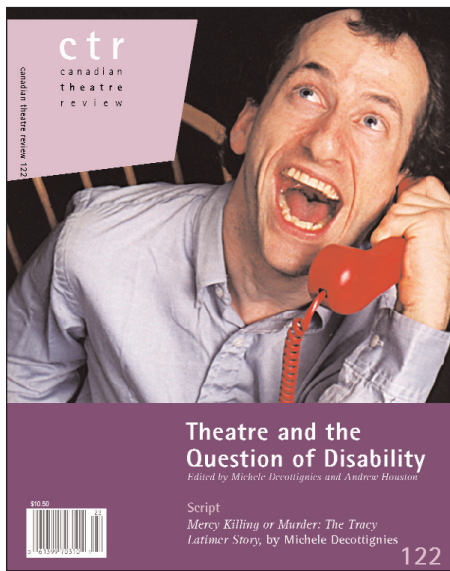


Theatre and the Question of Disability

EDITED BY MICHELE DECOTTIGNIES AND ANDREW HOUSTON



CTR 122, Spring 2005. This is the first issue of *CTR* to focus on “theatre and disability,” a phrase that encompasses a wide range of artists and theatre-making practices. Many of us within the disability community believe it to be synonymous with “disability art,” an artistic representation of the disability experience in its entirety: from Victoria Maxwell’s psychosis-induced, naked sprint down an upscale Vancouver street, to Alan Shain’s anxiety over a blind date with a non-disabled woman, to Heidi Janz’s socially savvy plays, which are “always” about disability – and the work of all of us artists in between.

Yet to those of us who have a disability but do not participate in theatre that portrays our experiences, “theatre and disability” means something different. We are not disability artists but artists with a disability – a blind actor who’s playing Rodney in Morris Panych’s *Seven Stories*; a woman with Downs syndrome who practices traditional Indian dance; a playwright with cerebral palsy who writes about small-town Alberta; a woman with an acquired brain injury who directs *See Bob Run...*

Adding to the dialogue are those of us who are both disability artists and disabled artists. We create theatre that has something significant to say about the experience of being disabled AND take whatever roles or jobs we can get within the professional theatre milieu (Lyle Victor Albert being the “crossover” artist most of us know by name).

Then there are those artists without a disability who are engaged in mainstream, alternative and/or highly innovative theatre practices that include, or are adapted for, people with a disability. In these cases, “theatre and disability” alludes not to the declaration or normalization of being disabled but to theatre practices that redefine, reveal or revel in the collective of human experience. For all of us, however, the term affords a remarkable opportunity to contribute to the continually evolving ecology that is Canadian theatre.

The *Canadian Theatre Review* is the major magazine of record for Canadian theatre. The magazine is committed to excellence in critical analysis and the innovative coverage of current developments in Canadian theatre. It introduces new artists, publishing at least one significant new playscript in each issue, and it provides a forum for the national discussion of new directions and new projects in theatre. The much anticipated spring issue of *Canadian Theatre Review* is now available. **CTR 122, Spring 2005**, presents a talented, charismatic, creative and renowned selection of playwrights and performers in the disability community.

Photographic Performance: A Part of Me

A Part of Me is a selection of photography by Calgary-based artist KYLE RIVA. In A Part of Me, Riva aims to depict the challenges that he and other people with amputations face in their daily lives. Kyle came to photography in a roundabout way; after brief stints in journalism and other media, his work proves that years of struggle and searching do pay off.

Disability Pride within Disability Performance

Speaking back against dominant narratives that report the disability artist as possessing a broken body, a tragic life and a diminished humanity, CATHERINE FRAZEE outlines the aesthetic parameters of the journey many disabled artists have taken toward a radical style of expression and a sense of pride in finding a poetry and gesture unique and yet offering much to a collective sense of a disability arts movement.

Disability, Theatre and Power: An Analysis of a One-Person Play

ALAN SHAIN asks us to consider how disability is a consequence of social oppression, not of the physical or mental impairment of an individual, and in the process, he outlines the dramaturgical development of *Still Waiting for That Special Bus*, his one-person play exploring the emotional and physical desire to connect with someone despite the power that the adapted transit system has to affect the situation.

Being Disabled?

In grade eight, TYLER FORTIN was told that learning French would be difficult for a kid with cerebral palsy; fortunately, he took a drama class instead. The rest is history, as he recaps the beginnings of his career as a stand-up comedian, where comic timing is more important than CP.

My Continuing Adventures as a “Challenged” Playwright

For HEIDI JANZ, playwriting is a work of creativity and activism. Here she describes the evolution of a production process through two plays, *Crips against the Law of Gravity* and *Return to Sender*, where she has crafted the art of creating theatre that challenges the notion of “the challenged.”

