

Summit 2016: ***Changing the Shape of Canadian Theatre***

Produced by English Theatre at Canada's National Arts Centre
in partnership with the Stratford Festival

Stratford, Ontario
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Summit 2016 Artist/Leaders, Institutional Respondents and Organization Team
last minutes before departing Stratford

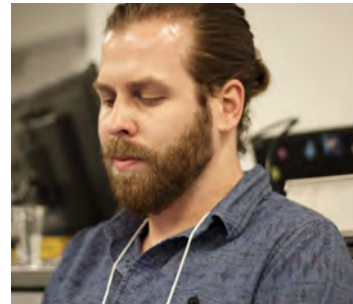
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About this document: This report is intended as a summary of our time in Stratford for **Summit 2016**. It was written by Co-Curators Sarah Garton Stanley and Syrus Marcus Ware with the assistance of Jesse Stong. Additional writing was provided by Clayton Baraniuk. Most images were taken by Marnie Richardson with additional photos credited in the document.

About language: Throughout this document you will come across several different modes of reference for describing people with the lived experience of the Deaf, disabled and MAD. This language is here in response to what we heard and learned throughout our time with the assembled Artists/Leaders. A Glossary of Terms can be found

Thank-you



Sarah Garton Stanley, Syrus Marcus Ware and Jesse Stong

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION

(or an informal hello from Co-Curators Sarah Garton Stanley and Syrus Marcus Ware)

“But before we launch into detail, we wanted to take minute to talk about the ‘why’.”

The statement above comes from a letter we sent to the Artist/Leaders prior to their arrival in Stratford. It is as useful to us now as it was then. Why gather? Why write about it afterwards? What does any of this have to do with the state of theatre in Canada today?

As co-curators, we spent the year leading up to **Summit 2016** thinking about how to have a series of conversations that would impact the way we make and receive work in Canada. We knew that we were not the first to think on this question, but our hope going into **Summit 2016** was that this approach would allow for both dialogue and change-making to happen. By “change-making” we mean all that can happen when institutional respondents who represent large national organizations meet and learn from Artist/Leaders. We also mean substantive change regarding the ways theatre is created, shared and produced, because we believe that this kind of change-making will make theatre better for everyone.

But back now to the “why” and what any of this has to do with people who make and love theatre. Our reason for gathering is at its root a dramaturgical reason, because it all stems from stories. What are our stories? And what is required for these stories to be told? What is required for these stories to be understood, valued and received? How can we change the shape of Canadian theatre (and impact the processes of its production), so that we can all be supported in creating our work, producing our work and sharing our work? How do we showcase the skill and brilliance of artists in our communities?

What changes need to occur for a broader spectrum of story generation and creation? What are the impacts of “traditional” rehearsal and meeting schedules on the possibility of all creators being fully part of Canadian theatre? And what are meaningful ways that institutions can respond to – without overtaking – the needs of creation in the Deaf and disability arts milieu?

These were some of the things that brought us together in Stratford for **Summit 2016**. **English Theatre at Canada’s National Arts Centre** is as committed to telling stories as it is to making theatre better. The Cycle which begins with **Summit 2016** is dedicated to these goals. What follows is a report about what we got up to with the first phase of our two-year journey.

SECTION TWO - PLANNING AND PRE-ARRIVAL

Prepared by Clayton Baraniuk, Producing Coordinator

From the outset of the logistics planning for **Summit 2016**, Producer Andy Lunney and I were tasked with creating an open, transparent and accessible environment that would take into account the varied needs and requirements of the Summit Artist/Leaders, respondents and support personnel. We endeavoured to gather as much knowledge about the needs of our participants as possible and likewise to provide as much information and event details as possible, investigating all aspects of access and inclusion related to the locations in Stratford. Our process evolved but our goal remained consistent: to provide the fullest participation possible by focusing on individual needs. This was key to the success of the logistical components of **Summit 2016**.



Clayton Baraniuk & Syrus Marcus Ware (Pic: SG Stanley)

Preparation & Research

Following a series of preparatory meetings with co-curators Stanley and Ware, we began conducting online research into the various venues and housing options available. In consultation with Keira Loughran and Shira Ginsler from the Stratford Festival, we developed a loose understanding of the surrounding areas, the availability of housing and transportation, and spoke with several providers about best practices for access. In addition, with the help of Ware and assistant Jesse Stong, we familiarized ourselves with a diversity of access needs, disabilities and terminology, researched the backgrounds of the

participants in advance of initial communication, and developed a plan for engaging in conversations with all Artist/ Leaders. Producer Andy Lunney had been directly involved with *The Republic of Inclusion*, produced by NAC English Theatre as part of The Collaborations in February 2015 in Toronto. Lunney's previous experience and our combined background research were both tremendously helpful in establishing our individual approach tailored to each participant.

Discovery of Needs

We engaged directly with the Artist/Leaders on multiple platforms – both by email and by phone. We used an online survey to gather personal information and to begin pertinent conversations around access needs. In addition to first-hand consultation with all Artist/Leaders, we found that gathering contextual information and advice from people who knew or had worked with the Artist/Leaders had a significant impact on logistical planning. In some cases, these conversations revealed overlooked or previously undisclosed information that allowed us to ensure better access and that elevated the overall experience. All bookings and plans were made in direct consultation with the Artist/Leaders, giving them as many options as possible and allowing them to lead us through the process. We encouraged ongoing feedback during all phases of our communication with the Artist/Leaders.

