

**QUEER(Y)ING QUAINNESS: DESTABILIZING ATLANTIC CANADIAN IDENTITY
THROUGH ITS THEATRE**

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Abstract

The Atlantic Canadian provinces (Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia) have long been associated with agricultural romanticism. Economically and culturally entrenched in a stereotype of quaintness (*Anne of Green Gables* is just one of many examples), the region continuously falls into a cycle of inferiority. In this thesis, I argue that queer theory can be infused into performance analysis to better situate local theatre practice as a site of mobilization. Using terms and concepts from queer geographers and other scholars, particularly those who address capitalism (Gibson-Graham, Massey), this research outlines a methodology of performance analysis that looks through a queer lens in order to destabilize normative assumptions about Atlantic Canada.

Three contemporary performances are studied in detail: Christian Barry, Ben Caplan, and Hannah Moscovitch's *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story*, Ryan Griffith's *The Boat*, and Xavier Gould's digital personality "Jass-Sainte Bourque". Combining Ric Knowles' "dramaturgy of the perverse" (*The Theatre of Form* 1999) with Sara Ahmed's "queer phenomenology" (*Queer Phenomenology* 2006) allows for a thorough queer analysis of these three performances. I argue that such an approach positions new Atlantic Canadian performances and dramaturgies as sites of aesthetic and semantic disorientation. Building on Jill Dolan's "utopian performatives" (*Utopia in Performance* 2005), wherein the audiences experience a collective "lifting above" of normative dramaturgical structures, my use of "queer phenomenology" fosters a plurality of unique perspectives. The process of complicating normalizing tendencies helps dismantle generalizing cultural stereotypes.

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Introduction

Theater can be a mobile unit in a journey across new geographies, a place that doesn't center the discourse in white male hegemony, but a space that can be filled and moved, by and to the margins, perpetually decentered as it explores various identity configurations of production and reception. (Dolan, 2001: 84)

In our present context of heated debates on social media and between government officials advancing harmful centrist and xenophobic ideologies, it may be tempting to seek refuge through theatre and avoid the more *political* theatre described above by Jill Dolan. While conducting research for this project, I resisted refuge by attending a theatre conference on Prince Edward Island and consciously chose whimsical escapism by seeing Don Harron, Norman Campbell, Elaine Campbell, and Mavor Moore's *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical*. This particular production, now in its 54th season, relies on satisfying common societal expectations: it does not rest in "the [social] margins" (Dolan) by remaining consistent—a political quality Dolan champions—despite numerous directorial approaches over the decades. The hordes of tourists visiting the Island each year have come to expect the gleeful innocence of Anne and—since the story has repeatedly been connected to its local geography—the geographical region itself. I argue that *Anne*'s "inescapable" quaintness of Atlantic Canada, along with other Maritime theatre, produces and tightens a cultural straitjacket that has historically limited the region's economic and cultural potential. Theatre can and must do more than normalize pejorative categorizations. My work demonstrates how new Atlantic Canadian theatre productions escape from said straitjacket by adopting queer material processes and affective moments. Theatre understood in a queer way is better situated to confront geographical stereotypes.

My argument is substantiated through three case studies of contemporary performances: Theatre New Brunswick's *The Boat*, 2b theatre company's *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story*, and Xavier Gould's online performances as "Jass-Sainte Bourque". Each of these case studies contain queer moments that "twist" their restrictive socio-social frameworks. It is therefore important to first describe what those frameworks are, and how the concentration of capital in Canada regulates cultural standards across the country. Chapter One explores geographical theories and contextualizes Canadian professional theatre as a catalyst for nationalism. Chapter Two then positions the cultural landscape of Canadian theatre within a queer framework, explaining why queer theory is an important tool for unpacking a resistance to restrictive identity structures. I argue that queer phenomenology, a concept articulated by Sara Ahmed in her book of the same name, is a useful way of measuring the potential of political intervention for theatrical performances. I then provide two specific tools for pinpointing Ahmed's queer phenomenology: Jill Dolan's "utopian performatives" (*Utopia in Performance*) and Ric Knowles' "dramaturgy of the perverse" (*The Theatre of Form*). The case studies then follow in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, revealing the ways in which Atlantic Canadian artists are queering the stereotypes of quaintness that often permeate the region. Theatre can be a tool for local communities to criticize broader generalizations of their culture.

In a country as geographically vast and culturally diverse as Canada, regional generalizations continue to overwhelm the public discourse concerning the social position of regions and their geographical progress. In May of 2002, Stephen Harper commented on Atlantic Canadian culture, saying, "There is a dependence in the region that breeds a culture of defeatism" ("Culture of Defeatism" 2002). Harper's generalization of the region resulted in significant backlash, with locals like political scientist Jennifer Smith responding: "[Atlantic Canada] is

growing faster than other regions of the country. I'm sure that comes as a surprise to some people, but it won't come to a surprise to people who are living here in the region" ("Culture of Defeatism"). Stereotypical observations often permeate the national consideration of particular geographies, resulting in restrictive expectations of their culture and economic potential. I argue here that theatre artists and researchers are in a position to intercede in the direct subjectification of Atlantic Canadian culture. As Herb Wyile writes in *Anne of Tim Hortons*, Canadian media and policies continually frame the region as culturally inferior (3). The prominent insistence on cultural cohesion across geographical space has been pertinent to Canada's accumulation of capital, as will be explored in more detail through work by Wyile and Alan Filewod.

My methodology entails analysing the material conditions of two contemporary theatre case studies: Ryan Griffith's adaptation of Alistair MacLeod's *The Boat* and Ben Caplan, Hannah Moscovitch and Christian Barry's *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story*. Close scrutiny of these plays via queer phenomenology will demonstrate the conscious queer construction within these performances. Theatre currently being created in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia functions as a salient tool for political intervention. After unpacking the effects of capitalism on the region, my research will provide new models of demonstrating how theatrical productions—traditional, adapted, and YouTube—respond to pressures from Canadian nationalism and globalizing audiences. East Coast performances continue to be a means for artists and communities to stretch and expand the traditional boundaries of their geographical condition. Atlantic Canadian theatre resists its mainstream identity as new productions by geographical outcasts shift negative impressions through a queering of its geographical and artistic conditions. These existing models of queer

geographical and theatrical inquiry will formulate my new methodology of using queerness to access the culturally and politically engaged content appearing in these performances.

In his book *The Tourist Gaze* (2002), John Urry states that a tourist's intent to leave home in order to experience diversity actually leads to further uniformity, as cultures are oversimplified to appeal to the mass tourist (7). Atlantic Canadians perpetuate this kind of oversimplification of their own culture in order to harness the financial potential of the tourism industry (Wyile 20). As Wyile so aptly argues, the current economic situation of Atlantic Canada is rooted in a history of centralization. Thus, this project will briefly explore the history of nation-building in a Canadian and capitalist context and how it has come to perpetuate restrictive stereotypes (Filewod, *Committing Theatre*) in order to speak to how theatre may address cultural stagnation. The three subsequent case studies argue that the region's theatrical works can reveal the ways artists either contest or hone these stereotypes and their associated external power structures. Through this dissertation, tools such as Dolan's utopian performatives, which are theatrical moments that encourage glimpses into more hopeful futures, and Knowles' dramaturgies of the perverse, theatrical structures that foreground normalizing tendencies, will be provided. These mechanisms could help contemporary theatre artists and academics open up and explore unprecedented queer spaces of "indifference" (Menon), broadening the scope of what constitutes Atlantic Canadian "imagined identity".

Benedict Anderson construes communal identities like nations and regions as "imagined communities": social constructs continually imagined by their inhabitants through various media (i.e. theatre). All individual citizens of a country are never simultaneously visible to one another, but we imagine the co-patriotism of those we cannot see. Imagined communities and Alan Filewod's "imagined theatre" (*Performing Canada; Committing Theatre*) bridge the gap between

theatre studies and queer theory. Canada's professional theatre practices have long supported ideological frameworks that benefit those dwelling in urban Central Canada: namely white, cisgender, heterosexual couples and their families. It has also been categorical in order to compensate for the vast geography of the country: Canadian theatre, in other words, has been sustaining the illusion of the imagined community of Canada while framing the general Canadian experience as white, heterosexual, and cisgender.

For Filewod, theatre "has functioned historically as a ceremonial test in which the national imaginary is enacted, codified, scrutinized, and monumentalized" (*Performing Canada* 4). Queer theory resists categorization and thus excites and dismantles these normative practices. Sara Ahmed's "queer phenomenology" pervades the analyses taken here as a concept that encompasses the multiplicitous potential of theatre. When a plurality of perspectives is encouraged in live performance, normative structures are actively dismantled instead of glazed over. My work applies queer theory to theatre and performance projects to show how they destabilize normative expectations and deconstruct essentialist identities. Theatrical work often subverts social and cultural standards or expectations (Knowles, *Reading*), and in so doing exposes oppressive forces and networks of power that are invisible to those privileged by them (Dolan, *Feminist Spectator*). However, there is a lack of academic study that explicitly connects queerness to theatre's inherent socio-political force. The intersection of queer theory and geography underlines methods of resistance in a particular region, but even more importantly, a more nuanced application of queer theory in performance studies opens theatre criticism up to more positive and embracing potentials.

Queerness addresses power hierarchies, in government and other systems of organization, and induces multiple angles of perception in order to dismantle said hierarchies. For example,

Gibson-Graham has articulated ways to demolish the “straw-man” that is “capitocentrism”: a seemingly undeterrable force that will eventually overwhelm all other forms of economic and cultural practice (“The End of Capitalism”). She stresses the importance of considering the multiplicity of our reality to emancipate geographical regions that are assumed to be helpless victims of our present neoliberal capitalism. Identities, regional and otherwise, are fluid and ever changing, and here I study theatre that explores and politicizes that queerness of Atlantic Canada. Queer theory, the emphasis and exploration of identity’s shifting nature (Sedgwick, *Tendencies*), can be applied to disciplines other than sex and gender. This research suggests that drawing on terminology often associated with queer studies can better position recent Atlantic Canadian theatre and performance as a tool for social intervention. I argue that applying a queer lens to performance analysis manifests results in two critical ways: 1) By expanding the general use of queer theoretical language and 2) By presenting new models of theatrical creation that place underrepresented voices centrestage.

Analyzing unassuming theatre practices through a queer lens presents potentially new and exciting ways to create future work. Fresh perspectives in the creation of contemporary Atlantic Canadian theatre are what could point toward a less culturally restrictive reality. After all, as Gibson-Graham articulates, micropolitical actions like political theatre move us into different socio-economic spheres and disrupt the cultural straitjacket of quaintness. Shifting historically common ways of analysing performance into an explicitly queer framework, one in which many alternative ways of perceiving social power structures is encouraged, may have positive consequences that open up more space for minoritized voices. As Jill Dolan observes in her book *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (2012) and elsewhere (2005), theatre practices and their methods of representation have been too heavily focused on the ideologies of white,

heterosexual, cisgender men. Those who fall outside of those categories are forced to confront their own exclusion from the ideological structures that frame both the theatrical narrative and the production process.

An example of exclusionary literary and theatrical criticism is Northrup Frye's naturalization of Aristotelian narrative patterns (*Anatomy of Criticism* 1957 and elsewhere), which Ric Knowles describes as a simple reaffirmation of cultural norms, "denying theatre the possibility of having any direct impact on consciousness or the social order" (*The Theatre of Form* 26). I look at how queer theory is used in engaging with these exclusionary contexts. This connection can then extend to the particular model of queer performance analysis I lay out, inspired by Dolan, Knowles, and Madhavi Menon. Such a performance analysis examines the material reality of a production in a way that mirrors Derrida's "deconstruction" or Foucault's "discourse" and "genealogy," dismantling the performance's reliance on normative ideologies by pinpointing its specific "utopian performatives". By closely examining the material mechanisms in the construction of a localized production, one can discern the elements of the work reaching beyond oppressive assumptions. Such "queer" elements gesture toward a more complicated and thus fully realized idea of Atlantic Canadian culture.

To argue that contemporary theatre practice in Atlantic Canada resists a limiting monolithic image of the region, I examine the current economic plight faced by the region and how creative individuals have been contesting it (Wyile, Savoie). This will preface the work of Alan Filewod on political theatre in Canada and the formation of the country's professional industry itself, which is framed by a discussion of capitalism and queer understandings of contemporary geography (Gibson-Graham). Gibson-Graham articulate ways of deconstructing normative social structures, and Filewod positions professional Canadian theatre as one such

structure to critique. By analysing the material conditions of performance, specifically drawing on Knowles' "dramaturgy of the perverse", I unearth the deeper and less visible structures of a performance in order to reveal how it has been influenced by invisible forces of power (like heteronormativity, the patriarchy, or capitalism). The Maritimes and Newfoundland have long been bound to limiting notions of pastoral Folkism: a generalized assumption that the provinces cannot reach past their dependency on the allegedly more resourceful Central Canada. To begin the research, I unpack contemporary trends of queer geography, specifically those applicable to Canadian nationhood. I point to the porousness of regional boundaries in general, and how queer studies are useful in identifying their oppressiveness.

Queer theory helps to understand how many personal identities are in fact imposed by outside structures and forms of social control, and a critical look at these identities reveals the ways they can work to resist or subvert those external powers. Queer individuals are those who fall outside of the heterocentric attitudes pervading our laws, culture, and politics, and they have an ability to engage with theatrical representations of the self in critical ways. As Himani Bannerji writes:

The possibilities for constructing a radically different Canada emerge only from those who have been 'othered' as the insider-outsiders of the nation. It is their standpoints which, oppositionally politicized, can take us beyond the confines of gender and race and enable us to challenge class through a critical and liberating vision. In their lives, politics, and work, the 'others' hold the possibility of being able to expose the hollowness of the liberal state and to provide us with an understanding of both the refined and crude constructions of 'white power' behind 'Canada's' national imaginary. They serve to remind us of the Canada that *could* exist. (Bannerji 2000, 81, italics in original)

The worldviews benefitting an elite few are still central to the fabric of our contemporary nation-state. In order to deconstruct regional essentialism cemented by traditional theatre practices, we have to understand how theatre can make space for *everyone* who has been excluded; not just Atlantic Canadians, but other minoritized communities in the national landscape. One point of connection between theatre, geography, and queer theory comes into play with queer phenomenology: the disorientation of bodies in space that provoke new understandings of tired power dynamics.

A captivating account of how queerness pervades social criticism comes from Michael Warner's *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993):

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is intricated with gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state ... Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. It means being able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what "health" entails, or what would define fairness, or what a good relation to the planet's environment would be. Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer. (Warner 6)

As a queer man from New Brunswick and presently living in Ontario, part my approach to this project involves building on previous work by queer theorists that confronts an exclusion embedded in the practice of nationalism. Nationalism and nationhood are constructs that depend entirely on performance, as Alan Filewod so aptly argues, and deconstructing them through a lens of critical queerness can lead toward invigorating and politically productive theatrical work.

My approach to deconstruction invokes Jacques Derrida's famous use of the term, and as I argue below this centres on his concept of the supplement, used most notably in a performance theory context by Marvin Carlson (1985). Derrida described the concept of deconstruction as a way to highlight the aporias inherent in any given literary text, where what was excluded and left in the margins would come back into the main body and crack its supposedly stable structure. Literature, due to the nature of language, has no meaning: the Saussurean concepts of signified and signifier are in a constant state of play, with one constantly morphing into the other.

Deconstruction is a process whereby what is left out of the primary work in order to present clear, "structural" arguments, or narratives, is reapplied to existing texts, leading these structures to collapse in on themselves and reveal their true weakness. Thus, language presents an innate inability to pin down meaning, since meaning, though it does exist, cannot be mined and exploited like theorists throughout most of the twentieth century contended. Applying the word to a methodological, critical examination of theatrical performances may at first seem counterintuitive with the knowledge that Derrida himself asserted that deconstruction is not a "method, critique, analysis, act or operation" ("Letter to a Japanese Friend" 4), but it is this embracing attitude to that which is excluded and the firm belief that apparent monolithic "norms" can be successfully dismantled that permeates this thesis.

In analyzing three contemporary performances, I expand on Derrida's concept of the supplement. Marvin Carlson ("Theatrical Performance") presents this approach as an alternative to "illustration" and "fulfillment" performance theories, the former emphasizing the organic unity and essence of the written text, while the latter emphasizes performance as essential and filling a *void* in the text. Derrida argues that Jacques Rousseau's critique of performance as an unnecessary addition to Nature is unstable, since all phenomena are supplements of others. It is

impossible to grasp the essential “truth” of Nature, since all attempts to do so are both additions and replacements to previous efforts. Performance works in much the same way, Carlson argues, as it adds to Nature a more tangible form of truth, as well as an infinite amount of possible *interpretations* of said truth. The supplement exposes the shortfall of both approaches to performance theory: the illustrative approach fails to take into account the ability of performance to add substantial meaning to the text, and the fulfillment theory ignores the text’s creative potential and openness.

This use of a Derridean-inspired performance theory can be unpacked further to explain the proliferation of queer theoretical influence. Derrida’s deconstruction and supplement have been shifted and transformed in various ways over time. The work of Michel Foucault may be the most prominent example of taking the concepts and applying them more practically to his archaeology of knowledge and genealogy. Foucault believes discourses (forms of knowledge regulation and dissemination) are controlled and employed by institutionalized structures. If one were to observe history through his deconstructive lens, the mechanisms of said discourses could be revealed, and the way institutions wield power over their subjects examined more clearly. The archaeology of knowledge is an effort to unearth these discourses and reveal the true mechanisms of power often hidden behind the promises of authoritarian forces. The work of Foucault has weight here, as it does for a number of prominent queer thinkers, like Gibson-Graham and her *resubjectivation*. Much of Foucault’s work is applied to literary theories, but the following examples portray the power of queer theory’s application in various disciplines.

Recent queer scholarship, highly influenced by Foucault and his contemporaries, has expanded beyond the definitional limits of sexuality and gender (Detamore 2016). In *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash have assembled an anthology

of queer-focused essays that question normative assumptions about research methodology and provide alternative perspectives. Foucauldian concepts of discourse and genealogy are infused into these theorizations. Queer theorists argue productive social and political possibilities emerge through destabilizing and decentering essentialist binaries, especially in discourses governed by existing power structures.

In his “Queer(y)ing the Ethics of Research Methods”, Mathias Detamore suggests the productive potential in viewing ethics as a form of methodological process. Traditionally, methodology necessarily invokes the use of ethics: a well-planned approach to studying a subject and not cause harm or unintentionally influence the result of the study. However, in flipping this paradigm so that ethics is an approach in and of itself, one can highlight an inherent complexity of the subject and thus open further possibilities of understanding, which is in fact a *queer* approach: “An ethics as method is understood to be ‘queer’ in its ability to destabilize our assumptions about the ethical in research, disrupt the researcher/researched relationship and cultivate the intimacies necessary to shape new types of alliances and strategies for alternative social worlds” (170). It is this intimacy that I hope to cultivate here, and in particular illuminate the indeterminacy of identity inherent in Atlantic Canada and its theatre practice. Like Detamore’s article, the title of this dissertation is inspired by Gibson-Graham’s “Queer(y)ing Capitalism in and Out of the Classroom” (1990). Their work here and elsewhere has revealed the “untapped potential and durability of queer theory to grasp a vast array of possible social worlds” (Detamore 172). Queer theory, in their understanding, proves to be useful beyond the confines of sexuality and gender. It has taken up space in more general social and political critiques, and this dissertation, as is suggested in the title, applies the concept of queer in this more expansive form.

Gibson-Graham presented this possibility by drawing on Eve K. Sedgwick's notion of the "Christmas effect": an assimilation of societal forces like the church, state, media, and others into one "monolithic voice aiming toward the expectation of a similar predictable outcome - in this case Christmas" (ibid). In Sedgwick's view this is a depressing reality, and sexuality works in much the same way: the binary of masculinity/femininity and a web of other sexual attributes work together to dictate a staid, structural understanding of what one's identity *should be*. She goes on to ask, "What if instead there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other?" (Sedgwick 6) Presenting a list of elements that constitute "the family", she discusses how they do not in fact carry equal weight but react with each other on various levels. Queer theory, she argues, engages in a more accurate observation of a construct's complexity: unpacking the idea of Christmas or sexuality, for example, and noting how powerful voices come to influence the individual's perception of it. Gibson-Graham uses "queer(y)ing", a play on query, to draw attention to the nature of Sedgwick's "queer" as a question: a way to destabilize popular assumptions about a given social or political structure.

