

# Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Membership of CATR

Thursday, June 6, 2024

18:00-20:30 EDT

Attendance (via ZOOM): Taiwo Afolabi, Kelsey Blair, Justin Blum, Jenn Boulay; Cassandre Chatonnier, Selena Couture, Moira Day (Secretary), Dave DeGrow, Giorelle Diokno, Katrina Dunn, Thea Fitz-James, Alex Ferrone, Barry Freeman, Taylor Graham, Matt Jones, Peter Kuling, Shelley Liebembuk, Signy Lynch, Michelle MacArthur, Hope McIntyre, Jayna Mees, Nicole Nicolette, Jimena Ortuzar, Jess Riley, Jennifer Roberts-Smith, Sebastian Samur, Bethany Schaufler-Biback, Marlis Schweitzer, Kim Solga, Fraser Stephens, Cyrus Sundar Singh, Jacqueline Taucar, Jessica Watkin, Robin Whittaker (President), Katherine Zien

1. *Preliminaries* (10 mins)
  - a. Call to Order
  - b. Land Acknowledgement (President: Robin W.)
  - c. **MOTION:** To Approve the 2024 AGM Agenda  
Moved by Cyrus Sundar Singh, Seconded by Shelley Liebembuk. Passed unanimously.
  - d. **MOTION:** To Accept the Minutes of the 2023 AGM  
Moved by Taylor Graham, Seconded by Alex Ferrone. Passed unanimously.
2. *President's Award* (President: Robin W.) (10 mins)

Congratulations were extended to Taiwo Afolabi and Katie Zien as the 2024 recipients of the President's Award for exceptional service to CATR. Katie Z. was praised for her efficiency, compassion, and support in helping to organize CATR's 2024 conference under challenging circumstances. Taiwo A. was praised for his enormous contribution to CATR not only in his role of vice president for two years, but over the past year as Chair of TheatreAgora, a member of the ARAO committee, the conference programming committee chair and conference co-chair. In all these functions, he combined a strong sense of humour, curiosity, respect and dedication into a people-first approach that was successful in bringing a diversity of people together to achieve meaningful outcomes across the full range of the job, and was consistently generous with his praise. He was also praised for using his position as Canada Research Chair in socially engaged theater to connect CATR to colleagues across the globe in new ways that will yield returns to CATR in future years.
3. *Report of the President* (President: Robin W.) (20 mins)

Robin W. announced that the conference organizing team had just been successful in moving the 2024 annual conference on short notice from McGill to the Université de Montreal due to the circumstances of the Law Professor's strike and the pro-Palestinian encampment. He praised Alex Ferrone, in particular, for his action in negotiating with the U de M Department of Literatures and Languages

of the World and administration for moving the academic panels and sessions to alternative spaces in U de M and scheduling them in ways that matched their original position in the program. With the theatre practice workshops and performance sessions still being accommodated in studio/theatre spaces at Concordia, the entire conference had been successfully moved off the McGill campus. Robin W. expressed gratitude and thanks to the entire team for their dedication and hard work in organizing the conference, and to efforts of many others, most notably Matt Jones, Taylor Graham, Signy Lynch, and Katie Zien, in putting time into reaching out to a number of organizations over the last few weeks to find an alternative venue for the conference. He also credited the hard work of Sebastian Samur, Taylor Graham, Jayna Mees, Kelsey Blair, Justin Blum, Cassandre Chatonnier. He also thanked Taiwo Afolabi and Fraser Stevens as conference leaders for the past 11 months, as well Dave DeGrow for his work as conference co-ordinator.

Robin W. was also pleased to mention that Toronto-based performance artist, curator, activist, teacher and mentor, Jess Dobkin, would be the recipient of CATR's 100<sup>th</sup> honorary associateship.

Robin W. extended a welcome to incoming members of the 2024-25 Board, and thanks to both continuing and departing members of the Board.

He also highlighted CATR's ongoing efforts to support graduate students and precariously-employed members, especially through targeted fundraising, low membership fees, the conference travel grant, a few paid conference positions, three elected representatives on the board, the task force on precarity, and various scholarships and grants that prioritize these members. He also expressed the hope that departments and graduate faculties would also fund students from their own resources to attend at least one conference each year. He asked for volunteers to start serving on the CATR 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration at Victoria in 2026, and online throughout the 2025-26 year.