Site Visits and Environmental Audits

In February we conducted various site visits and environmental audits alongside the co-curators, visiting all the locations under consideration for **Summit 2016**. We took the time to actually experience the proposed locations and to travel between these places to identify any access restrictions be they physical, emotional or sensory. We visited each hotel room, meeting space and restaurant and took photos and notes on what could be potential barriers, assessed the ‘accessible’ facilities, considered what might present potential environmental concerns (i.e. scents, heat, light), and examined possible solutions. While in situ, we envisioned the event as a whole, thinking through the impact of the type of work and length of day on the Artist/Leaders and all other participants. We aimed to address any unexpected barriers or restrictions *before* they came up, if at all possible. We also sourced local suppliers for things like medical equipment, attendant care and interpretation services (both ASL and audio description), independent means of transportation, facilities, care practitioners and food needs. Along with the Stratford Festival and their excellent catering department, we developed menus suitable for everyone’s needs, and planned the schedule in a way that allowed for time for rest.

Pre-Arrival Information

From the outset we developed clear communication chains by establishing both a logistical and an artistic point person. We provided detailed outlines for each day including the provisions in place, and communicated any concerns we had about access points. We provided maps, menus, and clear instructions on administrative services, including what, when and how expenses could be claimed or reimbursed. We used multiple platforms to ensure access to the documents for text readers, and considered simplifying and clarifying the language to ensure the easier comprehension. All available services were noted (such as ASL interpreters, attendant care providers, audio description services, chill out rooms, stools or additional furnishings and equipment, etc.), and needs were double checked with each participant. We coordinated travel with care providers and staff to ensure the comfort and safety of all participants, and arranged a system for communication while in transit. Pick up locations were coordinated with both the transportation operators and the locations in advance. We provided information to the participants on who would be attending, and how we anticipated the sessions would unfold. We also advised people on how they could navigate the schedule and locations, and about the comings and goings of bodies within the room. We prepared a local map and list of restaurants and services in the area, noting the varied accessibility and dietary options, as well as opening times.

Accommodation and Transportation

We contacted an accessible bus company in Toronto to take the participants from there to Stratford as a group. Accommodations were provided for people who required travel respite, and allowances were made for those needing to conduct other business or personal matters while en route to Stratford or en route back to Toronto. Rooms were inspected before arrival and allocated based on individual needs. Early check-in was arranged at the hotels to enable a smooth arrival for all participants. Information and a welcome package awaited everyone in their rooms, and we made ourselves available to all participants to assist with any needs arising upon arrival. Some participants who used wheelchairs declined accessible rooms in favour of location and proximity, and we were happy to adjust our planning based on the individual participants' preferences or requests. Ultimately, we endeavoured to be as respectful and responsive as possible both in the preparation and the execution of the event.

SECTION THREE - CLARITY IN COMMUNICATION

In order to best facilitate the work happening in the room, we created a series of supports and agreements as a group that carried us through the three-day conversation. These decisions enabled a conversation to unfold at a comfortable pace, one that was accessible to all types of abilities, and included everyone without discrimination or assumption.

Firstly, **Summit 2016** included the support of three ASL interpreters as well as one staff for visual description. In order to support these inclusions, everyone was asked, and occasionally reminded, to speak at a slow and comfortable pace, and pausing for longer names that needed to be spelled out. Also, to support clarity in communication, everyone was asked when speaking at any given time to start with their first name. For example, "(SPEAKER'S NAME), I totally agree with the point you just made and here is why..." Creating this system of speaking your name before making your point allowed the conversation to be followed more clearly by people with visual impairments. Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer asked that speakers end their point with "...and that is my current thought." This not only allowed for the visually impaired and sign interpreters to know when a speaker had completed, but also offered space for slowness, pause, and contemplation without interruption.

We also spent time on the first morning introducing one another, and allowing space for people to share their preferred gender. This first introduction allowed us to ensure there were no assumptions in regards to gender pronouns, and that everyone was being referred to by the title with which they self-identified.

Plain Language Commitment and Deaf and Disability Frameworks

Agreements were made on the first day to support preferred terminology and address our use of language. These included:



Artist/Leaders and Stratford scene shop staff exploring mould-making

- " Not conflating Deaf and disabled
- " Not conflating Mad and disabled
- " Disabled as a term coming from the social model of disability
- " People first language
- " Crip and other activist reclamations
- " Other ways that people describe themselves
- " Acknowledging our different experiences, different physical locations and different social locations, and how these differences are reflected in our language. We embrace our ability to choose for ourselves how we understand our own lived experiences.

Live Note-taking – Shared Document

Another one of our innovations was to introduce live note-taking for accessibility. Placing a live note-taker in the room, and creating a document which was instantly available online, allowed people who were unable to attend for accessibility reasons to participate from a separate room or hotel. It also offered participants an opportunity to catch up by reading what was missed due to other obstacles in the room. This was an important innovation to offer our leaders and respondents. Jesse Stong did the note-

note-taker on rotation in the same way that ASL interpreters operate. These simple additions to support the conversation were successful in creating a more inclusive and engaged discussion that allowed everyone to be involved. We were excited to see this system for note-taking used in Toronto at the Tangled Arts + Disability Symposium following **Summit 2016**.

SECTION FOUR - DAY ONE AT THE AVON

Summit 2016 began with a welcome and smudge from Elder Pauline Shirt, followed by introductions from everyone in the circle. The curators considered the inherent vastness of difference in the circle as a starting point for Day One, with the idea of developing ways to build trust and the space for permissiveness, and to relate across this difference.



Elder Pauline Shirt & Artist/Leader Bruce Horak

There was then a welcoming speech from the Stratford Festival, which told us the story of the Festival's first building, erected in 1953, and reminded us of the commitment the Festival has always had to innovation and new voices, along with an attitude of openness to difference. Artistic Director Jillian Keiley from the NAC also welcomed the group, sharing how thrilled the organization was to be hosting this exciting conversation with the intention of making Canadian Theatre more diverse, inclusive, and exciting. Protocols for the use of our proper pronouns and names were established as well as some guidelines for exchanges (e.g. a commitment to plain language; identifying ourselves each time we spoke, concluding with "this is my current thought," and other preferred terminology). We explained that the first two days of discussions would take place between the leaders while actively listened to by the respondents. The respondents were welcomed into the conversation as active participants in the latter part of the weekend.

