from, and what is sourced or made from scratch. She then invited us to come outside with her and weave the trees surrounding the Roundhouse community centre. As we walked outside, she continued to tell stories about the area, and her experiences, as she explained how to weave and instructed participants in what to do. The movement outside was an artistic intervention into the space of the community centre. It demonstrated clearly that what was taking place inside the exhibition must not be removed from its spatial context—the artistic works should be integrated and in conversation with the space of the community and the land, rather than removed from it.

Though often trivialized as anecdotal, stories have been (and continue to be) common components in diverse human communities throughout history (Gaztambide-Fernández 203). The epistemic privilege granted to written text or quantitative research is rarely attributed to non-Western ways of knowing—Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies are often Othered and ghettoized in white settler scholarship. Yet stories have the capacity to act as theory; to articulate a passage of time or imagined future; to illuminate cultural practices and traditions; and to act as a methodology for educating community members and researchers. Currently and historically, Indigenous communities have employed oral histories, stories, and creative practices as a means of imagining futurities and recalling ancestral pasts (Calixte 94). As a tool for decolonization, storytelling and creative practice are essential means by which to expose settler colonialism’s pervasive and ongoing impact and to express and make visible Indigenous practices and beliefs beyond colonial reach. As Martineau and Ritskes note:

Remapping stories of Indigenous presence into spaces from which they have been erased is a necessary reassertion of Indigenous sovereignty and sense making that, as Dion & Salamanca remind us, is also vulnerable work. It arrives in and through presence, pain, vitality and complexity; which, simultaneously, colonial structures work to re-capture—to consume these narratives through commodification, the
In the context of the Artist-Led Afternoon, the stories and dialogue that ensued were literally remapping the space—physically changing the way in which people interacted with the surrounding area, and drawing attention to how space is perceived and experienced. It worked to blur boundaries between creative space and public outdoor space. The reassertion of presence was an active resistance, but also a celebration of presence and culture. It was not a reactionary or defensive response to colonization, but an affirmation of persistence. If we think about the ways in which colonization may act as a disorientation device, we may see how the Artist-Led Afternoon can be thought of as a re-orientation device.

Indigenous (/) Queer Temporality

As discussed in the previous two analysis chapters, the allocation of space and the use of space in performance cannot be isolated from conceptions and experiences of temporality. As Andrea Smith contends in her discussion of colonization and settler narratives, “[N]ormative futurity depends on an ‘origin story.’ The future is legitimated as a continuation of the past” (47). Thus, as I have previously argued in relation to queer temporality, the stories we tell about the past inform power and privilege in the present and future by making ideologies and histories appear natural and inherent. Reading and theorizing temporalities through queer and Indigenous theories and methodologies provide a foundation from which to consider the capacity to create impactful change through decolonial performance. Temporality may be read and experienced through a frame of Indigenous epistemologies and theorizations, or through a frame of queer theorizations. Temporality could also be read simultaneously through a lens of Indigenous and queer theories. QAF conceives of such joint identities as “Indigequeer.” I present the title of this section with (/) between the two modalities to note the ways in which they may be jointly construed, but not conflated.

Like scholarship in queer theory, which considers how time and our experiences of it are constructed and molded, Native and Indigenous research works to subvert and challenge linear temporalities. As Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill suggest, the real promise of Native feminist theories lies precisely in the ways that, along with recognizing the very real challenges that Indigenous peoples face daily, these theories are simultaneously constructing what Smith (2008b) compellingly describes as “the history of the future of sovereignty, what sovereignty could mean for Native peoples” (257). . . . Thus, Smith demonstrates that one of the most radical and necessary
moves toward decolonization requires imagining and enacting a future for Indigenous peoples—a future based on terms of their own making. (24)

In blurring the boundaries between pasts and futurities, Andrea Smith’s “history of the future of sovereignty” brings to the fore the ways in which temporal periods are simultaneously constructed and continuously redefined in the present. Such a temporal understanding can be applied to artistic practices in order to envision and enact alternative experiences of time performatively.

