FIND A HOME, LOSE A HOME: A RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE JOURNEY INTO ACADIAN HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT. "Meet me in France to help me encounter my Acadian ancestors." The Acadians were French settlers who established a unique culture in Atlantic Canada before being forcibly removed by the British in the 18th century. Taking up the invitation, five disparate artist/scholars gathered in France, but all their approaches would fit under the bigger tent of Research-based Theatre (RbT), an arts-based methodology in which embodied performances are created through the systematic research of real-life events and social issues. How does RbT serve to help us navigate the liminal space between research questions and the creation of theatre itself? If RbT is a term that encompasses a variety of approaches, how would grafting disparate artistic techniques transform our understandings of research?

TROUVER UN FOYER, PERDRE UN FOYER : UNE EXPLORATION DE L'HÉRITAGE ACADIEN PAR LE THÉÂTRE BASÉ SUR LA RECHERCHE

RÉSUMÉ. « Meet me in France to help me encounter my Acadian ancestors. » Les Acadiens étaient des colons français ayant établi une culture unique dans l'est du Canada avant d'être déportés de force par les Britanniques au XVIIIe siècle. Acceptant cette invitation, cinq artistes/chercheur·euse·s aux parcours divers se sont réuni·e·s en France. Bien que leurs approches soient variées, elles relèvent toutes du grand domaine du théâtre basé sur la recherche (RbT). Comment le RbT peut-il nous aider à naviguer l'espace liminaire entre les questions de recherche et la création théâtrale elle-même? Si le RbT est un terme qui englobe une

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variété d'approches, en quoi le croisement de techniques artistiques disparates peut-il transformer notre compréhension de la recherche?

"What have you been up to?"

"I was on an artist retreat in the middle of France."

As far as personal updates go, it doesn't get much more envy-inspiring than that. And that's exactly how five artist/scholars were able to self-report in the middle of October 2022.

What took place was in fact even more inspiring.

We gathered to co-develop a new piece of theatre exploring Acadian history and identity. The reader may wonder: "What exactly does 'Acadian' refer to?" We didn't know either, but together we would soon find out.

"… an artist retreat in France?"

We make use of this reflective essay to share our experiences of Research-based Theatre with you. In doing so, we are afforded an opportunity to revisit the site of shared learning that we developed together: What was it like? What did we come away with? How did this artistic research experience help us learn about a moment in history, and how did we individually connect this experience to our own lives and artistic practices? These questions and more served to scaffold our journey, which took us back in time to explore the roots of the *Grand Dérangement* – the forceful expulsion of the Acadians from Acadia – located in the present-day Eastern Canadian Provinces of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. The expulsion began in 1755 and was the beginning of a tumultuous back and forth between new and old worlds.

As artist/scholars we dove into this historical event by means of five different arts-based approaches. While dwelling on themes that resonated with our own lives and personal struggles, we also considered how these experiences may have enabled our personal quests to experience the frisson of unfamiliar artistry.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

A reliable trope in any ensemble action movie is the montage of disparate accomplices before they come together.

Eva Göksel – Drama pedagogue, multilingual, musician, and mother, is in her kitchen in Uppsala, Sweden. She is attempting to multitask by cooking dinner, preforming childcare, and writing a paper. (Emphasis on *attempting*).

Erika Piazzoli – Researcher, arts practitioner, mother – caught in-between multiple languages, stares at the Irish sea outside the window on her morning commute to Dublin, pausing to see the world through the eyes of her child.

George Belliveau – Drama professor, father, trained actor, and an authentic, certified Acadian. He is the instigator of this rendezvous. Based in Vancouver, he loves to cycle wherever his travels take him. Using self-propelled energy, he inhales, breathes, and discovers new environments and ideas.

Tetsuro Shigematsu – a solo theatre artist, playwright/performer, artist/scholar, father, *also* based in Vancouver – twists the throttle on his electric bike and zooms past George.

Philippe Naud – un peintre professionnel – is in his Parisian atelier, surrounded by his brilliant vivid canvasses. He is doing the impossible: floating mid-air, free as a mote of dust, hovering in the pale light of the studio skylights. Français is his mother tongue.