Mark Graham elaborates on this in "Method Matters: Ethnography and Materiality": "Methodology is performative to the core and as such never able to claim closure" (*Queer Methods and Methodologies* 194). Attempting to do so would ignore the fact that "matter and things are performative, provisional, indeterminate (despite their apparent material obduracy), and, in the case of artefacts, continually gesturing beyond themselves to their, often disavowed, constitutive outsides" (184). If we understand Atlantic Canada to be relatively rigid in its predictable outcomes (due to a continual process that is "imagined community" and by extension an "imagined theatre", then queer(y)ing its cultural practices may illuminate the oft-unnoticed "mesh of possibilities" (Sedgwick) intrinsic to its unstable being.

Equating Atlantic Canada with an “artefact” may be too big of a leap, but Graham’s argument that queer theory can stand to focus more on material reality is persuasive. The following quote from Graham’s article underscores both the epistemology and methodology of my own research:

Queer methods, at least when addressing materiality, ought ... to place themselves in the critical tradition that can trace its roots back to Marx on commodity fetishism and forward through the dereifying ambitions of the Frankfurt School. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this affinity is often ignored in genealogies of queer theory that routinely neglect materiality in favour of textual and linguistic attention to objects of study. (185)

Contemporary queer studies like mine build on these “dereifying ambitions” and apply “naive” methodologies to human subjects and social concepts that necessarily construct boundaries, to invoke an openness that compliments the open structure of matter itself: “Matter is a ceaseless intra-active becoming continually refiguring local structures, boundaries and properties” (188).

I infuse the idea of queer and queerness into my methodology by taking up the call of previous queer scholars to refrain from a totalizing or essentialist approach. By prioritizing under-determined concepts and approaching my methodology with naivety, my research resists indulging in processes limiting the potential and comprehension of Atlantic Canadian theatre practice. Even much of queer and feminist writing often avoids delving deeper into deconstructing knowledge structures. Much of contemporary feminist practice, for example, centres on concepts and ideas rather than a material reality infused with patriarchal and sexist undertones. The material, rooted in essentialist or logocentric ideals, often reaffirms notions of biological superiority. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008) argue many feminists in recent history have been “taking refuge within culture, discourse, and language” (1). This avoidance has

been inherited by queer activists and scholars, who tend to see the heteronormative essentialism in materiality (namely theories of nature and biology) and rightfully run the other way; at first glance there seems to be no room for queer destabilization in a realm dominated by essentialist claims of heterosexual authority.

However, “another picture of materiality has emerged, one in which matter is performative, active, unpredictable, even literate” (Graham 183). Graham describes how some feminist scholars have looked at materiality more closely, and, much like Foucault and Derrida, revealed the invisible structures at play. On closer inspection, apparently “stable” matter and/or concepts crack open and refuse to hide their indeterminacy. Derrida’s “deconstruction” and Foucault’s “archeology” have been pivotal concepts in this movement of queering bodies of knowledge and practices. The reclaiming of particular objects of study—atoms, governmental structures, and geography, just to name a few—from the dominant essentialist methodologies opens up space for a *queer* understanding. Such a prefatory glance at the body of queer theoretical work has already indicated the expanse of queer theory, but more specifically this work takes a *phenomenological* approach to performance analysis. Scholar Sara Ahmed has pulled the archaeology of knowledge into the realm of phenomenology: an approach more readily applicable to performance studies. Erika Fischer-Lichte provides a succinct definition of the phenomenological approach, stating that it “focuses on the interplay of appearance, perception, and experience. How do people, things, sounds, and spaces appear, and what effect do they have on the audience?” (56)

Ahmed also approaches many of these questions in a manner she outlines as queer, mainly because it focuses on the act of *disorientation*, rather than many phenomenological studies whose priority is fixed *orientation*. This epistemological approach is detailed after

providing the context of Atlantic Canadian economic and cultural restriction. Wylie's *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature* (2011), and a study of Atlantic Canadian economics by Donald Savoie titled *Visiting Grandchildren: Economic Development in the Maritimes* (2006), buttress the notions of Anderson's "imagined community" and Filewod's "imagined theatre". Ahmed's notion of queer phenomenology then bridges us to a discussion of Knowles' "dramaturgy of the perverse" and its methodological applications. Having been interjected intermittently throughout, the three case studies will then be analyzed through these established lenses in more detail.

Chapter One: An Enforced Identity

[There] is much to be gained from putting the notion of ‘Atlantic Canada’ into both theoretical and historical perspective, to consider not so much whether Atlantic Canada is a region but how, and in what terms, it is seen as one ... [what] seem from the outside to be distinct and cohesive regions on closer scrutiny prove to be heterogeneous, unstable, even internally divided. (Herb Wyile 7)

This chapter describes the history of systemic efforts by the Canadian federal government to solidify a nation-wide cultural cohesiveness. The queer model I articulate in my work highlights how contemporary theatre artists are revealing and celebrating the innate complexity and cultural diversity of the region. The plurality of Atlantic Canadian cultures and identities has long been evident (Tremblay 4), yet the development of governmental cultural councils have historically favoured those artists who play within predetermined aesthetic boundaries (Filewod). Scholars and historians Tony Tremblay and David Creelman contend that New Brunswick in and of itself contains a myriad of cultures (*New Brunswick at the Crossroads* 166), and a monolithic identity is impossible to define. New Brunswick, and the other Atlantic Provinces, are made up of Acadian, Indigenous, Loyalist, and other cultural groups whose lived experiences and artistic works prevent the formation of any one identity. In the afterword to *New Brunswick at the Crossroads*, a book on historical moments of literary ferment in the province, Creelman concludes that,

our literary texts, from the outset, have been inherently pluralist and transcultural, and even if our blend of the local and cosmopolitan sounds easily on the ears of others, it is,

nonetheless, a simulacrum of the bricolage that has come to define not only the province but also the nation itself. (166)

The cultural output of Atlantic Canada, much like the diverse creative voices from across the country, includes an eclectic collection of perspectives. As is the case with any other nation, the multiplicity of Canadian experiences cannot be succinctly defined. One must accept and embrace the ever-changing and interconnected nature of the region's cultural tendencies. Although there are advantages in a unifying definition coming from *within* the borders, with Atlantic Canadians uniting under common experiences, an *externally sustained* pressure to acquire a sense of cultural uniformity does an injustice to the creative potential of the region's residents (Wyle, *Anne of Tim Hortons*).

Here I foreground external economic and cultural pressures from government agencies and discuss their impact. "In the twentieth century," writes theatre historian Alan Filewod, "the humanist vision of a self-sustaining theatre culture was a response to American economic colonialism and the spread of monopoly capitalism" (*Committing Theatre* 33). Such a humanist vision was implemented primarily through the Canada Council for the Arts, initiated by Governor General Vincent Massey at a time when many politicians and regional analysts were focused on an Ontario-centric federalism. Massey's ideal theatre was one structured around a canon of original dramatic literature that differentiated itself from American competitors. "For the anglo-Canadians," writes Filewod, "the absent Canadian theatre would be marked by its 'freedom' from American themes and forms" (28). Massey's theatre, however, was one dependent on city-dwelling and well-off artists privileged enough to have their work produced.

To explain the implementation of "nationwide" cultural standards placed on Atlantic Canada, the chapter unfolds in the following way. First, I explain the factors that establish

Atlantic Canada as a region on the peripheries of the concentric powers of the federal government. Then, the geographical theories of the production of space (Henri Lefebvre) and uneven development (Edward Soja, Neil Smith) further illuminate Atlantic Canada's social configuration. Herb Wylie's work on Atlantic Canadian literature that resists such a cultural straitjacket provides an example of how the political economy affects artists and how artists draw attention to the plurality of Atlantic Canadian experiences. The authors he studies defy the normative power structures dictating Atlantic Canada is simply "quaint".

Building on the cultural connection established by Wylie, the chapter's historical economical arrangements and geographical theories are used as a lens through which I examine the objectives of Governor General Vincent Massey. Massey orchestrated a Royal Commission which ultimately lead to the construction of Canadian theatre as an institution. I then provide an historical example of political theatre that confronted this institutional protocol. The Mummers Troupe, an artist collective developed in Newfoundland, antagonized the federally applied cultural model. The history of both Atlantic Canada and the regional theatre model, along with an example of political theatre in action, make up this contextualizing chapter. This context then allows me to speak to how contemporary theatre and performance artists are actively complicating the region's cultural reputation.

The History of a Region

Atlantic Canada, consisting of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, has a long and complicated history. Each province has its own unique constitution of people and cultures, as well as its own relationship to Canadian nationalism. Such uniqueness cannot be ignored, but there is a socio-political practicality in orientating the four provinces in a common direction. Doing so facilitates an analysis of the centralization of national

power and unites Atlantic Canadians under what Wylie describes as “a common sense of political and economic marginality relative to the rest of the country” (7). Again, it is important to stress that the definitions I provide here come from *within* the marginalized group: my own experience as an Atlantic Canadian informs this research process. What I wish to confront are restrictive stereotypes placed on the region by outside forces. One such force has been the ongoing ripple effect of Confederation.

The process of Confederation was initiated by officials in Ontario and influenced by British traditions. It entailed the concentration of political power to better facilitate the economic success of a population sprawled across great distances. As economist Donald Savoie writes, “The British institutions took shape in a unitary state where power was concentrated in the hands of the monarch and where a large population was concentrated over a relatively small territory. In Canada, political power is concentrated in the hands of the prime minister and a few key advisors” (10), yet the land is vast. Since Confederation in 1867, power has been concentrated in Ontario, resulting in significant differences between the economic development of Ontario and that of the East Coast. It is this uniting factor, along with a shared history of colonialism and imperialism, that ultimately united all four eastern shoreline provinces under the umbrella of “Atlantic Canada”. However, the four provinces are not always considered one (socially constructed) geographical entity: the “Maritimes” is often discussed as a region in and of itself, with Newfoundland and Labrador excluded.

“Atlantic Canada” was not a popularized term until 1949, when Newfoundland and Labrador culminated its turbulent political history by joining Confederation. Despite the province’s differences, historians Margaret Conrad and James Hiller note that Atlantic Canadians have since “come to share an angle of vision on the world they inhabit” (*Atlantic Canada: A*

region in the making 6). It is for the purpose of this shared vision that I use the term “Atlantic Canada” exclusively, while simultaneously recognizing the socially constructed organization of the provinces as well as their varying histories.

The social divide between the federal government and Atlantic Canada stems from the former’s centralization and concentration of national wealth. Canada has historically focused most of its resources on the more central provinces (Ontario and Quebec), deciding to:

concentrate its investment in infrastructure facilities in central Canada ... C.D. Howe, who was the key architect of this strategy, had no interest in regional balance. His goal was to build a modern economy capable of competing with the Americans, and if this meant favouring central Canada, then so be it. For C.D. Howe, the national interest was what mattered, and this has been true for many of Canada’s political leaders ever since. They would deal with regional interests only after the national interest was secured (Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren* 49)

Often, as both Herb Wylie and Donald Savoie note, what is good for Central Canada is seen as a *national* benefit, and what is good for Atlantic Canada only a *regional* benefit (*Visiting Grandchildren* 27). The four Atlantic Canadian provinces each had a relatively fruitful economy pre-Confederation, but entered into Confederation to resist ties to the United States, maintain ties to Britain, and develop a more diversified economic structure (Wylie 10). Many still argue that joining Confederation was a mistake, as to this day we see an ongoing decrease in jobs, an aging population, and increasing out-migration. The joining of the provinces into the Dominion of Canada meant a stronger dependence in the East on the political forces that were concentrated in Ontario. Although recognizing that Confederation was not the only factor in the shaping of present day Atlantic Canada, Savoie explains that “Canada's birth was motivated by regional

self-interest rather than by patriotism. Ontario wanted to counterbalance Quebec and co-opted the Maritime provinces for help to achieve this goal" (*Visiting Grandchildren* 14-15).

Confederation was championed by politicians in Ontario, with the Maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) all joining the Dominion of Canada by 1873. Again, such action resulted in a concentration of power in Ontario. Governmental policies were established that catered to domestic rather than national needs, an example being the National Policy, instated by John A. Macdonald's Conservative Party in 1879. Under this policy, protective tariffs were enjoyed by larger manufacturing firms like Canadian General Electric, which were located in Ontario and oriented toward the domestic market. Savoie explains that "Businesses were able to look to tariff protection and to a fully developed national railway system to exploit economies of scale by locating new capacity in the centre of the country, in Ontario" (47).

The National Policy's protective tariffs have largely been reduced, but its effects still have a lingering impact on the economic problems facing Atlantic Canada:

A look at history will highlight the damage that has been done by over one hundred years of being relegated to the periphery of the national economy and, to some extent, by historical accidents and historical events shaped in large measure by national policies.

(Savoie 326)

The history of Atlantic Canada's place within the larger context of Canadian development illuminates the complexity of regional problems still experienced today. Many federal economic policies since the National Policy remained focused on Central Canada because of the success in growing the overall wealth of Ontario. As Wylie argues, this focus led to a "concentration of economic and political power in Central Canada, a situation exacerbated by out-migration from

the Maritimes and a consequent decline in parliamentary seats and therefore in political influence” (Wylie 10).

The combination of these events has resulted in many people moving away from the region, especially at times when the smaller provinces were not appropriately represented in the House of Commons. There have been attempts at Senate reform, yet Atlantic Canadian provinces continue to be dwarfed by other provinces and therefore face difficulties in shaping beneficial policies. Savoie gives the example of former Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, who in his opinion “essentially [told] the smaller provinces to live with Canada’s current marital arrangements and to let the more populous provinces continue to have their way” (55). He then points to McGuinty’s efforts to increase the number of Ontario seats in the Commons, in order to provide “fair representation” next to British Columbia and Alberta. This is an example of how Central Canada has been and continues to be favoured in policy-making:

It ... suggests that the premier of Ontario believes that only representation by population should apply in Canadian federalism, and somehow other federations have it all wrong in having an upper house able to speak with authority to the interests of the regions and smaller provinces. How convenient for Ontario and its premiers! (Savoie 55)

The “representation by population” was indeed refuted by Maritimers soon after Confederation, for “Without a capacity to check the power of representation by population in the House of Commons, many Maritimers feared that their voice would be drowned out, leaving them unable to protect the region’s interests” (25).

The favouring of central and western provinces in domestic trading, coupled with this decrease in political power, has positioned Atlantic Canada as economically inferior: “The National Policy... and the need to strengthen national unity has served to concentrate Ottawa's

attention on Ontario and Quebec" (Savoie 49). Savoie describes other policies that developed after Confederation, which, as Wylie summarizes, have done little "to improve long-term economic prospects because they did not lead to the region's integration into 'national' economic policy" (Wylie 12) — an example of which being Pierre Trudeau's formation of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) in 1969. Trudeau's new department was meant to alleviate regional disparities but instead simply funnelled money to the provinces with no thorough development action taken on the ground (Savoie 104). Savoie contends that these national policies assumed that "political cohesion... would be maintained by instituting a system of transfer payments designed to underwrite the cost of uneven economic development but leaving intact the economic relationships that gave rise to uneven development" (Savoie 306). Attempts have been made at economic and cultural reform, but Atlantic Canada's reputed inferiority remains intact.

In order to provide a frame of reference for the impact of Ontario-centric policies, I now expand on the notions of uneven development and the production of space: the social effect of collectively imagining and articulating particular reputations of geographical areas. Together, these theories explain how governmental actions have shaped the social and spatial/geographical configuration of Atlantic Canada and how this positioning affects the freedom of its professional theatres.

Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space

As we have seen, not only is any given region conceptualized by its borders (physical or imaginary) but also by the socio-spatial conditioning disseminated from those in power. A useful concept in this regard is philosopher Henri Lefebvre's "production of space" (1974). The

production of space is a product of both mental space, where people imagine what it could or should be, and physical space, where natural markers make the space unique. Lefebvre's production of space speaks to how an area like Atlantic Canada is a construct that has been socially reified over time. It is important to understand Atlantic Canada in this light in order to investigate the lingering influence of governmental policies and their spread of cultural ideals.

Whereas philosophers like Emmanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel have theorized about mental "spaces" and individual "worlds" having an effect much like a *subject*, Cartesian-based studies have tended to focus on space as a more absolute *object*. Lefebvre argues all of these philosophers commit "the perfect paralogism: they leap over an entire area, ignoring the need for any logical links, and justify this in the vaguest possible manner by invoking, as the need arises, some such notion as *coupre* or rupture or break" (5). Lefebvre fills this hypothetical chasm with the idea that what has traditionally been viewed as two separate spaces, that of the mental and of the physical, are in fact overlapping and dependent on each other. *The Production of Space* covers a lot of theoretical ground, the full breadth of which is not crucial to cover in this context, but it is worth summarizing elements of the argument to corroborate the theory of Atlantic Canada as socially produced: a space reified by actions of the state.

Lefebvre seeks to formulate a universal theory encapsulating the socially constructed character of space. His seminal work articulates how the social construction of space and the subsequent attempts at its regulation — "The social and political (state) forces which engendered this space now seek, but fail, to master it completely" (26) — have largely gone unnoticed. Such concealment is the result of an oscillation between two sociological illusions: the illusion of transparency and the realistic illusion. In the former, we assume our own reasoning skills to be masterful in eradicating social problems. The mind can seemingly

illuminate all obstacles to discovering the truth about our surroundings. Conversely, the realistic illusion implies that all “things” *external* to the human subject are more strongly rooted in nature. The state can employ the realistic illusion to imply that its position of dominance is well-deserved: “The apparent translucency taken on by obscure historical and political forces in decline (the state, nationalism) can enlist images having their source in the earth or in nature, in paternity or in maternity” (30). If one were to reject the notion that natural elements “have more of an existence,” they would consequently “fall back into the embrace of the illusion of transparency” (29). Therefore the nation state, in repeatedly framing itself as inherently linked to what is natural, can conceal any intention to disseminate its regulatory and normalizing institutions. As Wyile summarizes in *Anne of Tim Hortons*, a “production of space” is “inseparable from, rather than existing outside of the political, cultural, and disciplinary discourses in which its existence is posited” (8).

Edward Soja, Neil Smith, and Uneven Development

Edward Soja expands Lefebvre’s notion by elucidating the role of capital in shaping such a conception of space. Uneven development allows Soja to explain the geographical implications of the movement of capital when there is an imbalance of material wealth favouring some areas over others. Capitalism “intrinsically builds upon regional or spatial inequalities as a necessary means for its continued survival” (107). Subnational regions are the divisions resulting from uneven development’s “subnational spatial division of labour” (163). With advancements in technology, specifically in transportation, no longer is it necessary to be near resources in order to capitalize off of them. As demonstrated by Neil Smith in *Uneven Development* (1984), capital becomes centralized the more it grows, thus contributing to an uneven development, and making those on the periphery even more marginalized (Smith 141).

The accumulation of capital is accelerated by an equalization process, whereby laborers must sacrifice certain freedoms to capital in order for it to become even more centralized and powerful. “Human nature is leveled downward,” writes Smith, and “the equalization process is manifested in the common scarcity of objects of labor” (*Uneven Development* 154). The flow of capital has been instrumental in inducing a dependency on “national” cultural standards established in Central Canada. The concentration of power and the resulting uneven development of peripheral regions have been fortified by the attempted unification of culture across geography.

The social creation of a scarcity works to the benefit of capital growth, but to the detriment to those on the periphery of power. The more the elite push for an imagined lack of resources, the more they can manipulate peripheral regions with wealth and control. When we understand the construction of “region” in this way, the power mechanisms at play and the role central Canada has in Atlantic Canada’s economic and cultural struggle are clarified. In addition, capital has become increasingly mobile, and works against Atlantic Canada's traditional beliefs in community, identity, and belonging. David Harvey writes that “the state functions more clearly now as an ‘executive committee of capitalist class interests’ than at any other time in history” (2006, 106). Capital concentration and exploitation of labourers in other regions was systemically imposed through the process of Confederation, and in many ways continues today.

Canadian historian Margaret Conrad speaks to this continuation when she writes:

With the exception of the 1930s, out-migration has been endemic to the region since Confederation, a condition that, had it occurred anywhere else in Canada, would have been a signal for emergency measures to staunch the flow of human capital. If anything gets my dander up, it is the view, implied in many national debates and policies, that

sustaining healthy, vibrant communities in Atlantic Canada is less important than it is in Quebec, Ontario, or Alberta. (“History Does Matter” 2008)

Two years later Savoie expanded further on these problems, and in “New Brunswick: Let’s Not Waste a Crisis” (2011), outlined the important history that has led to this unequal distribution of economic power. In addition to the National Policy, he points to Ottawa’s decision to locate “*all* - yes, *all* - crown corporations to support the national war effort in Ontario and Quebec” (55). He also cites Ottawa’s focus on Ontario’s automobile industry in 2009, its concentration of federal public servants in the capital region, and its “inability to shape economic development policies and initiatives to accommodate regional economic circumstances” (55).