Co-Curator Sarah Garton Stanley acknowledged the project partners and reviewed the history of **Summit 2016**. This Cycle began with a preliminary step on February 15, 2015, in Toronto, when Alex Bulmer and Sarah co-curated a one-day event called *The Republic of Inclusion*. On the day, Jan Derbyshire worked had with them on a co-design exercise and Eliza Chandler had acted as a scribe for the event. Both Jan and Eliza had helped Alex and Sarah shape *The Republic of Inclusion*.

Following this backstory, we (Sarah and Syrus) introduced the central objective of **Summit 2016:** Changing the shape of Canadian Theatre and impacting the process by which it is created, as well as sharing stories and storytellers. As Co-Curators, we hoped to gain feedback to the guiding questions... what are the stories, who are the tellers? What do the tellers need to tell the story? What follows is a review of the larger goals for **Summit 2016**.

- a) Creating a space (a stage/a container) for the assembled to talk about the practice: to share experiences within theatre and performance spaces, as well as community spaces, which have shaped the Artist/Leaders and helped them understand possible ways forward.
- b) Providing institutional respondents from various major theatre organizations an opportunity to sit in the middle of a conversation that many of the leaders have been having for years.
- c) Building an exchange that will foster a broader shift in how we all understand both the needs and the desires of our various milieus.
- d) Working together to build bridges of support and to learn from one another about what is already out there; to avoid duplicating what is already happening, and to work together towards strengthening and supporting one another.
- e) Obtaining guidance from the Artist/Leaders. NAC English Theatre plans to bring more artists, students and professionals together over the course of *The Study* and *The Republic of Inclusion (redux)* in June 2017 for a longer phase of development and conversation, informed by the conversation which unfolded at **Summit 2016**.

Highlights from Day One:



From left: Respondent Alan Shain and Artist/Leaders Jack Volpe, Jan Derbyshire and Niall McNeil

Artist/Leader Niall McNeil led the group in an interactive warm up which modelled the ways that artist/leaders can contribute specific resources based on their own strengths and lived experiences. Niall's activity of passing an imaginary ball was about more than the simple exchange of energy; it was a way to awaken our senses and help us learn and remember one another's names. The activity also had us collectively learn how to keep that energy moving across the room.

After setting the stage and warming up the players, we began the first discussion, started by Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer. This session, entitled *How We Work*, was a discussion about what we all need to be present in the room, to communicate with one another, and to have **Summit 2016** be a valuable contribution to everyone's work and artistic practice.

Alex introduced the phrase "to come to now" as a starting point that embraces the sense of presence and newness in the room. She recognized that the conversation could not and would not happen in any other way without all of the parties currently present. The conversation was about how we make the work we do, and what we need to continue and to create new opportunities. A large part of the conversation was around the concept of a *Creative Detour*.



Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer

Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer – "When you take a *creative detour* you discover things you didn't anticipate. You might end up at the destination or the destination might change. That is one thing I would not want to alter about how I work and what I need – I often take and need creative detours."

Many artists felt the significance of gathering all these passionate artists in one place, and in the power of sharing what we are all working on/creating/doing. The Artist/Leaders agreed that such collaborative gatherings were essential as a big part of the work that they create is in dialogue with other artists and audiences. An important need for many Artist/Leaders going forward was to have more chances for discussions with other artists and audiences.



Artist/Leader Paul Power

Artist/Leader Paul Power:

“I am currently on the east coast, and as far as disability arts go, as far as I know there’s not a lot happening in the Atlantic provinces. I feel very alone, and in the community I am involved in I don’t really know anyone else with disabilities going out and auditioning for roles on main stages.”

Opportunities, resources, and the invaluable resource of TIME became a central point in this discussion. Many of the Artist/Leaders discussed needing more support around energy and time management, because the balance of creativity and practical management is increasingly difficult in our fast-paced world, and because there is the added pressure on artists who are Deaf and/or with disabilities to spend time convincing people that they are capable of taking on the opportunities.

Artist/Leader Jack Volpe:

“I need people around me who can support me, who are not Deaf, who can see me for who I am. I call them ‘people who lift me up’, with privilege, they back me up, they support me, they make me believe I can do it, they push me through it and they believe in me. They help me find another way, the detours I have to take to get to the final destination.”



From left: Artist/Leader Jack Volpe, Stratford Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino, ASL Interpreter: Jordan Goldman

Furthering the discussion on *creative detours*, there was an agreement that artists with disabilities and Deaf artists have a giftedness/strength in understanding how to navigate the systems due to their constant negotiation of ableist/audits barriers. What they have learned about finding new and different ways toward their destinations is actually universally useful, something that everyone would benefit from experiencing. Disability arts is largely about negotiating vulnerabilities, and finding freedom by working beyond perceived limitations. Funding needs, collaboration/interdependence as a strength rather than a weakness, and the need for more youth engagement were also repeatedly discussed as areas that needed more support and attention. Systemic change was a major theme that the group discussed, and there was agreement that there needs to be large scale reframing of how the system can modify, evolve, and work for artists who have different experiences of disability.

Artist/Leader Jan Derbyshire:

“A friend drew a fish once, a fish of inclusion. This fish was divided into three. The front section represented all the people that the system works for. The biggest part of the fish is the middle, and represents the people who do other things to make the system work for them. And the tail, the end point, represents those who can’t get into the system at all.



“Disability arts is very workshop heavy... people come in and get an experience but rarely do they get built up into the writers/directors/other roles that they desire. They are not able to get into the system.”

From left: Jan Derbyshire and Carmelle Cachero

The second discussion, “*What is the Work?*”, was led by Artist/Leader Barak Adé Soleil and focused on sharing the incredible work that has been done nationally, past and present. As a group we created the first draft of *The Compendium* (attach link here), a shared documents that captures and organizes the many exciting projects past and present that have made Disability Arts what it is today.