Who brought this motley crew together? George is a descendant of the Acadians. He is also continuously seeking to expand understandings and applications of Research-based Theatre (Belliveau & Lea, 2016; Shigematsu, et al., 2022). This methodology is a theatrical approach in which embodied performances are created through extensive research and examination of real-life events and social issues, with the aim of exploration and raising awareness. As far as methodologies go, Research-based Theatre (RbT) is a big tent, big enough to encompass artist/scholars as disparate as the ones George gathered as an ensemble in Tours.

By bringing this group together, George hoped to explore timeless questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where are we going? As artist/scholars, the personal questions of our lives and our ever-evolving identities often serve as the impetus for our life's work. How does RbT serve to help us navigate the liminal space between our research questions and the creation of theatre itself? If RbT is truly an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of approaches, how would grafting disparate artistic techniques (devising, painting, play-building, song, dance) transform our understandings of research? To what degree can RbT build bridges to a past that is shrouded in mist?

THE LOCATION

Arriving from various corners of the globe, these five artist/scholars assembled in a place foreign to them all: *gîte La Bulle*, the bubble shelter, located in the middle of France. The converted barn was aptly named, as it conjured the aura of a floating bubble, an oasis away from our daily routines, an inviting space in the quiet countryside outside Tours, France. There were two floors, five bedrooms, a well-equipped kitchen, and a large living room in which we could facilitate our respective workshops. It also boasted a garden in which there was further space for work and play.

EVA: The cottage itself was located in one of the regions of France from which the Acadians originated. Knowing this gave us a sense of connection to history, through experiencing food, language, and landscapes that have likely not changed much since the Acadians left the old country.

TETSURO: Getting out of Philippe's car, the scenery looked like it was designed to be a photogenic backdrop for Instagram selfies. Indoors, there was a winding spiral staircase – double-helix DNA wrought in iron. Tellingly, the original wooden beams of the house were exposed here and there, poking through the newly painted walls. The home's original history, juxtaposed with the contemporary architecture, was a reminder that even beneath the most modern of appearances are the oldest of bones.

PHILIPPE: By entering this bubble, we began to create a home together, cooking meals as well as ideas, and our various languages, cultures, artistries, and pedagogies came together in a melting pot. Our exchanges being predominantly in English, my path to understanding often resembled a kind of obstacle course (the game was worth the effort), thus obliging me to find new ways of understanding. This experience gave me a sense of kinship with the Acadians landing in New France, meeting communities of Mi'kmaq and English.

GEORGE: The space had an open feel such that it seemed we would only be limited by our imagination to seek what was possible. This sense of freedom, *liberté,* was what the Acadians longed for, a place of opportunity, to dream of a better life. The French peasants who left France in the 17th century to eventually develop *Acadie* were from various regions of France with different languages, religions, and cultures. The five of us also brought this diversity of identities and languages to *La Bulle.*

A unique feature of the bubble retreat was the communicative environment we created: we were immersed in a constant flux between

English and *Francais*, at times interpreting from *Anglais* into French and vice versa, and at others moving between the two.

ERIKA: As George mentioned before we met, the retreat was an opportunity to explore themes with no predetermined results, no prescribed outcomes. We were entirely free from stakeholders' expectations, academic outcomes, and quantifiable goals. This was liberating and invigorating; it took the pressure off and left me with a sense of presence and playfulness – in that present playfulness, I felt right at home.

FIVE APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

George was on an artistic quest to reconnect with his Acadian ancestors, a journey so epic that he invited us along to be his travel companions. The path of artistic creation is always fraught, but in the company of collaborators courage is contagious. By convening diverse artist/scholars, George's exploration of Acadia might better refract through our disparate practises. In order to delve into the past, we chose to shift the Acadian story into a space in the present. Together, we reimagined this space. We exchanged ideas, questions, and artistic approaches through a mix of playful, deliberate exercises, and put them 'on the floor' (Belliveau & Sinclair, 2018) to ponder our own modern interpretations of 'Acadians.'