It is the joint effect of these forces, continuously articulated through government policies, that has framed Atlantic Canada as marginalized. Of course, Atlantic Canadian artists continue to create work that defies these expectations of inferiority, but this political economic history contextualizes the efforts of Vincent Massey in instating his professional regional theatre model. This model was (and is) more advantageous for Central Canadian theatres and artists. The forces behind its establishment, in other words, are similar to those behind the economic policies described by Savoie.

Up to this point, I have described forces that have shaped a particular understanding of Atlantic Canada’s economic, and therefore cultural, potential. Confederation and the subsequent National Policy have been historically in favour of Central Canada, and such favouring continues to have social effects. For example, Savoie discusses many initiatives taken by the federal government to *improve* the economic conditions of the eastern provinces but that are still often biased:

When decisions are made in Ottawa on where to locate a new research foundation, the space agency, or a government unit engaged in R&D, the debate nearly always turns on whether it should be located in Ottawa, other parts of Southern Ontario, or Montreal.

Only rarely will the Maritime provinces get ... a 'breakaway' and draw the attention of Ottawa based decision-makers. (268)

It is not my intention to place the onus of Atlantic Canada's disadvantages solely on Confederation, as I agree with Savoie that "such complaints just create despair and ultimately serve to disempower the region" (307). However, it is important to point to the social conditioning framing Atlantic Canada as economically and culturally vulnerable because, as we will see in the next chapter, thoroughly investigating the production of a social construct is central to queer critique. Herb Wylie, though not explicitly engaging in an act of queer(y)ing, points to work by local authors that resist these essentialist views of the region.

Wylie's book *Anne of Tim Hortons* provides a useful example of how Atlantic Canadian culture indulges in its inherent plurality. He adds globalization as yet another force contributing to the pigeonholing of cultural expectations, hence the "Tim Hortons" in the title: a popular chain restaurant that acts as a community centre in many Atlantic Canadian towns. The region's local literature examined in his work does not succumb to the pressures like globalization to remain stagnant, or, as he describes it, "quaint". An examination of Wylie's arguments connects the history of Atlantic Canada's ostracization to its effects on cultural output.

Herb Wylie and the Cultural Straitjacket

Explaining the impact of globalization, Wylie notes that neoliberalism and its celebration of the free market has "frayed the national commitment to a system of fiscal redistribution that developed over the course of the twentieth century to ensure relative parity of benefits and

quality of life for Canadians in different regions of the country” (4). The neoliberal ideology, specifically the emphasis on “an unbridled international laissez faire economy” (4), has become “incorporated into the common sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 3). The formation of this “common sense” is due to an ongoing process of social reification, as articulated by Lefebvre, and it encourages a perspective of Atlantic Canada through the lens of regulative stereotypes.

Stereotypes of quaintness have developed as a result of the consistent undervaluing or misjudgment described by Savoie. “While these stereotypes are a key source of the region’s appeal,” writes Wylie, “they also constitute a complex of misconceptions with which writers from the East Coast routinely have been compelled to contend” (5). Wylie’s book highlights various ways in which authors and playwrights have worked against the common image of Atlantic Canadians as backward-looking people (235), and he does so through a close examination of various texts. Wylie admits this focus may over-amplify a stereotype that might not exist as strongly as he implies (236). However, he argues that any stereotype is based on truth, and in fact many Atlantic Canadians find comfort in the emphasis on a life more casual, elemental, and friendly, as is found in many of his objects of analysis as well as the case studies examined below. It is the repetitive (external) restriction to *only* quaintness and the disregard of the region’s cultural plurality that causes tension.

In a similar vein to Wylie, I seek the degree to which contemporary theatre makers (Theatre New Brunswick and 2b Theatre) and performance artists (Xavier Gould) are challenging “idyllic constructions of the region as a leisure space” (6) and instead *complicate* the cultural experience within the region’s borders. I define this political intervention as queer because of the chasm it opens within a collective identity: although Atlantic Canada is far from

homogenous, there is a sense of unity precisely because of their political and economic marginality (6). The quotation from Wylie that opens this chapter speaks to the importance of recognizing a heterogeneity.

Wylie's writing is crucial to my argument, specifically because of his interpretation of region as a construct: "a kind of imagined and at times strategic sense of cohesion and community, projected usually from without but also from within" (7-8). My argument that *The Boat*, *Old Stock*, and Xavier Gould's digital performances all intervene in essentialist perceptions of the East Coast revolves around the notions of this socially produced (imagined) space. Contemporary theatre productions from the region are small, local practices that dismantle the limiting viewpoints caused by a capitalist globalization. *Old Stock*, for example, creates a complex image of Atlantic Canadian culture that highlights the multiplicity of lived experiences within its borders. Gould's character Jass-Sainte Bourque connects to live audiences on Instagram and Facebook to play with gender expression and language in Acadian environments.

Central Canadian values are continually viewed as representative of the entire country, but scholars like Wylie and Savoie have worked to dismantle these minoritizing discourses. Close examination of the workings of capitalism reveals that Atlantic Canadians are not less entrepreneurial or self-sufficient as Ontario (a perspective routinely reflected in the makeup of government agencies) but rather neglected or ignored by a continued neo-liberal focus on free markets and rapid financial growth.

My queer analysis of Atlantic Canadian theatre reveals how artists are complicating their own identities and reframing themselves as culturally empowered. Theatre and performance artists are particularly geared toward politically intervening in such restrictive assumptions because performance is a tool for social engagement: "Performances can," writes theorist Diana

Taylor, “normalize behaviours, or shock and challenge the role of the spectator very frontally and directly” (Taylor 41). By drawing out the ritualistic nature of performance and stressing the biological necessity of role-playing and imaginative situational exploration, Richard Schechner describes “the efficacy-entertainment braid”. Comparing social experiences to aesthetic drama (popularized in Canada through Massey’s model), Schechner highlights the deeper transformative power of the former by creating a historical “braid”:

theatre history can be given an overall shape as a development of a braided structure continuously interrelating efficacy (ritual) and entertainment (theater) ... performance is not a passive mirror of these social changes but a part of the complicated feedback process that creates change. (Schechner 132)

Theatre is most effective as a tool for social change when it successfully balances ritualistic and entertainment tendencies. The theatre-as-institution, described by Filewod as imposed on all Canadian regions, leans too heavily toward entertainment and a dependence on aesthetic tradition. Filewod contends that Vincent Massey’s privileging of quintessentially “Canadian” dramatic texts was aligned with the tendency to disseminate economic and cultural standards from the more urbanized Ontario: “In Canada as in other Western nations, theatrical diversity has been contained and regulated by the narratives of artistic mastery of the theatrical profession and its economy, centred around the idea of genius and tradition, usually made concrete in the classic repertoire” (Filewod 31). An articulation of how artists are currently decentring tradition speaks to how theatre might be used as a tool to alter the social framing of Atlantic Canada. Much like Wylie does with literature, I hope to connect new contemporary theatrical and digital performances to the current economic, cultural, and ideological problem in Atlantic Canada. A *queer* understanding of theatre in general and these live digital performances in particular may

create “a moment of opportunity for creative cultural opposition” (McKay). I seek to apply a method of performance analysis that unearths the queer *potential* of live performance, and its dramaturgy’s resistance to an enforced “classical repertoire”.

Alan Filewod and Political Theatre History

Alan Filewod speaks to how the forces of social production emerge within Canada’s theatre industry, particularly through its network of professional and institutionalized theatres. It is worth quoting Filewod in length to unpack how the theatre industry has been viewed as a simulacrum of our larger nation-state:

The crisis of nationhood in an era of globalized corporate economics and cultural imperium produces a dilemma for the institutionalization of national cultures and destabilizes fundamental assumptions of aesthetic and cultural value. Historically nations such as Canada have reinforced their claims to autonomy and indeed their occupation of territory with canonical structures of value in literature and art. Today we see this relationship weakening at both ends, as the boundaries of nation and of cultural aesthetics begin to dissolve under external pressures: of empire, hybridities, cultural mobilities, and the migration of forms and practices. (*Committing Theatre* 6)

Building on Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined community”, wherein a citizen imagines a patriotic connection between themselves and other, unseen citizens of the same nation (Anderson 6), Filewod discusses an “imagined theatre” (*Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre*). He outlines various ways in which capitalist-inspired national ideologies, specifically those laid out in the 1951 Massey Commission Report, infiltrate the way our professional theatre and its funding models function to this day. Vincent Massey used his influence as Governor General and other prestigious titles to promote a natural, evolutionary

definition of “Canadian theatre”. Lefebvre’s “realistic illusion” therefore frames Massey’s commission as a state effort to enforce a respect for nationalism: the model of theatre Massey created was tied to an apparent innate “nature” of the nation. This interpretation was largely ignorant of colonial impacts and Indigenous practice. Much like the constructs of regions and nations *imagining* themselves to be real, the theatre system Massey wished to implement imagined itself as representative of shared national needs.

Those who contributed to the Massey Report, including Massey and respected literary “master” Robertson Davies, were *opposed* to a centralized national theatre that enforced similar theatrical structures nationwide. However, they were still of the opinion that theatre practitioners in every region of Canada should be able to prove itself worthy of funding to central Canadian councils. Davies’ contribution of the Dominion Drama Festival Brief to the Massey Report commission confirmed Massey’s core belief that nationhood is expressed through theatre. It provided a model for decentralization by “unifying” regional and social differences vertically (through a hierarchy of artist elitism — Artistic Director taking the top as most masterful) and horizontally (decentralized regionalism; provincially-run government support systems) (46). This system was flawed, as was evident in the sudden abundance of what Canada Council labeled “alternative theatres” of the 1970s: those theatres whose artistic intentions fell outside of the more respected “regional theatre system” that preserved nationalist ideologies. The dichotomy of regional and alternative theatres was an excuse for the councils’ inability to keep up with the plurality of theatrical expression.

Filewod expands his “imagined theatre” further in *Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada* (2011). It is evident in recent years that the “boundaries of nation and of cultural aesthetics” are dissolving (6), and thus perceiving theatre as

a metonym of the nation-state is less applicable now than it was in the past. Massey and his contemporaries believed that the nation could prove itself as independent and culturally powerful through its proliferation of “quality” text and practice, and institutions were built to continue this cycle. Strong theatre centres would, hypothetically, generate “good” writing, and the good writing would improve the overall production value. This would ultimately create a theatrical environment that could prove itself worthy of notice on an international scale. “The theatre”, or what Baz Kershaw calls the “theatre estate” had become an “[operation] of power and presence” (Filewod 6). As queer philosopher Michel Foucault contended, relations of power are not “static forms of distribution, they are ‘matrices of transformation’” (Foucault 99). Therefore the power structure operated by theatre professionals and the Canada Council were bound to be met with alternative systems. The growth in popularity of the Mummers Troupe is one such example.

The Mummers Troupe: Political Theatre in Action

A conflict such as that between Canada Council for the Arts and Chris Brookes’ The Mummers Troupe provides a clear example of how the Massey Report’s federal influence was restrictive, especially for those English theatres found on the periphery of a metropolitan Central Canada. This restrictiveness has continued to trouble theatre practice in the country, and the funding agency’s early favouring of British-inspired, repertoire-worthy texts and male-centric traditions is still reflected in the common practice of theatre produced for entertainment rather than social advocacy. According to Filewod, there was an emphasis on canonical theatre because it was easier to identify value: “a good play is one that fulfills spectatorial desire by using the performance resources of the theatre to stage reproducible stories” (11). The theatre industry has thus taken the form of a hierarchical pyramid, where institutionalized theatres are viewed as the pinnacle of success, and independent theatre practices make up the base. Inverse differentiation

and creativity is the result, where those practices at the top of the pyramid look a lot like each other (season programming, for example, looks similar across major anglophone theatres). The more professional or institutionalized (i.e. the more money made), the less creative theatres can afford to be (14).

The historical development of arts funding in Canada had the intention of positioning the country firmly within the quickly expanding grasp of capitalism. Political theatre recognizes such an ongoing history of capitalist conformism while simultaneously branching beyond its boundaries, creating a “decentred network of practices that migrate through various domains” (17). The political theatre of Filewod is queer because of an emphasis on plurality, a refusal of essentialist definitions constructed within harmful hierarchies of power, and its confrontation of the history that has informed its makeup. It is the purpose of this study to take a queer approach in finding particular theatre practices that do the important work of moving Atlantic Canada beyond restrictive understandings of cultural growth.

Filewod traces the “grid” of the “theatre estate” (the axes of institutionalization and professionalism) in order to address the myriad of ways political theatre has departed from oppressive norms, particularly the power structures formed and regulated by capitalist globalization:

Political theatre has been narrated as a property of the left, in the modernist binary of socialist left and imperialist-capitalist right that defined the twentieth-century political ground. The postmodern refutations of this binary, coming from within struggles against oppression and led by feminist, queer, and postcolonial activists, enable us to recast the binary with the proposition that theatrical practices identified with statist political

programs and masculinist heroism straddle the ideological divide. (*Committing Theatre* 31)

The Canada Council originated with the purpose of funding regional theatres producing work deemed appropriate to the national image. It became a system in which the centrally located government could impose ideologies inspired by Imperialist Federation, stretching those ideologies into the far-reaching corners of the country: “This is the cultural logic of imperialism as empires envision themselves — as sustaining structures that contain, and thrive on, interior diversity” (39). The Mummery Troupe as an example of resistance provides insight on the extent to which this federal centralization forged biases in arts funding bodies. The desperation to reach a sense of cultural authenticity in the 1960s and 1970s made critics and Canada Council theatre officers wary of unconventional creation structures like the Mummerys’ devised theatre.

The Mummery Troupe was a company founded by Newfoundlander Chris Brookes in 1972. His intention was to form a collective of actors who would work closely with the surrounding community and present material directly connected to the political landscape. Using techniques in agitprop and puppetry that he had developed over more than a decade, Brookes approached the formation of the company with the idea of reinstating the old Newfoundland tradition of mummering. The interactive community tradition entails townsfolk entering neighbours’ houses at night and taunting their residents with crude jokes and stories. In Brookes’ opinion, reestablishing the tradition into the cultural zeitgeist would foster a stronger sense of community and therefore political agency at a time when Newfoundland was not accurately represented by federal government. In an address to the Association of Canadian Theatre History Conference in 1981, Brookes explained:

Any political theatre which intends to really move its audience (I am referring to activism, not emotionalism), over the long term and on a wide social level, must find a language not just of issues and ideology but of ritual and ceremony rooted in a sense of collective belief beyond language, integrating the lives of the spectators through traditionally symbolic performance invoking a mass for secular salvation. (Brookes 1981)

The Mummers became very popular in Newfoundland as they spoke to and for its people, working in contrast to touring companies “from away”. As Newfoundland academic Janice Drodge argued, the company was in many ways influenced by a larger cultural renaissance in the province, during which time Newfoundland began proudly reclaiming their nationalist history before joining confederation (Drodge 12). The Mummers therefore found great success among local constituents, and yet because of their personal model of touring and mirroring the nomadic practice of mummering, Canada Council did not see them as an established regional theatre. Those contributing and promoting the canonical works of Canadian playwrights were given priority for funding and support. Filewod writes “Brookes maintained that this was all Newfoundland needed, but the Canada Council was determined to impose its own model: if there was no regional theatre [in Newfoundland], the Canada Council would create one” (132).

As Filewod notes in an essay titled “The Life and Death of the Mummers Troupe”, the mainland criticized the group for not being professional enough and continued to hold them to their own biased standards (129). After all, “Canadian theatre as a whole has grown up in the shadow of cultural colonialism” (130). He points to the governmental pressure exerted on founder Chris Brookes and the Mummers’ subsequent acquisition of the Longshoremen’s Protective Union Hall (LSPU) as the beginning of its downfall. A lot of pressure came from The Massey Report, which was tied to the assumption that a healthy and productive theatre culture

would stem from a model in which regional cultural centres would produce large-budget shows, “surrounded by a cluster of smaller experimental and Canadian-drama theatres that feed into [them]” (132). The prioritizing of such a model was inherent in the Canada Council just as much as it was in the contract agreements for hired actors.

Theatre Historian Diane Bessai notes one particular review of the Mummers’ *I.W.A. Show*, written by Sandra Gwyn in the April 1976 issue of *Saturday Night*:

In the Town Hall, plastered with pink crepe-paper rosettes left over from the Kinsmen’s Dance, I sit down by a pair of loggers and their wives. They’re big, impressive people in their fifties, and for quite a while it’s hard to tell how they’re reacting. When the play gets to the sequences Donna [Butt] worked out, where she plays a striker’s wife who changes gradually from a shy homebody to a fiery militant who takes her husband’s place on the picket line when he goes to jail, the two women sit bolt upright. Almost before the scene ends, they jump to their feet and start clapping. Then they turn and put their arms around each other.

Bessai places this commentary in the context of other, more negative opinions of the Troupe, such as Toronto Star critic Urjo Kareda, who she says found them “theatrically ‘unadventurous’ in comparison to the socially-oriented collective creations of Passe Muraille” (Bessai 13). She also describes aspects of their production of *They Club Seals Don’t They?* as “a rather amateurish, farcical line of attack to those who have more sophisticated views of satire” (14). Comparisons to Ontario (Toronto) companies like Theatre Passe Muraille were common, despite there being different artistic visions and practices. However, the event mentioned above, where the two women embrace one another in a moment of excitement, points to the potential of the Mummers’ work to effectively engage their local audiences. Although outside of Newfoundland

they were meant with resistance and confusion, for the locals their performance style leant itself to the facilitation of these community-building moments.

In “The Regionalism of Canadian Drama”, Bessai traces the history of the regional theatre model. She points to the development of the Earl Grey Musical and Dramatic Competitions ultimately leading to the Dominion Drama Festival, citing this competition as evidence that regionalism lead to professional theatre taking shape in this country. She distinguishes “regional” from “provincial” understandings, claiming the latter is too limiting a word and suggests limited cultural influence and a submission to centrist control. *Regional* theatres, in her view, have more porous borders. I argue that regional theatres were (and still are) also limited in the sense of being subsidized by national funding agencies that require particular standards. These standards do not always line up with specific regional needs and cultural traditions, as is demonstrated through The Mummets Troupe. Brookes explored this contradiction in a letter to the Canada Council:

We feel that Council funding concepts should be tailored to fit theatre structures as they exist in Canada, not vice-versa ... [the projects], for the most part, don't have a clear beginning and end... we prefer not to predict, eight or nine months in advance, where we will be in this process and exactly what we will need to do (Mummets Troupe, Canada Council Correspondence. 1973)

Disrupting Atlantic Canadian Cohesiveness

The pressure to adhere to state-instituted rules of creation took its toll on creators like Brookes. Nevertheless, with the advent of a funding model that supported regional theatres that disseminated theatre to their local constituents, Canadian officials felt the country was achieving cultural legitimacy through the reciprocal growth of new dramatic voices as well as established

theatres (Filewod, *Performing*). There was a creation of a theatre unique to Canada which symbolically brought together all of those within the Canadian borders.

Such unity was and always will be impossible. In fact Bessai argues this as well, writing “For a theatre movement to stay alive and develop, it is necessary to go beyond mere conformity, to initiate rather than imitate” (Bessai 11). There are many distinct cultures within Canada and it is impossible to find one common denominator in the creation of a national theatre. How can there ever be a unified national theatre if each region is unavoidably unique, and if regional theatres are meant to showcase the uniqueness of their communities? The persistent blurring of cultural lines seen in much of Atlantic Canadians’ artistic output demonstrates the political usefulness for queer theory in theatre analysis and creation. The region’s theatre practices can productively build on its inherent cultural pluralism through queer theory.

Performance readings undertaken here endorse and support theatre’s capability of shifting the tides: putting the capitalist power of Central Canadian over Atlantic Canadian culture into turmoil. Queerness and queer theory have been proven valuable tools in these efforts, specifically in suggesting the political effectiveness of ambiguity and plurality, foregrounded (to varying degrees of success) in *The Boat*, *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story*, and in Xavier Gould’s performance work. One can understand the work of the Mummies Troupe to be queer because it reflected plurality, foregrounded restrictive social standards, and resisted essentialism. The following chapter further explains the notion of queer in this context and provides the methodological framework for the case studies.