Finally, he acknowledged the recent loss of a number of valued colleagues over the year, including Diane Bessai, Louise Forsyth, Angela Rubeiro, and Ches Skinner and invited members to visit or write tributes on the CATR website.

#### 4. *Report of the Treasurer* (Treasurer: Katrina D.)

**(20 mins)**

Kathrina D. mentioned she would be stepping away from the position of treasurer after four years. She thanked everyone who had helped her over those years, and Sasha Kovacs in particular, though she noted there were many, many others who had worked closely with her over that time. She also welcomed Craig Walker into the position of treasurer moving forward.

She noted that in 2023, CATR had run an operating deficit of \$7,987. She said that much of that came down to increased accounting fees that she had not budgeted for adequately. However, she felt their support and assistance to CATR as not for profit specialists, was critical moving forward, especially since there had been a pattern over the past two years of CATR relying strongly on membership dues to create revenue that isn't really covering all its expenses. So, moving forward, more innovative thought and solutions needed to be applied to the problem.

Our accumulated surplus was \$52,526, and a decision was made to create a conference surplus fund that could be used and held in case we didn't have the kind of financial support we needed, or we encountered an unexpected emergency of the kind we had when the conference had to be moved on short notice. She was also impressed by the amount of money raised by donations by CATR members. Of the \$5,833 collected, \$1,888 went to the Indigenous host, and the remainder was divided between the student travel fund and the Denis Salter grants.

She also reviewed our investment funds that support a number of CATR's scholarships and awards through their interest, and mentioned that after several years of work, the \$43,680.05 in total funds, that had been spread across several accounts had been consolidated at CIBC. We used \$1,000 from that account to back the CATR credit card to fund online accounts and subscriptions that were needed at our websites. It was also the first year that CATR had used QuickBooks Online, with good results.

Finally Katrina D. reviewed the major government grants we had: a little from the Canadian Heritage fund left over from the 2023 conference; and most significantly, the Canada Council for the Arts Digital Strategy Fund, that we were awarded two-and half years ago, and that we used to create the state of the art infrastructure for our online conferencing. She and Nicole Nicolette of SQET, the co-applicant on the grant, were just completing their final report now. So they were just closing the door on three years of funding that had been very valuable for the conference planning of both associations.

Next Katrina moved on to discuss the projected 2024 budget with expenditures totaling \$95,350. She said it was based closely on past budgets, with about \$40,000 of it being conference-related. She said that much of the conference funding was channelled through CATR sources, but not all of it. Some came from the support and funding of the conference host associations. For instance, while we were short of grant funding for 2023, the collaboration between Dalhousie, StFX and the University of the Fraser Valley was so strong that we were more than adequately supported.

Katrina was thanked for the excellent four years she had served as treasurer for CATR, and the enormous service she had done to our community in keeping us in good financial health despite ongoing challenges, and so much happening all at once

- a. **MOTION:** To approve the 2023 year-end financial statements

Moved by Jess Riley, Seconded by Fraser Stephens. Passed unanimously.

- b. **MOTION:** To approve the 2024 budget forecast

Moved by Fraser Stephens, Seconded by Thea Fitz-James. Passed unanimously

- c. **MOTION:** To appoint Adams & Miles as public accountant for the 2025 fiscal year

Moved by Shelley Liebembuk, Seconded by Barry Freeman. Passed unanimously.

5. *Conference*

- a. CATR 2024 Conference Report (Co-Chairs: Fraser S., Taiwo A.;  
Treasurer: Katrina D.)