I CHAIR OF POWER, FACILITATED BY GEORGE BELLIVEAU

The Activity

Before the retreat I shared written excerpts, songs, and images as stimuli, starting points to explore Acadian identity, history, and language for our time together. Rather than sitting and talking about what we encountered in our "homework," I thought we could explore key moments through images. Using an adaptation of Boal's (2005) image theatre, I invited the group to creatively arrange three chairs in the open space to depict a moment or a theme that resonated with them around Acadian history.

The non-verbal and playful placing of three chairs would be an opportunity for us to explore, interpret, and make connections. It was a prompt that allowed us to collectively make meaning and share what we saw in the images created by each participant. The emphasis was on what we saw, rather than what it was.

As a group we each brought our own knowledge of diasporic narratives, migratory cultures who seek new homes, and found refuge in language, either an 'imported' language or the locally dominant language or dialect.

Central to our explorations was the understanding that this Acadian story – an epic saga of hope and devastation – was but one variation of a timeless story unfolding again and again throughout human history.

PHILIPPE: In a moment of spontaneity, I precariously balanced two chairs, one against the other, to reflect the fragility of a meeting between two entities, two cultures, who had for a moment created a sense of alliance and balance. With this exercise, George offered us a key to unlocking our collective imaginations.

ERIKA: As we took turns to position and reposition the chairs, I watched those sturdy objects, made for sitting, catapulted before my very eyes. Those chairs were much more than objects for sitting, they were provokers of thought: *How are the Acadian people framed in the pages of history? What would we find in the shadows of history? And, even then, whose shadows would we be looking at?*

TETSURO: As an early career artist/scholar, it could have been intimidating to be among accomplished academics and artists, but there was something so liberating about the act of flipping a chair upside down, or laying it sideways, and then simply noticing what you notice. After all, no one can really show off their expertise at interpreting a jumble of chairs. When it came my turn to arrange, I took one of the chairs across the room, opened the sliding door, stepped outside into the night, and walked barefoot up the gravel driveway. The group had trouble perceiving what I was doing because they had to see through their own reflections against the glass sliding doors. *Can we ever peer into the darkness of the past without the distortions of our own reflections?*

EVA: Boal's (2005) Great Game of Power shows us that there is power in every relationship, even in the seemingly random set-up of everyday objects, such as, in this instance, three chairs. The question this exercise raised for me was: *How are we representing the Acadians in our artistic renderings? Are we erring towards a positive bias, in continually depicting them as a peaceful people, living an idyllic life? If so, what are the ramifications of this?*

II SCROLL PAINTING, FACILITATED BY PHILIPPE NAUD

In my metaphorical artist's backpack are the experiences of establishing a theatre company, working as a mime, and founding a dance company inspired by Japanese theatre and Butoh. A trip to Florence for a workshop in Venice allowed me to discover the painters of the Renaissance. Without my realizing it, painting was taking up more and more space and time in

my life. In a horizon that was slowly brightening, the colours beckoned to me. What is colour? What is light?

Kandinsky had the gift of synesthesia: he could hear colours (https://www.guggenheim.org/articles/checklist/synesthesia-a-visual-symphony-art-at-the-intersection-of-sight-and-sound). Each colour, for him, had the sound of a musical instrument. He painted while playing music. In order to broaden the spectrum of my curiosity, I studied with Jacques Lecoq, who used the language of colour to allow young actors to improve the sensitivity of their craft and vocation (https://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/school-history/?lang=en).

For Lecoq, each colour had its own unique movement. Regardless of the nationality of the speakers, the chosen colour was drawn in similar choreographies within the theatre space. For several years I worked on this discovery, from empirical study to pedagogical practice. I became, what I wanted to be: Chromo-Sapien.

TETSURO: With a flourish, Philippe unravelled a lengthy scroll across the floor. He then placed jars of water with little palettes of black paint along the scroll. He handed us well-worn paint brushes.

ERIKA: I was intrigued by the solemnity of the rituals in the preparation of the workspace: a huge plastic sheet, spread into the air then taped to the floor; a sturdy roll of wallpaper, carefully unfolded on the floor; several sets of brushes positioned at different locations; and, finally, the ink – a pitch-dark monster that stained beyond redemption.

