

Performing the Past in Situ

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ABSTRACT

Johnny Drops the Bomb is a site-specific, historical play written to be performed in the Diefenbunker, a bomb shelter built to protect key members of the Canadian government in the event of a nuclear attack. As a practice-as-research project, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* explores the theories and techniques associated with performing history in situ: aura and atmosphere, empathy and witnessing, embodiment and being-in-the-world, proximity and site-specificity, and upsurges of the Real. As the written component of that practical project, this thesis contextualizes *Johnny Drops the Bomb* by situating it within these approaches, reflecting on the role that each technique played as I wrote, rehearsed, and ultimately performed it with two other actors.

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Exact locality is one of the first elements of reality. The speaking or acting characters do not alone engrave the faithful impression of facts on the soul of the spectator. The place where such a catastrophe occurred becomes a terrible and inseparable witness of it, and the absence of this sort of silent character makes the greatest scenes of history in the drama incomplete

---Victor Hugo (3:63)

Introduction: Performing History in Situ

History and theatre share an interest in the traces of that which has passed. At this intersection of the two disciplines, theatre theoretician Peggy Phelan insists that performance, like the past, “becomes itself through disappearance” (Phelan, 146), and historian Greg Dening asserts that “history is always a performance” (Dening, 1). According to Dening, recording the past and cementing it as history, is akin to performance. Victor Hugo’s observation that site acts as a witness, like spectator to the past, serving as a “terrible and inseparable witness” (Hugo, 63). In another sense, if one pulls a layer of paint off a stage floor, the traces of past work are still physically present underneath, like fossils under rock, preserved materially and in memory.

This thesis focuses on the ramifications of historical performance in a site with its own clamorous historical resonances. When a performance occurs in a space recognized as historically relevant, spectators begin from a position of awareness that something important took place there. Further, because they inhabit the space in performance as a theatre, the audience can be made aware of the site’s participation in both the historical moment (the past) and the contemporary moment of performance (the present). In this way, site acts as a container, Hugo’s “inseparable witness,” housing both the historical and the contemporary moment, and because of its material existence, it does not fall victim to disappearing like the historical moment or the performance itself. Although both the historical moment and the performance are ephemeral, site remains a material thread between then and now, making reference to its past and present through material and memorial traces that can be emphasized or quieted through techniques employed by artists using the space for performance.

In order to think about these techniques, I begin with actor network theory (ANT), as theorized by Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy in *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*,

by considering space as a special category of object. ANT is way of looking at objects as active participants within a network of humans and other objects, rather than passive and pliable objects that are only animated when humans are using them. This theory posits that objects and materials should not be understood as “inert human possessions” but as actants with influence on the world through their relationship with the networks they participate in (Schweitzer and Zerdy, 2-3). If ANT is applied to historical objects, I posit, artifacts displayed in museums are removed from these networks, in their past and their present, treated as possessions rather than participants. In an article I co-wrote with Grahame Renyk for the *Canadian Theatre Review*, I consider museums as zoos for objects, disempowering an object’s influence on the world by separating it from its habitat, or its network (Horner and Renyk, 62).

In his above quote, Hugo theorizes that “place” is a “silent character”, witnessing the past and unable to separate itself from it. However, because I am interested in infusing space with a sense of participation in an historical event, in this thesis I shift my use of the term *place* to *space*. The difference between place and space is an elusive but significant distinction. Place is one that is shared by a community, a church for example, without specificity or known experience associated with a phenomenological experience. Place gains the specificity associated with being designated a “space” as those considering it inhabit it. Thus, space becomes a place through history, memory, and performance.

While place can also be analyzed using ANT, its function as an active participant is different from that of a portable object. Unlike the displaced historical object, because of its permanence site represents a continuity between past and present, activating “then,” “now,” and also a continuity between them, “since.” Even if the “since” of a site includes alternative uses distant from its past and present purposes, even if there are no material traces of its original use,

this use remains accessible through the invocation of memory; the thread between then and now has not been disrupted even if the space is used in a different context. Performance is one way of invoking that memory, reconnecting a place to its past by following this thread, backwards. By embodying a piece of the past in the place where it happened, theatre activates an understanding of “then”, “now”, and “since” within the bodies of artists, the historical site, and the spectators, mobilizing space as a container and witness to the past, the present, and everything in between.

Because the site is container to both the past and present when history is performed in situ, the line between the world of the play and the world of the spectator is blurred as both worlds are situated within the literal space of the performance: in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, the fictional characters and the spectators share a small room designated for single occupancy by Prime Minister Diefenbaker in case of nuclear attack. Through this intense proximity in an historical site, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* aims to ignite “upsurges of the Real,” as theorized by scholars including Bert O. States, Marvin Carlson, Hans-Thies Lehmann, Julia Kristeva, and Jenn Stephenson. In order to create that sensation of an oscillation between the real and fictive worlds, I draw on Rebecca Schneider’s theories about historical re-enactment, Pierre Nora’s about lieux de mémoire / milieux de mémoire, and Freddie Rokem’s about the actor as hyperhistorian alongside techniques employed in site-specific and immersive theatre such as bluemouth inc’s being-in-the-world and Michel de Certeau’s notion of walking through a space as a phenomenological experience with agency. Extrapolating from the theories of Walter Benjamin on aura and Gernot Böhme on atmosphere, I use this performance to explore both the techniques that would instill a sense of historical aura in a site and the implications of so doing. Site-specific performance allows for an oscillation between the real and the fictional spaces the performance inhabits, while historical re-enactment oscillates between past and present time:

performing history site-specifically is an exercise in creating both what Schneider describes as “syncopated time” and, extrapolating from her, syncopated space. By making visible the historical remnants, or “ghosts” as Marvin Carlson calls them, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* explores site’s ability to act as the fulcrum between past and present, triangulating existing techniques and theories relating to space and to history.

I. Performing History: the “again of a time out of joint”

Theatre and history become themselves through acts of disappearance (Phelan, 146). In her book *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment*, Rebecca Schneider explains that historical re-enactment is an episode in “history’s theatrical returns” (Schneider, 1). Through performance, traditional re-enactment attempts to replicate the intricate details of an historical moment to “authentically” re-perform an event, like a famous battle or a watershed moment. This theatrical practice of “re-playing or re-doing a precedent event, artwork or act” is often practiced in cultural programming in an age that exploits the “memory industry,” with “authenticity” as a leading objective (Schneider, 2). Living history museums and pioneer villages employ this strategy in historical animation often, relying on the liveness of actor bodies to reinforce an understanding of the once-liveness of history. In Schneider’s *Performing Remains* she re-enactments as examples, blurring the line between past and present by employing actors to wear corsets and churn butter before an audience of eager schoolchildren and tourists without the need to employ a willing suspension of disbelief because of the lack of a fourth wall.

Re-enactments create an effect that Schneider refers to as “syncopated time,” a disruption of the apparently solid line between then and now that makes simultaneously visible both the past and present (Schneider, 14). If time is syncopated and characters from the past are made

visible in the present, spectators are witnesses to a bizarre kind of time-travelling with both the past and present in view at the same time; when the fourth wall is broken by interaction between these characters and the spectators, space comes into play as the syncopated time is layered in a space that resonates as something historical and contemporary at the same time. Re-enactments as historical performance in historical sites have an emphasis on historical objectivity and imparting fact in educating the public on historical events. However, Schneider acknowledges that the closer re-animators try to get to objective historical reality, framed not as art but as an exact re-embodiment of “authentic history,” the more spectators can recognize the impossibility of this task (Schneider, 14). Indeed, historians influenced by Michel de Certeau and Greg Dening conclude that history itself is a performance, with no singular historical “truth” underpinning it: Schneider’s acknowledgement of the audience’s awareness of impossibilities nods to this challenge in re-enactment.

Sidelining the issue of authenticity, Schneider tries to understand “what re-enactors were doing and why they were doing it” in the process of re-performing the past (Schneider, 7). She theorizes that re-enactment as a theatrical practice asks its participants to put themselves “in the place of the past, re-enacting that past by posing as if they were, indeed” the characters they depict (Schneider, 9). This kind of embodied mimesis is sought after in historical re-enactment, and “getting it right” is a consideration for participants and organizers (Schneider, 10). Historical re-enactors strive for accuracy in the minute details, attempting to achieve what Schneider cites as Richard Schechner’s “twice-behaved behavior” (Schneider, 100). Spectators witness a “leak of another time” through the participants’ performances, an experience that Schneider identifies as “touching time,” or the hope by the participants that an exact re-enactment will present spectators with the potential to witness history. The presence of other spectators and the

trappings of contemporary life chafe against history, resulting in syncopy, the moment where “then and now punctuate each other” (Schneider, 2). This challenge of confronting “simultaneous temporal registers,” or the awareness of the visible then and now, categorizes re-enactment as “not the thing itself (the past), somehow also not not the thing (the past)” (Schneider, 8).