As Smith further elucidates, scholars such as Vine Deloria contest the presumed universal application of linear time to Native experience and knowledge-making:

[Deloria] and others argue that Indigenous epistemologies do not necessarily presume a temporal distance between the past, present, and future. . . . Native ceremonies can be a place where the present, past, and future become co-present, thereby allowing us to engage in what the Native Hawaiian scholar Manu Meyer calls a radical remembering of the future. (50)

In embracing alternative temporalities, Smith argues that Indigenous communities can reject normalizing structures produced by oppression and patriarchy. We see here a clear relation to queer and lesbian temporalities, previously explored in this research. Beyond queer and settler theorizing, Indigenous temporalities provide a mode of understanding and experiencing daily life that elucidates the ways in which colonization has shaped and influenced both spatiality and temporality.

In their article “Fugitive Indigeneity,” Martineau and Ritskes discuss how decolonial and Indigenous artworks “deconstruct the temporal continuum of colonial development that always places Indigenous peoples as ‘developing’ towards modernity and civility (Sardar, 1999), and forcibly displaces indigeneity into spaces of dispossession” (ix). A decolonial creative practice has the capacity to challenge normalized notions of “development” and “modernity” by grabbing hold of the future in clenched fists, while tugging at the strings of the past to bring them both into the present. As Martineau and Ritskes further articulate, Indigenous art is constructed and supported through the artist’s connection to the community and to the spatiality of the land, a relationship “not only [integral] to artistic praxis and decolonial aesthetics, but to life itself” (viii). Decolonial artistic practices do not simply elucidate the ways in which propagated histories are constructed, but invalidate and rewrite them. Histories are brought into the present, as lost stories are revealed in the now. In this way, decolonial creative practices “break down the linearity of colonial temporality, blending and reconfiguring Indigenous presence constituted in
multiple times, media, and spaces. . . By restructuring temporality in multiple ways, Indigenous artists plumb the slippages and elisions produced within coloniality in pursuit of escape routes” (viii). Thus, these forms of art and performance are not simply aiming to entertain or inform, but to shift consciousness and decolonize land in spirit and action.

**Centring Queer Women and Two-Spirit Indigenous Creators**

Creating aligns us with our Ancestors because when we engage in artistic or creative processes, we disconnect ever so slightly from the dominant economic system and connect to a way of being based on doing, rather than blind consumption.

– Leanne Simpson

Two events at the 2017 Queer Arts Festival explicitly centred the experiences of queer and Two-Spirit women: the Cris Derksen Orchestral Powwow, held on June 24 at Roundhouse; and the QAF Young Artists Program: Technical Knockouts, comprised of a four-day drop-in workshop from June 22 to 25 and a main stage performance in which young workshop participants had the opportunity to perform alongside established artists Kinnie Starr, DJ O Show, and Tiffany Moses on June 26. While other women and non-binary artists were featured in the performances and art exhibition at the festival, these two events actively prioritized women’s inclusion and centralized the experience of Indigenous queer women.

Cris Derksen, a Juno award-nominated cellist/composer from Northern Alberta, comes from Indigenous and Mennonite ancestors. As her website notes,

there is a line of chiefs from North Tall Cree reserve on her father’s side and a line of strong Mennonite homesteaders on her mother’s side. Her music braids the traditional and contemporary in multiple dimensions, weaving her traditional classical training and her Aboriginal ancestry with new school electronics, creating genre defying music” (Derksen, “bio”)

At the QAF, Cris Derksen, The Chippewa Travellers, hoop dancer Nimkii Osawamick, and percussionist Jesse Baird performed chamber symphonic work alongside the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, one of the first-ever orchestras with all female professional musicians. Derksen explains that the original style and blending of classical and traditional Indigenous music is a means by which to explore intersections: “It brings together both parts of who I am as
Orchestral powwow is exactly how it sounds. It is contemporary Indigenous powwow music, with a chamber orchestra ensemble. Being half-Cree and a classically trained cellist, it was a way that I could bring both of my roots together and bring my classical traditional roots alongside my indigenous ancestry. Actually what made me start to think really seriously about this project is that I sit on a lot of arts grants and I was reading a lot of grants of orchestras wanting to incorporate indigeneity in some way and often what happens is that they hire a white composer, usually a white man composer, to compose Indigenous-esque kind of pieces. And I feel like we are at a place and time where you know, not about us, without us. We are at a place and time where appropriation, you know, things have been taken over and over and over again, within our colonial history, that it is time that an Indigenous person wrote classical music for Indigenous artists. *(Daily Xtra Online)*