TETSURO: Within this extremely multilingual group, Eva seemed most at ease with real-time translation, and so it was through her that I listened to Philippe enlighten us about the true nature of colours, and how their vibrational energy would manifest in our bodies. For example, green might mean a stuttering form of energy that should cause our painting arms to zig zag.

GEORGE: The painting furthered the images the group had created the night before with the chairs, allowing us to translate our thoughts through another medium, one to which most of us were novices. Philippe's approach invited us to 'get out of our heads.' It started as a solitary activity as we worked on different sections of the large canvas, then it became much more collaborative as we began to engage with one another through our painting. These non-verbal conversations were often symbolic and metaphoric, and they were getting us closer to understanding what an essence of Acadian identity might mean.

EVA: Concerned that I might ruin the artwork, it was with some trepidation that I engaged in painting with India ink. My fear, however, was soon forgotten in the pure joy of co-creating a pictorial story in shades of gray. Attempting to master Lecoq's language of the 7 colours, as taught to us by Philippe, was a good distraction! Using thick and thin brushes we painted our way into the past, following prompts to fill in the negative space and to add to the others' creations. The moment that most resonated with me was when we were each invited to 'read' our image from one end of the scroll to the other, pointing out conflicts, tensions, and reconciliations. Each of us offered a different interpretation of Acadian history, and yet each rendition seemed to connect in some way to the other participants that went before.

TETSURO: Being invited to tell the story of the scroll felt revelatory. It was as if we all dreamt the same dream, but our interpretations were so different – all were fragments of a larger nocturnal vision of the Acadian experience. The scroll was brimming with barely figurative imagery. Are those stick figures interacting with music notes? No, maybe those are haunted trees, being hit by a storm of squiggly arrows? Or are they windswept boats? Well beyond Rorschach inkblots, together we were imaginatively telling the story of a people buffeted about by the tides of history.

ERIKA: We were to avoid sitting down; instead, we were encouraged to squat, paint in one location and then move on, letting our wrists be guided by senses rather than being trapped in a pre-defined narrative (i.e., I will draw a tree). I found myself painting hundreds of dots in a sequence that followed the length of the scroll, like a cartographer mapping my *imaginaire* through time and space. This phase was carefree and joyous, with jazz music playing in the background. At the end of the exercise, as we were asked to discuss our experiences of the activity, I shared my vision of the dots as a timeline. This offer was accepted by the others, culminating in George's annotation of the years of the Acadian *Grand Dérangement* (1755-63). The scroll thus transformed into a visual map – our collective map – of our version(s) of Acadian history. *How could we delve deeper into this map to explore, and experience, shadows of history, identity, and migration?* I proposed for the scroll to be hung from the ceiling, as I had a hunch this would be the pretext for my drama workshop in the afternoon.

III PROCESS DRAMA/WEIGHTS, FACILITATED BY ERIKA PIAZZOLI

The practice was influenced by my background in voice, physical theatre, Butoh dance, and process drama. I used found objects around me: the sheet of plastic paper used by Philippe; ink and brushes; two pieces of music titled *ingranaggi* (inner workings/gears), a keyword which I associated with the Acadians' ingenuity; and a set of antique scales found in our *La Bulle* home.

I found inspiration in the actions carried out by Philippe when preparing the space for his workshop:

1. Spreading the sheet at the start of the session
2. Pouring the ink into the containers
3. Positioning the brushes on the plastic sheet
4. The contamination between the water and the ink
5. The sensation of bare feet on the plastic sheet
6. Folding the plastic sheet at the end of the session

I was also drawn to a sentence, spoken by Eva while reflecting on our work: "Find a home, lose a home." It captured a note of identity, loss, and displacement which aligned with our central theme. It soon became the leitmotif of our time together.

As a warm-up, I asked everyone to hold the edges of the large plastic sheet and, in silence, to practise holding it up and letting it go. We then moved

to a visualisation: the plastic sheet became the sea, with waves ranging from calm ripples to stormy surges. Once we established a sense of group cohesion, I ducked underneath the marine sheet, and invited others to negotiate taking turns in going in and under, emerging on the other side. *How many storms at sea did the Acadians face during their journey across the Atlantic? What did it feel like to 'emerge on the other side'?*

I then shared the actions from Philippe's workshop (points 1-6 above). For each one, I asked participants to recall the sensory experience and anchor it with a movement or gesture. After we practiced those movements in order from 1 to 6, we went on to practice them out of order.