Chapter Two: Applying Queerness

In a way, if we return to the root of the word “queer” (from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself “twists,” with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of “deviation” in what makes queer lives queer. (Ahmed 161)

As the previous chapter makes clear, a binary of regional/national, and even regional/global, has been ingrained in the process of federal arts funding for quite some time. Even as there is growth out from the regional theatre model, its consistent regulatory efforts over time have formed the basis of present theatrical structures. Queer and feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham and Doreen Massey offer a challenge to prohibitive regional/global binaries like those faced in Atlantic Canadian cultural and economic growth. “As with any such binary formulation within Western knowledge systems”, writes Gibson-Graham, “superior power is already distributed to the primary or master term” (29). The “global” is always assumed to supersede or dominate the local, thus structuring the latter as a passive victim of unavoidable globalist practice.

In queer and feminist fashion, deconstructing such assumptions helps reconfigure regional relations and gives agency to local initiatives. It recognizes the political weight of smaller scale practices like community or regionally focused theatre.

The previous chapter outlined the historical configuration of Atlantic Canada and how the region has been generalized as culturally stagnant through the repetition of geopolitical narratives. This chapter describes how local theatre artists can use queer theory in their work to confront the inhibitory construct of such a “regional identity” and reveal its inherent

heterogeneity. I first discuss why queer theory is a focus rather than other possible critical theories that deconstruct social norms. Post-structuralism is briefly mentioned in order to clarify why its auxiliary method of queer theory is preferred. Queer theory is then applied in the context of geography (Gibson-Graham). If queer(y)ing means dismantling regulatory power structures by acknowledging and celebrating one's various identities, then a queer geography is one that confronts forces like capitalism and its essentializing tendencies (Gibson-Graham, "The End of Capitalism").

I then move into the methodology for my performance analyses: Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology (*Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*). I argue that Ahmed's phenomenological study of orientation and how bodies direct themselves in the world can be applied to the theatre-going experience. A queer phenomenological experience occurs when one's typical perception of the world is shifted: a sense of disorientation allows them to interpret reality in a new way. To situate this experience in the context of theatre, I point to the work of theatre theorist and critic Jill Dolan.

Dolan's concept of "utopian performatives" (*Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*) describes those moments in the theatre that lift audiences above the world of a performance to experience a collective sense of hope. Drawing on linguist J.L. Austin ("Performative Utterances"), Dolan uses the term "performative" to signify something that in its enunciation *acts*: that *does* something simply by being said or presented on stage. In this case, a utopian performative gives the audience a glimpse into a happier, more hopeful future. Through their dramatic form they make an imagined future feel real, and they encourage audiences to reevaluate their present conditions. Bessai's observation of two Newfoundland women finding a

common emotional connection at a Mummers Troupe performance is an example of such an event.

A summary of my queer approach then follows, and the chapter concludes with a nod to theatre academic Ric Knowles's "dramaturgy of the perverse" (*The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning*). His method of dramaturgical analysis "twists" common perceptions of normative social structures (such as heteronormativity or nationalism). Chapter Three is reserved for the application of Knowles's dramaturgical concepts, as well as my critical analysis of Ryan Griffith's *The Boat*. To engage in queer phenomenology and dismantle the reputation of Atlantic Canadian quaintness, a dramaturgy of the perverse and utopian performatives must *both* be present in a theatrical production. The chapter is both theoretical and practical and demonstrates the usefulness of queer theory in performance analysis.

A Note on Poststructuralism

Much of Western philosophical practice took a major turn in the 1960s, largely because of Jacques Derrida's work on "différance" or deconstruction (*Of Grammatology*). It was common practice for philosophers and cultural critics like Ferdinand de Saussure to rely on binaries to conceptualize their theories. Saussure, for example, built his notion of semiotics around the dyadic nature of "signs", with each sign containing a "signified" and "signifier". Meaning is created through the interplay of the two, in which a word, or symbol, oscillates between suggesting a concept (as signifier) and conjuring a concept in the mind (as signified).

Structuralist thought is rooted in the inherent division of this binary and the differences between one word or symbol and another. "The signifier 'boat'," writes Terry Eagleton, "gives us the concept or signified 'boat' because it divides itself from the signifier 'moat'" (127).

Poststructuralists like Derrida extend the notion of meaning as inherently divided. They articulate the ways in which any *specific* meaning is formed through a complex web of multiple *potential* meanings. Thus, meaning can ultimately never be pinned down. Signifiers play off of other signifiers, and we make meaning based on how one signifier differs from a multitude of others. These connections are endless and therefore the process of meaning-making is infinite. If observed closely, any work of literature (in Derrida's case) could unravel because of the inability of meaning to settle. Eagleton writes that "All language, for Derrida, displays this 'surplus' over exact meaning, is always threatening to outrun and escape the sense which tries to contain it" (134). This process of deconstruction, as Derrida termed it, reveals the inconsistencies in the dichotomous structure of signs that structuralists perceived as sound. These binaries, "in order to hold themselves in place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves" (Eagleton 133).

Deconstruction takes peripheral elements of the text and examines them in detail, revealing that their inherent logic positions the structure in which they function as flawed. If one small element in the large piece of literature can have a multitude of different potential meanings, then its surrounding structure that suggests an inherent "truth" is in fact built on inconsistent ideologies. Poststructuralists contend that binarisms break down when one examines their peripheral qualities, and what appears to be reasonable structures are actually networks of many possible meanings.

Queer theory, as mentioned, developed as an *extension* to poststructuralist thought. Much like poststructuralism, queer theory contends that an element presumed to be essential to a larger concept (such as Canadian regionalism to Canadian nationalism) can actually deconstruct the legitimacy of said concept upon deeper inspection. The key point of variance, I argue, is that

queer theory focuses on the lived experiences of those *marginalized or ostracized* by their surrounding structures. Queer theory is developing through an examination of people who live on the margins of the social realities in which they are “supposed” to feel comfortable. Where poststructuralism is concerned with abstract elements that function within the structure, queer theory focuses on the human beings whose lived realities inhibit them from living comfortably within the structure.

I conduct my queer analysis not only as a gay, cisgender man who experiences pressure to live within a heteronormative social code, but also as a New Brunswicker living in Ottawa and witnessing a federal prioritization of Central Canadian issues and cultural projects. It is this latter point that takes precedence over this thesis, and the “queerness” of the Atlantic Canadian region can be understood through the geography-focused lens of J.K. Gibson-Graham.

J. K. Gibson Graham and Queer Theory

J.K. Gibson-Graham, in “The End of Capitalism” and elsewhere, explains that queer theory approaches both local and global practices by identifying them as embodied processes rather than fixed entities. The quality of embodiment allows one to grasp the political potential of localized practices and level the imbalance of power. As we will see in Chapter Four, the play *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story* positions its characters on both global and local scales: its dramaturgy allows the two to play out simultaneously, thus recognizing their mutually constitutive nature and effectively dismantling the power-imbalanced binary of region/nation I describe in Chapter One. The play plays with fact and fiction and with representational style, since dramatic realism is employed with the style of a concert. It brings the locality of the theatre space into the global conversation of immigration and refugee crises. *Old Stock* gestures to Gibson-Graham’s idea that “connections and contradictions between class and other social

processes and relations, over small or great spans of space and time" (Gibson-Graham, "The End of Capitalism" 20).

Challenges to the global/local binary attempt to break down the dualist structure of difference, allowing us to see that the global is not global, the local is not local, and the local is not powerless or even less powerful. They argue for the unfixity and multiple meanings attached to each term and resituate them as processes whose courses are unknown and potentially malleable. ("Beyond Global vs. Local" 33)

Gibson-Graham argues that an upscaling of localized politics is necessary to effectively oppose larger structures like national centralization. In this case, the work of local Atlantic Canadian theatre artists would need to reach national or even international recognition in order to actuate real social change for the oft-subordinated Atlantic Canadian culture, but such a large-scale impact is unnecessary.

A queer intervention does not need to go far beyond Canadian federal institutions, for it is those institutions that can alter the power imbalance between region and nation so eloquently described by Wylie and Savoie. Gibson-Graham argues that more agency must be given to small-scale critical practices, for if we follow the line of thought given by many geographers in recent years, each localized place is constitutive of the larger "machine" of capitalist globalization. Gibson-Graham names this process "resubjectivation" and defines it as follows:

It seems to us that a politics of the local (an antiglobalization politics that is not simply "grassroots globalization") will go nowhere without subjects who can experience themselves as free from capitalist globalization. Our project of revaluing the local as a site of politics is not about "liberation" from subjection as such, but about creating new

discourses that *subject* in different ways, thus enabling subjects to assume power in new forms. ("Beyond Global vs. Local" 36)

My work discusses the implications of queer theory being used in theatrical discourses. Atlantic Canadian artists can thus "assume power" in the new form of queer theatre analysis, but more importantly, I highlight the important critical view queer scholars like myself can bring to the table. I emphasize the importance of local identity exploration and introspection.

"Resubjectivation" is, after all, "a process that is both prior and concomitant with the building of alternative economic institutions and practices" (36).

Local theatre positions itself in the here and now because of its liveness. Audiences and actors engage in an "autopoetic feedback loop" (Erika Fischer-Lichte 20), in which emotional energy is felt by both parties, thus influencing the course of the performance. This loop interferes with oppressive assumptions and moves us toward alternative (utopian) communal practices. Gibson-Graham advocate for micropolitical experiments in order to address local stereotypes shaped by capitalism: taking matters into our own, personal hands and cultivating small-scale communities (like theatre audiences) centred on listening to and amplifying different voices. Ahmed provides a clear way to interpret such small-scale events as "queer moments", and it is her "queer phenomenology" that presents a point of departure for my performance analyses in subsequent chapters.

What, exactly, is the connection between queer theory and creating theatrical moments, and, more importantly, how can these moments gesture toward a more nuanced understanding of Atlantic Canadian culture? How can theatre, through what Dolan calls "utopian performatives" (*Utopia in Performance* 14), complicate Atlantic Canada's regionalist identity? The answer lies in approaching theatre as a way to demonstrate the restlessness of our lives and in discovering a

method of analysis that does not rely on essentialist assumptions: one that pinpoints aesthetic moments capable of encouraging comfort when exposed to socially uncomfortable material. Dolan provides a useful description of such aesthetic events with “utopian performatives” (*Utopia in Performance*), launching off of Bertolt Brecht’s “gestus” and Victor Turner’s “communitas”. These moments in the theatre that lift us into a more thoughtful or hopeful understanding are queer when they run counter to the common direction of what is deemed “normal” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*). Queer moments disorientate us and reveal the tendencies we have toward assuming a normalized social makeup (male/female partnerships, cisgender assumptions, geopolitical hierarchies, etc.).

Sara Ahmed and Queer Phenomenology

Ahmed’s *embodiment of distance* confronts the legitimacy of “normal” through active dismissal of anyone considered “other”. She quotes David Theo Goldberg in saying “Just as spatial distinctions like ‘West’ and ‘East’ are racialized in their conception and application, so racial categories have been variously spatialized more or less since their inception” (Goldberg 185). She writes, “while ‘the other side of the world’ is associated with ‘racial otherness’, racial others become associated with the ‘other side of the world.’ They come to *embody distance*” (Ahmed 121). Although this study does not discuss racial politics, the conversation about embodying harmful perceptions of others finds purchase here. The tourism industry of Atlantic Canada provides an example of how the region has problematically assumed self-depreciative inclinations. It paradoxically,

celebrates a way of life whose waning has intensified the need for tourism to provide compensatory revenue ... It masks the degree to which the region was and is industrialized and how thoroughly it is bound up in an increasingly global, modern,

capitalist economy (including the very tourist industry promoting such a stereotype)
(Wylie 22)

Ahmed addresses how a community constructs its identity through adopting and perpetuating certain principles, like the paradigm outlined by Wylie: nations develop through repeated orientations. When citizens repeatedly focus their attention in the same direction (revering Central Canada as the source of power, for instance), such focus reinstates the authority of the object.

Ahmed stresses this point that nations can emerge or be produced without physical co-presence: “the circulation of print is what creates common lines or even ties that bind” (119), and, like print, theatre reenacts the national imaginary through its local dissemination of knowledge and ideas. Theatre forges similar “common lines”, temporarily directing a group’s gaze toward a shared interest. Therefore, anything that alters a perspective and allows one to see what they take for granted in a different light, anything which *disorients*, can be effective in its ability to produce an awareness of the destructive consequences of capitalism’s centralization of wealth and power.

Queer phenomenological moments in performance can bring Atlantic Canadians closer to a communal understanding of the uneven distribution of cultural control, encouraging those present in the theatre to move toward a more positive and inclusive future. Ahmed uses “queer” in the sense of being at odds, or twisted, just as it is in reference to non-normative sexual practices. Retaining both meanings of dissonance and twisting is important in keeping the non-settling nature of the word alive: the productive potential of its elusiveness would be lost if one were to pin it to a specific definition, because it “sustains the significance of ‘deviation’ in what makes queer lives queer” (161). A focus on nonontology — the refusal to settle on generalized

definitions — facilitates a resistance to restrictive identity structures embedded in a culture. The imaginative, exploratory realm of theatre can allow space for a surplus of cultural information and reveals how a given culture can defy or surpass expectations. Understanding “queer” in this way dismantles normative performance structures that perpetuate limiting social standards, and excavating the moments of disorientation showcases applied queer theory in practice.

There are moments in *The Boat*, *Old Stock*, and Gould’s work that shift or change the typical social direction we face, or even cause us to look “behind” and confront the history that brought us to our present orientation. As mentioned, a concept critical to queer theory is the excavation of genealogical knowledge (to use Foucauldian terminology), or confronting the history of social formations. A shift in focus to how we have come to understand and act on particular social habits is therefore a queer act. Doing so offers a more thorough understanding of how we move through the world.

Ahmed describes how bodies extend themselves through space, and how space in turn becomes shaped by such an extension. “[Spaces] acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them” (129), and become “habit spaces”, in which the repeated behaviours within the space make it more accessible for people who share similarities, and less accessible for others. In interacting with the objects “in our reach”, we stretch the power of our bodies and allow them to do more. The space around us is shaped by how our bodies inform it, and vice versa. The more we repeat certain patterns of existence, the more we expect the spaces around us to reflect our natural patterns. Diana Taylor’s work speaks to the potential of what can happen when audiences are critically engaged in a performance. Political intervention occurs when spectators are invited to take part, but not when they are forced to be passive through a process she calls “‘percepticide,’ in which threats of atrocity and terror render us deaf, dumb, and blind” (Taylor

75). Dolan argues we have agency when attending theatrical performances when we can envision a life beyond our identity restrictions — when we imaginatively act out various performances of ourselves. Our orientations, the directions we take toward the objects we grasp or witness, influence our perceptions and understandings. “By objects,” Ahmed writes, “we would include not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, even worlds ... Whiteness”, for example, “is an orientation that puts certain things within reach” (126). The more habitual an object or space, the more its history and conditions of arrival become ignored or overlooked. We ignore that which becomes naturalized around us. A queer effect brings awareness to an often taken-for-granted arrival of an unexpected object, causing an interlocution of queerness into supposedly normal space.

A queer reading of theatre productions addresses the material reality of the set and the configuration of both it and the audience. My analyses of *Old Stock*, *The Boat* and Gould’s performances will therefore discuss their designs and my personal experience attending their venues/digital chat rooms. No matter the “reading” of these spaces, their phenomenological states carry meaning for each audience member. My queer approach seeks out any material reality that criticizes and resists a more traditional theatre practice, instated by Vincent Massey and his contemporaries (Northrup Frye, Roberston Davies, etc.): one favouring any sort of hierarchical or essentialist structure. In other words, queer phenomenology is a way of criticizing theatre performances and their associated companies that focus on “narratives of artistic mastery” (Filewod, *Contemporary Theatre* 24), i.e. canonical, outdated texts and/or hierarchical administration.

The instability of queerness and the theoretical approach associated with it do present issues for theatre historians and theorists. “If objects are the extensions of bodies, just as bodies

are the incorporations of objects, how can we locate the queer moment in one or the other?” (Ahmed 162). When we experience moments of disorientation, when our contact with objects becomes oblique, what is actually “queer”, the aspects of the performance, its creators/performers, or the audience? However, it is the arrival at this question that presents useful analytical tools for disrupting restrictive regional stereotypes, simply because it can never actually be resolved. Inserting queerness into the method of performance analysis causes ongoing disruption and an inability to settle on one particular answer, thus allowing scholars and artists alike to resist essentialist norms. In considering theatre, or a particular performance, as “object”, and the bodies of the spectators as having varying degrees of “reachability” (ability to “grasp” or understand the material), a queer phenomenological model provides valuable angles of criticism.

Theatre studied in this context draws attention to the arrangement of things in order to cause their onlookers to experience them anew (Ahmed 164). In this sense, the case studies’ repeated references to a real world direct us to that which is (historically) *behind* us and thus encourages critical examination of *current* political situations. The audiences can confront their own ideologies and worldviews concerning the productions’ dramatic content or, in Gould’s case, the performance’s social critique. The expansiveness of Ahmed’s phenomenological framework makes it useful in addressing the disorientating conventions felt in theatre and performance.

When contemporary theatre practice in Canada begins taking on traditional (Aristotelian) plot elements the audience becomes comfortable: they feel they know what to expect. A subversion, or deconstruction, of said elements then creates a different kind of queer effect, in the sense of making the social norm appear slantwise. Seeing the normal in a different light

encourages empathy and understanding for those whose reach is not as privileged in everyday life: those who are marginalized and misunderstood. “This is how phenomenology offers a queer angle — by bringing objects to life in their ‘loss’ of place, in the failure of gathering to keep things in their place” (Ahmed 165). It is not sufficient, however, to simply claim that *The Boat* and *Old Stock* contain Ahmedian queer events without incorporating specific performance terminology to define what that means in the theatrical experience.

Jill Dolan and Utopian Performatives

Jill Dolan bridges phenomenological approaches and queer theory by illustrating the oppressive potential of a performance that reinstates and naturalizes powerful ideologies (*The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 2012). In fact, she outlines the ways that cultural production acts as a framework for the “imposition of ideology” (4). In *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* Dolan discusses the naturalization of the patriarchy specifically, but *Utopia in Performance* speaks to additional social hegemonies that contemporary theatre practice plays off as normal. In this context, ideology is not simply a knowledge/power restriction coming from higher levels of authority, but a complex web where we delineate ourselves through systems of experience. Furthermore, “When the representational apparatus is foregrounded [in the theatre], its once mystified ideology becomes clear” (14). In many theatrical performances, specifically those rooted in dramatic realism, structures of power embedded in everyday society are normalized and presented as stable truths, rather than debatable ideals that can be critically analysed.

While watching a production that employs realism, for example, spectators are typically manipulated into empathizing with a protagonist. The character lives in a fictional world closely resembling our own, and the narrative is built on an assumption that its obstacles are part of a universal experience. This process of dramatic representation enforces ideologies meant to be

taken as general truths. Ric Knowles, in *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning*, speaks to how a playwright might employ a normative structure only to twist and foreground its regulatory tendencies. The problematizing of affirmative social assumptions “[makes] it possible to question the transparency of the dramatic lens through which we typically see and *construct* those ‘truths,’ and they thereby inscribe the possibility of seeing things differently” (Knowles 32). In Chapter Four I discuss how this problematizing occurs through what Knowles terms a “dramaturgy of the perverse” (44): a dramaturgical structure that facilitates a queer phenomenological analysis. Recall that queer theory focuses on the fluidity of identity by dismantling systems of power and articulating a plurality of possible experiences. If a dramaturgy of the perverse dismantles power structures by foregrounding and manipulating affirmative social assumptions, Dolan’s “utopian performatives” articulate other possible futures.

Essentialist claims, such as those defining the region of Atlantic Canada, exist because of their exclusion of all that is deemed “different”. Theatre, therefore, reveals its interventional potential when it is not approached as a mirror reflecting the current society. Representation with no critical examination of social hegemonies simply reaffirms the hierarchical positions of “normal” and “different”. This approach excludes those who are marginalized in society’s current configuration. Theatre as a political *force*, on the other hand, actively dismantles regulatory powers and suggests other social trajectories, therefore trying to include those left on the margins. Dolan writes that her intent “is to uncover ideological meanings that otherwise go unnoticed and continue to perpetuate cultural assumptions that are oppressive to women and other disenfranchised social groups” (17-18, 2012).