Where historical re-enactment focuses on reanimating the past, the performance of history opens the possibility of seeing the past through the lens of the present, making room for an acknowledgement of the fictionality that is embedded in re-performing the past and, with it, a critical distance from that past. Joseph Roach, in his book *Cities of the Dead*, coins the term “surrogation” to describe an interaction between the past and the present that, rather than seeking to recreate the past in the present, acknowledges and seeks to fill the absence of the past. Performance, Roach theorizes, is one way of attempting to fill these “cavities”; it does not provide access to the past, as historical re-enactment would wish, but only a surrogate for it. Colleen Murphy’s history play *The December Man* is an example of performance as surrogation, inviting the audience not to witness an authentic recreation of the past but to confront its inaccessible pastness. Murphy’s play follows the Fournier family, bystanders to the 1989 mass shooting at Montreal’s L’École Polytechnique. A sophisticated history play exploring the act of remembering rather than the moment itself – the cavity left by the past, in Roach’s terms -- *The December Man* is a memory play that goes backwards, from 1992 to the events of the fateful night in 1989. Because of this reverse chronology, and also because the play deals with a real and well-known historical event, both the inevitability of the event and the impotence of the characters to change it are reinforced. Like the protagonist Jean Fournier, the most immediate witness to the tragedy, the spectators are December men, witnesses to the memory but forced to

remain inactive in intervention. Disavowing re-enactment's attempt at authenticity, in her playwright's notes Murphy reminds her readers that "this is a work of imagination" that has "altered and embellished reality and extended imaginary characters into real space and time" (Murphy, 1). This is, as Jenn Stephenson suggests, a typical gesture in contemporary Canadian realism. Murphy explicitly distances herself from authenticity while simultaneously using history for dramaturgical effect. While the playwright's note itself may not have any role to play in performance (it would be unusual for spectators to read the playwright's notes before seeing a play), these notes serve as evidence that this distancing is an explicit authorial strategy, one that I have used in my own project.

Situated in this tradition of historical inauthenticity, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* could also be prefaced by a disclaimer of sorts. The play focuses itself in history, the Diefenbaker government's official plan to preserve order, continuity, and good government in the event of a nuclear attack. There is no evidence that Diefenbaker spoke with his wife about the plan, which excluded her from the Diefenbunker and implicitly doomed her to the consequences of an attack, should it occur. By situating the play within the site that looms over both that official plan and that private conversation, I depart from the historical record, particularly as there is no record that either John or Olive Diefenbaker ever visited the bunker. Like Murphy, I conclude my play by returning the audience from counterfactual to documented history: *Johnny Drops the Bomb* ends with John's line "oh no, I was never here," reminding the spectators that John was never at the bunker (Horner, 39). Where Murphy and Cooper use dramaturgical structure to make the performative elements visible, I use the spoken text to draw the audience's attention to this fact. By making this fictional frame visible through text, I acknowledge that this is not an attempt at a re- recreation of the thing itself, but a surrogation.

II. Reproducing Historical Aura

Surrogation is a particular kind of inauthenticity that connects with the notion of aura. In his influential text on art in the age of reproducibility, Walter Benjamin suggests that although the technological revolution has enabled the reproduction of works of art in exact detail, some quality of the art remains only with the original, its “aura of authenticity” (Benjamin, 13). The knowledge that the original object is the original, the only one, surrounds the object with an aura that cannot be replicated. Although art has always been reproducible and “objects made by humans could always be copied by humans,” technology’s global reach and immediate potential to make the copy affects the original (Benjamin, 12). Benjamin argues that “in even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence at the place at which it is to be found” (Benjamin, 13). That insistence on here and now connects Benjamin’s aura to the project of performing history, resonating with Roach’s assertion that performance cannot bring history back but also proposing a different view of that which performance allows: the here and nowness, the authenticity that adheres to the performance, not the history it surrogates.

Furthermore, site-specific performance can take notice of Benjamin’s “physical duration to the history to which it testifies” (Benjamin, 14). Because both the art and the audience gather in the same “here” for the performance, the cavity between then and now is apparent; the “now” is durational, encompassing both the present and the past that endures through its traces in the space. By paying close attention to the “here,” by setting the fiction of the piece in the exact same space as the theatrical set and the space occupied by the spectators, historical site-specific performance allows for spectators to interact with here and then, through the here and now. For example, Kingston-based site-specific company Cellar Door Project’s *Stones in the Woods* was

performed on the remains of a 200-year old telescope pillar, amounting to four scattered stones and a Parks Canada sign. Although the observatory itself is gone, performing the historical retelling of the observatory on this site makes visible the historical moment continuing to exist in the here and now.

While *Stones in the Woods* did not attempt to retrieve the authentic aura of the observatory, it did attend to the creation of the observatory's atmosphere, a more experiential term drawing on the more recent work of Gernot Böhme. Responding to Benjamin's thoughts on aura, Böhme proposes that atmosphere is a quality inherent in an "authentic" site, though he questions the degree to which it belongs to "objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them" (Böhme, 114). Drawing on Böhme, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* focuses less on auratic authenticity than on atmospheric authenticity co-created by the oppressive environment of the Diefenbunker, the weight of its known history, the performances of the actors, the dialogue and actions of the script, and the associations and emotions contributed by the spectators. In so doing, it creates an authentic theatrical event; a work of art, in Benjamin's terms, with its own aura separate from the authenticity of the history it depicts.

While I have clearly stretched historical accuracy in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, the authenticity of the performance space as an actual historical site is crucial to its atmosphere, as a true site of memory rather than a surrogate site designated for remembering, in Pierre Nora's terms. In "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," Nora distinguishes between *milieux de mémoire*, which are genuine sites, and *lieux de mémoire*, which are constructed and artificial sites (Nora, 7). Nora's notion of the difference between *lieux de memoire* and *milieux de memoire*, the former (*lieux de memoire*) as a "crystallized" memory in materiality like a designated historical site, suggesting that the past is separate, unattached but visible to us and the

latter (milieu de memoire), as an embodied and continued tradition, an “environment of memory”, a past that continues to exist speaks to the transition of place to space, the former as “history” and the latter as “memory”. In my study, I liked to think about this concept as a past that is aware of not only then and now, but also “since” the space between. When performance reactivates a lost collective memory, an historical site can be reinvigorated to act as a milieu de memoire, a real environment of memory. This is the project of *Johnny Drops the Bomb*. By performing *Johnny Drops the Bomb* in the Diefenbunker, my project invests the space with a surrogated memory of Canada’s Cold War Prime Minister, drawing on Böhme’s notion of atmosphere to craft an experience of shared history through performance, or better, a shared collective memory. Like the transition between place and space, Nora’s history to memory, the physical experience moving through a space reactivates a lost collective memory. The piece invites the audience to follow John Diefenbaker all the way from the entrance of the bunker to his suite three floors below ground. It also invites the audience to follow John Diefenbaker on an emotional journey that culminates in his rejection of the space.

The decision to bring the audience on a journey through the labyrinthine corridors of the bunker was reinforced by my experience of Cliff Cardinal’s *On the Rise*, an installation for Ramshackle Theatre’s site-specific outdoor show, *Theatre in the Bush*, performed in Whitehorse during the 2016 Magnetic North Theatre Festival. The show took place in the woods just outside Yukon’s capital and seemed to capitalize on the authentic features of this space. Cardinal and co-creator Eric Epstein used an artificial but believable soundscape to reinforce aura and atmosphere through sound design; during the piece, an artificial soundscape of crickets was heard from a speaker hidden in the woods. Near the end of the piece, this soundscape of crickets was suddenly cut, drawing attention to both the original that they were reproducing (the crickets

that already make sound in the real Boreal forest) and their artificial reproduction (the reproduction of the sound used in the show). Spectators could notice the space between them and the work, the aura, through the cavernous silence that was suddenly introduced when the manipulated atmosphere was interrupted. While I considered using a soundscape to highlight the creaks and groans of the underground bunker in light of this experience, ultimately I decided that

I was not interested in the creepiness and claustrophobia that would be highlighted in this way, but rather the notion of a journey through a labyrinth, visually echoing the moral quandary through which Diefenbaker forges his path in the play. The journey to and through the wilderness in *On the Rise* has its echo in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, though the crickets do not.

III. Empathy and Witnessing

There is inevitably a certain degree of claustrophobia in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, not only because of the venue but also because of the play's focus on an intensely personal and difficult moment in a marriage. The inciting incident of *Johnny Drops the Bomb* is sparked when Olive starts to unpack her box of decorative trinkets to make a home of the room that John knows she will never occupy. This moment, which I hoped would be poignant, relies on empathy, ideally for both Olive and John. In a general sense, through embodiment, historical performances rely on actors to make visible the past in the present, and, often, to be the catalysts for an empathic response to a historical moment. Besides providing a vehicle for shifting the point of view on an accepted historical narrative and allowing contemporary views to intercede in the process of re-telling, re-performing the past relies on activating empathy as a tool in storytelling. Empathy is not an uncomplicated tool: in her problematization of empathy, *Affective Relations*, Carolyn Pedwell describes empathy as an approach that “crosses, imbricates and reconfigures normative

boundaries of discipline, field and subject” (Pedwell, 1) but that, in so doing, privileges the empathizer as the active agent, situates the empathized as a passive recipient of that empathy, and may reify problematic hierarchies of power, an obviously tricky notion to navigate in dealing with macro-historical characters and moments whose internal power structures cannot be dismantled. Nonetheless, empathy for characters from the past is a virtual *sine qua non* of historical performance. Empathy and affect, defined by their “ability to change and transform and the ways in which they blur and imbricate categories of inside and outside, self and other, psychic and social, biological and cultural, human and non human, and so forth,” can close historical distance and promote understanding (Pedwell, 1). In a history play, empathy is working to dissolve the boundaries between then and now, allowing contemporary spectators to feel a connection with people long dead.