While I am hesitant to broaden this research to include orchestral music, I mention the performance briefly here because of the way in which it enabled women, including Two-Spirit Indigenous women, to take up space and create together. Perhaps most relevant to the research is that this event took place outdoors. Unlike many of the exhibitions and events presented inside Roundhouse, this even broke down walls and barriers to produce a free outdoor event. The spatial organization of the orchestra musicians was also a significant way in which to explore otherwise-precarious and insecure access to space. Derkson states in an interview with *Xtra:*

> We are showcasing the powwow group in the middle, front and centre, so we are showcasing Indigenous artists as the front and centre, and the European classical music are around to support. I wrote this whole thing with the idea that the Powwow being in the centre and front and everyone around all of the players, they have to listen to the powwow beat. It is about time that we start listening to the aboriginal beat first and us follow after. So really what I hope people do is listen. *(Daily Xtra Online)*

While a festival structure and one-off event may be problematic in terms of sustaining marginalized queer artists’ artistic practices, the spatial organization of this performance could have a lasting impact. Demonstrating that it is not simply about showcasing Indigenous works, but also about prioritizing their voices and actively listening to and following their practices, is a performative gesture. It changes how we are oriented within and how we perceive space. It is an instructive moment for the spectators, who see the music and rhythms of traditional Indigenous peoples at the centre of the stage, and also for the classically trained musicians, who, through their positionality and place on stage, begin to unlearn Eurocentric ways of knowing and being.
Such a placement is a decolonial practice, which challenges the dominant spatial organization of mainstream orchestral concerts.

The second event that centred the voices of women and non-binary artists was the Technical Knock-Out workshop and performance. The workshop invited Indigenous and allied emerging youth artists to develop work alongside established professionals in the field through drop-in sessions. Following four days of workshop, the participating youth had the option to perform their materials at an evening event. The opening performance at this final event, performed by Two-Spirit performer Raven John, situated the audience within unceded and complex territory. John opened the evening with an original spoken-word introduction. I include the full text of the poem below, because it is significant and necessary to make space for the original words of Indigenous artists within this research. Including the full text, rather than only a segment, is a means of creating space for Indigenous artistic works within scholarship and recognizing the creative as theoretical. After a brief introduction and land acknowledgement from Rachel Iwaasa, and a welcome from the evening’s MC MountainSide, as well as music from DJ O Show, Raven John stepped on to the stage. Paper in hand, they began their piece, entitled “Unfair Folk”:

Good Evening fair folk, un fair folk
I hope you take pleasure in tonight
I hope you take displeasure in tonight
I hope you feel welcome and unwelcome
That you second guess every invitation
I present to you the most holy and unholy of lands
Here
Here is a piece of Saint Mary’s Residential school.
The hallowed floors of the boys’ dormitory.
Here on these tiles, children were violated
Here on these floors children were colonized
In metaphor
In murder
In every real bodily ways you and I would LOVE to never think of.
But I hope you do.
I hope you mourn as I do when I walk down the streets of these cities.
I hope you see the urine stained concrete as well as the rich cedar filled meeting grounds Vancouver should have been
I hope you hear my English words and mourn the Halq'emeylem taken from my tongue
That you see in my colonized beauty a mere fraction of what I could have been.
I hope you remember that when you walked through these theatre doors you passed over some of these tiles.
Your body passed over these same unholy floors
That you shared this space with my Uncle, my grandmothers and my aunts.
I stand here
On these tiles.
Because I know that I can never not be here
That you can never not be here.
That wherever we are on these unceded lands we are still here
That we cannot leave this space
That we cannot leave this place
That we are always on these floors
You are always on the same spaces that our people were raped
Murdered
Starved
Beaten
Humiliated
COLONIZED

John’s performance style was informal. That John did not read directly from the paper in hand, holding it rather than reciting from memory, points to the process of creation, rather than a polished final project. Like Dobkin asking, “Am I performing now? Now am I performing?” the presence of the paper set a tone. Audience members did not see character or performer, but a person with whom they were sharing space. What struck me about this writing and performance was—like the contradictory and layered ways in which theorizations on “UnSettling” can be undertaken—the complex ways in which space was mapped and complicated in this work. This was something that, throughout the performance, was never reconciled.

