

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: “Energizing the Acting Community: Realism in Actor Training and Performance”

Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (<http://catract.ca/>)

Part of the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities (<http://congress2016.ca/>)

May 28 – 31, 2016, Calgary, AB. CANADA

SEMINAR ORGANIZERS:

Ursula Neuerburg-Denzer (Concordia University), Conrad Alexandrowicz (University of Victoria), Patrick Finn (University of Calgary)

Whether the formulation is post-modern, post-colonial, post-dramatic or post-human, many theoretical developments aim to move us beyond realism, and yet it remains highly influential in actor training and performance. In Canada, in particular, there exists a deep commitment to traditional understandings of realism in performance training. In 1996, Ric Knowles, writing in *Canadian Theatre Review*, posed serious questions about the ideology behind certain approaches to training that purport to bring the actor closer to a realistic or natural expression. In *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater*, Elin Diamond offers suggestions designed to liberate performance from rigid identity constructions. David Eulus Wiles argues that the politics of staging plays in the realist tradition directly supports repressive models unacceptable in any other part of society (*The Politics of American Theatre*). Richard Schechner, writing in *The Drama Review*, has asserted the importance of overturning realism’s powerful forces of racial and cultural boundaries.

More recently, a number of scholars have stepped forward to defend specific forms of realism and its aesthetic and political contributions. For those who research and teach acting, the work of Sharon Carnicke and Jean Benedetti in their engagement (critically and in scholarly translation) with Stanislavsky has uncovered new energy in a field often trapped by its relationship to a particular understanding of *method* acting. Exploring the political ramifications of realism and performance, Jill Dolan, Elaine Aston, and Janelle Reinelt warn of challenges to civil rights entailed in abandoning the *real* world where *real* political oppression destroys all hopes of community. Defending the portrayal of the real as an aesthetic and political statement, Roberta Barker and Cary Mazer explore the ongoing challenge of making classical theatre real for communities today. John Lutterbie, Rhonda Blair, and Philip Zarrilli explore the intersections of cognitive science, Stanislavski, actor training and the nature of the real today. In this country, scholarly work on realism, Canadian Theatre’s “bread and butter,” according to Jerry Wasserman, has seen significant development in theory and scholarship (Barker and Solga), but less so in the realms of actor training and performance.

Whatever our approach to or understanding of realism, it is clear that this area requires reflection in light of current research, practice and politics. The seminar continues the work of a group of artist / scholars who have been exploring contemporary actor training for the past four years, and invites fresh contributions for CATR 2016. (Past participation in the seminar is not required.)

Areas of inquiry might include:

- Are there distinctions between contemporary European and Anglo-American theories and practices of realism?

- What is Canada's commitment to realism in actor training and performance? How do these commitments vary across geography, social, and cultural contexts?
- How do we reconcile the various posts—human, modern, dramatic, colonial—with the ongoing commitment to realism as an aesthetic and political choice?
- What are the practical challenges to opening up our understanding of realism as an epistemological category, and as a mode of performance training?
- Why have the scholarly developments with regard to realism been slow to translate to the studio and the stage?

The seminar is open to all conference attendees. Interested parties should send a 250-word proposal and a brief bio to all three organizers by **January 31, 2016**.

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