Dolan’s argument for theatre as a forum for social change (*Utopia in Performance*) provides specific ways that theatre allows us to glimpse into a more inclusive future: a future less

reliant on essentialism for the sake of efficiency. The artificiality of live performance can include traces of an improved societal makeup, where those often excluded because of their race, sexuality, or other features are instead fully accepted into the social fabric. She calls these theatrical glimpses “utopian performatives”:

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (5)

Dolan’s book analyses many types of live performance and seeks to find examples of these utopic gestures. Importantly, much like queerness, Dolan defines utopia not as a fixed place or state of being. The word means “no place”, in fact, and she stresses using the term does not imply one particular meaning. The utopian potential of theatre is lost when perceived as a concrete concept: an artform that simply reflects what exists in society. Dolan’s performatives provide a productive method of understanding utopia as “an *approach toward*”, as Angelika Bammer suggests in *Partial Visions* (7). Utopia, in Dolan’s view, is never meant to be fully actualized. Theatre, however, is a place in which one can inch closer. She perceives theatre’s use value

as a place to fantasize how peace and justice, equality and truly participatory democracy might take hold sometime in a near or distant future, as well ... as a place in which to connect emotionally and spiritually with other people (90)

She explores this use value through her theory of utopian performatives: the events in the performance where multiple theatrical languages (embodied, textual, technical) intersect, “lifting” us above ourselves, providing us with new perspectives on tired conventions.

They create a common “lifting” effect, in which the audience is collectively moved above performance’s normalizing tendencies. The effect of shared joy or wonder is due to a culmination of artistic decisions (the actors’, designers, etc.). The play might progress in a “traditional” way, with spectators empathizing with a protagonist, then suddenly twist expectations and shift their perspective. Utopian performances are central to the queer phenomenological approach because they consider a plurality of unique angles taken toward the performance analysis. A queer approach opens up the diversity of perspectives, highlighting many oblique angles. Privileging the plurality of engagement allows for various perspectives of the content. In the case of theatre created by Atlantic Canadian artists, queer phenomenology resists generalized assumptions based on stereotypes of quaintness and leisure. Instead, an Atlantic Canadian theatrical production employing utopian performatives would point to the complexity of Atlantic Canadian regional identity and not rely on overarching assumptions of cultural stagnancy.

The Boat, Old Stock, and Gould’s digital performances contain many aesthetic choices whose meanings rely on the heightened emotional moments detailed by Dolan. *The Boat* in particular, under the direction of Thomas Morgan Jones, engaged in overt theatricalization, wherein the audience moves beyond realism and into moments entirely centred on emotional affect. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, analysing *The Boat* in comparison to the other two case studies highlights the benefits of infusing performance theory with queer theory. To be “queer” means to approach a social norm at a slant. Putting queer theory to work in theatre means keeping within view social constructs an audience should or could be questioning or dismantling.

In experiencing a utopian performative, audiences may see social norms from such a distance as to see them *anew* — to be disorientated. Perceiving social standards from a more external viewpoint — not as close and personal — *queers* how the construction of such standards is understood. Distancing has been discussed in performance studies for quite some time. Bertolt Brecht presents arguably the most seminal work in this regard. Brecht's "gestus" are "actions in performance that crystallize social relations and offer them to spectators for critical contemplation" (Dolan 7). Gestus maneuver audiences in ways that allow them to engage in critical thought through particular performative moments, while still remaining "in sight" of the important cultural power structures.

Gestus occur when performers act as witnesses to the events they describe. Both performer and audience members assume an outside perspective through which they can engage relatively objectively. Utopian performatives are a close relative of gestus because of their potential to encourage cultural intervention through aesthetic distance, but the former are better suited for *queer* intervention because they assume an emotional connection — an *affect*. While gestus avoids emotional involvement in the dramatic narrative in order to evoke a purely political reading, utopian performatives delve into the possibilities of emotion, calling for a sense of pleasure that will linger and echo long after the performance's final moments. Rather than being fully reliant on comfort, these performatives can also provoke, and cause audiences to question why some objects are considered more desirable than others.

In an essay titled "Happy Objects", Ahmed describes the place of the affect alien (30): the person considered a source of unhappiness for not finding pleasure in the objects deemed "happy" by those around them. The affect of happiness becomes associated with certain objects not because they are inherently good, but because they have been part of the repeated habit of

being *framed* as good. All others are seen as bearers of unpleasantness. This reputation can also develop through a defiance of what has been repeatedly constructed as normal desire. As discussed, the history of the (power) discourse becomes forgotten through habituation, and the affect alien draws attention to how the affect is construed as normal. They are viewed as unhappy for not accepting that which points everyone else toward happiness, and unhappiness becomes associated with looking “backward”: a problem detailed in Knowles’ account of Atlantic Canadian theatre practice. Atlantic Canadians, he argues, are perceived as complainers, because they tend to focus on their past — in many cases the economic advantages they enjoyed before Confederation. “Looking back,” he writes,

particularly in rural, realist plays about regional identities, can be a fraught, dangerous, seductive, but potentially self-defeating exercise, the ultimate, almost Rousseauian “message” of which is that a rich, poetic, and noble ... way of life ... has tragically passed, and there's nothing we can do about it but lament. (189)

Just as Savoie writes that a fixation on Confederation can position Atlantic Canada as passive, Knowles agrees that a practice of producing canonical realist dramas about what has “tragically passed” also undermines Atlantic Canadian agency.

In the same remarks, Knowles addresses the interventional potential of companies “with [a] processual focus on group training and its collaborative/consultative creation process” (192). He gestures toward a theatrical landscape geared toward improving oppressive conditions rather than regional theatres that remain focused on the idealized past and how life “used to be”. The work of companies like Zuppa Theatre (an ensemble theatre company based in Halifax, Nova Scotia) “might best be measured less for the fidelity of its reproduction of some nostalgically imagined ‘real’ than for its capacity to *produce* potentially new realities” (193).

This capacity to produce “new realities” takes precedence in a more emergent theatre practice. To Dolan, one gestures to a possible future through what anthropologist Victor Turner has described as *communitas* (Turner 274): the elevated awareness of the life experiences of others, namely the bodies of strangers surrounding us in the room (or, in Turner’s case, the spiritual ritual site). It is the moment when “spectators’ individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them” (Dolan 11), thus “lifting” us out of the regular patterns of our own lives.

She cites numerous examples of such affectual events, including many solo performances where the utopic gestures occur because of the intricate play of character swapping. An array of character physicalities across one actor’s body highlights the multiplicitous potential of identity construction. These solo performances, or monopolylogues, “[seem] particularly suited for investigation as a site of utopian performatives because it models fluidity of cultural identities and offers a method through which performers and spectators might experience them” (67). Acknowledging the fluidity of identity performance in such a concrete way encourages the audience to recognize both differences and similarities in their own lives. In the case of Atlantic Canadian theatre work, effective utopian performatives point to the plurality of Atlantic Canadian experiences rather than denoting one way to “be” Atlantic Canadian.

Imagining a Future East Coast

Queer theory, like utopian performatives, revolves around the prismatic nature of identity construction: we are never only one thing, but an amalgamation of many. Thus, theatrical presentations of dialogic personalities and complex selfhood open spaces for more holistic understandings of particular cultures. Knowles provides an example of this style of *communitas* and its effect when discussing Michel Tremblay’s 1984 play *Albertine in Five Times*:

The play fractures the identification of actor with role or, more accurately, character with role and thereby has the potential to destabilize unified subjectivity and the normalized linear structure of a life narrative and thus undermine the bases of modernist unity and identity. (*Theatre of Form* 63)

Knowles discusses a fracturing of identity also central to Dolan's approach to disorientating moments. Theatre scholar Harry Elam writes, "The unique conventions and inventiveness of the theatre allow for provocative explorations of identity not possible in the outside social environment" (94). Dolan adds to this that the fact that people with many different lived experiences gather in one theatre is conducive to effectively understanding identity's multiplicity: "Audiences and performers, as cocreators of meaning in performance, might strive together to imagine the potential for radically altered social communities in the momentary suspension of disbelief that constitutes theater" (66). When surrounded by others experiencing a moment of disorientation, a moment of veering from a path considered "normal", one's emotions become heightened and they can glimpse another possible social trajectory.

Much of the canonical Canadian drama that was the focus of Vincent Massey and his contemporaries through the 1950s and 1960s did just the opposite: it assumed assimilation to enforced social structures like heterosexuality and/or regional conformity, in order to create the illusion of a cohesive nation. Knowles's "dramaturgy of the perverse" offers a method of intervening in modernist traditions of such regulation. A dramaturgy of the perverse resists or defies traditionalist conventions in the play's structure in order to make social impacts and engage spectators in political thought and action. Actors playing multiple characters is one method for objectivist potential to emerge and we see it used in all three case studies here.

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the methodology I take in my performance analyses of two contemporary Atlantic Canadian theatre pieces and one performance artist. Queer theory is useful in dismantling power hierarchies like that which is described in Chapter One: a standardized theatre practice enforced by a capitalist federal government. Ahmed's queer phenomenology employs the tenets of queer theory in a way that translates to cultural critique. Her work on disorientation and empathizing with different social perspectives, bringing those marginalized into the social narrative, is in concert with Dolan's theatrical concept of utopian performatives. Dolan's term emphasizes the plurality of the theatrical experience and extends it into the real and lived social space. By collectively engaging in an act of imagining, theatregoers get a taste of what life could be like beyond the normalizing structures in which they currently participate. Utopian performatives are moments that *do* something, and that "something" is a "lifting above" of the real world in a shared sense of joy and wonder.

As we will see, Ryan Griffith's *The Boat* has theatrical moments pregnant with utopian potential, and flirts ever so slightly with Knowles' dramaturgy of the perverse. It is also appropriate to describe the *mise-en-scene* itself as queer. Doing so allows for an expansion of the term "queer" and productively moves queer theory more firmly into the realm of theatre and performance analysis.

Chapter Three: Ryan Griffith's *The Boat* and the Dramaturgy of the Queer

Having conceptualized the fluid productive potential of queer theory and how it takes shape through utopian performatives, this chapter turns to the second mechanism necessary to an affective queer phenomenology: what Ric Knowles terms a “dramaturgy of the perverse”. The chapter is structured in the following way: First, I incorporate one other queer theoretical concept in order to highlight the specific queer potential of *The Boat*. Madhavi Menon describes the unstable nature of identity and how it accentuates the porousness of essentialist boundaries (*Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism*). The ebb and flow of identity, particularly evident in our our constantly unsettled desires, necessitates a social framework or structure that recognizes plurality. Menon describes this ideal framework as a “queer universalism”, and at the end of the chapter I present a performance analysis in order to argue that this porous structure is evident in Griffith's play. The queerness of Knowles' dramaturgy of the perverse is understood through Menon's universalism as well as Williams' method of cultural criticism. This chapter thus equally employs theory and its practical application.

Raymond Williams' approach to cultural analysis (*Problems in Materialism and Culture*) breaks down the political effectiveness of art into four categories: residual-alternative, residual-oppositional, emergent-alternative, and emergent-oppositional. Understanding these two conceptualizations, Menon's queer universalism and Williams' cultural forms, unveils the queer potential of a play with a perverse dramaturgy. With these mechanisms explained, I then describe my experience attending *The Boat* and provide an analysis developed through a queer phenomenological lens. I examine its dramaturgy of the perverse as well as its utopian performatives in order to highlight the extent of its queer phenomenology.

Madhavi Menon and Queer Universalism

Let us term this queer event, this event of queerness, this space and time of nonconformity, this sphere of nonontology, the theater. Not a literal theater, necessarily, nor even a performative one in the Butlerian sense, but an evental one that stages the impossibility of ontology. (Menon 23)

In *Indifference to Difference*, Menon also looks at the creation of art through a queer lens, unpacking the term not as one entirely affiliated with sexual identity, but as a philosophical approach. She builds on Ahmed's definition of queer as a word that "itself 'twists'... allow[ing] us to move between sexual and social registers" (Ahmed 161), and Menon uses "queer" specifically because of this twist: "like universalism, queerness too is marked by a desire that refuses the contours of a fixed body" (17). She advocates for an advantageous universalism founded on indifference: disengagement with ontology and categorization by moving toward a common acceptance of identity's fluidity. This is not to say she views differences as unimportant. Instead, she stresses our need to avoid any assumption of a pure or stable identity based solely on one's difference from the cultures and communities within which they exist.

Extending Sedgwick's description of a queer politics, where differences cannot be limited by ruling power structures, Menon argues the notion of universalism itself is queer:

we are never fully any one or multiple things. We are always moving across and beyond markers attributed to us. Universalism asks us to consider this impossibility of identity seriously because it is the condition of the real world in which genetic, linguistic, regional, and sexual purity barely and rarely exists. (Menon 43)

As previously referenced, Sedgwick describes "queer" as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent

elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (8). It is a designate that "[renders] those culturally central, apparently monolithic constructions newly accessible to analysis and interrogation" (9). The "identity" of Atlantic Canada can be understood as queer when one perceives it through the eyes of those actively confronting the nationally prescribed characteristics of quaintness and inaction.

Raymond Williams and Cultural Forms

Raymond Williams offers a critical theory that connects well with Menon's universalism, and the two together frame Knowles's dramaturgy of the perverse as politically affective and "queer". My study of the conditions of theatrical practice in Atlantic Canada is an effort to answer Williams' call in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1990). He argues for a shift in our approach to cultural analysis, encouraging an observation of the conditions of *practice* rather than the components of a *product*. Williams notes the now common analytical approach of considering creations of art analogous to "objects", which holds methodological weight in the realm of visual arts but certainly not in performance, where there are no permanent objects of analysis but rather "notations" (Williams 47).

Since, much like the queerness of our desires, the art of drama and its performance is in constant fluctuation and any given production changes upon each observation, theatre is "only accessible through active perception and interpretation" (47). When we analyze individual projects and, upon noting similarities, group them with others, it is because there are similar conditions of practice: conventions that are active and ever-changing. Regarding a work as an object in order to understand its parts does not hold water because theatre-as-notation cannot be considered a stable entity. Instead, in order to make most use of its analysis, I look to theatre's

material conditions of production in order to reveal how theatre practices are confronting dominant ideologies, or hegemonies.

Philosopher Antonio Gramsci defines hegemony as “a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming” (38). In acknowledging hegemony, we can then be aware of what is excluded from its central values. It is necessarily complicated, however, to disentangle dominant cultural norms from daily experiences.

Hegemony is a structure firmly embedded in the structural reality of a society. It *is* possible, however, to observe cultural forms that are external to the dominant culture forming the hegemony. Williams categorizes these forms as alternative and oppositional, with further subcategories of residual and emergent. Identifying these forms and the people participating in them reveals the nature of the hegemony itself, thus providing evidence of its adapting nature and a need to study culture through models of change rather than objectification.

Alternative cultural forms are those typically left alone by the dominant class: excluded from that which is considered “normal” but allowed to continue if they do not interfere with the ideologies of those in power (38). Oppositional forms are more confrontational, actively questioning the systems in place that perpetuate the ideological underpinnings of a society. These forms are further divided into residual or emergent; the former is a practice rooted in historical traditions in existence when the social structure was different, while the latter is entirely new conceptualizations of the society’s normalized cultural forms (38). Therefore there are four categories of cultural forms identified by Williams: residual-alternative, residual-oppositional, emergent-alternative, and emergent-oppositional. Filewod’s historical analysis of the Mummers Troupe thus positions the collective within the “residual-oppositional” form. The Canada

Council for the Arts practically disregarded the Mummers' financial needs because their creative objectives differed from what was offered at residual-alternative regional theatres.

Ric Knowles and the Dramaturgy of the Perverse

Building on Williams's forms, Knowles asks "what cultural work is done by different dramatic forms and different dramaturgical structures, whatever the subject matter or thematic content of the works in which those forms and structures are developed or deployed" (16). *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning* (1999) analyzes the dramaturgical forms of contemporary Canadian dramaturgy and performance "and to a lesser extent structure as the 'unconscious' of the plays under discussion, which may or may not be at odds with their "conscious" subjects, themes, or points of view" (16). Knowles explores what Herbert Blau calls a "structure of expectation": the deeper level of dramaturgy rooted in social systems, not just the more superficial structures of character or plot.

Most of Canadian theatre and dramaturgy has inherited formulaic models of creation, and these influences are strengthened through repeated teaching and practice to the point where adherence to specific ideological coding has become second nature. Canadian naturalism centres on Aristotelian elements of recognition (anagnorisis) and reversal (peripeteia), and often becomes conflated with biblical structures. Famed literary critic Northrup Frye naturalized these patterns of narrative in his *Anatomy of Criticism* and *A Natural Perspective*, and did for comedy what Aristotle did for drama by claiming they make up a universal experience, despite his analyses being focused on male perspectives (Knowles 37). According to Frye and his contemporaries, the Oedipal structure rings deep in the collective human consciousness. This ideological coding, according to Knowles, includes Aristotelian-influenced naturalistic and modernist forms, within which most Canadian theatre artists work and create.

Many plays created during the Canadian national identity “resurgence” in the 1960s and 1970s—after the centennial celebrations and the many patriarchal efforts stemming from those events—were often sources of national pride. People felt the plays of this time were able to accurately depict the typical or normal Canadian experience, both historically and in present situations. These plays, such as those in David French’s *Mercer Trilogy*, were Oedipal in form, privileging the role of the father and using women and others as plot devices. *The Boat*, too, “works to reify the Law of the Symbolic, to universalize the (male) oedipal experience, and to deny the relevance of contextual variables and immediate social contexts, together with the potential for ‘variants’ or human agency to produce changes that are formally precontained” (37).

Knowles argues, as does Filewod, that the growth of professional Canadian dramaturgy has been centred around the straight, cisgender male experience, presenting it as though it were universally shared by all. As Amanda Hale writes, “the great male revolution of the Sixties and Seventies did not improve the status of women [or other Others] in theatre” (83). Aristotle’s *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* became assumed staples of any effective narrative, not least because of their continuous association with universalist claims (Knowles 43), and as such excluded the perspectives of those on the outside of the “normal” experience.

Aristotelian *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* derive from an analysis of a specific kind of drama in a specific historical place and period reflecting specific ideologies; as analytical tools, however, they have been adapted, reconsidered, interpreted, and used with universalist claims throughout the history of Western dramatic criticism, with the result that these structures and the ideologies that they embody have remained privileged, in Canada as elsewhere. (43)

Anagnorisis, or “recognition”, entails a disruptive reveal: upsetting news or a realization that spurs an intense reaction from the protagonist. Peripeteia, or “reversal”, is the conversion of the antagonists, the Others, into what was established as a proper state of being early on in the play. The fictional world reassumes its normalcy, and its ideologies assumed as natural are further reified. Recognition and reversal require a linear structure to induce catharsis — the purging of emotions — and the inheritance of this dramatic tradition is apparent in much of Canadian theatre practice. What this structure lacks, however, is the ability to engage in political intervention. If the normalizing ideologies are codified in these simple, linear, and “sound” structures and claimed as universal truths, it becomes impossible to confront and dismantle them. What is required, therefore, is a dramaturgy that employs elements of the traditional structure in order to deconstruct its apparent solidity. If a dismantling occurs, then the voices left on the margins and “othered” through the process of recognition and reversal may take precedence and be heard. When a destructive dramaturgy is employed alongside utopian performatives, the production may be more successful in queer(y)ing cultural stereotypes.

Knowles’ “dramaturgy of the perverse” focuses on identity construction and “disrupts the complacent, voyeuristic, oedipal, or ecstatic satisfaction and containments provided by dramatic catharsis” (45). Describing what can be done to address the failure of mainstream Canadian theatre to make a social impact, he proposes that we must first acknowledge the systems within which we create our work. Again, these structures of recognition and reversal function only to reaffirm existing cultural norms. If theatre is to be used as a tool to break Atlantic Canada from its perpetual geopolitical and cultural struggle, then we must first address these structures and practice ways of defying them. The same can be said not only for naturalist traditions but also for

modernist, where playwrights create unique worlds that follow their own specific rules and fail to comment on or disrupt social reality.

One such method happens by “twisting” the expectations of the audience and not following through with a trajectory aiming only to provide emotional release. Knowles points to Judith Thompson and George F. Walker as artists whose work “*foregrounds* the expectations of its audience in order to disappoint, disrupt, or fracture them” (46, italics in original). It is clear in the context of Ahmed and Dolan that this “perverseness” can be more aptly called “queerness”. One can easily discern the similarities between that which Knowles describes as perverse and Sedgwick and Gibson-Graham define as queer: a twisting of expectation, or a state of being that provides an “open mesh of possibilities . . . when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically” (Tendencies 8). When discussing the plays of Thompson and Walker, Knowles makes many references to “twists”: “[Thompson] employs a Walker-like series of twists in the construction of a representative scene in her play *Lion in the Streets*, a scene with oedipal resonances that also explicitly conjures up yet disappoints the Christian iconography of death and (explicitly baptismal and/or confessional) rebirth” (49). Performances examined here manage, in their different ways, to foreground and denaturalize their inherited structural principles together with their ideological weights, and they thereby succeed in perverting those structures and opening up, again in their different ways, the disruptive possibility of genuinely productive cultural intervention (52).