Contradictions are experienced in our bodies that are neither oversimplified or justified. Histories and presents are not isolated. The audience is not asked to remove itself from space and place, but to think through its daily actions. Each sense is invoked to physicalize the experience of colonization. The space is articulated orally through sight and smell. The audience is situated within the social and political histories of colonization through the repetition of the word “here.” As Qwo-li Driskill articulates in their discussion of Cherokee Two-Spirit peoples, it is not that Indigenous peoples have been absent from space, but rather that colonial powers consistently attempt to invisibilize and devalue their existence: “We were never lost. While heteropatriarchal colonization attempts to claim land and bodies, asegi\(^53\) bodies remain unruly. We trick colonial powers. We escape. We survive. We re-create and re-member who we are. We come home”

\(^{53}\) Asegi, which translates from Cherokee as “strange,” refers to “people who . . . fall outside of men’s and women’s roles” (Driskill 6).
(Driskill 99). In John’s piece, the sharing of space with ancestors rearticulates and emphasizes persisting presence. It refuses the empty or placeless space that settler colonialism proposes as a natural and neutral originating state.

Following the performance, one spectator approached a performer inquisitively: “Did that all really happen right here? Was Roundhouse a residential school?” The poem had made that person reflect on the space they were in and ask about its history. The performer responded, “Not right here. But we need to recognize the way that all of this land is resting upon that violent history.” With this in mind, we may consider the ways in which this poem situated audience members within space, implicated their presence, and increased settler accountability, but also took them somewhere else, enabled them to understand how their current position in the theatre is predicated on other violence within the province and country. This articulation of “here” does not transport audience members to a new place, but instead forces them to complicate the ways in which settler colonialism shapes all spaces in Canada, including the space of the theatre where they sit.

Conclusion

Throughout each of the performances analyzed, the space of the performance was articulated and explored through narrative. Stories are essential orientation strategies. They are not singular. The purpose, use, and messaging of any one story will differ and diverge from those of others. Thus, the relationship between stories and space requires fluidity and change. The ways stories educate depends on their structure, style, and content, but also on the spatial and temporal context in which they are told. King writes:

For Native storytellers, there is generally a proper place and time to tell a story. Some stories can be told any time. Some are only told in the winter when snow is on the ground or during certain ceremonies or at specific moments in a season. (153-154)

Stories are negotiated and are situated. They are temporally and spatially specific. As much as they point to particular spaces, they also take up space in the act of being told and heard. Oral histories and narratives reclaim land by establishing histories and presents that are often erased or unknown. At the QAF, the multidisciplinary and multi-generational approach encouraged stories and narratives to take on diverse forms and aesthetics. The ways in which stories
remapped space and situated the audience within the space of the theatre demonstrate a connection and respect for land and place.
Chapter 8
Conclusions

A feminist does not lend her hand; she too curls her fist.

– Sara Ahmed

From the ovens we rise with our fists in the air. Now is the time.

– Dovid Zisman

I recently started learning how to box, and I find myself always wanting to stay still when I am in the ring—to keep my feet firmly rooted in the ground. I refuse, at first, to shuffle my feet, to circle the space. My fists move more quickly with each class, my coordination improves, but my feet don’t want to budge. My body clings to the floor beneath it, wanting to be static, to remain in this one single spot. There is stability in this spot. I can learn to hold my ground. Yet, as my sparring partner enters the ring, the seeming strength of my stance dissipates. It is only when I move that I am fully able to see my opponent—to fight them from new angles; to change the space through my body’s movement in it. To learn how to navigate the space, I cover more ground. I make bigger strides. I can see new angles of the fight—what I am up against. When I move, I am able to take up space; to see more fully the battle I am in, and to fight.