Empathy is a particularly acute tool in the hands of those marginalized by accepted historical narratives, a category that does not include John Diefenbaker unless we consider that he is a maligned figure remembered as the Prime Minister who crushed Canadian industry with his halting of the Avro Arrow program; Olive and Maggie, the women behind the man, are more obviously the characters whose depiction chimes with the microhistories more typical of this genre, connecting in particular with feminist revisionist history. The connection between feminism, empathy, and performance is well established: in her keynote speech at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in 2016, filmmaker Jill Soloway identifies empathy as a key aspect of what she defines as the female gaze. Drawing on Laura Mulvey’s influential theorization of the male gaze, Soloway defines its female counterpart as an “empathetic way of seeing stories, of being in feeling rather than looking at the characters” (“Jill Soloway on the Female Gaze”, 17.30). She talks about her camera operators being “in action” with the actors, as

if to say to the audience “I’m not just showing you this thing I want you to feel it with me” (“Jill Soloway on the Female Gaze”, 18.10). Soloway asserts that this female gaze allows the spectator to “feel held by something that is invested in my feeling, in my body. Emotions are being prioritized over the actions” (“Jill Soloway on the Female Gaze”, 19.30). Though the “female gaze” is a feminist concept and applies to the perspectives of Olive and Maggie, it is an approach that need not be gendered, including both male and female characters in its “being in feeling.” Positioned in the same material world as John and Olive in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, spectators are not so much shown the characters as thrust in the middle of their argument, aligning with Soloway’s notion of being “in feeling” with them. Staging the piece site-specifically, without a fourth wall physically present, allows spectators to situate themselves empathetically in the same space as Olive and John. Where Soloway makes the female gaze visible by situating her cameras “in action” with the story, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* places its “in action” underground with John and Olive.

With a similar purpose but another approach, *The December Man* uses micro-historical narratives as a vehicle for empathic storytelling. Rather than tell the story of the tragedy with macro-historical characters, characters whose names are consecrated by posterity, Colleen Murphy focuses on the Fourniers, a fictional family caught in the wake of events. Rather than focusing on a macro-historical participant in the tragedy in Montreal, with expectations from the historical record that accompany their portrayal, ordinary characters, in this case a family like the Fourniers, illicit empathy because they occupy the same role as the majority of spectators. Micro-narratives resist the official and fixed nature of the macro-historical landscape, presenting “the making and remaking of history as a contingent and ongoing process,” blurring lines between the past and the present (Stephenson, 249). Political philosopher Martha Nussbaum

suggests that the empathetic imagination helps us “bring a distant individual into the sphere of our goals and projects, humanizing the person and creating the possibility of attachment” (Nussbaum, 66). The same potential that allows empathy to act as the bridge between transnational and intercultural crises allows empathy to be the entry point for historical theatre. To embody historical characters or events and humanize them and their struggles in the fictionalizing frame of the theatre uses empathy as the bridge connecting then and now. John and Olive Diefenbaker are not participants in micro-histories, of course, but well-known historical figures, at least in their official roles. Their personal and (almost) private argument as husband and wife brings them out of the realm of macro-history in ways that resonate with the micro-historical approach to storytelling in *The December Man*. Although I would argue that John is the protagonist in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, Olive and Maggie, the two female gazes that look on him, are the keys to making him a three-dimensional and empathetic character.

To make John a three-dimensional and empathetic character, I oscillate between the personal and the political in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*. In the confrontation between John and Olive, John occupies his role as both Prime Minister and husband. John reminds Olive that he must square his “own wants and needs with the wants and needs of the country” and that “in the moment of emergency, I become John Diefenbaker, Prime Minister and surrender my position as John Diefenbaker, Olive's husband. You know that” (Horner, 38). In this intimate scene during which the private man can emerge, Diefenbaker imagines a future moment in which the public figure will dominate entirely. Peter James Haworth, the actor playing John, relied on changes in his voice to dramatize the character’s shifts and struggles between these two versions of himself. Certainly many history plays use performance to intervene in the historical account by providing an alternative to the received account: like *The December Man*, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* has

another objective in mind, the act of witnessing history with empathy in line with Julie Salverson's view on performance as an act of witnessing and an attempt to use empathy in order to reach across the chasm of time. If performing history elicits empathy through witnessing, the cavity of surrogation is filled with feeling.

While Olive is ultimately forced into the role of bystander to history, the fictional character who most clearly serves the function of witness in *Johnny Drops the Bomb* is John's assistant Maggie. Spending most of the play present in the room next to the Prime Minister's suite, visible but not active, Maggie listens in on the conversation happening next door. Like the audience, Maggie has access to both the private and the public valances of meaning, both aware of the official plan and, by eavesdropping, a witness to the personal conversation. As both playwright and performer I could have given Maggie a stronger function by having her intervene in support of either Olive or John's side of the argument, whether in the dialogue or through a more subtle gesture of solidarity; by placing her in an adjacent room, I removed her from the situation in order to align her more explicitly with the role of witness, not participant.

IV. The Embodied Actor

An actor embodying a historical figure is performing the role of hyperhistorian. This actor, Freddie Rokem suggests, creates a "double or even triple time register," opening a space in which to interrogate official histories and charged with embodying them (Rokem, 21). While the actor's role in interpreting history through performance is apparent, the historian Greg Dening articulates the similar interpretive function of those who share his own profession: "the history I write will always be mine and something more than the past, but there is a part of it that is never mine. It is the part that actually happening, independently of my knowing that or how it

happened” (Denning, 4). Like Schneider’s syncopated time and Hugo’s observation about space, Denning’s historian and Rokem’s hyperhistorian are concerned with resurrecting the past in the “here and now” of contemporary bodies, part of it independent of the individual actor, part of it subject to that individual actor’s choice. While Denning admits that the historian is a kind of performer and Rokem suggests that the performer can be a kind of historian, Diana Taylor goes farther still in suggesting that performances of history can serve as “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through re-iterated, or what Richard Schechner has called twice-behaved behavior” (Taylor, 3). Like Rebecca Schneider, Taylor is interested in the performative gestures that complement or contest the archival and material remains of the past to constitute a culture’s understanding of itself. *Johnny Drops the Bomb* participates in this process, using its actors as hyperhistorians to transmit and transform the received account of a historical moment. Phenomenology illuminates the role of the spectator in this transaction, particularly in a site with its own historical meanings.

V. Being in the World: Phenomenology and the Embodied Spectator

A live performance, whatever the parameters of its fictional world, always happens in the here and now, a phenomenological space shared by the actors and the spectators. Often, performances seek to diminish the spectators’ awareness of the phenomenological world and increase their focus on the fictional world through the suspension of disbelief and the creation of immersion and illusion.

Techniques designed specifically to disrupt immersion, illusion, and the suspension of disbelief have been part of theatre practice since the influential work of Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud. More recently, practitioners have experimented with techniques to expand the

phenomenological experience and resist the mere observation of a fictional world, an approach that Canadian theatre company bluemouth inc. refers to as “being-in-the-world.” In its productions, bluemouth has harnessed being-in-the-world, for example by asking spectators to paddle a canoe across a significant distance to the Toronto Island as part of their experience of *It Comes in Waves*, a co-production with Jordan Tannahill and Necessary Angel. Approaching being-in-the-world more theoretically, Erika Fischer-Lichte in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* suggests that in contemporary theatre that mobilizes the materiality of the shared experience, the semantic crux of a work of art hangs in the space between actor and audience, or in the container itself (Fischer-Lichte, 190). Environmental theatre like *It Comes in Waves* or Cardinal’s *On the Rise* relies on the existing semiotic connotations of a non-traditional theatre space to reinforce this shared materiality. *On the Rise* started with one of the actors, Eric Epstein, reassuring the audience as they wandered into the playing space, “don’t worry, we’re not lost, I know exactly where we are.” As Epstein points his flashlight unconfidently into the forest, the light catches the menacing face of a hooded figure deep in the woods; Cardinal, the second actor, hollers at Epstein to stay where he is, daring Epstein to “take another step and I’ll fucking stab you.” Because spectators were in the dark, in a place entirely foreign to them, the material quality of the space, what Bohme would define as its atmosphere, spoke loudly. The atmosphere innate to a space and the semiotic connotations that are embedded within a space, for example the historical surrender to a higher power embedded in the architecture of a Medieval church or the institutional surveillance of children in an old elementary school, can be used in environmental performance as a “new dramatic presentation built upon the connotations already present in a space created for non-dramatic purposes” (Carlson, 2003, 250). The consequence of using non-traditional spaces for performance, post-