Following Knowles method highlights the many ways theory and playwriting can both deviate from the norm, and therefore the invasiveness of inherited hegemony itself. As Eve K. Sedgwick argues:

an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and ... the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentred perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory (*Epistemology* i).

Queer theorists understand the importance of unpacking the perspectives of outliers on the sexual and gender margins: these viewpoints dismantle the assumed necessity of a monolithic hegemony, often enforced through a “required” heterosexuality. As mentioned in the introduction, Sedgwick’s “Christmas effect” theory showcases how diverse social institutions collectively reinstate heterosexuality as a societal norm. Gibson-Graham works through the Christmas effect to expand queer theory into the realm of politics and economy, in effect queering capitalism:

Sedgwick’s vision calls into question the project of representing societies and economies as hegemonic formations. What if we were to depict social existence at loose ends with itself, in Sedgwick’s terms, rather than producing social representations in which everything is part of the same complex and, therefore, ultimately ‘means the same thing’ (e.g. capitalist hegemony)? What might be the advantages of representing a rich and prolific disarray? (81)

If Knowles’ intention is to uncover dramaturgies capable of resisting cultural hegemony and producing change, i.e. dramaturgical models that do not simply reproduce psychosocial norms (29), then an application of queer theory might better serve these efforts.

Highlighting the perspectives of or relationships to narratives that do not fit the mold of Herbert Blau’s “reproductive structure of the oedipal drama” (Blau 89) helps serve the purpose

of questioning capitalism and national centralization. The production of more socially necessary theatre may be put into effect if its makers were to focus on queering social theory itself, which, can be seen to involve not (or not merely) constituting a minority population based on same-sex desire, set in opposition to a heterosexual norm, but calling into question the very idea of norms and normality, calling attention to the violence entailed by normalizing impulses, including the impulse to theorize a social site as subsumed to a hegemonic order (“Queering” 83).

One such “normalizing impulse” is the framing of Atlantic Canada as an escape from the presumably more sophisticated urban life in Ontario and Quebec and not emphasizing the complexities of its culture. The representation of the region as unrefined further accentuates the cultural straitjacket currently plaguing the provinces and works to maintain its victimization or “defeatism”. Extending outside parameters imposed by globalization and centrist policies, like those established by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau soon after the 1967 centennial, theatre allows us to both confront systemic regulations with limitations as well as imagine more positive futures.

Armed with these queer phenomenological tools of a perverse dramaturgy and utopian performatives, I will now discuss my experience of Ryan Griffith’s *The Boat*, produced by Theatre New Brunswick. I include a performance analysis in a chapter consisting mostly of Knowles’s theories in order to highlight the similarities and discrepancies between an “ideal” dramaturgy of the perverse and that which is found in Griffith’s play. Chapter Four contains my analysis of *Old Stock*, which warrants its own chapter because I find it to be more socially affective through my queer phenomenological lens. Both *Old Stock* and the performances of

Gould's "Jass-Sainte Bourque", in fact, have more effective elements of queerness to unpack. That said, *The Boat* does contain its politically useful moments, as will now be discussed.

The Boat: An Analysis

Ryan Griffith's *The Boat* may be considered a step in the right direction: toward a reading similar to Knowles' work on Thompson and Walker. In an interview about his creative process, Griffith explains,

I've always had a great love for [New Brunswick]. And I've always kind of stood behind the province in some of the more - what people see as the kind of backwards things about it ... [plays should] paint pictures that show you how characters got to be a certain way, because anyone can turn into anyone. (Griffith 2017)

Griffith's work highlights the multiplicity and complexity of the Atlantic Canadian experience. The play contains theatrical moments encapsulating the pain and affect associated with issues of economy and class. These moments evoke Dolan's utopian performatives, moving the audience away from forming negative generalizations about its characters and, by extension, the culture(s) or normalization(s) they represent. Although it ultimately falls too neatly into a common neo-Aristotelian tradition of recognition and reversal, *The Boat* contains seeds of structural resistance, particularly in its playfulness with narration and in Thomas Morgan Jones' provocative direction. Overall, the imagery of fishing villages and boats overwhelms the audience's understanding, spoiling any of its potential to elicit multiple complex understandings of Maritime culture. The following section analyses a performance of *The Boat* and its material conditions, combining Ahmed's queer phenomenology with Knowles' dramaturgy of the perverse, revealing how its use of utopian performatives is engaging but not necessarily culturally emancipatory.

I attended the production of *The Boat* at Theatre New Brunswick's new Open Space Theatre in March of 2017. The 98-seat theatre was built in the fall of 2015 and is now the only space the company has since the Fredericton Playhouse, its central hub since its founding in 1969, undergoes demolition and relocation. The small Open Space Theatre is in an industrial park off the highway entering Fredericton, New Brunswick, and is surrounded by auto repair shops, a millwork company, and a lawn mower store. Getting dropped off at the theatre felt like I was getting dropped off in the middle of nowhere, and yet I could not help but view this as a sign that the theatre was treated as one of the city's essential services; just as people require car repairs, they need the cultural consumption and twisting of geographical assumptions this professional Canadian theatre can provide.

The lobby of the building emphasizes this approach to theatre as culinary, with its small, intimate feel and the company's warm paint tones of red and off-white. Black and white posters promoting their 2016-2017 season lined the walls, and there were a few chairs along the sides for seating. A small pop-up box office, or reception area, sat in a corner. The company has gone for a pared down aesthetic, seemingly self-aware of its position in the industrial park and what that may convey, and therefore focused on providing the basics of a theatre-going experience. There is no ornate chandelier, nor any fancily dressed ushers outside the doors. When entering the space, General Manager Susan Ready, who checked my ticket and pointed me to my seat, also greeted me at the door. The experience of comfort and charming familiarity was an obvious priority, and I wondered when arriving if the production itself would work within these confines commonly associated with the region while also disrupting such expectations and resisting their stagnancy.

Ryan Griffith's script is an adaptation of Alistair MacLeod's "The Boat", a short story published in 1968. Structured largely on symbolism and allegory, an older man narrates the story of his relationship with his father and his father's relationship to the sea. Growing up on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, most members of the man's family expected him to be a fisherman like his father. His father, however, wanted his children to be whoever they wanted to be. The story grapples with the concept of leaving home while still feeling tied to its personal affiliations and traditions. This is a struggle common to many Atlantic Canadians today due to economic pressures and shifting socio-cultural tides amidst globalization. Since the nation of Canada is centred primarily on Ontario, workers on the East Coast are forced to find employment elsewhere (Savoie 2006).

Griffith's adaptation of this story begins with the sound of a violin, playing a song reminiscent of a sea shanty. Lights come up on the actors playing the Mother, Father, and Uncle facing upstage, and Ron Kennel entering from the wings, immediately differentiating the character of Son/Narrator from the others. He joins the others in facing the upstage wall momentarily (watching the ocean waves), and then moves down to address the audience and begin the narration. The opening line continues as follows: "We cannot help but think of the past. We become so obsessed with the past that our minds become our enemies - our *hearts* become our enemies" (Griffith, *The Boat*).

The set, designed by Mike Johnston, features a series of impressionist panels, each a different size and hung in an overlapping pattern on the upstage wall. The panels are painted a mixture of blues and oranges, and together give the impression of either rough Maritime terrain or a tumultuous ocean. The overlapping arrangement evoke that of the four wooden arches, the sole set pieces taking up space in the playing area downstage. Seemingly haphazard in their

construction, the simple frames carry a lot of meaning in this production's staging. The main character of the Son/Narrator, played by Ron Kennell, moves among the frames as he tells the story, while the actors playing his mother and uncle station themselves within them. The Father, played by John De Leon, is different, in that he also moves outside the frames with his son, but when he does so he remains upstage, away from the apron used specifically for direct audience address. The inside of these arches of wood denote a realist framework of static time and character. The characters within the dramatic context, or the story told by the narrator, usually speak from within the frames. The flexibility of time and space demonstrated by one actor's body weaving in and out strengthens the potential of objective *witnessing* rather than emotional absorption.

This playful duality presents at least two layers. Not only is there an ongoing oscillation between the son's ages, but the protagonist also moves from being a character within the dramatic context to a more objective status, addressing the audience and jolting us out of more traditional, realist immersion. We therefore attach ourselves to a similar external perspective. Griffith's framework and Jones' blocking increase the likelihood of utopian performatives by allowing the spectators to share in *both* a critical observation of the events as well as the emotional journey of the characters. The moving door frames not only distinguish dramatic plot from the Narrator's personal commentary, but also highlight moments when characters veer away from the confines of societal expectations. If we understand that which is queer as that which gives an outside perspective on things taken for granted, the Father and Son moving in and out of the frames, where the Mother and Uncle are confined, denote a sense of fluidity and nonontology. We can connect such "spilling over" to Menon's queer universalism and the never-settling nature of the characters' respective desires.

This queer framework pinpoints particular moments in *The Boat* highlighting the variety of ways characters struggle with identity formation, namely the Son's apprehension of a life in a fishing community and the Father's feelings of restriction and regret. In addition to the movement within and outside of the frames, there are queer moments—instances of twisting the narrative's standard construction or disrupting typical expectations of how Maritimers live—commenting on the region's economic plight as previously discussed. The characters struggle with the tension of working hard for little income while wanting to be elsewhere, and the play's symbolic nature leads its audiences to assume these themes apply to broader aspects of Maritime experiences.

A symbol crucial to the establishment of queer deviation in the play is the Mother. She embodies tradition in the household, and her insertions of rules and structure create obstacles for the Father. About 10 minutes into the play, there is a break in the dramatic narrative where the stage goes darker, and Kennell and Graham Percy, who plays "Joe", begin frantic movements upstage, illustrating the process of boating on rough water. The Mother, played by Stephanie MacDonald, stays within a downstage door frame, while the Father walks frantically between the frames. Both parents shout for their daughters, having lost sight of them for a moment, as the performance style shifts from straight dialogue between the characters to an overlapping mesh of exclamations, underscored by loud ethereal music:

FATHER. Where are you my life? Where are you my heart? Where are ye?

MOTHER. Where are my daughters? My girls? My blood? My life?

FATHER. Where is it?

MOTHER. Where are they?

FATHER. They're not you.

MOTHER. They're mine.

FATHER. They're not you, they belong to -

MOTHER. They belong here.

FATHER. They belong to themselves. (Griffith, *The Boat*)

This short scene shifts suddenly into a more naturalist conversation between the Mother and Father about one of their daughters, Lynn, playing near the wharf. They disagree about this being allowed as a play site: the Mother wants their daughter to be there because it will acclimate her to the life she will always have.

FATHER. That's how you want it?

MOTHER. That's how it is to be. (Griffith, *The Boat*)

The Father believes their daughters should be making her own decisions about where she should spend her time. The Mother clearly wants their children to live the life *expected* of them, whereas the Father wants them to live a life *meaningful* to them. Their perspectives are shaped by an event earlier in the play: the audience sees it sink in for the Father when Joe explains that a calm fishing trip is the most dangerous:

JOE. It's the calm days that do it to men. The calm days on the water. The best days, the good ones, those are the ones that twist men the worst. The ones that give you time to think while you're doing it. When she's turbulent you don't think about much. You get the work done and you're satisfied to get done what you can, but when she's calm... when the sun comes out and she's glass, in many ways she's riskiest then. Men can see their reflection in the water, they have time to think, fall in love with what they see...

(Griffith, *The Boat*)

From the early moments of the story it is easy to see that the Father does not fully enjoy the life he has. He has his own room in the house filled with books and magazines, which he reads late into the night. Its contents are “visible for all to see” and bleed into the kitchen, which the Mother keeps meticulously clean. The Father, then, finds respite in this room, and it acts as an unseen symbol for the life he wishes he could have full time. When Joe speaks of the dangers of a calm sea, the Father interrupts him, not wanting to hear of it any further. He feels pinned to be a fisherman and providing for his family the way he always has been, and it is in fact dangerous for him to think too much about it.

Later in the aforementioned utopian performative, the Father is “out there” on the rocky ocean (manifested by Kennell and Percy) while his wife waits safely at home. They both want the same thing, safety for their children, but they want them to get there by different means. For the Mother safety means security in tradition, but for the Father safety means forging your own path and finding happiness in your work. It would be impossible for them to shout these feelings at each other in “real” time and space, but it is the imaginative, liminal fissure shaped by the creative team that is more conducive to an emotional impact. It is the queerness of the theatrical moment, how it spills outside the “box” of expectations and makes us face the societal protocols we take for granted, that allows the play to comment on the complexities of Maritime living. By rerouting an expected path of meaning making, the play expands audiences’ understanding of the East Coast. It does not, however, fundamentally disrupt the stereotype of inescapable hardship.

This brief shift of theatrical tone becomes a utopian performative. It lifts us above our experiences and expectations to give us a clearer perspective of the play’s “deep structures”, as well as the embedded assumptions in Atlantic Canada’s regional mentality. Theatricalization draws attention to our own inherited unease, developed through the nationalist efforts of the

sixties and seventies. It packs an emotional punch, helping us sympathize with the Father's urge to free his children from the life of restrictions that bind him. The Father becomes a symbol of Maritime life overall by representing an allegedly widespread tension caused by unrequited dreams. The Father ultimately dies, and we are left to wallow in the family's pain: the story works to "prove" that there is in fact no escape from these desperate times. The play is thus problematic in two ways: it employs a patriarchal figure as a geopolitical symbol, reducing the agency of women and minoritized groups. It also perpetuates common misconceptions of the geopolitical region it represents by presenting a closed loop of despair: the Maritimers start in economic parity and end in the same social position. There is, however, a leaning toward a *queer phenomenology*. Utopian performatives can channel the multiplicitous meanings and understandings so pertinent to queerness. If a performance can move us into a shared moment of *communitas* (utopian performative), it can also, perhaps, give us each a unique perspective of its structural formula (queer phenomenology). Jones' staging of *The Boat*, specifically De Leon's blocking, builds on the affective power of utopian performatives and reaches toward, though ultimately fails to grasp, the disruptive potential of queerness.

The Father's uncertainty, suggested throughout the play, comes to a climax near the end. Since he physically weaves in and out of the frames much like his son, we expect that which we have already associated with the convention: the ability to narrate; to move from the dramatic world into our own. A queering (or "twisting") of conventional time and space occurs when Kennell stands stage right of the door frames, now configured to look like the bow of a boat, and De Leon steps outside of the bow, interrupting the narration with humming. The Son does not want to remember the father so vividly: he does not want to recount the event of his father's death because it causes too much psychological pain. His father hums loudly in an attempt to

have him do just that. "Spilling over" and removing himself from the narrative, the Father speaks to his son as Narrator, encouraging him to move the story into terrain he does not wish to travel.

SON. Stop it, Dad. Stop it!

FATHER. I won't.

SON. Please stop.

FATHER. You can't.

SON. Please -

FATHER. You have to remember

SON. Stop please -

FATHER. You'll forget me. You'll forget me, you hear me?

SON. I won't -

FATHER. If you stop it now you will. If you stop it now you'll paint right over me.

You'll change me. You'll change yourself.

...

SON. Dad.

FATHER. You hear me?

SON. Yeah. Yes I hear you.

FATHER. Well then. [*offers hand*] Last run. (Griffith *The Boat*)

The final moment of this exchange is the Father's movement back into the boat, stretching his arm out to the Son on stage right. The Son follows him in, and they reenact the Father being thrown off the boat in a storm and sinking to his death. Afterward, Uncle Joe engages in a ritualistic pouring of salt, creating a circle of salt piles in front of the Mother, who then steps into the centre and speechlessly gazes outward. She now seems to break from the convention of

remaining within the archways (or the framework). She looks around while the Son speaks the last few lines to the audience and the Father's singing plays faintly in the background. Does she now understand the importance of seeing tradition as a construct, and the freedom that comes with knowing you can either live within it and/or without?

The question of whether the Mother goes through a fundamental change remains unanswered. The almost ritualistic nature of the final moments could, for some, stir up a lot of emotion. The theatricality, however, distances us from complete affectual immersion: we disengage in a way that allows us to perceive the situation objectively. This setup is essential to effective queer phenomenology in performance. When watching the performance, I felt emotionally invested enough to care, but the aesthetic choices prevented me from caring too much and made me engage a critical eye. However, the dramaturgical structure ultimately followed through with the expected trajectory. For me, the important takeaway was not an uplifting opening of the Mother's perspective, but her unwavering stubbornness. The Father dies, and the Mother continues to live within the confines of her own habits and traditions.

The final imagery of the production framed the story as a cautionary tale. If we live permanently framed within socially imposed boundaries, we will drown in the pressure and never fulfill our truest desires. The play does reveal a deeper level to that which is typically depicted as Atlantic Canadian culture: underneath the sea shanty quaintness of the region's people, there is also a desire to innovate and move forward from that which is expected. It is important to recognize the instability of our (geographical) identities.

SON. You spend a lifetime working it out, falling backwards. You know the feeling.

Nothing is solid. There are some things we know are certain - things you know that are true. (Griffith, *The Boat*)

The Boat fails to reach beyond its own deeply embedded naturalist structure. It falls within a particular narrative tradition with its beginning, middle, and end, and is built on oedipal patterns.



Figure 1: Jon De Leon as The Father. Set Design by Mike Johnston. Photo by Andre Reinders.

These patterns reify the Lacanian “Law of the Symbolic”, with its universal application of masculine ideals, and deny “the relevance of contextual variables and immediate social contexts” (Knowles 37). By maintaining an Aristotelian format where the drama is an entity in and of itself and does not explicitly comment on real, contemporary life, the play fails to hold the potential of producing real social change. It does not “disrupt the complacent, voyeuristic, oedipal, or ecstatic satisfactions and containment provided by dramatic catharsis” (45); in fact, it relies heavily on generalizing Maritime culture as one focused on its own economic crisis, rather than one with rich innovative potential. Such generalizations strengthen the audience’s voyeuristic gaze, especially those audience members who are unfamiliar with Atlantic Canadian lifestyles, and the emotional ending makes its impact precisely because we have been cheering for the Father’s escape from an “inescapable” life of hardship. In other words, the narrative uses the pain of its

characters as symbolism for the economic and class difficulties facing Maritimers, and implies that such a life for those who find themselves stuck in the region is only escapable through death.

Conclusion

Despite the play not indulging fully in a queerness perhaps innate to the text, a model of queer performance analysis proves useful in this case. *The Boat* is queer in its unsettling of expectations and by not reconstructing or resolving them easily — anagnorisis with no peripeteia. Audiences experience diverse queer affects, primarily through an emotionally evocative exploration of Atlantic Canadian tropes. The spectators' ideal utopias are disrupted, and, through theatrical gestus, transformed. By holding queer concepts of nonontology and fluid identities in one hand, and Knowles' dramaturgy of the perverse and material analysis in the other, one can measure the production's potential for shifting geographical perspectives away from retrospective tendencies ("Atlantic Canadian life used to be so carefree and we should return to how it was") and toward innovate or future-oriented thinking ("How can we improve the socio-cultural conditions of the region?"). *The Boat* is a manifestation of Williams' residual-alternative cultural form, which, in comparison to the other forms Williams describes, lacks an important political imperative.

Knowles's closing remarks at the 2004 national conference on Atlantic Canadian theatre, "*Shifting Tides: Atlantic Canadian Theatre Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*", supports the conclusion of my analysis. Knowles translates Williams' "residual, dominant, and emergent" into "yesterday, today, and tomorrow" respectively in order to conceptualize Atlantic Canadian theatre artists as a community: specifically one with elements that resist cultural norms. Knowles' analysis is useful because it frames the region as a community: one capable of highlighting the structural limitations of the hegemony of Canadian nationality, structured

primarily to the benefit of Central Canadians. In his closing statements “Looking Back/Making Work”, he points to examples of these cultural forms. He notes these are “forms and values that resist coercive (such as nostalgic) definitions of community and map both social change *and* cultural continuity” (“Looking Back/Making Work” 190). *The Boat*, along the aforementioned Mimmers Troupe, are residual in form, but the Newfoundland group was more *oppositional* in its critique of Canada Council. This is evident in Chris Brookes’ continuous contradiction of the Council’s imposed regional theatre model.