On Whose Terms: Mobility and Stasis

When I began this study, I entered with an assumption. I believed that the transience of queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance was a fraught state and a wholly undesirable experience. That this transience, which is a direct result of inequitable gender dynamics, left artists with nowhere to go (or, perhaps more specifically, nowhere to stay). Yet through my analysis of case studies and discussions with artists, I discovered tightly woven contradictions, which I opt to hold, rather than reconcile or justify. The contradictions became apparent fairly early this research. We move because there is nowhere to go. We cannot control the arm’s-lengths institutions that refuse to grant operational funding, or the boards and artistic directors who continue to slot queer women’s and marginalized artists’ works into festivals and one-off events instead of main stage season programming. We move because we are ghettoized, deemed particular, among a wash of neutralized, cisgender, straight white performance.
However, when we move, we create change. We create new maps and new stories. We alter the expectations of space and create new spaces that reflect diverse queer communities. We reach beyond the walls of a theatre and beyond the safety of security. We resist single narratives. We find each other in unexpected places and reveal places among the placeless. But the resistance and interventions we create do not justify the struggle or result in it “getting better.” Fighting is not easy, and it cannot be trivialized.

Transient and nomadic performance practice has fewer structures to which to be accountable. Travel through space offers the opportunity to change surroundings and to question motivation and setting persistently (Knowles, *Survival Space* 31–34). This is true for all nomadic performance. I argue that what is of particular significance to queer women’s and non-binary artists’ performance is that taking up space and making space through a transient artistic practice affords not only more (though perhaps still limited) freedom of expression, but also the ability to queer the space and the neighbourhood around it. It enables creative practitioners to dismantle normalized geography and challenge the often-invisible dynamics of white heterosexist settler colonial space. I do not claim this turn as a reclamation of an impenetrable white straight patriarchal system; on the contrary, rather than taking a positive turn, I assert that this is a survival strategy in a very messy struggle. Our strength in creating together and in our diverse communities is testament to our creativity and resilience. But such resilience can never be imagined as a symptom of progress. This is a battle to exist in a world that deems queer women and non-binary artists to be outsiders. Even when winning, we remain (and perhaps opt to remain) outside. Access to the placeless or empty stage is not what we are fighting for. Thus, we are alive with contradictions.

As queer women and non-binary performers continue to combat the oppressive spatial inequities in theatre communities and the broader country, the efficacy of mobility should not be romanticized. Though there are benefits to transience, the absence of an alternative strips queer women and non-binary artists of the *choice* to be transient. Whether artists are forced to move continually to produce their works in short-term rentals or whether artists are unable to develop a nomadic practice, the absence of agentive action or capacity to orient oneself within dominant normative spaces is indicative of the inequities of space that shape marginalized queer artists’ theatre practices. Other contradictions exist as well. On the one hand, when discussing
marginalized queer women and non-binary artists, I argue that more equitable, accessible, and stable space is necessary for their works. On the other hand, in unmapping the places in which theatrical productions are staged in Toronto and Vancouver, I demonstrate the ways in which theatre (and perhaps white queer theatre in particular) is used as an institutionalized mechanism to gentrify already colonized land. Settler colonialism necessitates complicating access to and ownership of space and land in the arts. While one is working toward increasing access to space for marginalized artists in Canada, it is essential that the history of spaces and the ways in which settler colonialism continues to function be illuminated.

In this research I have worked to analyze the relationship between precarious access to space for marginalized queer artists, and experiences and manifestations of place in performance. In this consideration of geographies and performance, I engage with space as durational and time-based. Responding to the idea of the “empty space,” I argue that when space is perceived as neutral and universal, when it is emptied of its particular histories and politics, we “disappear” spatial inequities that organize the performance venue, and disregard or invisibilize the conditions of arrival operating for distinct groups and communities. In *Tip of the Tongue*, Peter Brook returns to ideas originally theorized in his canonical work *The Empty Space*. Here, he notes that “emptiness was a starting point, not for its own sake, but to help discover each time what was really essential to support the richness of the actor’s words and presence” (339). It is significant that such discovery implicitly involves the removal or erasure of that which is not considered “essential,” that which is seen as “clutter” or crowding a space. He continues by saying that the richest expression of emptiness exists in the moments of silence that transpire when audience and performer share a deep feeling: “[T]his is the rare, the ultimate empty space” (339). Though such shared silences are affectively significant to the theatrical experience, I argue that they are not an articulation of emptiness. In *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*, Audre Lorde discusses the dangers of silence, but she does not speak of filling these silences. That silences are already heavy with the histories and stories of those who have not been heard is implicit in the title of her work. She is speaking instead of the courage and ability to transform silence. This is an act of revelation, not creation. Though silence on stage has an impact on audience and spectator, arguably it is not because of an articulation of emptiness, but rather because such silences draw us to think of what is not being said. Rather than an expression of emptiness, then, these silences might elucidate how spaces are already full. Although each of
the case studies I analyzed was markedly different in form, content, and discipline from the others I examined, I bring them together in this context in order to demonstrate the multitude of ways in which we can engage the fullness of place and transform the assumed emptiness to reveal the spatial dynamics at play.

