

Here We Are, in the Middle

Yvette Nolan

When I was serving as artistic director at Native Earth, we started doing this thing. It's a physical thing, a way of reminding ourselves why we do the work. We extend one arm behind, extend the other arm forward. That arm behind us, that's the ancestors, the arm before, that's those who come after us, and here we are, here I am, in the middle of the continuum. I do the work for those who came before and those who come after. This action, arms outstretched like you have just drawn and released an arrow from the largest bow, arms outstretched as in Virabhadrasana II, Warrior 2, is also a reminder that we carry the knowledge of our ancestors forward, we pass it on to our descendants, blood, artistic, or otherwise.

The back and forth of discussion is what moves us forward. Discussion in circles, in gatherings, in classrooms is how we remember those who came before, our teachings from them, and how we pass that knowledge along to those who come after. Hearing each other, hearing ourselves, being willing to say things out loud—or on the page—and then be challenged on them by others—editors, scholars, gentle readers—and be asked to re-examine them. Staying open to the possibility of change, of growth, of learning.

Ric Knowles is cited in Barry Freeman's article "Hourglasses and Hammers: A Reflection on Forty Years of Interculturalism in *Canadian Theatre Review*" (this issue)—of course he is, he has literally written the book on *Theatre and Interculturalism*, as well as edited the CTR issue *Inter/Cultural/Performance*. Ric's thinking and writing about interculturalism has changed over the years, what he knows has shifted as he learned, and he has done some of his learning in front of us. In response to seeing an early iteration of Native Earth Performing Art's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, he wrote an article titled "The Death of a Chief: Watching for Adaptation; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bard," in which he unpacked his resistance to what was on offer, talking about his disappointment with what

we showed in our first workshop, assessing his expectations, and recognizing that they may have “blinded” him to what we were actually attempting to do (62). In the article, he tracks his own evolution as a scholar, alongside the evolution of the work of a small, scrappy Indigenous company.

Similarly, Barry returns to his earlier self in “Hourglasses and Hammers,” examining his experience with the Prague–Toronto–Manitoulin Theatre Project (PTMTP) some twenty years ago. Barry is reflecting on forty years of interculturalism in the pages of *CTR*, and he tracks it admirably, but he also displays his own growth. This Barry is wiser than the 2005 Barry, and he looks back on his grappling with the terms, the words, the nomenclature. As Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert noted decades ago, “the terminologies are woolly, to say the least” (32).

Words are so fraught. The meaning with which they are endowed shifts and changes. Feminism, inclusion, civilization . . . words that are one day descriptive and the next, derogatory. I am regularly chastised for using the word “halfbreed” to describe myself, in spite of the fact that I feel that Maria Campbell reclaimed it for us in her 1973 book of the same name. Many of us have been challenged when we use the word “Indian”—even though we are all—Canadians and Indigenous folk alike—still held in thrall by the Indian Act, established in 1876. Ask your institution what policies they have in place to “authenticate” Indigenous identity and I guarantee you that “a valid Indian Status or Treaty card” will be the first acceptable form of verification.

So with interculturalism. Josette Féral says that it has “at its core the concept of difference. . . . Could we not say that studying this difference, far from freeing us and allowing a dialogue between cultures, ultimately results in the reinforcement of individualities and specificities that work against the cultural dialogues it attempts to establish” (7)? That may well be true, but the implication is then that different is bad. Are we at a place and a time where we recognize difference and work together across difference? Is the problem who gets to name the difference? Is the problem the impetus behind the desire to work together? What if the players want to work together because of the similarities they sense between the different players? Lo and Gilbert do much work unpacking the meaning and the application of intercultural in their “Toward a Topography of Cross–Cultural Theatre Praxis,” in fact making

something of a wish for intercultural practice, twenty-plus years ago, pointing many of us towards many possible paths.

These conversations happen intergenerationally in the pages of *CTR*. They happen across geographies, and across time. The late, great Daniel David Moses teaches me again through Barry's piece—as he taught Barry back then. Lo and Gilbert teach me again, as they taught Selena Couture, who generously shared their 2002 article with me when I could not find it in the library. Note the language in the title—*Toward* implies movement, reaching for, evolution. There has been, as Barry notes, some scepticism about “intercultural utopias” (141) in the pages of *CTR*, as scholars and thinkers and artists and writers grapple with the word, the definition of the word in this particular moment. Good, let us wrestle with the language, let us tussle with the ideas, let us not erase the past, but understand that we can't get there from here, without going through this.

References

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