dramatic theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann argues, is that a new ‘aesthetic gaze’ is cast onto them. The space presents itself. It becomes a co-player without having a definite significance. It is not dressed up but made visible. The spectators, too, however, are co-players in such a situation. What is namely staged through site specific theatre is also a level of commonality between performers and spectators. (Lehmann, 152) *Johnny Drops the Bomb* is about re-telling a story of that space, in that space. Unlike environmental theatre like *On the Rise*, which uses spaces with rich semiotic weight to emphasize an aspect of a performance, site-specific theatre should, by definition, be specific to a site, impossible to perform elsewhere. Cellar Door Project’s *Tall Ghosts and Bad Weather* was set in the oldest cemetery in Kingston and explored religious conflicts in Kingston in the early nineteenth century. Situated in the center of downtown, in a seedy part of Kingston kitty corner to the city’s only strip club, the juxtaposition between nineteenth-century religious conflict in a cemetery and passersby who were just hoping to have a wild Friday night made possible a hyperawareness of how the past and present exist in one space, sequentially but also simultaneously in the moment of performance. While the Diefenbunker is far from what bluemouth, inc calls the “functioning part of the city’s landscape” (bluemouth inc, 162) and unlikely to benefit from the serendipity of passersbys, it still offers the potential to reimagine the way in which past and present inhabit the same physical spaces, a key feature of bluemouth’s form of site-specificity. Because access to the Diefenbunker is controlled, I began my bluemouth- style being-in-the-world at the entrance, once the audience had already been constituted, at the moment the character of John Diefenbaker is introduced.

The long journey from the entrance to Diefenbaker’s suite three floors down was fortuitous, because it enabled me to mobilize some of the theories arising from de Certeau’s notion that walking through a space is an “act of enunciation, to be perpetually working between

the absence of what we imagine the space to be and the material evidence of its proper and present uses” (de Certeau, 103). The walker is the spatialized avatar of Rokem’s hyperhistorian and is, therefore, especially pertinent when thinking about re-performing the past site-specifically. As Andrew Houston argues, deploying de Certeau, performance in situ is “a way of being-in-the-world and bringing to bear a social, political and historical consciousness upon our navigations through experiences of lived space” (Houston, 2007, 7). Through site-specific performance in a historically-relevant space, spectators experience history, a discipline characterized by absence, phenomenologically, through their own contemporary presence.

Phenomenology insists that knowledge can be gleaned through the material body, entirely subjective and predicated by material experience. Phenomenology as a system of knowledge (both in construction and reception) is often employed in post-dramatic theatre; the post-dramatic suggests that meaning-making in the theatre be done in the moment of exchange, dialogue, and experience between art and audience (Behrndt, 132). If the meaning is made in the moment of experience itself, during what Fischer-Lichte calls “the autopoetic feedback loop,” liveness, ephemerality, unpredictability, and spontaneity are emphasized (Fischer-Lichte, 75). Theatre that embraces the unpredictability and ephemerality of liveness relies on phenomenology as its epistemology. In terms of performing history in historical sites, if spectators can be simultaneously made aware of the material conditions of an historical site and their own material presence in that historical site, history, like the theatrical moment, can be-in-the-world.

This phenomenological liveness is practiced in the reception and creation of site-specific projects that privilege the phenomenological body. In Zuppa Theatre Circus’s touring production of *Pop-Up Love Party*, for example, the shared phenomenological experience is paramount. The audience is primed with a seven-course meal to accompany a re-imagining of Plato’s reflections

on love. Besides the materiality that is reinforced by asking audiences to eat, during the performance the actors are constantly touching spectators and encouraging them to touch each other, asking them to clink glasses and high five “for love!” *Pop-Up Love Party* is not merely a participatory experience, but rather an experience that invites audiences to be aware of their physical and material existence in the room through proximity and touch.

Proximity and touch come into play when site-specific theatre activates spectators’ proprioception, or sense of the orientation of their bodies in space. Proprioception is embedded in bluemouth’s “central question: ‘what would surprise, excite, inspire me as a spectator at this point’” (bluemouth, 162). Part of what encourages spectators to be fully aware in the moment is the risk that otherwise they might “stumble on a rough patch of terrain or miss an invitation to play basement” (bluemouth, 166). When spectators, like those in in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, retain the agency to navigate the space how they choose, the phenomenological imagination is working hard at being-in-the-world of the historical event and the moment of performance.

VI. Proximity and Site-Specificity

The choice to situate the play within Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s small suite was made in light of theories about proximity and performance. I could have selected a larger space such as the bunker’s tunnel, mess hall, or gold vault, but I wanted to play with the notion that in site-specific performance the actors and the spectators share an unusual relationship because of the space they also share. When the space between the spectators and the performance is collapsed, the theatrical moment becomes one of “shared energies instead of transmitted signs,” Hans-Thies Lehmann has suggested (Lehmann, 150). Lehmann’s premise is not predicated on audience participation or the breaking of the fourth wall, nor does it relate only to historically-relevant

sites, although these elements enhance the circulation of shared energy. In the case of performing history in historical sites, past and present, fictional and real space, actors and audience, all are “guests in the same place” (Lehmann, 152). I stretched and compressed the proximity between spectators and actors at certain points in the performance, allowing them to fall some distance behind John Diefenbaker during the journey to his suite, squeezing them into his room during the main action, without imposing any spatial restrictions beyond the walls of the bunker. Once settled in the tight three-room suite, spectators moved freely, with no divisions imposed between audience space and performance space. As Gay McAuley suggests in her influential *Space in Performance*, when proximity is emphasized, so too is the “simultaneous presence of both performance and spectator” within their shared physical space (McAuley, 3). In *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, although the audience and the actors did not interact, this simultaneous presence was emphasized as the space was so tight that they could find themselves bumping shoulders. Through physical proximity between actors and spectators, I hoped, also, to enhance the proximity of the past to the present. By performing history in an historical site, history is not defined by its absence, but made immediate by the presence of live performance in the here and now.

VII. Eruption of the Real

Proximity, being-in-the-world, and through them the phenomenological experience of *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, contributed to an ongoing awareness of the physical space of the Diefenbunker. The Diefenbunker was both the fictional world of the play and the physical world of the spectators, responding to Bert O States’s observation that theatrical signifiers are complicated “not simply by signifying the world but by being of it” (States, 373). States suggests that when objects on stage both refer to and are of the world, they carry their own “worldly meanings with

them” (States, 374). States illustrates the power of certain theatrical objects to remain rooted in their real world meaning by drawing attention to things in the theatre that resist semiotic classification. Clocks, fire, running water, babies, and food are all examples of objects that States calls “mildly distracting” as they simply cannot shed their real world actions to truly be submersed in the fictional world of the play: a working clock does not tick along with the “time” of the fictional world, unless the fictional world proceeds in “real” time. This understanding of theatre helps to articulate my project’s aim, which is to imbue history with a sense of being-in-the-world, not symbolic value. In *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, the space serves as a clock that ticks in both fictional and real time.

The realness of some theatrical objects, in which I would include space, has implications beyond States’s aesthetic struggle to avoid distraction. Schneider reminds us that the closer historical re-enactors get to re-creating the historical thing itself, the more aware of the impossibilities of that task the spectators become. The technique is to ensure that the frame of the theatrical event is visible, so that the historical moment being retold is not framed as the thing itself again, like re-enactment, but rather as a semi-fictional theatrical event. In *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, this framing is achieved in a pre-show introduction that introduces the ambulatory aspects of the performance; unintentionally but fortuitously, this was reinforced as staff members of the Diefenbunker continued about their business ignored by Diefenbaker as he navigated with the audience through the space, introducing the possibility that audience members would run into the contemporary staff as an “irruption of the Real” themselves, a quick unscripted moment reminding spectators that this building was a historical one that continues to exist contemporarily as a museum with purpose.

The script that follows this introduction has been annotated to identify the techniques that were deployed in order to put into practice what this introduction has discussed in theory, and is followed by a reflection about their efficacy and implications for performing the past in place.

Johnny Drops the Bomb

A play in the Diefenbunker by Mariah Horner

Johnny Drops the Bomb was first produced in the Diefenbunker for a Master's thesis in Theatre at the University of Ottawa in August 2016¹, with the following company:

JOHN	Peter James Haworth
OLIVE	Beverley Wolfe
MARGARET	Mariah Horner

Directed by Mariah Horner
Supervised by Kevin Orr and Dr. Kathryn Prince

Time: October, 1961 | Place: The Diefenbunker, Carp, Ontario

As the audience arrives, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker stands at the front door of the Diefenbunker. It is the first time he and his wife Olive have been to the bunker and she has just left on a tour. He enters the tunnel, looking for his secretary Margaret.

JOHN

Margaret? MARGARET?