As I articulated in my first case study, d’bi.young anitafrika runs a theatre company that, though precarious, maintains a space for development of its work. The need to find alternative spaces nonetheless in which to stage performances demonstrates the insecurity and inaccessibility of space for marginalized artists. The need, and at times the desire, to move comes to characterize The Orisha Trilogy, as audiences not only move to different venues in the city to see the three performances, but also move during the performance—moving between thresholds before entering the performance space. Such a technique compels audiences to place themselves—to have an embodied experience within the theatre—becoming accountable to the dynamics of space and place, and reflecting on the relationship between the content of the production and everyday experiences of racism, homophobia, and classism outside of the theatre.

Jess Dobkin’s The Magic Hour also functions to accentuate space and place, playing with temporality and pacing. Through elongated moments that lengthen perceived and experienced time in the space, her work demonstrates the capacity to change orientations within space through a refusal to rush through it. Dobkin’s repetition of the question “Am I performing now? Now am I performing” does not compel audiences simply to question the nature of the production and Dobkin’s role within it, but also implicitly compels us to ask, “Am I a spectator now?” Our own roles within the production are questioned through this experience. In the final moments of the production, when audience members leave the stage space and returns to a newly transformed lobby, their expectations of space and place are challenged too. Here, like anitafrika’s work, the movement over thresholds challenges audiences to avoid passive consumption of a performance. Unlike anitafrika’s trilogy, which moved through various venues, Dobkin’s production was stable, and she was allotted the most development time and resources she had ever received for a single project. The security of space enabled Dobkin to take her time, to explore the space and to take up space for longer, with fewer concerns for running out of materials, funds, or resources. As part of the Theatre Centre’s season, Dobkin was given a privileged spatial position.
In the final chapter, which analyzed the Queer Arts Festival, place and space were also essential to the exhibition. The annual festival’s theme made space, even if only momentarily, for Two-Spirit and Indigequeer performance. Rather than demonstrating how placefullness might manifest, as I had articulated in the previous two chapters, here we can begin to see its origins. Settler colonialism enables and demands an erasure of place, and an assumption of space as universal and available. Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies insist that land and space are integral to performance reception. The power of the land and its histories shapes how we experience space, and what is available to us within space. Considering placefullness and spatial precarity through the lens of settler colonialism thus provides insight into the invasive ways in which settler colonialism shapes dominant performance space and orients particular subjects as insiders to the experience in the theatre.

Future Research

Beyond the City Limits

As I continue this research, I am interested in navigating the disparate experiences of those who produce artistic works in rural areas and small towns outside of cosmopolitan cities. The increasingly high cost of living and rent makes creating artistic works in Vancouver and Toronto unattainable for many marginalized queer artists in Canada. As a result, many artists have begun to move to nearby cities, which, though much smaller, have developed vibrant artistic communities, due to lower costs of living and space. Yet queer experiences in geographies outside of major cities are vastly different, particularly for queer and transgender people of colour, and those who do not conform to normative gender binaries or expected behaviours. One recent example that demonstrates the need to conduct this research outside of major cities is the defacement of posters for queer productions at the Hamilton Fringe Festival. On July 22, 2017, the Hamilton Fringe Festival notifying followers of their Facebook page that posters were being defaced in the area. They noted that they were filing a police report, and encouraged spectators to photograph the slurs to document the incidents. They urged fringe-goers to attend queer events and productions to support these works. With this event in mind, and building on Jack Halberstam’s theorizations on rural and small-town queer experience in *In a Queer Time and Place*, the this research project will expand to examine the ways in which placefullness manifests in areas outside of urban centres. The decentering of the urban city
sphere, in response to increased costs of living, extends beyond Canada. This movement is an important part of the geographies of artistic place-making by new generations living with increasingly precarious income. As this project moves forward, I will examine how placefullness manifests in queer women’s work and in non-binary artists’ work in rural areas and small towns in and through performance in the US and Canada.