I then directed the participants' attention to the scroll we had created in the morning, our visual map of the Acadian diaspora that had emerged from our *imaginaire*. There was one sentence, spoken by Philippe while we were working, which captivated me: "Find the negative space between the lines and fill it with history." *Could we do the same now, through performance?*

Working in three pairs, participants were to choose a segment of the scroll that resonated with them and that represented a moment in time – framed as the interaction between two Acadians on the verge of departure. Rather than using words, however, they could only use the range of gestures practised in the previous phase, like a newly found alphabet.

In the presentation phase of the work, the three pairs performed their pieces. Minutes before the performances, I remembered seeing an antique object in the kitchen: brass scales with a set of weights. I placed weights of different dimensions in each participant's hand to symbolize whatever the character felt was at stake in the dramatic situation. It felt like inhabiting some of the negative space within the lines of Acadian history. As a final step, I asked participants to write a short text, in role, inspired by the weight they carried (or left behind).

> My digging scoop. I worked the land with this shovel for years. It's small, but it's mine. My brother wanted to give me his, which is much larger. He knew I would need this for the new world. Despite receiving his cherished tool, letting mine go was not easy. But now I have a little part of him, and he has a little part of me. (George)

TETSURO: The invitation to take a gesture, born of the scroll, and repeat that physical phrase until it became the action of a dramatic moment was inspiring. It was as if we were guided to conjure moments of history from the fumes of the painting.

EVA: What resonated with me was the specific use of the drama building blocks, such as the still-image, visualisation, and improvisation, to

transport us in time and space. Erika captured a key phrase from each of us – one that we had used as we read the ink scroll after our painting exercise.

GEORGE: The whole experience was of flowing from one space to another through gentle guidance. The non-verbal and physical allowed us to continue the work of seeking what might be, rather than striving for something definitive, that we had begun in the morning. The exploration allowed us to bump into meanings, unsuspected stories, and narratives.

PHILIPPE: For each moment there was an appropriate gesture. Step by step, we arranged story fragments to create a mimed dance. And Erika knew how to assemble it all, how to make the puzzle come together so that the invisible became visible.

IV EXPLORING LANGUAGE PORTRAITS THROUGH MUSIC, FACILITATED BY EVA GÖKSEL

Our voice is a unique instrument – sharing it is an intimate and sometimes vulnerable act. And yet joining in song is also a source of joy and strength — it creates community. We thus began by singing together. I invited the group to think about how we use our voices in song, in speech, and in different languages and settings.

As a musician (violin, recorder, and vocals) I had already decided to offer a musical experience to the group. However, the decision to work with Language Portraits (Kusters & De Meulder, 2019) was spontaneous and based on a suggestion made by Erika, who had brought along some paper dolls. The work we had done with Philippe and Erika the previous day had prompted me to consider the importance of music as a vessel for carrying and preserving culture, language, and a shared history. The goal of my workshop was to invite everyone to journey back into their past via music to reconnect with lived linguistic and cultural experiences. *What languages and dialects are residing in our bodies now?*

We began by walking around the space and considering how we move and stand (differently) in each of the languages we speak. If we were to map these various languages onto our bodies, where would they reside? Everyone was given a flat paper doll, marking on it where each language or dialect lived.

I next invited the group to lie down and close their eyes. I offered some guided imagery accompanied by music to help reconnect to memories that might be relevant for their language portrait. *What language(s) did you speak there -with your family? And with classmates?* I interwove the questions with

musical prompts that I selected based on my knowledge of the group. The music included children's songs such as 'Au Claire de la Lune,' a Japanese folk song 'Sakura,' and tunes from Italy, France, and North America. As a Canadian, I could not resist including 'Home for a Rest' by Spirit of the West.