He makes his way into the bunker² and eventually enters Prime Minister's suite. There is a cardboard box on the table in John's office.

Margaret? (*beat*) This is unbelievable. Margaret? (*picks up a telephone*) Oh, for heavens sakes a telephone? Underground? Of course it's not going to -- (*someone picks up*) Oh hello, yes this is John Diefenbaker -- no, it isn't Harry and yes I know this is an emergency line. It is an emergency. I need -- a cup of tea. (*pause*) Fine. Who's in charge of things like the tea -- no, I know this is an emergency line -- look where is Margaret? Alright fine, while I have you...can we get a painting or a rug or something for in here? It's a little...bleak. Really, you can't expect the Prime Minister --

Margaret appears in the doorway³

MARGARET

I agree sir. The room could use a little something.

¹ See VIII: This Never Happened, but Then Again, What Did? Committee members and colleagues travelled

² See IX: Being in the World. Peter Haworth started the play alone at the tunnel entrance to the bunker. He was directed to take a convoluted route from the entrance of the bunker down three floors to the Prime Minister's suite

³ See X: Witnesses Witnessing Witnesses. Throughout the piece, Margaret appears and disappears without warning. Because we had the luxury of working in a suite with three rooms, I would sit in the secretary's room quietly without notice of the audience.

JOHN

Geez -- how long have you been there?

MARGARET

Since you have.

JOHN

Margaret -- thank you. Although, to be frank, it's as hot as the prairie sun in here --

MARGARET

Down.

JOHN

I'm sorry?

MARGARET

Down here, sir. We really should get used to saying "down" here.

JOHN

Oh, yes. Down. Look Margaret, have you seen Olive?

MARGARET

Yes sir, she is still on a tour of the bunker.

JOHN

Fine. *(beat)* Can we do anything about this heat? You'd think with all the...technology buried away in here they could triangulate a window or -- you know, even a good old-fashioned peephole would do. This is the 1960s, after all. If we can get to outer space --

MARGARET

I'm sorry did you say you're hot? Excuse me sir but I don't think it's hot. I'm actually quite comfortable.

JOHN

You don't think it's hot in here?⁴

MARGARET

Down.

JOHN

Fine. It's hot down here Maggie.

⁴ Like the walking exploration of the space, this was another attempt to emphasize audience phenomenology through registering temperature. Was the room too hot? Too cold? Did the audience notice?

MARGARET

You want a peephole sir?

JOHN

No, no Margaret -- let's just start with a cup of tea.⁵

MARGARET

But sir, if you're hot –

JOHN

Tea, please Maggie (*she leaves, he wanders around the room opening drawers*) No bible? (*He starts singing "Oh Johnny" by the Andrews Sisters*) Oh Johnny, Oh Johnny how you can love. Oh Johnny Oh Johnny, heavens above... oh, I can hear them now. (*As Lorne Greene*) This is Lorne Greene for the CBC. October, Nineteen hundred sixty one. Dief the Chief has announced that in the event of a nuclear attack, he plans to leave ordinary Canadians behind and go into hiding underground, 100 feet deep in Carp, Ontario –
Margaret returns, struggling to carry a large painting.

MARGARET

How's this, sir? I thought it would really brighten up the place (*beat*) Oh dear, your tea!

JOHN

Yes fine, that's fine. Maggie, do you think I look old? I really picked the wrong decade for this position.

MARGARET

You look fine, sir.

JOHN

Better old than boring. "Diefenbaker's a boring son-of-a-bitch," he says, well look at me now Kennedy! We've got 50 of these underground bunkers all over the country. Keep poking at the Russians, you'll hear me laughing from CBC underground (*beat*) Margaret, be honest with me. It's not so bad is it? I have my own bathroom. I have to say this bed is too small. I hear the food isn't impossible. Although I really don't appreciate reading a sign for the MORGUE⁶ in the cafeteria -- Sir John, I could almost go for a scotch.

MARGARET

Why don't I just go get your tea sir?

⁵ See **XI: The Embodied Actor**. Peter and Beverley were invaluable in navigating between the historical record and the contemporary act of staging it. Often in rehearsal we would discuss the relationship between accuracy and authenticity in performing the historical record

⁶ See **XIII: Performing Historiography in Situ**. Because I became interested in teasing out the relationship between the real in site and fictional in narrative, I focused on making direct references to the material reality of the space.

Olive enters.

OLIVE

Why, hello Maggie! Where's John? John? John, my dear! This is something else. That tunnel -- I felt like I was walking into the future. You could have a pretty good holler down that thing. Oh, the colours though John -- it is a little grim isn't it? Well, so is nuclear attack I suppose. This all seems very...American doesn't it? I don't know how your mother will manage those stairs dear, and that's just down to your room. The structure goes down two more floors! (*beat*) Is this floor safe John? You are the Prime Minister after all. Shouldn't we, you know for safety's sake, be kept as far down as we can?

JOHN

The vault is on the bottom floor dear⁷.

OLIVE

The vault, John?

JOHN

The vault Olive. For the gold.

OLIVE

The gold?

JOHN

Yes, that's right. The gold will be kept in the vault.

OLIVE

The gold will be kept...below the people?

JOHN

In-case-of-emergency our country's gold will be kept safe in the bunker.

OLIVE

Safer than our country itself?

JOHN

Olive, I have to tell you --

OLIVE

Did you see those peculiar stripes on the walls?⁸ They told me that it combats claustrophobia! Is this where Maggie will be set up? Maggie, do you think I can claim some room on one of your desks? And this is you I presume? Between Maggie and the bedroom! I don't think I'll mind the

⁷ See XIII: Performing Historiography in Situ.

⁸ See XIII: Performing Historiography in Situ.

close quarters truly. Speaking of close quarters – this reminds me of our little place in Wakaw, John. Is there even enough room for me in this wee little bed? Not much space for the cats I'm afraid.

JOHN

Well - Olive, the cats really aren't our main concern in the event of a hydrogen bomb -

OLIVE

Nonsense John, those cats are like family! My goodness, it's cool and damp down here! Anything we can do about that smell? I assume the cabinet will be bunking down here with us "in-case-of-emergency" and we know how much those boys smoke when they are working. That will only get worse with a nation to save, I'm sure --

JOHN

Olive yes --

OLIVE

You don't mind if I make this house a little more a home, do you John? Don't mind me!

JOHN

Look Olive, don't worry about the photos --

OLIVE

What do you say of my establishing a little bridge league down here John? I assume Pauline Vanier will be down here too? Mona McLaughlin? She is a shark with cards in her teeth, I swear. Do you think Mrs. Fairclough would join us⁹? I see her office is just around the corner. I know she'll be working so she will have quite a bit on her plate but I doubt we'll have any immigration concerns as a country underground. Maggie, how about you?

MARGARET

I'd love to Mrs. Diefenbaker!

JOHN

There won't be a bridge league Olive, Maggie.

OLIVE

Oh! A shame. There will be plenty for us to do, I suppose. Perhaps I could spend some time learning about that enormous computer? I've always fancied myself a fast learner and I hate to be with nothing to do.

JOHN

No Olive --

⁹ See **XIII: Performing Historiography in Situ**. Ellen Fairclough was a cabinet minister during Diefenbaker's time in government. Like referencing the physical reality of the site, referencing facts from the historical record leaves space for performance interrogation between fact and fiction.

OLIVE

Well! I'm sure I can find something to do. I've never been in your way before John.

JOHN

I know, my dear.

OLIVE

My heavens, where is the – oh is this our charming little closet? Is this the...the facilities are...questionable John.

JOHN

Olive, there is something I need to tell you.

OLIVE

Oh? You go right ahead dear - I'm going to keep unpacking now that I've found the closet¹⁰. I brought some things because I figured if we do have to rush here we wouldn't have ample time to pack. I'm going to put our best clothes in this corner. Now don't get me wrong, we'll make it work, but I don't want all of my best dresses smelling like aftershave! Oh -- I nearly forgot, I also brought the kettle!

JOHN

You won't be coming my dear.

OLIVE

I'm sorry John?

JOHN

You aren't listed as one of the 535 people that will be housed safely here, underground, in case of nuclear attack.

OLIVE

What do you mean?

JOHN

You aren't on the list (*long beat*) If Canada falls victim to nuclear war I, along with 534 other public servants, will get on a train and head to these Emergency Headquarters here at Carp. You are not on that list. You are to stay at 24 Sussex. Without me. With the rest of Canada! But unfortunately, without me. Because I'll be here.

OLIVE

I don't understand John.

¹⁰ See XII: Objects in Space. During this exchange, Olive has been unpacking from a cardboard box that was already in the room when John entered.

JOHN

If we are bombed by the Russians, you will wait it out at home.

OLIVE

I will...

JOHN

Wait it out -- yes. That's right.

OLIVE

I don't understand.

JOHN

If the bomb falls in Ottawa -- you, the cats and 18 million other Canadians -- you will all hold tight -- stick it out, for 30 days --

OLIVE

30 days.

JOHN

30 days.

Margaret appears with the "11 steps to surviving nuclear attack" book.