**(20 mins)**

Fraser S. reported that the 2024 conference was one of the largest on record. We had 178 submissions from 12 countries, across four continents, and we were expecting many of them to show up in person at U de M. However, he identified a number of systemic issues to be addressed moving forward. There continued to be difficulties with our system not interfacing well digitally with the Congress system, a problem compounded by a lack of synchronization with their programming and deadlines. For instance, even before we had our CFP&S, or call for papers and sessions, out, we were asked to estimate the number of rooms we needed for the conference, and had to have the space booked and confirmed before we had even submitted our letters of acceptance or offers to people. It was suggested that if we work with Congress again, that we synchronize planning and deadlines on both sides more carefully: a better sense of when to start initiating things, when to hire or bring on staff, and what matters might involve a last-minute pivot would help. In conclusion, Fraser F. thanked everyone who had helped with planning the conference over the past 11 months.

Katrina D. took over discussing the 2024 conference funding. During the discussion of the 2024 conference budget, the subject of possible refunds related to the last-minute shift in conference venues was raised. This year, the SSHRC Events fund applied for by the host institution did not come through, but the conference reserve fund did not need to be used because of money from the digital generator grant still flowing through, the fees coming in from our high conference registration, and strong support from our presses and theatre and performance departments; we also had some ongoing support from the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. So we actually managed a surplus rather than a deficit in 2024. Nonetheless, we did lose some of our Congress event funding for making some of our events open to other Congress participants when we moved away from McGill. Moving forward, she said one thing she had spent the past four years doing was making sure that funds were raised to help pay grad students and precarious scholars for conference technical and communication support. Even if the fees paid were not huge, it was important to continue placing value on their work by paying for it.

There was a question of whether people who had paid for both Congress and CATR fees could at least be refunded for the Congress fee, if the Association had pulled out of Congress. Katrina D. felt that given the volatility of the situation, the number of other associations withdrawing, and the financial difficulties caused by that, the answer was likely no, though McGill had been willing to reimburse accommodation booked at McGill.

This was followed by a lengthy discussion about why we had coordinated our conference with Congress this year, given the various systematic issues and inflexibilities involved in being one small conference integrated into a larger event. The answer was that while in recent years we had found it often suited our own purposes best to run the CATR conference outside of Congress, there had been occasions when a rapprochement made sense for a given conference, even knowing the drawbacks of working with Congress. In some instances, people attended CATR because they could also attend the conferences of other associations being held at the same place and time, especially in a larger city



where other events were also going on at the same time. And, at least in the past, at least some of Congress-CATR conferences had worked well. Nonetheless, an argument was made that large events often did not provide much beyond minimal accommodation. For instance, supplying an ASL interpreter to sessions, an increasingly common practice, overlooked the density, richness and interconnectivity of deaf culture and the art that came out of it. It was suggested that that was certainly another argument for the wisdom of avoiding large, one size-fits-all conferences in favour of the flexibility of annual conferences tailored more closely to our own interests, and held in spaces and at times more responsive to the needs of our particular performance/scholarly community.

b. CATR 2025 Update (President: Robin W.) **(10 mins)**

It was mentioned that possible venues for the 2025 conference included Regina, and George Brown College in Toronto. Though Congress would be held in Toronto May 30-June 6, 2025, the idea was that the CATR conference would not be connected to the event, and be held at a different time.

A question was raised over whether we should make our annual conference a biennial event instead. If the 2026 conference in Victoria was simultaneously going to serve as our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, then perhaps it made sense to cancel the 2025 conference so everyone had more time to prepare for the larger 2026 event instead. The opposing view was that cancelling the conference would lead to fewer opportunities for grad students and underemployed scholars to present their work in a public forum and to network.

A decision was made to continue pursuing Regina and George Brown as possible venues for the 2025 conference.

6. *Ongoing Initiatives*

a. Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression Ad Hoc Comm. Report (Chair: Robin W.) **(5 mins)**

It was mentioned that 16 motions were passed over the year. It was thought that because of low attendance at recent ARAO sessions, perhaps it was not necessary to do a separate ARAO conference session every year.

b. Task Force on Precarity Report (Unaffiliated Scholar Rep: Jacqueline T.; Neil S.) **(5 mins)**

It was mentioned that Sarah Robbins would be joining the Task Force in 2024-25. People were also reminded that there would be a mental health workshop for the precariously employed on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025. It was suggested that tenured colleagues adopt a curiosity-empathy approach in their interchanges with the precariously-employed. Further projects moving forward include revising the travel fund guidelines to give better assistance to the precariously employed; adopting more humane hiring practices; giving more advance notice of conferences and paper acceptances to help people plan more efficiently on a limited budget that has to cover basics like rent first; and mobilizing research to make it less hierarchal in nature.