Discussion three was led by artist Jan Derbyshire. The theme of this ambitious discussion was: *What do we need? What do we want?* This part of the dialogue was based on the concept of Utopian Design, and Jan started us off by taking time to recognize those who are no longer with us, the artists and activists who held onto a dream and pushed for evolution. We took time as a group to talk about our long term goals. The need for space, financial and political support, and supplies were a large part of the recommendations from the Artist/Leaders.

Artist/Leader Barak adé Soleil:

“I would love to think about spaces we can merge where folks with disabilities – where people who self-identify – can come together. Spaces for them to talk about what they do and what they want to do and to be supported. We need more opportunities to release and share amongst ourselves.”



Artist/Leader Barak adé Soleil

Many of the leaders had a lot to say about space, specifically the need for accessible work and rehearsal space, not just accessible audience spaces. Some had had their experiences of ableism discounted when they sought support, and worried that access issues were not taken as seriously as other human rights issues. Even if there is no sign on the entrance door that says “no people with disabilities”, the fact that there is no ramp, no access information or way inside feels just as oppressive as an outright ban on disabled participation. Artists are also tired of having to be constant advocates for access on top of the creative work. A big takeaway was that artists are often asked to provide free informal or formal disability audits for organizations that they are working with, and all agreed that this is a service that draws on considerable expertise and knowledge and that it should come with remuneration.

Many cited the need for the development of diverse measurement and critiquing standards, and for disability informed arts evaluations, critiques and discussions. We need to see disability arts advocacy in the Prairies and Atlantic regions valued just as much as the work coming out of Ontario. It was also suggested that we research what other countries are doing, as there are many theatres internationally that have staff who are specifically designated as accessibility coordinators.

We also need more training and professional development opportunities for disabled people in the arts, especially for youth. Deaf and disabled artists do not have to be cast in the ‘token disability role’ but should be included in all aspects of production. Accommodations can be made to ensure that this works for all involved.



Artist/Leader Debbie Paterson

Artist/Leader Debbie Paterson:

“So many theatres will budget for a dialect coach or a movement coach, but would balk at hiring an ASL interpreter. People need to stop thinking this is outside the realm of their responsibility.”

Jan wrapped up Day One by reminding us that Utopian Design was a concept that started in the lower-income neighbourhoods of Chicago, and that there was a ‘knowing’ during those initial planning conversations that they may never actually build the perfect world. The process of utopian design involves having a larger frame to consider the little steps that will get us closer to the bigger dreams. Utopian design is about action, and in order to have some of the ideas that were generated come to life, we need to do more than just talk about them.

SECTION FIVE - EVENING AT THE SCENE SHOP



From left: Shira Ginsler, Naomi Campbell, Sarah Garton Stanley and Bruce Horak

After a great first day, we took a much needed break. Everyone returned to their rooms (or the bar!) and during this time a storm of freezing rain descended on Stratford. Despite the weather and intrepid as ever, we set off for dinner at the Stratford Festival Archives followed by a tour of the scene shops and prop and wardrobe storage.

Though they were in the midst of final rehearsals for their season launch, our gracious hosts at the Stratford Festival provided us all with warm hospitality, including evening socials which welcomed us behind the scenes and provided an opportunity for leaders and participants to continue the conversations. We met with the Stratford Festival's head of production Simon Marsden, several department heads and Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino.

Together we assessed the possibilities and limitations of working within theatre as it is currently manifested, produced and displayed. We reviewed the many innovative adaptations the Festival had already put in place to ensure that all workers could continue to practice their craft. Stratford explained that as their workers developed disabilities, they had developed many new ways of doing the work. This was an excellent backdrop for our earlier discussion about the concept of 'TABs' which emerges from the social model of disability – that everyone is 'temporarily able-bodied' and that if we live long enough, everyone experiences disability at some point in their lives. Theatre needs to grapple with the changing workforce, and needs to plan for disabled participation by workers who begin their careers with particular impairments that require innovative ways of 'doing what we've always done'.



Niall McNeil, Jillian Keiley and Kazumi Tsuruoka trying 'em on for size with Joan McNeil in background.

SECTION SIX – TALKING ABOUT TOUCH TOURS

While taking our tour of the props and costume warehouse, there was an extensive discussion on how Touch Tours have been utilized in theatre, and suggestions on how to improve the accessibility of tours which occur before the production begins.

While on our private tour of the immense costume and prop department at the Stratford Festival, we took some time to discuss as a group some best practices for creating touch tours. A touch tour is an opportunity for theatres to allow a space of time for people with visual impairments to experience elements of the performance that will allow them to have a more inclusive and accessible experience as audience members.

In the discussion it was agreed that ideally touch tours happen before the show, but not so far in advance that its impact on the experience of the performance would be lost. It was suggested an ideal time frame would be 45 minutes before the show, even though the logistics of cast and crew getting ready while hosting a tour are understandably difficult. Regardless, it would be best to leave the touch tour fresh in the mind of the audience members with visual impairments. The ideal tour is actually on the set, before the house opens. Artist/Leaders felt it was important to highlight that although this type of tour may be a cost issue, it does not have to happen every night, but only nights specially flagged with extra support services for people with different abilities.

A touch tour can be an opportunity to feel the objects in context of the play, and a geographical understanding of how the objects are situated in the play. It can also give someone a geographical understanding of where the actors and scenographic elements are moving. This discussion led to the suggestion that a MODEL BOX of the space be used to support people with visual impairments. The model box, if designed very carefully to capture all the elements of the staging, could support a better understanding of the relationship between action, objects and people on stage.



Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer said, “Even though I’m blind I still find the illusion magically created by theatre really exciting. I also like having an actor or two participate in the tour... It introduces the voices of the characters coming, it almost warms up the ears to the voices you’re going to hear. It’s a combination of feeling the props within the concept of the narrative, understanding the geography of the space, and maybe a little exploration of voice.”