MARGARET

This helpful guide outlines the 11 steps to surviving nuclear attack, including --

OLIVE

Thank you Maggie. Please do continue John.

MARGARET

You're welcome, Mrs. Diefenbaker. Mr. Diefenbaker?

JOHN

The name Olive Diefenbaker does not appear on the list of 535 --

OLIVE

Well, that's silly isn't it! My name doesn't appear on the list? Who will take care of you dear? I know you are in Maggie's very capable hands at the office but surely this is a mistake. Although it may not be obvious to those in charge of making this list, you need me, my dear! I don't need to tell you that. We'll just fix this oversight, why don't we just get Maggie to send off a note --

JOHN

Olive, it's much more complicated than that --

OLIVE

John, you're the Prime Minister. You must be able to pull some strings and get your wife, of nearly 10 years on this 'list'? Oh John, surely you can make it 536 for the woman who deals with your mother.

JOHN

Olive -- this wasn't my decision alone.

OLIVE

Did the majority of Canadians not collectively decide to make you ultimate decider of things in this country? Isn't it always, ultimately, your decision?

JOHN

Well Olive, in the case of emergency --

OLIVE

Well, who made this list? Where is the silly list anyway? *(beat)* My dear - you know you are, for all intents and purposes, killing me. You are killing your wife.

JOHN

Olive! Let's be reasonable, you've always been a reasonable woman.

OLIVE

I honestly believe that it is highly unlikely that this threat will come to a head --

JOHN

You're wrong, this is all very real! Nuclear attack is not to be taken lightly! I don't need to tell you that. We have all worked hard to ensure the safety of this country and we suspect -- look, we could have the end of the world on our hands here. Trust me, this wasn't an easy decision.

MARGARET

I'm so sorry Ms. Diefenbaker.

OLIVE

(beat) Are you on the list Maggie? Oh you can tell me, it isn't your fault my dear.

JOHN

Maggie is necessary staff.

MARGARET

The country can't run without Mr. Diefenbaker and Mr. Diefenbaker can't run without me.

OLIVE

And without me. John, you can't be serious --

JOHN

Olive --

OLIVE

I don't eat much, I don't take up much room. I can't even eat a full can of peas by myself, John. What is one extra person? Together, Maggie and I weigh as much as you! I stand on her shoulders and we're still only at your nose! *(beat)* Hang on -- are any families included? *(beat)* Mothers and children, John! How do you all expect to do this without us?

JOHN

Keep your voice down Ollie¹¹. The rest of you will have to -- when I was elected Prime Minister, I surrendered some of my own wants and needs for the wants and needs of this country. In the moment of emergency, I become John Diefenbaker, Prime Minister and surrender my position as John Diefenbaker, Olive's husband. You know that¹². *(beat)* You're right. I don't know how I would do this without you. This is ridiculous! This whole situation is just ridiculous...underground bunkers? *(beat)* I'm sorry.

OLIVE

No, I'm beginning to understand your...position John.

JOHN

You're...what? What do you mean you're beginning to understand my position? *(beat)* You don't understand Olive. You remember the photographs of those poor people in Nagasaki, Ollie. Bleeding lungs, blistering skin. *(beat)* I can't do this, you're my wife.

OLIVE

I know how many people it takes to run a country. The cabinet, the engineers, and the scientists, the military personnel and they'll need cooks, nursing staff. There simply wasn't any more room *(beat)* Yes, as your wife, of course I am... hurt and to be honest, really quite scared. But I was scared of moving to Ottawa and scared of meeting your mother. *(beat)* We're the wind from the West.

JOHN

That isn't good enough.

OLIVE

I wasn't going to show you because I didn't want to upset you. *(She digs in the box and pulls out a newspaper)* Have you seen the Toronto Telegram today? They know John.

¹¹ See X: Witnesses Witnessing Witnesses.

¹² See XI: The Embodied Actor. During the rehearsal process, Peter and I were very conscious of creating two distinguishable voices for John, a personal and a political. Besides intention changes embedded in the text, Peter worked to establish an official voice for John the PM and a different voice for John, the husband.

JOHN

"If there's a nuclear war, public servants get an underground hotel - we'll all fry". An underground hotel? Look around, this isn't the Chateau Laurier. "A sighting of a surplus of toilets in Carp, Ontario"¹³ Toilets! They haven't even forgiven me for the Arrow, Ollie.

OLIVE

I know John.

JOHN

The Diefenbunker! The DIEFenbunker. I am not this kind of leader. Or this kind of husband¹⁴.

OLIVE

John, how responsible would it be to move forward without a plan? And now you have one! If you are unprepared and the government is blown out we'll have no one to rebuild the country.

JOHN

Rebuild the country? (*beat*) This is a hydrogen bomb we're talking about here. The damage will be 10 times worse than what happened in Japan. What are we expecting to be left when we poke our heads out of this thing? Lorne Greene and I emerging to a radioactive world of utter desolation – he's on the list, Ollie. Lorne Greene.

OLIVE

We don't know at all what we are talking about, do we John?

JOHN

Oh, Ollie of course I don't. (*beat*) How can a country believe in my ability to think rationally in a moment of crisis if I leave my own wife behind? (*beat*) I can't abandon you.

OLIVE

This is bigger than me John.

The door of the suite slams unexpectedly.

JOHN

Funny, it's not like there could be a breeze down here --

OLIVE

John, you need to do this. (*beat*) My dear, it seems that I will be dead with or without you, so I'd rather you save the country for the both of us (*Olive goes to leave*) .

¹³ See **XIII: Performing Historiography in Situ**. Like the physical qualities of the space and the historical context the play is rooted in, this headline makes reference to a real newspaper article that leaked the bunker's construction to the Canadian people

¹⁴ See **XI: The Embodied Actor**

JOHN

Where are you going? (*Olive leaves*) Olive? (*beat*) The bed was too small anyway.

MARGARET

Do you need anything sir?

JOHN

Oh, no -- I was never here¹⁵.

End.

¹⁵ See VIII: That Never Happened, but Then Again What Did?

Impossible Probabilities: Performing History Site-Specifically

Canadian Forces Station Carp, known as the Diefenbunker, was commissioned in 1958 by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker as a response to, with the benefit of hindsight, the rising tensions of the Cold War. The bunker was designed so that in the event that an imminent nuclear attack on Ottawa was detected, a train on permanent standby would shuttle the Prime Minister and 534 other civil servants to this underground headquarters in Carp, hopefully outpacing the incoming bombs. Besides being equipped with enough rations to keep those underground alive for thirty days, the bunker housed a hospital ward, a cafeteria, and an underground vault for Canada's gold in hopes that those underground could rebuild the country.

Although Prime Minister Diefenbaker approved the plans for CFS Carp and the other "Diefenbunkers" that dotted the country in the 1960s, he never went underground. He did not visit the Diefenbunker in Carp during construction or after its completion in 1962. While there is a room specifically designated for the Prime Minister, a humble suite with a walk-in closet, a bathroom, a single bed, and an adjacent office for his secretary, the only head of state to visit the bunker in Carp was Pierre Elliot Trudeau in the 1980s. It was rumoured that Diefenbaker never visited the bunker because his beloved wife, Olive, was not on the list of those who would be shuttled to Carp if Ottawa was attacked. Taking this historical detail of Diefenbaker's strange refusal and this rumoured explanation of the reason as my starting point, the fiction of John breaking the news to his beloved wife forms the crux of the conflict in my practice-as-research performance, *Johnny Drop the Bomb*, performed in the Diefenbunker in August 2016 with Beverley Wolfe as Olive, Peter James Haworth as John, and myself as Maggie.

Because Diefenbaker never visited the bunker, he was not left to navigate the tunnel

alone, as he is in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*; Olive never did get an official tour. I suspect that John and Olive must have had some kind of conversation about their respective fates in the event of an attack that, at the time, seemed sufficiently likely to warrant the construction of the bunker, but history does not record it; there is, of course, no evidence that it happened in the Diefenbunker. This is unquestionably a challenge for a site-specific theatre artist interested in making work in historical sites. By performing the past in situ, I am interested in site's ability to serve as a witness to the past, present, and future. I am interested in how site as a material referent can enrich or complicate the official history of a given event. However, this event that I have chosen to dramatize, John and Olive's conversation about his single bed in the bunker, did not happen in this site; the space was not a witness to this historical event. Expanding my view of how site serves as a witness, I was able to engage in a more interesting exploration of the space between what *we think* happened and what *could have* happened, manifested in the relationship between the reality of the site, the fictionality of performance, and the fictionality that we know is inherent to looking at the past from the present. This juxtaposition informed much of our work in rehearsal and in performance, allowing us to explore what we as creators and spectators understand about performing historical "truth," what we think we "know" about history and how we can know if it is truth; a question of historiography rather than history. Thus, site-specificity stages historiography by employing empathy, embodiment, witnessing, and the being-in-the-world of both the past and present. More than making visible site as a material connection through the past and present, performing history plays site-specifically allows for artists to interrogate fact and fiction in the context of the past.