We then shared our language portraits with the group, some of us offering stories about childhood language experiences. In a final step, we worked together in pairs to transform a language portrait into a musical soundscape. We ended the session with a final musical offering: I sang "The Raggle-Taggle Gypsies" a traditional Scottish folk ballad, in which a lady choses freedom above all else. A fitting theme as the Acadians also valued their freedom – refusing an oath of loyalty to the British, which eventually became their downfall.

GEORGE: As I recalled the places in my body where French, English, and Acadian language reside, I was deeply torn and nostalgic. Cultural currency and opportunity where I grew up meant losing my Acadian accent as it was deemed 'less than' speaking a proper French, prompting me several times since to wonder what else was lost. My Acadian ancestors were also surrounded by multiple languages in their communities and no doubt faced some of the same challenges of learning and unlearning languages for advancement and survival.

TETSURO: Even though I look Japanese, English is my mother tongue. Yet, when Eva invited us to recall a song from our childhood, only one song came to mind, and it was Japanese, Zousan, ぞうさん. I knew this lullaby by heart, but I wasn't sure if I was pronouncing it properly. I realized it didn't matter. We were already engaged in a much larger, much more impossible task – evoking the lost history of the Acadians. We strive towards the unreachable. We can't succeed, but attempting is all that matters.

ERIKA: While Eva was talking, I recalled a lullaby that my mother used to sing to me, 'Au Claire de la Lune,' and saw myself, as a child, taking comfort in the sound of her French. Moments later, I could not believe my ears when Eva started to play the exact same tune on her recorder! I held back the tears. As I heard the music play, I realized that though French had once been my mother tongue, it was not my language now. Although I understand both English and French, from the beginning of the retreat I had taken refuge in the safety of English, hiding my crippled French, ashamed of having lost my ancestors' language. *Did Acadian people forced to repatriate to France after le Grand Dérangement also feel an uneasy sense of foreignness at their language loss?*

V BUTOH/SURI ASHI, FACILITATED BY TETSURO SHIGEMATSU

I self-identify as a writer, but lately I've been drawing upon my experiences of Butoh, a contemporary Japanese dance form. I originally learned this type of dance in my twenties, while I was living in Japan. I had the privilege of learning from Kazuo Ono himself, one of the originating masters of the form.

When I left Japan nearly three decades ago, I pretty much left Butoh behind as well. But recently, this dance of darkness came thundering back into my life thanks to Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget (https://www.createastir.ca/articles/dcd-hall-of-fame-2022).[1]

Suri ashi refers to a sliding walk found in Japanese dance and martial arts. The head remains steady, as your feet glide horizontally to the ground. This was the foundational movement we executed together as a group, upon which I offered prompts in the form of guided visualizations.

After giving some instructions on how to do *suri ashi*, I prompted everyone to begin moving. Because there wasn't enough room for five adults to do the sliding walk at length, I decided we would do the exercise outside. Each person had their 'lane' that enabled them to walk about 30 metres in a straight line, before turning around. *Suri ashi* is exquisitely slow. In fact, the slower the better.

During *suri ashi*, I offered a series of prompts inviting everyone to reimagine what was happening on different parts of their body. For example, the tension you might feel within your calves from lowering yourself as you walk isn't just muscle fatigue, it is Acadian farmers tilling the fields. On your shoulders are ship masts, swaying in the wind as you make the journey from France to the New World.

After we settled into the rhythm of *suri ashi*, I invited everyone to 'imagine your parents walking behind you, with your grandparents walking behind them, until you could imagine yourself leading the pyramid of your ancestry with every step.' I wanted to reimagine our own individual stories against the backdrop of the larger continuum of our ancestries, as we delved into the parallel history of the Acadians.

EVA: I was struck by the imagery that Tetsuro conjured for us as we balanced and held ourselves still, all the while moving forwards. Imagining one's own life cycle from zygote to death, accompanied – or perhaps shadowed by – our ancestors over generations is an intense way to think about family and home. I thought about how connected these ideas were for me, realising that home was indeed where my family *was*. *Find a home*.