An audio describer on the tour also gave us a rundown of what is said before a performance to the listening audience, describing set, colours, exits and entrances. Then during the show they offer a descriptive geographical sense, and a description of each character and costume whenever an actor comes on and as they speak. The audio describer likened live audio to calling a ball game from the booth, and generally suggests having the listening audience take their seats 15 minutes before the show to get situated in the descriptive world.

The evening set the stage for our conversation the following morning. (It is worth mentioning that this was the first time the Festival had served a meal in the Archives, and it won't be their last!)



A meal in the archives (Photo: Syrus Marcus Ware)

SECTION SEVEN: DAY TWO AT U OF WATERLOO

We began the second day of **Summit 2016** with an open session which welcomed the Stratford Festival staff. During this time, we revealed a surprise: a short film that celebrated all of the Artist/Leaders from **Summit 2016**. We followed up by responding to the prior evening's tour and, in tangible terms, questioning the production processes of theatre making. How is theatre built, literally?

The opening discussion of Day Two, entitled *Theatre – Is it in the design?*, was led by Christine Karcza. We discussed how the design of the theatre world impacts how we experience it. As guideposts for the dialogue, Christine suggested the following questions:

- 1. How do you use the theatre space?**
- 2. How does it impact what you do?**
- 3. What do you need?**
- 4. And what do you see as the possibilities?**

Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer – “Theatre is often conceived as being a visual medium, and as my starting point is non-visual... Our challenge and opportunity is to re-order the way theatre is created. Often the set is designed first and the performers come in later, but I've worked on projects where the opposite is possible... a set created for a performer's specific needs.”



Andrew Mestern, Technical Director, Set Construction,
Antoni Cimolino and ASL interpreter/respondent, Carmelle
Cachero

The Artist/Leaders discussed the need for advanced planning in theatre processes, and the need for artist input (and workshoping) in the design of theatre spaces, sets, props and costumes. These need to be created with feedback from, and in collaboration with, artists with the lived experience of disability to ensure that they meet needs in advance of putting them into use during a production.

Much of the conversation in the broader theatre community remains focused on ensuring disabled audiences can engage with theatre works, rather than considering creation and production by cast and crew with a lived experience of disability/Deaf culture. The Artists/Leaders described a stigma around hiring that manifested in worries about the financial implications of creating fully accessible processes, because access is considered outside the 'main' budget. This thinking needs to change. Creating accessible productions is actually about making **better theatre** and will ensure a deep and meaningful engagement by brilliant artists who have so much to share but who are currently marginalized within the sector.

Some newer facilities have been built with access in mind, but the accessible elements are often considered for front-of-house only, aimed at audiences and still fall short of access needs. Many theatres cite financial concerns when asked to build/renovate according to universal design principles. Yet building new facilities without these considerations in mind feels like a violation to many Artist/Leaders. Being able to use the washroom while in production, to get in and out of spaces freely and with dignity, and having a clear plan for communication that includes interpretation, if needed, should be guaranteed when artists are hired to create work.

In Canada, understandings about Deaf and disability culture are often based on the perceived lived experience of a wheel and power chair user, despite the fact that

- a) disabled, Mad and Deaf identities are diverse and multifaceted and
- b) this perception of the needs of wheelchair users is often not based on actual input from chair users.

As such, many theatre spaces focus their access work on preparing for participation by wheel and power-chair users rather than considering a multitude of different physical, intellectual and emotional needs of artists, including artists who are chair users. This underlines the importance of an early consultation process that engages the community in theatre design.

The conversation also focused on time. We discussed theatre processes, theatre production timelines and how to consider actors' time. As theatre is currently imagined, there are tight timelines and heavy time pressures. When a theatre schedule is designed on a tight timetable, it becomes stressful and rushed and this simply does not work for many people. In fact, this fast pace really doesn't work well for anyone. We create conditions that do not allow for the artists to pause, take a break, or stop rehearsal if they need to. We discussed how to imagine theatre which allows for our humanity – and all of our physical and emotional needs leading up to opening night.

Some of the questions in our discussion included: What would happen if on an opening night some of our actors were physically or emotionally incapable of pushing further? What could we do if we considered this to be an opportunity and not a 'problem'? What plans could we have in place to allow for all of our humanity in these moments?

Artist/Leader Eliza Chandler:

“As a programmer when I am hosting an event, there's an ever expanding set of best practices that I follow. But we can't stop there; we have to always be co-designing the space with each participant that enters the space.



Artist/Leader: Eliza Chandler

“This is not about just ‘getting it right’ or about ‘getting access checked off the list,’ but rather about having an in-depth review of the spaces and practices that we use every day in Canadian theatre. There will need to be ongoing adaptations as we move forward – this is a journey that will never be ‘finished’. We need to generate an archive of what has worked well for us/what hasn't worked well for us and we need to share these learnings with others in the milieu.”

Many Artists/Leaders described their own foibles while trying to make inclusive spaces for Deaf and disabled practitioners (some of their attempts had led to embarrassing circumstances that became learning examples moving forward). These reflections underscore the fact that there will always be certain perspectives missing from our planning teams which result in missed opportunities for creating exceptional accessible design. We need to strive for diverse teams, and should never stop trying, learning, getting feedback and improving the next time based on this feedback.

The second discussion of the day, led by Kazumi Tsuruoka and Debbie Patterson, was titled *Time and its Impacts*. The conversation centered on sharing strategies/ways of working and considering the time-specific needs of Artist/Leaders producing theatre.

Because we work within a capitalist system with increasing pressures to produce more with less time and less money, ‘cripping’ the timelines and modes of production can seem impossible to do. However, if we don’t cripp these processes, disabled artists will continue to struggle to survive. The mere presence of a crip lens in theatre environments offers an opportunity to disrupt the capitalist machine and the fallacy of ‘independence’. It disrupts the notion that art should be made quickly and with little expense, disrupts the grant cycle and the set regulations of reporting and timelines. Artists may create work in unique ways, and this may take longer than traditional ways of working. It was said that ALL theatre practitioners need to be able to take more time doing the work. In this way, disability and Deaf arts can serve as an intervention in a world moving way too fast.