VIII. This Never Happened but then Again, What Did?

Olive Diefenbaker is remembered as a perfect political wife, often seen but rarely heard.

Profiling her in *Maclean's* in 1957, journalist Alan Philips praised her for fulfilling the function demanded of a Canadian First Lady, who must “offer her husband a sense of calm, no mean feat in itself when a man is embroiled in political warfare and pressed by decisions of the state” (Philips, 18). In Philips’s account the role can be a powerful one, with the potential to “offer advice he respects, lead the party’s female contingent, sway diplomats, and influence voters all across the country, especially those women who judge a man by the kind of wife he picks” (Philips, 18). Working from this hint that Olive could exert a strong influence on her husband and on national politics through her private actions and words, I interpreted her as a confidante to John during this very trying time in Canadian history. I wondered how, if this were their relationship, John would have told his confidante, his calm centre, that in the event of a nuclear attack she would be abandoned. In *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, as John finally manages to squeak out his confession, it is first met with total surprise from Olive. She takes the news as a misstep, a clerical error, insisting that John should “just fix this oversight, why don’t we just get Maggie to send off a note...” (Horner, 35). Even though the Diefenbunker space was not a witness to the plausible conversation that ensues, it was the invisible yet palpable backdrop to any conversation that they might have had about the official plan, made manifest in *Johnny Drops the Bomb*.

Because Diefenbaker’s absence seems out of the ordinary for a bunker that he commissioned and in which he anticipated surviving the aftermath of a nuclear attack, I wanted to plant this information in the text itself. At the end of the play, when Margaret asks if Diefenbaker needs anything, he leaves the space, reminding her, “oh no – I was never here” (Horner, 39). Although subtle, this line of dialogue refers to John having never visited the bunker. We also encouraged museum staff to ignore us if they saw us, with the intention of communicating the same notion. Because the goal of the project was not to report, but rather to

engage with history imaginatively and aesthetically, choices in staging that made fictionality visible served to interrogate the relationship between fact and fiction in historical storytelling.

In rehearsal, the actors struggled between fact and fiction in constructing John and Olive as playable and empathetic characters based only on political personas pieced together from memory and the historical record. As writer, director, and academic trying to experiment, this was a challenge to negotiate in rehearsal. For example, John Diefenbaker was a well-known teetotaler. Initially, I wanted to explore fiction in fact by suggesting that he may have secretly sipped whiskey after hours to calm his nerves in this fraught historical moment, the gap between his public professions and private vices underscoring the severity of this personal and political crisis. In early drafts of the text, when John is looking for Margaret to hunt down a cup of tea, he is actually hunting for a whiskey. This was met with resistance in rehearsals, as both Peter and Beverley contested this very obvious complication of a known narrative, insisting that this would stray too far from truth that they kept intact in their memory. Eventually, we agreed on more subtle explorations into the historical record and John spent the first few pages trying to find a cup of tea.

Building on a hint in Aristotle's *Poetics*, *Johnny Drops the Bomb* dwells in a zone of "probable impossibilities" (Aristotle, 66). In his discourse on the difference between epic and tragedy, Aristotle suggests that a good poet should "choose events that are impossible but plausible in preference to ones that are possible but implausible," favouring plausibility within the fiction over absolute truth within historical fact. Aristotle makes a careful distinction between the poet and the historian, insisting that these probable impossibilities craft entertaining drama, with the potential to "sweeten" these impossibilities presented in history with performance and poetry (Aristotle, 67). This way of situating the narrative was a major revelation during the

rehearsal and performance process of *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, linking productively with debates about historical reenactment discussed, for example, in Schneider's *Performing Remains*.

Within the real historical context of international espionage and marital confessions that break both social taboos and national laws, against the backdrop of propaganda and false flag operations to conceal real projects like the Diefenbunker, this plausible conversation in this historical site invites spectators to position themselves between the known and the unknown, the plausible and the probable. Through performance, these historically inaccurate intricacies reinforce the notion that the historical record is partial, and, indeed, performed. The Diefenbunker is not only an "inseparable witness" to events that happened within it, but also to those calculations of probability that led to its creation and to the many difficult conversations about how, when, and by whom it would be used.

IX. Being in the World

The performance began outside the entrance to the Diefenbunker tunnel with an unscripted introduction by my supervisor, Kevin Orr, to the kind of performance that would take place. He then opened the doors to the bunker and the audience met John Diefenbaker pacing the mouth of the tunnel, hesitating about how to enter the space, having never been there before. Without his staffers, his secretary Margaret, or a map, John is left to his own devices to navigate from the entrance of the bunker to his suite on the three floors underground. Because he has never been to the bunker, he takes the long way around, accidentally walking through the decontamination showers, poking into the hospital quarters, and opening doors to official boardrooms before he finally makes it to the Prime Minister's suite. At one point in his trip underground, he stops in a boardroom and takes a drink from a water cooler. This long pause came from an impulse of the

actor, as the room he lingered in is one of the most interesting rooms in the building, with a large boardroom style desk; one can easily imagine emergency plans floating up with the cigarette smoke of the 1960s Canadian cabinet.

Peter was initially resistant to this three-minute walking tour of the bunker. Worried that it would lose the audience emotionally if not literally, he was nervous to lead the audience through a building that he, as an actor, was not comfortable navigating. Because we were only afforded the opportunity to rehearse in the bunker twice, there was a real risk that Peter would actually get lost within the winding hallways. The Diefenbunker is an oppressive and intimidating space, one in which Peter felt acutely uncomfortable as an actor. While this enhanced his performance of Diefenbaker's discomfort, it also created risk for the audience, both a genuine risk of getting lost and a perceived risk that this actor could not be trusted to keep the spectators safe.

In the event, it seems that his tentative exploration invited the audience to feel comfortable exploring as well, at times lingering in rooms that invited a second glance. In the archival video of the performance, the videographer lingers behind Peter to look into corridors and rooms along the way. Exploring a space by walking it is a frequent practice in site-specific performance: Andrew Houston explains that walking through a space is an act of enunciation that creates new meaning by “perpetually working between the absence of what we imagine the space to be and the material evidence of its proper and present uses” (Houston, 2007, 7). By walking through a space with this inexpert guide, spectators were invited to experience autonomy; in a historically-relevant site like the Diefenbunker, that autonomy can lead to what Houston posits as a renegotiation with history: “our performative relationship to history is often based on what remains, but also on what remains differently as it is embodied through the act of

remembering” (Houston, 2005, 75). Spectators were invited to pollinate their own memory (or lack thereof) of Cold War Canada by exploring this space through performance. Where the performance told this story with a sense of historical context, the exploration of the space remained an autonomous task for the audience; the hesitation of their guide could afford them the opportunity to explore the bunker at their own whim.

While this discovery was an inadvertent effect of our rehearsal and performance process, it was a valuable one. In a remount of *Johnny Drops the Bomb* I would experiment further with audience autonomy in the space. A promising example of mixed techniques for combining autonomy with narrative is Ken Cameron’s *How iRan: Three Plays for iPod*, performed at the Main Branch of the Ottawa Public Library this winter. Spectators were each given an iPod and invited to follow audio prompts to different installations in the library. Each iPod offered a different perspective on the narrative by relating the events from the points of view of three characters: an immigrant from Iran, his son a journalist, and his son’s teacher. Because participants could choose their path from one installation to the next, the library was an unpredictable participant in the story; because it was my first time in the library, I tried to take a different route every time. Thus, parts of the narrative that spoke to navigating a new world, a common experience for immigrants, were emphasized in my own walking navigation in exploring the library.

Building on this experience of *How iRan* and Houston’s notion of walking to create meaning between the way we imagine a space and its materiality, a future version of *Johnny Drops the Bomb* could invite spectators to choose how they interact with the space before the performance, perhaps discovering installations like Margaret’s notebook or a group of men chatting over a shared pot of tea. Although John (and Peter’s) confusion in the space invited the

spectators to pursue their own curiosity within the framework of the group's progress through the space together, I am interested in the phenomenological potential of exploring a space without that togetherness.

X. Witnesses Witnessing Witnesses

Margaret also found herself stuck underground between the Prime Minister and his wife.

Margaret is John's secretary, a fictional character whose existence was suggested by the office assigned to her, attached to the Prime Minister's suite. As one of very few women (nurses and one female cabinet minister, Ellen Fairclough) assigned to the Diefenbunker, and the one who would fill Olive's role as confidante and close companion, Margaret was an intriguing figure. Because I played Margaret in our workshop performance of *Johnny Drops the Bomb*, I could observe moments in spectator behavior that reinforced my reason for including Margaret, as an internal witness, in the script.

