

Book review

Performing the Intercultural City by Ric Knowles

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Performance's cultural pluralisms are addressed in much recent scholarship, increasingly informed by interdisciplinary dialogues such as with transnational feminisms, critical race theory, and queer-of-colour critique. Ric Knowles's most recent book engages related theories in order to update the canon of self-styled *intercultural* theatre associated with practitioners such as Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Eugenio Barba. *Performing the Intercultural City* attempts to 'explode the binaries of source-to-target culture' on which this canon is based by examining performances that take place in a particular North American metropolis (Toronto) but that connect multiple Indigenous, diasporic, and postcolonial cultures (p. 2).

The book is written in three parts: the first ('Contexts') frames intercultural theatre in Toronto in tension with state policies of multiculturalism; the second ('Dramaturgies') looks at the theatre of three different communities, broadly mapped as Filipino Canadian, First Nation, and Caribbean Canadian; and the third ('Mediations') addresses the ways in which theatre practice might form part of negotiations between cultural groupings, 'across real and respected difference' (p. 129). Each chapter focuses on a range of productions that stage varied approaches to intercultural negotiation. The companies Knowles writes about are contemporary, and the book is as much a mapping of current theatre in Toronto as it is a conceptual examination of the problematics of intercultural theatre-making. A rich appendix organises descriptions of the companies he has researched, their productions, and their interconnections (both

established and ad hoc). Along with other contributions, the book will be of great value as a record of a particular moment in Toronto's theatre.

Though the book's title might suggest that Toronto is presented as *the* emblematic intercultural city, Knowles is careful to articulate a rationale for his focus; he notes, for example Toronto's playing out of Canada's unprecedented (and problematic) national policy of official multiculturalism. Though by no means central or representative on a world scale, Toronto raises questions about intercultural performance that are also relevant elsewhere, and particularly in locations that officially legislate for multiple ethnicities or cultures.

The book is framed by a 'merging of selected metaphors' drawn from the work of Baz Kershaw, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Michel Foucault, which articulates Toronto as a heterotopic space in which theatre is part of a relational, rhizomatic ecology (p. 10). However, Knowles insists that these conceptual methodologies (affiliated exclusively to white European men) are employed only insofar as they are compatible with the 'Indigenous Research Paradigm' laid out by Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson, after the work of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (p. 11). This paradigm understands research as a ceremony founded on relational accountability and respect. Knowles explores ways in which indigenous methods both ground and challenge the European philosophies he engages, such as through the example of the radican strawberry plant, which has been deployed as a 'dazzling but (ironically) ungrounded' *metaphor* by Bourriaud, and alternatively by Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson as a *model* from which to learn about specific modes of interconnectedness tied to language and territory (pp. 14–15).

While Knowles's discussion of indigenous methodologies concludes with the resolution that research 'has to benefit the community', I feel that this statement provokes more questions than

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it resolves as the book unfolds (p. 16). It seems
 85 evident from his rigour and judicious self-reflexivity
 that Knowles practices respectful and reciprocal
 relations with the artists and companies whose
 work the book is about, and in many cases he has
 worked with them as dramaturge, co-author, or
 co-editor. Yet to what extent do these colleagues
 90 constitute or represent a *community*? Put differ-
 ently, who is ‘the community’ that Knowles seeks
 to benefit?

His endeavour might have been strengthened by
 attending to diverse and uneven sites of privilege
 95 within the culturally defined groups addressed in
 Part II, for example. In his chapter ‘Towards
 a Filipino Canadian cultural dramaturgy’, Knowles
 discusses a production that addressed U.S. and
 Japanese colonisation of the Philippines ‘through
 100 a recuperation of what in the culture was *not* intro-
 duced by the colonizers’ (pp. 80–81). This aim, he
 recounts, entailed a ‘return’ to cosmologies and
 cultural forms adopted from a long list of
 105 Indigenous peoples (including the Bukidnon,
 Kalinga, Ibaloi, Ifuago, Igorot, Subanon, and
 T’boli), whose relations to these urban theatre-
 makers and to the politics of Philippine-ness are
 not explored (p. 81). The ‘grass roots’ Filipino
 Canadian theatre-makers may be working ‘from
 110 below’ in the Toronto context, to use recurrent
 expressions, but this hierarchy is less stable when
 interrogated through the diversity of peoples and
 politics implicated in the production (pp. 80–81).
 Though he does provisionally acknowledge the
 115 plurality of Filipino identification, gauging research
 ethics through accountability to *the community* may
 obfuscate the appropriations and oppressions that
 take place amidst the multiple positions agglom-
 erated by this singular noun, which in the Philippine

context are significantly organised around class, 120
 mobility, ethnicity, religion, and language.

Knowles also intimates hierarchies between dif-
 ferent migratory generations, seemingly based on
 an adverse reaction to the state’s discourse of ‘pre-
 125 servationist’ multiculturalism (p. 27). He differ-
 entiates work that is ‘more radical’ or ‘more
 political’ (and by implication *better*) from work
 that is ‘folkloric’ or seemingly essentialist, in one
 particularly loaded description bemoaning the
 130 ‘types of compensatory nostalgia that plague first-
 generation immigrant communities’ (p. 76). It is
 not clear on what terms the politically radical can
 be quantified, nor why the survival strategies of
 first-generation migrants are *depoliticised*, even if
 135 they may appear as ‘mere replications’ of imported
 forms (p. 69). Moving quickly between produc-
 tions in order to follow a roaming argument
 about Toronto’s diverse intercultural theatre
 scene, we sometimes miss opportunities to attend
 140 to these thorny problematics. On the whole, how-
 ever, the book is highly nuanced in its considera-
 tion of the works discussed, and Chapter Seven,
 written with Jessica Riley, offers a particularly deep
 and satisfying reading of intermediality in Aluna
 Theatre’s *Nobayquiensepa* (2012), propelling
 145 some of the book’s most compelling analytic work.

Performing the Intercultural City will be valu-
 able to scholars, students, and practitioners seeking
 analysis of creative strategies of intercultural thea-
 150 tre-making as well as its tensions and difficulties.
 These are elaborated through attention to produc-
 tions, processes, and collaboration, and carefully
 tethered to the sociopolitical conditions informing
 Toronto’s complex ‘performance ecology’ (p. 5).

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