Queer Precarity:

Queer women and non-binary artists, particularly those who are Indigenous, Black, people of colour, and/or live with disabilities, are fighting to create their work, to express their ideas, and to earn sufficient funds to survive. Queer women and non-binary artists often do not have a choice about whether or not their productions will inhabit an ongoing or secure space. They may not choose to move. Yet movement may afford them opportunities. We can see our opponents—we see them in the city centre, in the storefronts, in the village. We see them in bars and in festivals. We gain perspective when we move. We can fight the system from multiple angles. We can surround and envelope the city. There is something to be said about a strategy that refuses to stand still. That spreads and seeps and unashamedly takes space. To ambush is to hide in plain sight, to surround the theatre industry and create despite and through precarity.

I began this research project with three questions pertaining to queer women’s and non-binary artists’ experience of space and engagement with place in performance. As I commenced my analysis of the productions I attended, the unique ways in which place was produced began to shape and develop my theory of “placefullness.” Placefullness emerged on stage, and in the audience. It is a phenomenological experience of orientation that deneutralizes the theatrical space. Though any artist could produce work that draws attention to space and place in performance, what is unique to this inquiry is the connection between the precarity of space and an articulation of place for queer creators. Placefullness enables the illumination of space, where it has been previously erased. It points to precarity, without necessitating that a production explicitly address it. It is a mechanism by which to resist inequities through the insistence of presence.

Throughout this work I focus on the tactics used in spite of and in response to precarity by examining artistic expression and ways in which precarious place and space can be articulated
despite their own erasure. I am interested in expanding upon the concept of queer precarity in continuing this research by unpacking how spatial vulnerability is in part constituted and shaped through the acquisitions of rights and property by more privileged LGBT subjects. Initiating an analysis of the intersections of marginality, such a project also calls into question how and whether queerness exists without precarity. Put another way: Can a queer politic and theory exist within the comfort of equality and equity, and would such a position necessitate conformity to the normalizing tactics queer theory seeks to dismantle and destruct? For Muñoz, queerness exists within the ephemeral moment. It is, as Fred Moten suggests,

[i]ts own deliciously filthy and uninviting utopian project, one whose temporal dimensionality is manifest not only as projection into the future but also as projection of a certain futurity into and onto the present and the past, piercing their previous arrangement and administration. Queerness . . . is located in displacement, at sites that are both temporary and shifting, in underground, virtual neighborhoods, ephemeral, disappearing clubs and ordinary, everyday venues broken and reconstructed by extraordinary everynight presences. (167)

Queer presence, in this conception, is enacted through an absence of stability. Invested in—or perhaps defined by—its own displacement, queer (as a politic and theory) might not seek the security of an ongoing place, with its ties to capital, ownership, and inevitable conformity. Though combating queer precarity is at the centre of my research, and demonstrates the impact of patriarchal heterosexism and racism, further inquiries could probe what queer precarity is, beyond the centring of queer subjects—as an aesthetic, a politic, and a social and cultural destabilization of conventional understandings of wealth and privilege. Queer precarity’s relationship to space might offer insight into the liminal shifting and slipping in-between to which Muñoz and Moten allude.

I realized throughout this research that I was less interested in the ways dominant space is organized than I was in the ways in which this organization is erased and how such erasure can be combated through the performance event. When the politics of space are erased, space is naturalized. Though some bodies remain hyper-visible, the conditions of this visibility result in surveillance, not effectual recognition. In Living a Feminist Life, Sara Ahmed notes:

When we say something is precarious, we usually mean it is in a precarious position: if the vase on the mantelpiece were pushed, just a little bit, a little bit, it would topple right over. That position—of living on the edge—is what is generalized when we speak of precarious populations (see Butler 2015). . . . When I
think of this, I think of how fragility as an effort to hold on can become more revolting; how fragility can be militancy. (238)

Patriarchy, racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia are violent forces. They threaten to push us over the edge. Yet it is in this in-between state, not quite fallen, not quite stable, that our rush exists, it is where our stories and histories can teeter between the past and the future. In these moments of stress, we find hope and potential. We are not fighting for a place on the mantelpiece, we are not fighting to conform: we are fighting to hold on to our place on the edge.
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