Rasika’s Bharata Natyam and Story-Dancing Résumé

Bharata Natyam is one of the seven classical dance styles of India; despite the challenges of living with Downs syndrome, RASIKA VIDYUT AKLUJKAR has mastered this form of expression, and here she shares how she performs the stories of Rama, Krishna, and Hanuman for children in British Columbia.

Making the Invisible Visible

As a professional actor, VICTORIA MAXWELL toyed with the idea of exploring her bipolar disorder through her art; possessing what’s often referred to as an “invisible disability,” she thought she had a choice. When life’s circumstances finally “outed” her, she not only turned her considerable talent toward the expression of these invisible disabilities; she became Hollywood North’s Bi-Polar Princess!

Iris’ Tours: Pitfalls, Potholes and Chutzpah

In the 1990s, a car crash changed the life of psychology professor AUBRY BISSETT forever. On permanent disability, she enrolled as a part time student in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock University, and, with the help of GLENYS MCQUEEN-FUENTES and

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H. CHRISTINA MACNAUGHTON, has turned this ill-fated trip by car into a journey of tremendous dramatic and therapeutic proportions.

Lyle Victor Albert's After Shave

ANDREW HOUSTON examines LYLE VICTOR ALBERT's multiple-award-winning production *Scraping the Surface* through the framework of theatre anthropology and explores how the "actor as refusenik" performs identity as revolt.

Challenging Bodies: Very Physical Theatre

Part theatre, part dance, part multimedia event, KATHLEEN IRWIN's *Challenging Bodies* is outlined here, a remarkable project exploring the link between imagination and physical expression.

Sex, Cars and Shopping: Meditations on Social Disabilities

Vancouver's Radix Theatre creates performances that offer meditations on society's dysfunctional relationship with sex, cars and shopping. ANDREW TEMPLETON presents compelling insight into why Radix's approach constitutes a form of disability theatre.

Building Communities: Disability Arts Festivals in Canada

In the past five years, disability arts festivals have emerged as vital cultural forum across Canada. KIRSTY JOHNSTON outlines this relatively new phenomenon and discusses its importance in asserting, linking and celebrating the talents of artists from across the country.

The Truth about Theatre from the Inside Out

Defining feminism as "the desire to strive for equality for all people," Artistic Director RUTH BIEBER describes how she infuses her feminist ethos into the process of creation at the Inside Out Theatre Company.

Using the Arts as a Tool for Healing, Self-Discovery, Empowerment and Catharsis

In the wake of a disabling car accident, S. SIOBHAN MCCARTHY created the absolut theatre company in 1997, and ever since, this company has created an aesthetic space of healing through theatre.

Stepping from the Wings

With an art form that takes its name from the Greek word *theatron*, or "seeing place," WANDA C. FITZGERALD wonders why most directors in the professional Canadian theatre community can't see the virtue of hiring a blind actor, as she offers insight into why Toronto's Glenvale Players has been cultivating the talents of blind performers since 1941.

Stage Ability: A Terrific Theatre Experience

As the Artistic Director of the Theatre Terrific Society from 2001 to 2004, LIESL LAFFERTY brought many skills to her work with this company, but most important to her tenure with Theatre Terrific seems to be her ability to see how the creation of truly remarkable art begins with patience and an openness to a freedom of expression.

Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story

Artistic Director and founder of Stage Left productions, MICHELE DECOTTIGNIES outlines the extraordinary process of creation that went into the making of *Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story*.

Script: *Mercy Killing or Murder: The Tracy Latimer Story*, a collective artist and community collaboration in performance creation of Stage Left Productions

Guest Editors: Michele Decottignies is the founder and Artistic Director of Stage Left Productions, Calgary's only theatre company engaging exclusively in professional artist – community collaboration and the producers of *Balancing Acts: Calgary's Annual Disability Arts Festival*. Andrew Houston teaches at the University of Waterloo and is Views and Reviews editor of *CTR*.

Contributors include Kyle Riva, Catherine Frazee, Alan Shain, Tyler Fortin, Heidi Janz, Rasika Vidyut Aklujkar, Victoria Maxwell, Aubry Bissett, Glenys Fuentes-McQueen, H. Christina MacNaughton, Andrew Houston, Kathleen Irwin, Andrew Templeton, Kirsty Johnston, Ruth Bieber, Siobhan McCarthy, Wanda Fitzgerald, Liesl Lafferty, George Belliveau, Stephen Johnson and Robyn Read.

Upcoming Issues:

CTR 123 • Summer 2005, **Working Conditions**

CTR 124 • Fall 2005, **High Performance Rodeo**

CTR 125 • Winter 2006, **Canadian? Theatre? Review?**