Artist/Leader Eliza Chandler – “The choice is whether we understand that disruption as productive or distracting. I think disabled and Deaf people have the enormous potential to rail against austerity and neoliberalism in the way that we care for each other and organize our time. We need to accommodate time differently, and work against this pace of production, production, production!”



From Left: Eliza Chandler, Jan Derbyshire, Saada El-Akrass, Syrus Marcus Ware, Claire Saddleton and Alex Bulmer.

A high degree of importance is often placed on physical and mental endurance; many people can’t ‘endure’ a 12-hour day and are therefore not encouraged to continue in theatre. The group articulated a desire to start a *slow theatre movement*, seeking to find another mode of creation at a comfortable and inclusive pace. With the demise of disability-specific festivals and venues with a clear understanding of our time-specific needs, there are less and less opportunities for crip artists to practice their crafts in ways that are safe and manageable.



Artist/Leader Kazumi Tsuruoka

Artist/Leader Kazumi Tsuruoka “I think deep down inside, we are all curious about who we really are, but because of time, we never find out.”

The second discussion of the day was led by Eliza Chandler and themed *How do we organize?* This session focused on organizing our practices and getting our work out into the milieu. We considered organizing by artists, artistic producers, and curators, funding councils and big theatre companies. Protest, advocacy, cooperation, and collusion were words that came up consistently in the conversation. There were many who felt that we are too siloed nationally, that we work separately in our home provinces without a national platform. We need this national scope to offer greater perspective and insights for systemic change. We also need to learn from what other communities are doing internationally. Disability becomes a culture when people organize and work together around a shared experience, and Canada is behind on supporting this cultural journey. There was a strong consensus that we need a national disability arts organization.

Artistic collaborations and how to work together across distance was discussed. Disability arts organizations have come and gone, many of them filling a niche or serving a specific need that eventually transitions/changes. As one need is met, we can then articulate the next needed resource. This constant evolution can lead to organizations shifting, changing, and in some cases disbanding. This process should inform the mandate of all organizations by creating more inclusive and transformed practices imbued with flexibility. We acknowledge that organizations don't need to last forever. Once an organizing group has reached its goals and fulfilled its purpose it can dissolve, allowing room for new resources to flourish.

Artist/Leader Michele Decottignies

“The question of sustainability of the work is really critical, but for me it is always more about personal sustainability... It has always been critical that we recognize that they do not need to be sustained forever. They serve a role for the people they represent, but they do not need to hold that role forever.”



Artist/Leaders Debbie Patterson and Michele Decottignies

Our final discussion of the second day was a philosophical exploration that asked: *How do we uniquely define story and storytelling?*

This session was led by Jack Volpe. We began by asking what comes to mind when we think of the word storytelling? Our lives, our teaching, collaborating and learning were commonly part of the definitions of “storytelling” shared by the Artist/Leaders. We considered the ways that our experiences of disability, madness and Deaf identities affected the way that we see, hear and share our stories. We considered the magnificent beauty of our disabilities and how they have helped us to understand ourselves and the world in ways that would not be readily available to non-disabled

artists. We also talked about how the creation of art can be a way of reclaiming our power, a means of describing a future that centers the lives of people with disabilities. The discussion shifted to stories that “flip the familiar” – how disabled, crip, mad and Deaf artists can, if provided access and space, share parts of our humanity that are rarely seen. The Artist/Leaders all had their own ways of storytelling, and some felt pressure from external forces who tried to shoehorn them into a traditional non-disabled storytelling mode. The power in breaking the story structure has caused a rippling evolution for Canadian theatre, and has led to many unexpected discoveries about how and what we do. It should be celebrated!

Many had memories of being forced beyond their comfort and safety in order to fit into a prescribed process that was not designed for their bodies and minds. Many had experienced body shaming, misunderstandings and violations and were now trying to build a dialogue around honouring our authentic bodies and minds. This lesson has universal value. Our Artist/Leaders have injured themselves in order to fit into what is considered a ‘proper’ aesthetic, a ‘proper’ process, and a ‘proper’ concept of theatre. It is essential that we stop creating conditions that serve only imaginary bodies and start looking at the real bodies that exist and have a story to tell. Learning to listen and respect the truth of our bodies was a major theme throughout this discussion, but also throughout **Summit 2016**.

We discussed the need to switch the script, to ensure that we are telling stories about the brilliant magic that disability, madness and Deaf identities afford us as artists. We need to change the ableist script that requires a ‘triumph over suffering’ narrative about disability. And yet we need to be able to present the lived reality of some of our struggles with disability.

SECTION EIGHT – RECEPTION AT THE AVON



From left: Niall McNeil and Jan Derbyshire, The Avon Theatre, and Anita Gaffney

The second night the Stratford Festival put on a terrific reception for everyone. They provided a meal-by-request chef’s stand (delicious and considerate of various dietary needs) and drinks (alcoholic and non) for all. Stratford Festival Executive Director Anita Gaffney hosted the gathering and in her remarks thanked all present for broadening the Festival’s perspective. She also thanked the NAC English Theatre for their initiative and care in creating and producing **Summit 2016**.

SECTION NINE - DAY THREE CLOSING AT U OF WATERLOO

To close out the weekend, we wanted to discuss how to continue this momentum, how to build more innovation and interaction amongst the Artists/Leaders and with organizations nationally.



From Scene Shop Tour, 2nd Night of Summit 2016
(Photo: SG Stanley)

We began the day with a warm up: Niall led us in some collective singing and signing of a well-known choir song. For the last day, there was an opening of the circle and permission was given for those who were listening and representing organizations to participate with their thoughts and resources. There was a brief reminder at the top that this was not a space to share all the work the listeners are doing, but rather a chance to continue the discussion together with the artist/leaders at the centre.