ERIKA: A decade of Butoh training inhabits my joints, muscles, bones. When I realised Tetsuro was going to lead us through a *suri ashi*, I took to the exercise with rigor and commitment. I was standing on the grass, and I was barefoot. This, I soon discovered, was not conducive to the Butoh walk I had been trained to perform in the polished wooden floor of a dance studio, and for the first few minutes my rational side was entirely focused on trying to 'get it right.' Before long, however, my ridiculous attempt to adhere to a self-imposed protocol fizzled away, erased by a visualization that Tetsuro offered: we were invited to imagine our parents and ancestors walking behind us. Being in France, the land where my grandmother and my mother had fled to, was a powerful activator for me. I transcended the technicalities of the exercise and began to see myself as part of a whole, sliding across generations and reaching back to the Acadians, looking for a place where I could walk my walk, as myself.

GEORGE: This final workshop seemed most fitting to cap off our time together. Again, we dwelled in the imaginary as Tetsuro carefully guided us with specific Butoh steps and Acadian images, accompanied by haunting, spiritual music. Also, knowing that the ground we were treading upon could be traced back to some of the original French families who travelled to present-day *Acadie* made each foot placement more poignant. Images of 18th century French peasants working the land were joined with my father and grandfather in large potato fields in present day Acadia. The holding of the mast, the torch, the spirit of what it means to be Acadian was made physical. A responsibility to pass on the story and keep it alive seemed imperative.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is no place on earth with higher, more extreme tides than the Bay of Fundy (*Baie Francaise*) in the centre of *Acadie,* Canada. A wild, beautiful, and fertile place, watered with the blood, sweat, joy, and tears of generations of Acadians, who like the tides, were constantly ebbing and flowing. Arriving from France in the 1600s, a small community of pioneers reclaimed the land from the sea and peacefully lived, worked, and intermarried with local Indigenous tribes for decades.[2] They developed a shared language and culture, steeped in music, tradition, and history. Despite their declared neutrality, the French-speaking Acadians were forcefully expelled from their homes, and from their lives, by the British over a period of 8 years (1755-1763). *Le Grand Dérangement* would continue to affect generations of Acadians. We came from around the world to join George on his journey through the mists of history in search of his ancestors. As RbT practitioners, we are all diverse mariners traveling in

very different crafts. Navigating the liminal space between our research questions and the creation of theatre itself, we climbed into each other's methodological boats, allowing ourselves to blend various artistic techniques, and transforming our understandings of research. This process inspired new questions: Could RbT serve as both compass and current in guiding us through the uncertain waters between research questions and theatrical creation? If RbT is a term that encompasses a variety of approaches, how would grafting disparate artistic techniques transform our understandings of research?

Ultimately, George's exploration remains a solo journey, but as he meets new companions along the way, his insights into what Acadia is, then and now, will continue to evolve like the shifting waves of the ocean.

During the retreat, we drew on RbT methods to tap into our collective *imaginaire*. Throughout our creative processes, two-dimensional textbook-like descriptions of Acadian history gave way to rich, multimodal processes of discovery, connecting to our personal experiences, and re-shaping them into a multi-layered offerings that explored the themes of identity, language, and migration. Textbook history was transformed into lived experience.

The Acadian journey did not end in the 1760's—it continues today. Do we recognise that we are all on the same journey? From far flung places, five artist/scholars came together for a retreat. A retreat from our families, a retreat from the present, but also a departure from our familiar ways of doing things. Artistic collaboration is challenging at the best of times, and colliding different artist/scholars with such vastly different approaches was akin to operating a particle collider. By accelerating our particular artistic approaches to high speeds, we were able to collide them into each other and gain insights into the fundamental nature of displacement and dispossession. We didn't study Acadian history in the traditional sense, but for the briefest of moments, we were afforded glimpses into what life may have been like for the Acadians. By pushing up against each other's practices, and into the mists of history, we expanded our understanding of what RbT can do. It is a Ship of Theses, forever being dismantled and rebuilt, circumnavigating the joys and hardships of the human condition.

NOTES:

1. Prominent figures in the Canadian dance community. Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget are co-founders of Kokoro Dance, a Vancouver- based contemporary dance company known for its Butoh-inspired performances
2. Upon arriving in New France, Acadians formed alliances with the Mi'kmaq while facing territorial tensions with English settlers.

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