A witness serves an important function in this kind of performance, associated with both the fictional characters in their shared world and the spectators through their shared action of witnessing. Margaret is a fulcrum between the audience and the action, and therefore between the past and the present; Margaret, unlike Olive or John, would survive the past if there were an attack because she has a place in the bunker and will use it. Margaret appears and disappears without reason within the narrative, eavesdropping on the personal conversation from her office and surprising John and Olive when she chimes in from the doorway. Like the audience, Margaret enjoys a privileged ear into this conversation. Although John is not aware of the audience's presence, he is certainly alert to Margaret's eavesdropping, warning "keep your voice down, Ollie" when the conversation with his wife becomes heated (Horner, 37). This constant

reminder that someone is listening served as a reminder that even this most intimate conversation between husband and wife was not entirely private. At one point during the performance, one audience member left the action in the bedroom and came back through the suite to find Margaret; she brought over another spectator to watch Margaret listen, preferring to observe me rather than the protagonists. The witness within the narrative appeals to the audience who remain in their own position of witnessing, watching without the ability to intervene, recalling the spectators in Schneider's work, who, though observers, are in some way participants through the act of witnessing. Maggie, as witness, is an intriguing character situated in parallel to the audience's act of witnessing.

XI. The Embodied Actor

In rehearsal, Beverley and Peter were invaluable in constructing both the macro-narrative of the play and each character's individual narrative as a probable leap from the historical record. Because actors are concerned with embodying every intricacy of a character, they offered questions that complicated the characters as individuals, and as a couple. Their own memories of the Diefenbaker years complicated and enriched the process because each had firm ideas about the limits of that probability.

During our initial rehearsals, Peter and I worked to establish two distinct voices for John, vocal tactics that he would employ depending on who he was talking to or what he was talking about. Although I tried to convey this dichotomy in the text, it was Peter's work as an actor that made this double voice audible in performance. Spectators could hear the resistance within the official narrative by hearing the voice of John the Prime Minister and John, Olive's husband (Horner, 37). We can imagine that the two Johns wrestled with the tough decisions required of

them during the Cold War. In literally giving a voice to both sides of John Diefenbaker, Peter's act of embodiment gave shape to the personal in the political, an empathetic approach to understanding the past.

XII. Objects in Space

CFS Carp was designed as an underground bunker, not a home. Performing her role as First Lady, Olive enters the Prime Minister's suite and immediately seeks to "make this house a home" by embellishing its "grim" décor with a few trinkets she has brought from their official residence in a cardboard box (Horner, 33). As Olive moves her objects into the space she lays a sort of claim on a room that is not, and never will, be hers. The very action of ornamenting the space, an action expected of a First Lady in other circumstances, is a violation in this context. The real, historical Olive showed more than eight hundred people through the Prime Minister's residence during her first three months as First Lady; Olive was known as an excellent hostess there and believed that even though it was a private residence it "belonged to the people" (Philips, 18). I wanted to underscore the heartbreaking poignancy of Olive's gesture in these circumstances, and the extent of the betrayal that ensues when she realizes that her homemaking skills are surplus to requirements.

XIII. Performing Historiography in Situ

Johnny Drops the Bomb fits within the case studies in Jenn Stephenson's "Re: Performing Microhistories: Postmodern Metatheatricality in Canadian Millennial Drama," which posits that in the first decade of the twenty-first century "history is not just performed as an alternate perspective" but rather becomes "totally unknowable" (Stephenson, 264). The historiographic plays that she explores, including a first generation of texts like Sharon Pollock's *Komagata*

Maru Incident and more recent ones such as Michael Redhill's *Goodness*, are most "concerned with the process of how we create what happened," interested in "how we respond to the ambiguity of the past" and the "exercise of performative power in creating any past" (Stephenson, 264). *Johnny Drops the Bomb* is of its place and time in the sense that it, too, is engaged with these ideas. Many of the elements of the text and staging of *Johnny Drops the Bomb* reference historical facts that we understand to be "true"; John and Olive were married, Olive was not invited to the bunker in the event of an emergency, the bunker does feature painted horizontal stripes to avoid claustrophobia, the vault is on the bottom floor and was designed to keep Canada's gold safe and sound. Because these realities are juxtaposed with the fictional elements of performance, the play presents a contraction between fact and fiction, between history and the present. Site does act as an inseparable witness, to the past event, the future staging, and all of the plausible situations that could be materialized within its walls. Performing history in situ allows for both a folding of time, past and present on top of one another, and a view into both the fact and fiction inherent in the historical record. Through practice-as-research, I can conclude that staging the past in situ allows for an empathetic and embodied approach to the past in the present and for reflection on what we choose to remember.

History is, in essence, unknowable and inaccessible except by an archive. It is a fiction that is remembered, misremembered, crafted in narrative, rehearsed, recorded, re-enacted, but ultimately to replicate exactly. However difficult to unearth the dead, this thesis is interested in these impossibilities. I am interested in what happens when staging an historical story in situ, when actors animate historical figures to change remembered history like Rokem's hyperhistorian suggests, or when directors use techniques to physiologically situate the audience in an historical site. Supported by theories these techniques animate, I argue that space can be

understood as Victor Hugo theorizes, as an “inseparable witness” to both the historical event performed and the contemporary one of performance. Because of its material existence, site does not fall victim to disappearing like the historical moment or the performance itself but instead can act as a fulcrum between past and present, and between fact and fiction, memory and history. I am interested in the pedagogical oscillation between these polarities and what that means for performance and history and ultimately performing history. Performing the past in situ stages historiography more than history.

Space does not have agency itself in performance. In order to make space act as a fulcrum between the past and present, between reality and fiction, this thesis looked at theatre artists interested in this kind of performance and how they *intervene* and *activate* space by way of theories on acting style, physical movement through a space, or complications in the macro-narrative.

Because this project depended on the application of these theories I discussed in the first section of this thesis, through process we discovered that some of the theoretical tools were more helpful than others in performing the past in situ. In this case of performing history site-specifically for example, activating empathy through performance was an effective and an obvious impulse for a few reasons. The first being that actors embodying historical characters, as political philosopher Martha Nussbaum suggests, allows us to “bring a distant individual into the sphere of our goals and projects, humanizing the person and creating the possibility of attachment”, an notion I was especially interested in because of macro / micro history of this narrative, Diefenbaker’s position as both Prime Minister / Husband (Nussbaum, 66). The audience present in the same material space as Diefenbaker paired with an actor playing a

recognizable situation, allowed us to see the difference between the Diefenbaker the record remembers and the Diefenbaker that like Martha Nussbaum suggests, is...human. The second case for empathetic staging was a discovered relationship between this performance's lack of a concrete fourth wall, our decision to activate empathy in performance, and the presence of a 'witness'. In this case, Maggie, Diefenbaker's assistant and the witness, served an important function in this performance, associating both with the fictional characters in their historical world and in the spectators through a shared act of witnessing. Because I played Maggie in the performance, I can attest to this combination in practise. The audiences' ability to move freely about the space, listen to me listening, reinforced the notion that the audience could empathetically be "in feeling" with the characters but without the ability to intervene, a quality inherent to history as a discipline. This recalls the role of spectator in Rebecca Schneider's work in regards to re-enactment – witnessing is a participatory act of observation and performing history gives spectators the opportunity to make witnessing participatory and physical. At one point one spectator actually left the room where John and Olive were, to find me as a witness. She actively participated in history by witnessing the witness, witnessing.

The biggest realization of this project happened during the process of reflection. CFS Carp, known colloquially as the Diefenbunker, was commissioned in 1958 by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker as a response to, with the benefit of hindsight, the rising tensions of the Cold War. The bunker was designed so that in the event that an imminent nuclear attack on Ottawa was detected, a train on permanent standby would shuttle the Prime Minister and 534 other civil servants to this underground headquarters in Carp.

The play departs from fact from the very outset. The past was not performed *situ* because this conversation never happened here. However, by untethering my play from fact immediately, I found myself able to engage in a more interesting exploration of history and performance. Besides the other theories I discussed about, this project actually explored space between what we think happened and what could have happened, manifested in the relationship between the real materiality of the site, the fictionality of performance, and the fictionality that we know is inherent in looking at the past from the present. Therefore, through practice-as-research, I conclude that staging the past site-specifically, by mobilizing theories to do with empathy and memory, in juxtaposition with the real materiality of space through viewpoints like “being-in-the-world”, performing history stages historiography rather than history. More than making visible site as a material connection through the past and present, performing history plays site-specifically also allows for artists to interrogate fact and fiction in the context of the past.

Many of the elements of the text and staging of *Johnny Drops the Bomb* reference historical facts that we understand to be “true”; John and Olive were married, Olive was not invited to the bunker in the event of an emergency, and the bunker does feature painted horizontal stripes to avoid claustrophobia. Because these realities are juxtaposed with the fictional elements of performance, for example a photo of *real* Diefenbaker beside *actor* Diefenbaker, the play presents a contraction between fact and fiction, between history and the present. Site does act as an inseparable witness, to the past event, the present staging, and all of the plausible situations that could be or were materialized within its walls. Performing history *situ* allows for both a folding of time, past and present on top of one another, and a view into both the fact and fiction inherent in the historical record. Through practice-as-research, I conclude staging historiography by juxtaposing reality (through the materiality of site) and

fiction (fiction in narrative and storytelling), serves to make visible history as performance, as arbitrarily recorded, as flawed, as performative, and as flexible to change as memory.

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