Artist/Leader Rose Jacobson, and asked the group an open-ended *Now What?* What has been learned, shared, and what will move forward? This included what has happened for many years in the past, and the questions we are asking now. Are they the same questions? What are people seeking and where can they find what they are looking for? To build on this dialogue, Rose asked participants to anonymously write on a piece of paper a problem on one side that they face in their work, and a possible solution on the other. This was a chance to hear diverse perspectives on the issues out there, as well as solution-focused suggestions. Answers ranged from general issues such as isolation and lost energy, to specific comments like the lack of funding and organizations, difficulties completing grants, and schedules in face of different challenges. Solutions were shared, and for the vast majority of problems the solutions were patience, flexibility, time, collaboration, understanding, and empathy.

The first discussion was led by



From Left: Artist/Leaders Rose Jacobson & Jan Derbyshire

Institutional listeners mentioned being interested in learning more about Disabilities and Mad Arts Canada (DMAC) and other service organizations mentioned. There was a discussion around how the Canadian Theatre Agreement dictates that many organizations cannot work outside of the rules like others can, but through collaborations much more can move forward. Performancewiki.ca was also mentioned as a way to share the work that is being done and keep the dialogue moving forward.

The artists mentioned that there needs to be more recognition for the consultation that they do. Often they are brought in as artists, but then have to play the dual role of accessibility consultants. They feel that consent is a key to awareness, i.e. showing that you understand you are asking these artists to take on this consultation role rather than just expecting it. At the same time, there needs to be more money available to pay for consultations before the artists arrive to work. It should not be assumed the consultation is part of the artistic project.

It was unanimously agreed that we need better spaces and more time in them. An actual studio or lighting grid, not just side spaces with resources lacking. There is a need to recognize that art and access go hand in hand, and one cannot talk about the arts without talking about those who are able to access them and how.

Artist/Leader Alex Bulmer:

“Organizations need to do an audit on disability regularly. If you get public money... disabled people are the public. You have to work with the public and make your resources and spaces accessible to the public.”



From Left: Jack Volpe, Andy Lunney, Simon Marsden, Christine Karcza and Antoni Cimolino

There is an undeniable need for more national dialogues and conversations. The Canada Council for the Arts mentioned the paper on their website titled “Working with Artists with Disabilities” as a great starting document which lists all the protocols and practices around communicating with individuals as well as organizing meetings and festivals. Equity in Canadian Theatre is already starting to become an important policy in many innovative ways.

For the final conversation of **Summit 2016**, Co-Curators Sarah and Syrus shared that the desire of **Summit 2016** was not to own information, but to create a stage to share the knowledge the leaders already possess. The hope is that this conversation will push forward through the individuals in the room, and facilitate organization so as to not lose or repeat efforts. We ended with a discussion of how we can complement, support and engage with one another in the future. Syrus mentioned the idea of a scarcity model, of there not being enough resources and time, and challenged us to think about how we can work around and respond to this mentality. Is it possible to imagine that more resources can come with more interest in disability arts?

During the discussions, it was mentioned that although there has been an increase in interest and funding, there is also the danger of our art becoming institutionalized. Less power in the hands of the people who are living with disabilities can put the practice of our art-making at risk. We run the constant risk of being a trend or token instead of actually increasing inclusion and accessibility. You create interest by creating good work, and there is nervousness around funds created solely on political or social interest. Many mentioned a need to understand that there is a missing history, and that people need to learn where disability arts has come from and the struggles it has faced along the way. Many also explained that there is excitement about a population that has been left out of Canadian theatre, that its lost stories and audiences can enrich the work that is out there and the Canadian narrative.

Artist/Leader Debbie Paterson:

“I personally think resources will increase as more people are authentically welcomed into the theatre. We can even anticipate a box office explosion as more disabled artists are welcome on stage and in the audience.”



From left: Beth Russell and Debbie Patterson
Behind: Nathan Medd and Heidi Taylor

Many made mention of pioneers in disability arts, and the need to be a fighter. To get more and more involved in the work you do and the work of others, and to stand up for your rights and your voice. The need to know who you are, and start doing what you do is key to pushing the movement and evolution forward, and will support funders' understanding of who we are and what we are demanding. There was a mention of the issue faced by some people in that they cannot work as paid artists because of the disability benefits they receive, and some tricky side-stepping of legal issues that many have had to take to make projects with disabled artists work. All leaders agreed that there needs to be a re-evaluation of policy around how people on disability payments can be included in projects and paid honorariums or salaries for their efforts without potentially losing their long-term supports from the government.

The discussion ended with the question of how we can support people with all different abilities to become leaders. It requires us to look at what we list as qualifications of a leader, and understand that people who have been prevented from taking on leadership roles cannot be expected to come to the table with a lot of leadership experience. We need to understand and support potential leaders as they grow into the roles, and we need to accommodate their learning process. We need to look at the current leaders and validate the years and years of unpaid labour they have put in advocating for our rights. We need to fund through arts councils and governments access funding so we can pay someone to address the questions and crises that the leaders in the room have been addressing for so many years. It is time to recognize this leadership role and provide sustainable support.

The experience of disability is a cultural experience. We need to shift minds and policies in this direction, towards the understanding that there is a culture here that requires not only protection but also the opportunity to work together to build a stronger community. We need to pool resources and solutions, and we need support to have disability arts be recognized as part of the global community. There are solutions in the world, and Canada must organize to gain access to these communities and contribute to the dialogues already happening.

SECTION TEN: SHARING SUMMIT 2016

The major take away for us (Syrus and Sarah) was how important it is to keep momentum moving forward. Isolation was a word that arose countless times throughout our three days and our hope, through our work with The Cycle, is to continue to help mobilize information.