Knowles acknowledged that most of the presentations at “Shifting Tides”, however, dealt with *emergent* cultural forms: “much of the theatre that participants at the conference witnessed and the workshops in which they participated provided exemplary, new, and emergent (one hopes) models” of future alternatives for Atlantic Canadian theatre. It is these new and emergent models of theatre that are most conducive to queer deconstruction of stereotype. “Looking back”, not in a way focused on nostalgia but in commenting on the present, can move us *forward* into a culture more open to transformative possibilities. As Chapter Four describes, *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story* and its unique performance structure provides a fresh and different example of a more politically effective and affective Maritime cultural experiences.

Chapter Four: *Old Stock's* Queer Angle

If the potential queerness of *The Boat* rests largely in superficial moments of heightened theatricalization, 2b theatre's *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story* incorporates its queerness at a deeper level within its structure: it twists audiences' expectations and politicizes taken-for-granted social standards via its dramaturgical form. Chapter Four builds on the performance analysis discussed at the end of Chapter Three by pointing to not only *Old Stock's* utopian performatives but its dramaturgy that foregrounds normative structures.

The chapter unfolds in much the same way as the performance analysis in Chapter Three. First I explain the play and its structure, as well as the inspiration behind its title: a demeaning comment made by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Then, I incorporate additional theoretical material from Knowles' *The Theatre of Form*. His "Structures of Authenticity" are particularly relevant here, and I address their application to his dramaturgy of the perverse. After providing this context I then discuss my personal, queer analysis of the performance I attended in Ottawa, Ontario.

Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story

Written by Hannah Moscovitch, Ben Caplan, and Christian Barry, *Old Stock* takes the form of a Klezmer musical concert. It recounts the real experiences of Moscovitch's great-grandparents (Chaim and Chaya Moscovitch) and how they met while fleeing from Romania to Halifax in 1908. "The Wanderer", played by Ben Caplan, sings original songs with a mixture of both contemporary and Klezmer themes. The other actors play their own instruments: Chris Weatherstone (as Chaim) on clarinet and Mary Fay Coady (as Chaya) on violin. The three actors are supported by two additional instrumentalists upstage: Jamie Kronick on percussion, and

Graham Scott on keyboard and accordion. The musical numbers help the narrative progress while simultaneously jolting the audience out of any sort of comfort in the dramatic retelling. Chaya and Chaim, for example, have scenes of dialogue interrupted by a “drop” of character and sudden playing of instruments, which draws attention to their real-world capabilities as performers.

This aesthetic choice and its double-meaning directly criticize Stephen Harper’s insensitive and ill-informed comments about immigrants and refugees in Canada. In 2015, when debating about immigration and refugee healthcare, Harper said "We do not offer them a better health-care plan than the ordinary Canadian can receive. I think that's something that both new and existing and old-stock Canadians can agree with." (“Old-Stock” 2015).

His “old stock” comment garnered a lot of criticism. In an article for the *Globe and Mail*, Mark Gollom writes:

The "old-stock Canadians" remark, instead of going unnoticed, immediately unleashed an onslaught of questions over what "old stock" meant, whether it had racist overtones and whether it was part of an overall Conservative campaign to engage in identity politics or stoke fears against other groups (Gollom 2015)

Whether it is racist or not, the comment unequivocally raised concerns that Harper was engaging in divisive politics. The term is considered outdated and has historically been used to minoritize immigrants and any non-Anglophone Canadians. After the event, professional pollster Frank Graves was frequently cited stating that Harper was deliberately engaging in what he termed “dog whistle politics”: making inflammatory comments in order to appeal to his Conservative base. According to Graves, "It's part of the deliberate strategy to sort Harper's constituency from the rest of the electorate ... It creates a sense of us versus others” (“Deliberate” 2015).

Caplan and Moscovitch, in an interview with Brent Bambury on CBC Radio's Day 6, describe their thought process behind titling the play after Harper's remark. Caplan explains:

[the comment] made me realize that I would have to have a very short view of history and a very naive identity to think that I could be included in this idea of Old Stock. And I didn't think that Harper was trying to exclude myself or the Jewish community, but 100 years ago, my great grandparents coming into Canada were not Old Stock Canadians. And to take this view that now you're Old Stock and these people are other, these people are dangerous, to me was just so troubling ... Well let's go back 100 years to look at when people who are now members of Canadian society were themselves being othered ("Day 6").

The play's constant twisting of expectation and its mixture of genre distance us from the dramatic narrative and allow us to question these notions of "ideal Canadian" with which many actively engage. The form carries more interventional weight than the dramatic content. The production enables the audience to construct a more substantial and complex meaning than what can be captured through "straight" Aristotelian structure of a beginning, middle, and end.

Moscovitch, Caplan, and Barry accomplished effective queer phenomenology through referencing the artificiality of theatre in general while simultaneously stressing the *realness* of the play's story.

Arguably all theatre does this: the realness of the bodies on stage is unavoidable when enacting a performance, and we thus experience a tension between emotional investment and critical disbelief. We suspend this disbelief in order to appreciate the narrative or experience. A production focused on dramatic realism may, however, encourage emotional escapism if its dramaturgical structure simply affirms social standards. As Knowles has outlined, Aristotelian

structures often uphold cultural values, and, in the case of *The Boat*, stereotypes. *Old Stock*, however, uses Brecht's alienation effect not only in the form of utopian performatives but also in its underlying dramaturgical structure. The production's pairing of authenticity with heightened theatrics allows the emotionally charged moments (utopian performatives) to direct spectators' attention to more than just a generalized, "collective" sense of belonging; it enforces a critical analysis of regulatory frameworks. In the case of *Old Stock*, audiences are encouraged to confront their own biases of Canadian immigration and refugee history. The production leads audiences to expect certain stylistic conventions associated with dramatic realism, like accurate, domestic interpretation, only to suddenly change aesthetic direction. Such disorientation *distances*, in a Brechtian and Ahmedian sense, the objects we regularly have in our reach.

This alienation effect encourages a more in-depth consideration of Canadian refugee history, but, specific to the production I attended at the National Arts Centre, it productively frames Atlantic Canadian performance as "other". The *mise-en-scene* spoke to both extreme diasporic experiences and to the experience of Atlantic Canadian artists travelling to Central Canada, and, given the nature of 2b theatre's touring, other countries. To unpack this further I again use the analytical model put forward by Knowles in *Theatre of Form*, specifically his discussion of authenticity in chapter four, "The Structures of Authenticity".

Knowles' Structures of Authenticity

In order to work outside of tired narrative structures and form a dramaturgy of the perverse, Knowles argues, it is important for theatre to include forms of authentication: phenomenological elements that connect us to the real. Real objects "allow the scenes to mean" and have "(socially) transformative power" (86). He elaborates further by saying "[Robert] Nunn's 'truth hidden within the facts' is, I think, what I am referring to as 'meaning,' and it is the relational

production of structure and meaning, to which Nunn points, that I suggest provides these plays with their potential to mean *politically*” (241).

Objects of the real, both physical and symbolic, highlight the gaps between the audience as subject and their representation on stage. The historical content of *Old Stock* acts as a real object, as does the actors’ sudden dropping of character. When I watched the historical narrative play out in conjunction with the odd, almost jarring performance style, I felt compelled to reflect on the legitimacy of the storytelling. This was further emphasized by The Wanderer’s manipulative playfulness with the audience. After a particularly emotionally heavy moment—a flashback where Chaim discovers all of his family members murdered in his home—the Wanderer says something along the lines of “Don’t worry, this story is fiction. Or is it?” Given these explicit parallels between history and the present, *Old Stock* can be compared to the style of documentary theatre, where structure evolves by focusing on combinations of both “the actual world and on the actuality of performance”:

As the performers reveal the truth hidden within the facts, they lay bare their own activity as performers. As in Brecht’s epic theatre, their primary gest is *showing* ... The form of documentary theatre is generated by the relation between these two actualities. (Nunn “Performing Fact”, emphasis added)

The actors/performers in *Old Stock* move between a realistic acting style and what Nunn describes as a Brechtian “showing”. Much like documentary theatre, the play weaves together historical truth with theatrical retelling. The following account details a specific performance and applies a queer lens to a material/dramaturgical analysis. I argue that an infusion of queerness provides the appropriate language (disorientation, multiplicity of understandings) to approach a play like *Old Stock*.

Old Stock: An Analysis

Entering the National Arts Centre Studio in July of 2017, I was immediately absorbed into the pre-show set of stringed incandescent light bulbs, extending from the stage and encircling the entire audience seating. The warmth of the lighting strung in the building's more intimate space felt welcoming. Sitting on the stage was a large, dark red shipping container graffitied with contemporary, local references (such as "Ottawa"). The presence of the shipping container spoke to both the travelling of the cast and crew (from Halifax to Ottawa) as well as the travelling of the refugees in the story, thus proclaiming the show's motif.

The performance begins with a dimming of both house and string lights as music plays from within the container. A top flap opens, pouring out smoke that is slightly obscuring a bejeweled hand, extending from an ornate coat sleeve. Furthering the sense of confrontation that the shipping container had already instated, this playfulness with overt theatricality connects to Ahmed's "queer moment" and Knowles' "perverseness" in its veering from the straight and narrow path of preconditioned expectations. This bedazzled arm belongs to "The Wanderer", who speaks and sings directly to the audience throughout the performance in a Brechtian, tongue-in-cheek way of retelling rather than the more realist style employed in *The Boat*.

Weatherstone and Coady push open the doors of the container, spilling haze out into the floor of the stage and revealing an eclectic mixture of instruments and other colorful objects within. Most of the container's walls are covered with hung pieces of fabric, denoting a sense of both welcoming warmth as well as the closeness due to travelling large distances in small spaces. With joyous, uplifting music, the Wanderer introduces the show: "Welcome! Welcome! We made it, you made it... Others were not so lucky" (*Old Stock* 2017).

Caplan describes his character as “a larger than life, Godly, mischievous narrative-structure-offering kind of a character who cavorts with the audience and interferes in subtle ways with the actors on stage, and acts as a sort of musical MC for the night” (“Day 6”). Caplan approaches his performance like his concerts, building a rapport with the audience and developing an autopoietic feedback loop (Erika Fischer-Lichte 20). Interplay between actors and audience is rooted in the push and pull of high musical intensity and quiet realist restraint. Such interplay fosters a collective experience of creation and understanding rather than a more traditional model of theatre that resists engagement with the audience and reifies social norms. *Old Stock*’s queerness, its style’s encouragement of cultural critique, takes its audience outside the frame of “normal”. A number of moments may be considered queer for the above reasons.

For one, The Wanderer remains downstage of the container and links the audience with the stage world. On a swung-open stage left door of the container there is a platform on which (at times) he stands. He sits on a chair at stage right. The other actors and musicians remain within the shipping container for the duration of the production. I read the shipping container as a traditional proscenium arch within the performance space. Caplan-as-Narrator speaking to the audience while outside of the arch emphasizes the piece’s overt theatricality. The audience engages in a feedback loop with the Wanderer, thus experiencing a distance from the narrative content: the audience themselves become critics of the action. The story is presented as fiction despite being based on real, historical events. The gap between real and fictional creates a sense of disorientation: a sense of queerness.

Analyzing performance texts of documentary theatre from Theatre Passe Muraille and Mulgrave Road Theatre, Knowles explains “The gaps between the audience as subject and their representation on the stage ... constitute the source of both the pleasure and the politics of these

(performance) texts” (87/8). *Old Stock* actively foregrounds these specific gaps and therefore invites a political analysis concerning its content. The shipping container functions as a frame within the automatically imposed frame of “fiction” inherent in the audience’s “horizon of expectations” (Jauss 1970). It also presents a boundary between audience and immigrant experiences, purposely echoing the containers of real-world theatre spaces where we often sit and largely observe immigrant stories on stage instead of participating in them.

A celebrated singer/songwriter in the Halifax region, Caplan has released two Folk albums (prior to *Old Stock*) titled “In the Time of Great Remembering” (2011) and “Birds with Broken Wings” (2015). He sings with his band The Casual Smokers, members of which are also on stage in *Old Stock* (Kronik, Weatherstone). Attending this production feels like attending a concert; even more so for Halifax audiences. *Old Stock*’s close connection to the band’s usual singing engagements allows it to be structured as an almost entirely phenomenological event. To me, this acts as the form of authentication required to work outside of an imposing narrative structure. The audience engages in a more immediate experience of a Ben Caplan concert rather than an escape into socially cathartic dramatic content. The juxtaposition of dramatic realism with real-world musical events prevents spectators from unconsciously reifying social norms. In addition, regarding the run of the production in Ottawa specifically, there was a connection of authenticity to city locals.

Hannah Moscovitch was born and raised in the Ottawa area, and her parents and grandparents have close ties to local residents and the Moscovitch family. These connections accentuated the queerness of the play by positioning the contemporary audience firmly within the historical account of Romanian refugees. Confronting our own histories “behind us”, i.e. the arrival of refugees from war-torn Romania, helped me understand that to some degree I am

personally involved in a similar process of cultural integration for exiled persons. As Moscovitch herself has said, “It was undeniable that my story was the same story as the Syrian refugees who are trying to get out of Syria right now” (“Day 6”). Interestingly, because of the nature of Canada Scene’s programming, the geographical distance of where *Old Stock* was created (Halifax) is also foregrounded.

Old Stock is also presented as a travelling act. The shipping container, with its colourful disarray of the objects contained within, denotes a sense of foreignness. Paired with the paratextual materials framing the play as representative of another region, the mise-en-scene positions the production as coming “from away”. On top of this, the Ottawa audience experiences the play as a visceral musical *event* and is dramaturgically configured to feel as though they are a part of the live creative process. The production’s objects of authenticity—Caplan’s musical reputation, Moscovitch’s personal connection to Ottawa, and the “real” structure of a concert—work in tandem with a sense of exoticism to complicate stagnant assumptions of Maritime life. Knowles argues such “authentic objects” are necessary in order to critique more traditional models of passive representation.

Knowles writes that authentic objects “allow the scenes to *mean* and invest actuality with a (socially) transformative potential at the level of deep structure” (86), after all, “[as] in all representations, the value of the representation lies in its *not* reproducing point for point that which it represents” (87), and an ostentation of objects with an authentic relationship to the narrative content foregrounds in turn the artificiality of performance. Having never seen Caplan and the others perform before, the dependence of a concert structure and tone was clear to me and shaped a sense of aesthetic distance from the story of Chaim and Chaya. The parallels of Caplan’s real career with his role as *The Wanderer* is more than simply an example of *gestus* or

alienation. When layering Knowles' analytical lens with Ahmed's phenomenological approach we can adopt an explicitly queer reading. In connecting the basic phenomenological notions of "arrival", or contact, with sexuality, she writes:

If the sexual involves the contingency of bodies coming into contact with other bodies, then sexual disorientation slides quickly into social disorientation, *as a disorientation in how things are arranged*. The effects are indeed uncanny: what is familiar, what is passed over in the veil of its unfamiliarity, becomes rather strange. (Ahmed 162, emphasis in original)

Having Caplan assume such an elaborate, manipulative character, who repeatedly makes the audience question their own interpretations of the content ("It's all made up... or is it?"), makes for a queer experience in and of itself, especially for audience members familiar with Caplan's prolific work in the Maritimes.

The audience may assume they know Caplan and his performance style, but the queerness of his character emphasizes the queerness of the theatrical event itself.

You've arrived, that much is clear. God knows where you're coming from, but now you're here. Just relax, but not too much. I need your cooperation to ensure a gentle touch. I will need a volunteer, maybe two to get us going, there's a lot to get through here. (*Old Stock* 2017)

Overall, the techniques of a foregrounded framing and a mixing of genres were successful in implementing queer moments. Actors became witnesses of a story instead of attempting complete Stanislavskian absorption into naturalism. These techniques, therefore, allowed for a political analysis or contemplation of the refugee experience in Canada. Despite the story of Chaya and Chaim taking place in 1908, the production's forced attention on the current zeitgeist

allowed these exilic characters to feel contemporary. We see, for example, the real-world comparisons to the Syrian refugee crisis. Its political commentary on the here and now also allows the production to speak to the makeup of Canada and nationally held perspectives of specific regions like Atlantic Canada.

As Doreen Massey points out in her discussion about responsible relations between places (“Geographies of Responsibility” 2004): “Many of our inherited formulations of ethical questions have that particular imaginative geography: the Walled City (and who shall come in), the question of engagement in proximity, the question of hospitality” (6). *Old Stock* seems to share her intent to demystify and thus open up for critique the apparently unchangeable “machine” of capitalist globalization, which is also responsible for the restrictiveness of Maritime culture. An important step in dismantling these often-unchallenged geopolitical assumptions is to recognize “the places in which capitalism (and thus globalization) is very definitely embedded” (14). It has been obvious, through the summary of Wyile, Savoie and Filewod above, that globalization has been facilitated in our country by the urbanized areas of Central Canada. Taking a queer approach, Massey writes “It is important that we analyse and recognize both the specific forms of power at issue in any particular case and the specific locations of its enabling resources” (14). The visiting performance of *Old Stock* in Ottawa highlighted these “specific forms of power” at the NAC in the queer undertones throughout the show’s dramaturgical structure.

I have been libeled

As a Wanderer.

This is not the case.

I have a home,

It's just that it's an inconvenient place

Right now ... (Caplan, *Old Stock*)

Before Caplan sang these words at the beginning of the production, the history of 2b Theatre's travelling had already informed the production's conditions of reception. Canada Scene, a program produced by the National Arts Centre, hosted performances and events from across the country as its ultimate installment in 2017. The program was meant to showcase the quality artistry Canada has to offer, and it finished its fourteen-year stint during the Canada 150 celebrations. The approach to the Canada Scene programming was indicative of the nation's "fantasy of interculturalism" (Filewod 2002), wherein the imagined theatre and national enactment play into the assumption that Canada is a cohesive unit of multiple identities.

Again, Filewod writes "the theatre has functioned historically as a ceremonial test in which the national imaginary is enacted, codified, scrutinized, and monumentalized" (4), and even in the present day we can understand the theatre as a site of legitimation, as "it materially constructs in its audiences the community it addresses in its texts" (xvii). In the case of Canada Scene, one can understand the selection process of performances to be based on limiting assumptions about the country's cultural makeup. The intent is to showcase the "diversity" across the country by claiming that each region has its own defined composition; a tradition engraved in Canada's theatrical practices since the dawn of European imperialism.

When Caplan/The Wanderer speaks of his home in "an inconvenient place", I understood such "place" as not only the country of Romania, but also a region of Canada too often slighted by the federal government. *Old Stock*, unlike *The Boat*, brings the local community to which it presents (Halifax originally, but also the "nationally representative" Canada Scene in Ottawa and other places around the world) into contact with external embodied experiences. We witness, on

stage, a conflation of Maritime and Romanian refugee identities, thus complicating both the ostensibly simple (yet actually heavily weighted) “quaintness” of Atlantic Canada, as well as the generalized binary of Harper’s and the Conservatives’ “old/new stock”. *Old Stock* encourages more thoughtful consideration and critique of essentialist binaries. Such encouragement is most explicitly found in the lyrics of “Truth Doesn’t Live in a Book”:

Anything written down can be twisted upon. Don’t be ashamed to talk about your mental health. Try to love your neighbour like you love yourself. That’s what’s in there, but it always gets forgotten. Truth doesn’t live in a book, you find it in the little surprises. The Good Book is only a lens to focus the view. Justice for all is composed of the ugliest compromises. You can’t only look at the lens, you gotta look through. (Caplan, *Old Stock*)

Examining 2b’s *Old Stock* through a queer phenomenological lens reveals the ways in which the play confronts regulatory social structures and complicates regional identity. Layering authentic stories and experiences onto a fictionalized retelling blurs the boundaries of reality and allows audiences to glimpse other possible outcomes. A straddling of worlds and the queer web of possibilities that elicits is also evident in the performance work of Xavier Gould. Gould presents a character through both digital and live platforms, connecting the real world to one that is imagined and deconstructing the legitimacy of regulatory powers in the process.

Chapter Five: Queer(y)ing Acadie Online

La communauté queer c'est basically une terme qu'est une libère de non seulement les labels qui existent avec les termes gai pis lesbien, mais c'est une libère aussi de toutes les choses négatives qui existent dans ce culture là. Pour moi, queer c'est un exploration de toutes les limites qui m'en était misent en grandissent. (Xavier Gould, "Jass-Sainte", *La Fabrique Culturelle*)

Thus far, a queer lens has been applied to live performances in material theatre spaces: spaces where spectators gather together and imagine possible futures in each other's presence. This chapter explores the queer potential of the work of an Acadian performance artist who performs in digital as well as tangible space. Extending the argument that queer experiences — like poststructuralist “meanings” — are impossible to pin down, a queer performance does not necessarily need to occur in physical proximity to spectators in order to dismantle normalizing tendencies. This political power is exemplified in the performances of Xavier Gould.