7. *Theatre Research in Canada* Report (President: Robin W.)

**(30 mins)**

There was a lengthy discussion about the changing relationship between *TRIC* (*Theatre Research in Canada*) and CATR. In the earlier years the link between the Association (initially Association for Canadian Theatre History) and the journal (initially *Theatre History in Canada*) as the main bilingual, refereed journal associated with the research/publication profile of the organization had been direct and clear; an automatic subscription to the *Journal* had always been seen as one of the important perks of buying a membership in the Association.

However, in recent years, rising expenses were making automatic inclusion of the *Journal* as part of a CATR subscription a serious financial challenge moving forward. For example a “free” journal subscription for a CATR member costs the Association the equivalent of one membership at the lowest income rate. It was suggested that there were three possible options for dealing with the issue: (1) reducing the amount of money CATR was transferring to UTP to help with the *Journal*’s publishing, and drop the print subscription as a way of cutting back on printing and mailing costs (2) completely remove the *Journal* as part of the membership package and (3) pro-rate the subscription cost to CATR membership according to the income level of the individual member.

It was also suggested by a number of former editors and board members, that the Association’s initial stake or ownership in the *Journal* had become muddled by the latter’s move to UTP. It was suggested that the move had, in some ways, been necessitated by the very success of the *Journal*; it had simply reached the point that even with the help of paid student assistants, the publication and management of the *Journal* was presenting mounting challenges to the time and work of even senior scholars doing executive editorship duties alongside an already heavy teaching, research and administrative load. The difficulty was that instead of supporting and continuing CATR’s ownership in the journal, the move to UTP had severed, or at least highly problematized, its formal association instead.

It was suggested that at least some of this had been complicated by transition issues as complicated by COVID; a lot of notes and documentation over 2020-21 had gone missing. Nonetheless, it was suggested that we let this matter remain unresolved at our own peril, and possibly the *Journal*’s, if the main subscription base for *TRIC* remained CATR, and via joint memberships, SQET.

It was suggested that any new understanding of the relationship between UTP and CATR as regards the journal needed to look at a number of other issues besides how we accommodate the costs of *TRIC* within our membership packages. This included: the role of the *Journal* moving forward as the only bilingual, refereed journal dedicated to Canadian theatre research and how that fit not only into the planning of CATR but SQET as well; the question of editorial succession, which remained unresolved as of spring 2024, and how a CATR editor would fit into the new structure; and additional financial, operational, and administrative issues that needed to be resolved in restoring interconnectedness between CATR and UTP.

It was resolved that these issues would be looked at over the coming year.

It was mentioned that our membership for 2024 stood at 188 members. There was a lengthy presentation given by the Conduct and ARAO committees on systemic prejudice against those who were most vulnerable - socially, racially, culturally, economically, physically, sensually – within the hierarchy of the current socio-economic, cultural and academic hierarchy we work in. It was also urged that CATR strongly consider becoming more active in some of the social justice and humanitarian issues that lay behind the student protests at McGill.

- a. Conference Working Groups Report (WG Liaison Justin B.)
- b. Recognitions
- c. Membership
  - i. Membership Report (Membership Coordinator: Dennis G.)
  - ii. Elections Report (Nominations Committee Chair: Michelle M.)
  - iii. Graduate Students Report (Grad Students reps: Taylor G., Jayna M.)
  - iv. Communications Report (Communications Officer: Taylor G.)
  - v. Committee on Conduct Report (Committee Rep: Selena C.)
- d. Cross-Institutional Reports
  - i. Theatre Agora Report (Theatre Agora Co-Chair: Fraser S.)
  - ii. SQET Report (CATR Liaison to SQET: Cassandre C.)
  - iii. Federation Report (Federation Rep: Katrina D.)
- e. Archival Committee Report (Chair: Jessica R.)

#### *9. Adjournment*

Moved Taylor Graham. Meeting adjourned at 20:25 EDT.