Screen-capture from The Summit, a video celebrating the Artists/Leaders

In concert with our planning for **Summit 2016** we were also developing a strategy to discuss and share the work that is already going on across the country and internationally. Between discussions, Artist/Leaders were interviewed by Summit Associate Jesse Stong and NAC New Media Marnie Richardson. Syrus Marcus Ware also directed and Sarah Garton Stanley produced a collage video sharing the work of the leaders participating in this phase of The Cycle. These videos are all part of knowledge mobilization and a

celebration of the incredible artists who joined us for **Summit 2016**. They, along with this report and a new section of the NAC's website, will be used to help facilitate the ongoing discussions for the next phase of The Cycle, and are a way to proudly share the great work that is already being done. All of this is done in pursuit of the goal to help change the shape of Canadian Theatre and the processes used in its creation.

nac-cna.ca/inclusion

During **Summit 2016** social media was also employed to share our process with our online community. The Hashtag: #Summit2016Cycle as well as many tags to @CanadasNAC and @Stratfest. Permission was requested in advance for use of photographs and quotes.

On the opening day of **Summit 2106** we spent a period of time sharing work from the Deaf, disability, and MAD communities – both our own and the work of others that have inspired us. This was the launch of THE COMPENDIUM – a living document that we hope will capture, track, and allow the future sharing and documentation of all work from this community. We are in discussions with several groups about where this can live and how it should be presented, but in the meantime we are adding to it as new information arises.

goo.gl/Brcuzs

SECTION ELEVEN: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Access/Accessibility - Refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience different abilities.

ASL - American Sign Language is a visual language.

Audio Description - Refers to an additional narration track for blind and visually impaired consumers of visual media. It consists of a narrator talking through the presentation, describing what is happening on the screen during the natural pauses in the audio, and sometimes during dialogue if deemed necessary.

Compendium - A collection of concise but detailed information about a particular subject: In this case MAD, Deaf, and disability arts.

Creative Detour - Embracing that due to a need or desire, a deviation from a direct course or the usual procedure can happen. Discovering things you didn't anticipate, perhaps ending up at the destination or the destination might change.

Crip/“Crippling the Arts“- An activist/artist reclamation of the previously oppressive term “*crip*”

Deaf/deaf - Lacking the power of hearing or having impaired hearing. Capital D for the community/person, lower case d when making reference to the actual impairment. Some call it a deafness gain rather than a hearing loss.

Dramaturgy/Dramaturgical - The theory and practice of dramatic composition. The study of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage.

Environmental Audits - An assessment of the extent to which an organization/space is observing practices that seek to minimize exclusion and maximize accessibility.

“Flip the familiar” - How artists (and people in general) with different abilities can, if provided access and space, share part of our humanity that are rarely seen.

Inclusion/Inclusive Space - A space or practice that recognizes our universal oneness and interdependence. Fighting against exclusion and all of the social diseases exclusion gives birth to - i.e. racism, sexism, ableism etc.

Interdependence - Mutual dependence and collaborative support.

MAD - An activist reclamation/movement of the users of mental health services, former users, and allies.

Sustainability - Something that is able to be maintained at a certain rate or level, able to be upheld or defended over time.

TABS - Temporarily Able-Bodies: A term that highlights if we live long enough, everyone experiences disability at some point in their lives.

Touch Tours - An opportunity for theatres to allow a space of time for people with visual impairments to experience elements of the performance that will allow them to have a more inclusive and accessible experience as audience members

Utopian Design - Planning/designing from an imaginary place in which the government, laws, and social conditions are perfect

SECTION TWELVE – PARTICIPANTS AND PARTNERS

LEADERS

Alex Bulmer	Writer, Director, Performer, Artistic Director
Eliza Chandler	Artistic Director, Post Doc Ryerson University
Michele Decottignies	Artistic Director, Activist
Jan Derbyshire	Writer, Director, Performer, Artistic Director
Bruce Horak	Writer, Painter, Performer
Rose Jacobson	Artistic Director
Christine Karcza	Consultant
Niall McNeil	Writer, Director, Performer
Debbie Patterson	Writer, Director, Performer
Paul David Power	Writer, Director, Performer
Barak adé Soleil	Dancer, Choreographer, Performer
Kazumi Tsuruoka	Writer, Performer, Singer
Jack Volpe	Writer, Director, Performer, Artistic Director

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONDENTS

Naomi Campbell	Luminato Festival
Saada El-Akhrass	The British Council
Dipna Horra	Canada Council for the Arts
Kirsty Johnston	University of British Columbia
Jillian Keiley	National Arts Centre, English Theatre
Keira Loughran	The Stratford Festival
Nathan Medd	National Arts Centre, English Theatre
Beth Russell	The Stratford Festival
Claire Saddleton	Arts Council England
Heidi Taylor	Playwrights Theatre Centre
Alan Shain	Canada Council for the Arts

CO-CURATORS

Sarah Garton Stanley & Syrus Marcus Ware

SUMMIT 2016: Changing the Shape of Canadian Theatre (NAC English Theatre)

Produced by National Arts Centre, English Theatre
in partnership with **The Stratford Festival**

SUMMIT 2016 PRODUCTION TEAM

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Clayton Baraniuk	NAC Producing Coordinator
Marnie Richardson	NAC New Media
Jesse Stong	Assistant to the curators
Keira Loughran	Stratford Festival Summit coordinator
Shira Ginsler	Assistant to Keira Loughran

STRATFORD KEY SUPPORTERS

Antoni Cimolino	Artistic Director of Stratford
Anita Gaffney	Executive Director of Stratford
Simon Marsden	Festival Director of Production
David Auster	Festival Producer

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Canada Council for the Arts (Theatre Office)
The Department of Theatre and Film at the University of British Columbia
British Council Canada

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Playwrights Theatre Centre
Canada Council for the Arts (Equity Office)
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