I first clarify the impact of performance in cyberspace through concepts described by Diana Taylor (“animatives” and “scenarios” in *Performance*) and Jordan Tannahill (the liveness of “web theatre” described in “The New Intimacy”). The intention is not to introduce theories important to all queer analyses this late in the work, but rather to elucidate the queer potential of digital performance specifically prior to applying utopian performatives and perverse dramaturgies. Then, a description of Gould's work substantiates these theories and places them within the context of Atlantic Canadian, and, more specifically, Acadian experiences.

Although I focus on YouTube videos, which may seem to suggest a different object of analysis completely, it is important to note that the “liveness” so important to Tannahill's “web theatre” is crucial to the character development and social impact of “Jass-Sainte Bourque” (see

Figure 2). Gould's work lives primarily in the realm of performance, but their creative development has recently been exploring theatre specifically. I argue that their live video streams can also be considered *web* theatre. *Jass-Sainte* speaks directly to viewers through a live streaming of pre-written scripts while wearing carefully designed and curated costumes and engaging in pre-planned blocking. In addition, the character work done online has resulted in live stand-up performances on the East Coast and in Montreal, as well as more traditional plays (*Jass-Sainte à la camp*). My queer analysis of the "theatre" of Gould's work is therefore justified because of its liveness. What's more, I extend the queerness of Gould's theatre into their geopolitical surroundings by stressing the queer (unstable, pluralist, and confrontational) nature of Chiac as a language and the historical suppression of Acadian culture (Nichols).

Digital Performance Theories

Diana Taylor's *Performance* (2016) offers a multitude of theoretical and practical approaches to articulating the queerness of digital performance. Taylor notes, "[New] technologies clearly offer us new options for developing non-normative subjectivities" (103) and "the digital has forced us to name and delimit the 'real'" (110). Her descriptions of disruptive concepts in performance studies corroborate the interventional qualities of Gould's work, specifically her discussion of "animatives" and amplified bodies. If, as Taylor maintains, a cohesive community unit or political body is a projection of collective emotion and aspirations, then artists play a key role in forming our geographical identities. Her concept of animatives takes the Austinian "performatives" and focuses on the emotions surrounding such events. Animatives are "the 'inappropriate' response to a performative utterance" (127). A performative is a linguistic declaration that does something—that creates action. Animatives capture the indescribable energy affected by performatives; they describe the movement "that animates embodied

practice” (127). It becomes almost irresistible to immediately connect this term to the fight against cultural hegemony.

Taylor stretches the affect of “animatives” into what she describes as “scenarios”: the established parameters of a performance that function as “flexible frameworks for thinking and doing” (137). Scenarios are the frameworks necessary to conceptualize social simulations as performance. Their flexibility allows them to take shape in digital space as well as physical, heightening the potential of reimagined identities through the multiplicitous networks of the web: “We can be here and there, present in various physical, simulated, and virtual environments. We are or have avatars in virtual environments” (138). Scenarios in digital space allow us to play out alternative realities and futures. She writes,

If Jacques Lacan theorized that human beings had an existential crisis by visualizing themselves whole in the mirror and yet experiencing their bodies as fragmented (because they can only see parts of them), the digital takes the questions of fragmentation and altered subjectivities to unexamined lengths (138-9).

It is this fragmentation that draws me to Gould’s performance. They engage in stereotypes often associated with rural Acadian people — moose hunting, church obsession, “improper” French — and then exaggerate and flip these limited expectations. Their use of digital scenarios creates space for exploring Acadian identity.

When describing his play that was presented live on the video streaming platform *YouStream*, Jordan Tannahill writes, “There is something uniquely charged and intimate about the live video. While we have been conditioned to regard videos as documents of the unalterable past, the live video evokes at least the possibility of a dynamic, undetermined present” (Tannahill 10). Digital technology can allow for audience members to sign in to a performance no matter

their location in geographical space. Tannahill defines web theatre as “performance created specifically for, or substantially incorporating, Internet applications” (11). Many of the performances he describes move between the virtual and material worlds, using virtual applications in a way that facilitates material connections. Jonathan Goldsbie’s *Route 501 Revisted*, for example, is presented through a live stream of text on *Twitter*, with the option for audience members to join on an actual streetcar (11).

Gould’s performances, many of which are presented through live video streams, also encourage audiences to gather in real space. Their play *Jass-Sainte à la camp* was promoted by Jass-Sainte herself via YouTube (“Jass Sainte à la camp”). The character promotes real-world events but remains within a fictionalized scenario: Gould has created parameters for Jass-Sainte that allow her to speak about the material world while having the benefit of presenting imagined materialities. Her scenarios are hopeful. In the world of Jass-Sainte, discrimination does not exist. Jass-Sainte’s Acadie is complex, innovative, forward-thinking, and fully accepting of differences. Her digital performances allow viewers to glimpse into a more utopic version of their lived realities and stretch beyond the boundaries of quaintness. Gould’s repeated performances as Jass-Sainte in New Brunswick communities blurs the line between the real and the imagined, and the scenarios they construct “prompt the need and desire for embodiment, even if that embodiment is simulated or virtual” (Taylor 138).

Gould’s queering of Acadian culture and stereotype works to strengthen ties within New Brunswick/Acadian communities. With a subscriber count of 3,000 on YouTube, Gould’s character immerses herself in stereotype only to then subvert (or twist) expectations. The local Acadian community has celebrated Gould’s comedic work in a number of ways: they have been featured on Radio Canada’s “*Méchante Soirée*”, they hosted an event for the popular Hubcap

Comedy Festival in 2017, and they were recently Grand Marshal for the Moncton River of Pride Parade. Gould has said that they are often approached on the street in New Brunswick communities, and children dress up like Jass-Sainte for Halloween. In a segment filmed by Télé-Québec, they describe how their character grew from their geopolitical roots:

Au début il y a beaucoup des gens qui posé ces questions, comme “Ah, est-tu une femme? Est-tu un homme?” Pis juste ça était absolutely amazing. Parce que des gens, en Acadie, de Moncton, est entrain de me poser des questions sur l’identité du genre, que avant ça, moi je me jamais experiencé dans mon Acadie à moi. Mon Acadie à moi avait aucun conversations de gai qui existait. Jass-Sainte reste ambiguë parce qu’il faut que Jass-Sainte reste ambiguë. Parce qu’il faut que ces questions là se fasse poser. (“Jass-Sainte”, Télé-Québec)

The gender fluidity of Jass-Sainte acts as an extension of an inherent queerness Gould finds in Acadian culture. Their performances complicate what has otherwise remained stagnant and traditionalist: conversations surrounding queerness never existed in their circles before. Importantly, they view the creative process of Jass-Sainte as one that queers Acadie itself.

Gould highlights the complexity of living in a geography heavy with the history of its community’s displacement. The only way they find to address this sense of unease in a celebratory way is to take a multidimensional approach to their art. Place, after all, is often erroneously “posited as one of the grounds through which identity is rooted and developed” (Massey 7). Although where we live and work has a great influence on how we create, Gould emphasizes the necessity to acknowledge the queerness, the nonontology, of our geographies: “J’ai réalisé je suis pas juste acadien. Je pas juste queer. Je pas juste une artiste. Je toute ça en même temps, pis Jass-Sainte est comme le produit de mon intersection queer et acadien” (“Jass-

Sainte”). Much of their confessional-style YouTube videos assume a format that underscores the unsettling nature of geographical identity.

The Acadian Commentary in Gould’s Performances

Typically, Jass-Sainte begins a video by looking at the camera, seemingly unaware it has begun recording. The line “Hello everyone, cer Jass-Sainte icitte. So basically...” introduces her life updates, and she proceeds to complain about minor problems, often focusing on her unseen roommate Cinthia. The dialogue touches on Jass-Sainte’s fame as well as her hobbies, such as moose hunting and making her signature bandanas. Often, news of an event or realization then pivots the emotional state of the character, and Jass-Sainte quickly descends into irrational distress. She refers to local community events like the Hubcap Comedy Festival (“YEAR EN REVIEW 2017 // vlog”), and, through tears, explains why she is “frigging pissier off right now”. The self-held camera remains zoomed in far enough to frame only Gould’s face as they perform, and they (as Jass-Sainte) often stare into the camera for a few moments before speaking, making satirical references to other popular *YouTube* confessionals.

“Jass-Sainte” digitally embodies a sense of unease potentially shared by the majority of Acadian people in present day. The character’s quickly changing attitudes, as well as her performative (Taylor 120) obliviousness to their own political naivety, reflects broader tendencies in the Acadian community. Glen Nichols writes:

While the French Acadian community was originally also a settler/invader colony, it experienced an entirely different history of settlement, expulsion, and return under the English as colonial masters. The result is a society more akin to the model of a conquered people striving to accommodate a mythologized and idealized past in resistance to the presence and domination of an English majority (13).

Gould's exploration of English domination is evident in many of their videos, but most prominently in "BOYCOTT L'ANGLAIS AU JEUX DE LA FRANCOPHONIE" (2017). Jass-Sainte describes her interaction with an Anglophone man after losing her sunglasses at Les Jeux de la Francophonie. A language barrier presents a source of anxiety, and she narrates the story for her viewers: "So j'ai lui gardé et j'ai dis: 'Sorry, je understand pas anything tu dis right now, monsieur.' Pis il me gardé et il dit 'That's okay.' That is *not okay!*". Gould's playfulness with language acknowledges the anglicisms embedded in the French dialect of Chiac, while simultaneously pointing fingers at the cultural assimilation required of French Acadians. One can therefore frame Jass-Sainte Bourque as a queer performance using the three principal claims I have outlined above.

First of all, the performance is queer because it addresses historical circumstances—conditions that have coaxed Acadians to orientate themselves in particular directions of victimization—and resists the normalizing tendencies that are present in modern day because of previous mistreatment. The British's expulsion of the Acadians has continued to shape the lives of the descendants.



Figure 2
Gould performing as Jass-Sainte via a live video stream on *Instagram*, September 2018
Screenshot by Authour

The Day of Commemoration of the Great Upheaval, held annually on July 28th as well as National Acadian Day on August 15th, serve as two examples of cultural traditions drawing upon the exilic experiences of the Acadians in the 18th century. Theatre has long been created in the area with such cultural oppression as a governing influence. Yana Meerzon's *Performing Exile Performing Self* (2012) acknowledges that globalization has made the term "exile" more complex, and that this new complication "enables the emigre artist to (re)establish new artistic devices" (2). Gould's work is no exception to a pattern of drawing on an exilic past to comment

on the present. Their performances echo Acadian theatre's historically common practice of addressing cultural unease.

[Plays] and playwrights [in conquered societies] construct discursive contexts for an artistic, social and political present by enacting other versions of the pre-contact, imperial, and post-imperial past on stage [...]. Reconstructing the past in this way usually heralds the emergence of new voices and new tools for understanding the past. (qtd. in Nichols, 13)

Second, it subverts conventional expectations by disrupting satisfactory plot trajectories.

Looking at Gould's performances dramaturgically, one can see that they cultivate anticipation by sharing an excitement for upcoming events—like *Les Jeux de la Francophonie*—only to quickly defy any expectations of a happy event by breaking down into emotionally fraught grievances.

Such perversion induces a critical reflection on the stereotypes and barriers met by Acadian people, like language, but also geography and general cultural misinterpretation (“CHANSONS ACADIENNE”).

Third, and most importantly, Gould offers a glimpse into a more utopian and universally accepting future. Exploring geographical clichés through the perspective of a character opens up a new mesh of possibilities for future political and social change. Instead of labouring over tired strategies to resist the Maritime cultural straitjacket, this queer performer shakes up normative expectations while also giving agency to sexually queer and genderqueer identities. Gould reimagines a past, present, and future for the Acadian community by reconstructing the common narrative. Jill Dolan quotes David Harvey on this very subject: “We know a great deal about what divides people, but nowhere near enough about what they have in common. ... Without translation, collective forms of action become impossible” (*Spaces of Hope* 245). Comically

presenting critical perspectives of cultural essentialisms allows Gould's work to resonate with wider audiences, subverting their expectations to encourage productive disorientation.

In Gould's work and in varying degrees in *The Boat* and *Old Stock*, identity's inherent pluralism takes precedence rather than a specific change, focus, or reformulation. Aristotle's anagnorisis is engaged and reveals the complexity of the given culture without proceeding into peripeteia, reversing into the world as it was experienced before. The goal of my research is to encourage alternative perceptions of the East Coast without pressuring Atlantic Canadians to recraft any collective sense of community. I look to theatre and performance that acknowledges the plurality of different identities within a local place: specifically one defined by enforced cohesion and simplicity. Xavier Gould's artistry provides a perfect example of how performance can complicate Atlantic Canadian and Acadian identity, and does so using a medium that will be a primary focus for performance scholars as we move into the future.

Coda: Queer(y)ing Futures

I look to theatre that acknowledges the plurality of different identities within a local place: specifically one defined by essentialist claims. The purpose of this thesis has been to stress the utility of queer theory in performance studies, because, as David Savran has pointed out, theatre *is* the queerest art. He writes:

the flowering of a queer dramaturgy is a reminder that queer is a performative designation, one that privileges doing over being, action over intention. When applied to theater, it is less a fixed attribute of a given text than an effect produced by the interplay between and among text, actor, director, and spectator. (154)

This final section explores the breadth of a queer phenomenological application to performance analysis. Having applied my own hybrid model to two Atlantic Canadian productions, articulating an application of Ahmed's queer phenomenology to performance analysis by combining Dolan's utopian performatives and Knowles' dramaturgy of the perverse, it is clear that the method has the capacity for future and diverse applications. Reading the performance of *Old Stock* through a queer lens, for example, amplifies the interventional effectiveness of the dramaturgical form. There were many Brechtian alienation techniques, such as the Klezmer concert form or sudden tonal shifts into war flashbacks, which prevented the audience from having an uncritical gaze. In *The Boat*, heightened emotional events (utopian performatives) and the use of the wooden frames caused a similar effect.

The queer power of *The Boat* rested in the Son/Narrator speaking to the audience as well as in the distancing aesthetics. Staging the more theatricalized moments within the door frames removed the audience from complete immersion—and therefore passive participation—in an Aristotelian plot structure. As is important to queer theory, the play addresses the history of a

culture. Our history is what has orientated us in a particular way and put some objects in our reach over others. In *The Boat*, Griffiths (through MacLeod) details the hardships many Maritimers had indeed faced because of the centralization of resources. After Confederation and the implementation of a railway, what was once the cause for a flourishing economy in the East has since been relocated to Ontario. However, since the dramaturgical form and style did not assume a critical gaze itself, when the Father dies, the cycle of Maritime defeatism continues. Utopian performatives like the Father breaking from dramatic convention and speaking to the Son-as-Narrator carry interventional potential but fail to create an experience open to multiple *unique* audience readings. A queer phenomenological approach, on the other hand, not only reveals Brechtian conventions but also provides us with a way of measuring its effectiveness in cultural intervention. The work of Ahmed, underscored by queer confrontations of capitalism such as those from Gibson-Graham, allows us to pinpoint the *The Boat's* unavailing efforts in expanding social expectations. The play's dramaturgy fails to break from traditional, Aristotelian conventions, and queer theory shows us how remaining in those structures can be unfavourable.

Old Stock, on the other hand, proves to be more potent. The historical experiences of Moscovitch's great-grandparents are confronted: their problems are displayed clearly for the audience and tied directly to current political events. The play becomes a physicalized archaeology of knowledge (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*), in which the aesthetic choices deconstruct normative, essentialist narratives of both "old stock Canadians" and Halifax artists. These particular effects of historical and cultural intervention are grounded in Ahmed and Menon's conceptualizations of queerness.

The dissertation then veered from traditional theatre spaces in order to explore the queer impact of digital theatre and performance. Xavier Gould is a multidisciplinary artist/comedian

whose character “Jass-Sainte Bourque” is rapidly growing in popularity in and outside of Acadian communities. Their presence on streaming services like *YouTube* forms audiences who sign on to experience their performances live. The scenarios, or frameworks, of their videos and live streams are conducive to more hopeful and less desolate imaginings. A queer digital scenario functions in much the same way as Knowles’ dramaturgy of the perverse, twisting what is accepted and expected spatio-social behaviour into a multitude of potential patterns. Jass-Sainte presents alternative ways of perceiving the communities in and around Acadie. Gould’s full embrace of identities as complex and ever-changing allows them to more accurately explore the inherent plurality of their geographical region.

Furthermore, the work of feminist and queer geographers underscores theatre’s power as a local practice. Like the plurality of readings made possible by a queer approach to theatre and performance, Gibson-Graham discusses the importance of dismantling the seemingly unconquerable process of capitalism by recognizing its “hybridized and nomadic” nature (“The End of Capitalism” 12). In order to resist the cultural straitjacket limiting the cultural potential of the East Coast, one can point to Gibson-Graham’s argument that we must cease giving unquestioned authority to capitalism. Doing so will uncover the “connections and contradictions between class and other social processes and relations, over small or great spans of space and time” (20). Theatre acts as a way to bring people together in a collective process of multiplying unique perspectives. We come to witness the same performance, and yet, if the queerness of the performance takes root, everyone walks away with unique understandings of restrictive power structures. Theatre, in other words, is a localized community tool for broader social action, and when presented in a queer way can deconstruct the overwhelming force of capitalist globalization. My research has shown that queerness provides a way of articulating the

employment of deconstructive performance techniques in the specific efforts of dismantling restrictive regional tropes. However, as my brief overview of its anti-capitalist potential suggests, a queer phenomenological application can go beyond Maritime performances in a theatre.

As explored above, applying queer phenomenology to dramaturgical structures is not only useful for works with queer content, but any performance that dismantles or questions common power structures. Although Ahmed, Menon, and others stress that queer theory can stretch beyond topics of sexuality and gender, it is important to remember “[During] the late 1980s, self-identified queer performers appropriated and expanded the techniques of deconstructive performance” (159). It is not my intention to ignore—and thus erase—the sex-based history of queer theory. On the contrary, in keeping with queer tradition, I acknowledge and support that history, for it has orientated *me* to face this particular direction of study. Like others before me, I have found it useful here to combine my experiences as both a theatre researcher and a queer man. Importantly, the queer phenomenology/dramaturgy of the perverse hybrid model I have presented may be expanded to other methods or forms of performance, *particularly* those created by queer-identifying artists.

As geographer Doreen Massey has argued,

It may indeed [...] be a crucial political stake *to* challenge and change the hegemonic identity of place and the way in which the denizens of a particular locality imagine it and thereby avail themselves of the imaginative resources to reconstruct it. Indeed, the process of what they call ‘resubjection’ is an essential tool in J.K Gibson-Graham’s attempt to work through an active politics of place in the context of globalisation.

(Massey 7)

Applying queerness to theatre through the model I have presented allows researchers and artists to articulate how their work partakes in such “resubjectivating” advocacy. Queer(y)ing theatrical expectations in the Atlantic Canadian region disparages the harmful regional stereotyping perpetuated by current capitalist movements in the free market. Repossessing power from capitalism involves understanding its movement in terms of real bodies, and not an abstract notion unreachable by critical analysis.

A fruitful line of study moving forward may be found in digital-focused research. Cyberspace presents a fascinating network of interconnected fields: a matrix of differentiation that Gibson-Graham seeks in *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (2006). Taylor writes “Our sense of space has also been altered. The digital has become an extension of the human body. We live simultaneously in a “real” world and a “virtual” one” (108). New Brunswick’s English theatre’s inability to “imagine” itself (Nichols 12), and the nation’s overall tension in constructing a clear identity (Filewod), need not be the object of our focus. Instead, we could fully embrace the complexity of identity. Such ambiguity or lack of ontological settling can be an advantage when artists take an explicitly queer approach to theatrical work and construct their dramaturgical structures and affective moments in a way that brings normative tendencies out of the shadows. This can only happen if queer artists themselves take on the mantle, creating theatre and performance that resists restrictive essentialism; something queer people have been practicing in their daily lives since sexual “abnormality” became a concept. Sexual deviance is a European idea historically swept into this land by imperialism and colonization, and it remains perpetuated by the mechanics of capitalism and colonialism. Confronting these regulatory systems, resisting harmful gazes, and queer(y)ing quaintness in a region like Atlantic Canada are all acts queer artists and researchers like myself have long been performing. As the Angel

proclaims in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*: "The Great Work Begins"; in the Canadian Maritimes it also "continues".

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