AnOther Story: Women's Dramaturgy and the Circulation of Cultural Values at Mulgrave Road

Richard Paul Knowles

ABSTRACT

Richard Knowles uses Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre to exemplify women's production, transmission and transformation of cultural values in a rural context.

RÉSUMÉ

Richard Knowles se sert de l'exemple du théâtre coopératif de Mulgrave Road pour illustrer le rôle des femmes dans la production, la transmission et la transformation des valeurs culturelles dans un contexte rural.

In an essay first published in 1978 Teresa de Lauretis called for "a feminist theory of textual production" that was neither a "theory of women's writing nor just a theory of textuality," but was instead a theory of "women as subjects-- not commodities but social beings producing and reproducing cultural products, transmitting and transforming cultural values."[1] It is neither my purpose nor my place to propose such a theory, but it may be useful to examine some of the ways in which women as subjects and social beings-- theatre workers, community members, and audiences--have engaged in the production, transmission, and transformation of cultural values in the limited context of a small rural theatre company, the Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre in Guysborough, Nova Scotia, since its founding in 1977. In doing so, I want to suggest that these women, both individually and as a group, have constructed what de Lauretis calls "a new practice and vision of the relation between subject and modes of textual production."[2] They have developed one model through which Maritime women, as theatre workers and as audiences, can take possession of their cultural (re)production, including the construction of gender.

Mulgrave Road is not a women's theatre company. It was founded as a collective in 1977 by three men--Michael Fahey, Robbie O'Neill, and Wendell Smith--and only one woman--Gay Hauser. Rather, it is a touring company dedicated to producing new work by Nova Scotians about the Maritimes, primarily north-eastern Nova Scotia. Nevertheless, and although its organizational structure has varied over the years, the Co-op is dedicated to operating collectively and by consensus, and as Cindy Cowan, one of its best-known playwrights, has suggested, this has made the company congenial to many women theatre workers in a way

that theatres in the region with more traditional administrative structures have not been.[3]

Women's dramaturgy began at Mulgrave Road in 1977 with a monologue and song created and performed by Gay Hauser in the company's first production, a collective creation called The Mulgrave Road Show. In the middle of a show she created with Fahey, O'Neill, and Smith, in which Hauser herself and the women of the community's past and present that she represented played primarily supporting roles, the actor used the now familiar image of the quilt in a song that was woven into the narrative form of a woman's monologue about loneliness and isolation. Alone on stage and the centre of focus for the only time in the show, Hauser sat with an old quilt in her lap, and as she told her story she punctuated it with verses of a song about a quilt "of a thousand pieces," of "moments sewn in heartache/Cuttings joined in joy and pain." The song, the speech, and the image of quilting created, according to Cindy Cowan, "a powerful moment of recognition for any woman watching in the audience."[4]

This moment worked more or less as an intervention in The Mulgrave Road Show itself and the community history it presented, first to deconstruct the conventional and condescending distinction between arts (including theatre) and crafts (including quilting), a division which privileges the former term and relegates to secondary status much of the cultural production of women. Secondly, Hauser's intervention modelled future interventions by herself and other Co-op women in the operations of the theatre company itself, together with interventions by the women of the company and the town in the life of the community. Finally, as the quilting metaphor has done for other communities of rural women (notably as represented in Donna Smyth's 1982 novel, Quilt[5]), its use in this scene may be seen to figure forth for Mulgrave Road the communal creativity of women in rural Nova Scotia.

With this monologue, in fact, Gay Hauser initiated a pattern of cultural intervention and cultural production that served to shape the creation and structure of a broad range of women's plays that have emerged at Mulgrave Road in subsequent years.[6] Included in that pattern is an informal but interdependent kind of networking over the course of many productions, in which women who took part in one women's collective creation, scripted play, workshop, or other project,[7] eventually produce or initiate the production of their own play, often involving the company women from the earlier shows, workshops or working groups. Cowan suggests, moreover, that "what gives strength to the women in the Mulgrave Road Co-op is the attempt they have made to build upon each other's work from year to year. Picking up where the last woman left off, they have incorporated the last 'message' or experience and attempted to go one step further in developing plays for women."[8]

In any case, all of the women who have eventually emerged from the Co-op as playwrights, including Mary Vingoe, Cindy Cowan, Carol Sinclair, Jenny Munday, and Mary Colin Chisholm, had previously been involved with other Co-op women in collective creations and/or scripted plays by women, and this pattern is often reflected in diachronic series of intertexts among the shows, as well as structural reflections and parallels in what seems to be an evolving women's dramaturgy at Mulgrave Road.

Because of the unique material conditions shaping the production of theatre in Guysborough county, moreover, there is also a kind of parallel synchronic process involved in any one production. There's not much else to do in Guysborough when a show is in rehearsal. The population is just over 500, there is only one real restaurant (closed much of the time during the off-season--that is, the theatre season), and the Legion Hall houses the town's only bar. The result is that the rehearsal hall itself, which, together with the

usual collection of musical instruments assembled for a show, contains a small kitchen, tape decks, and other comforts, usually becomes a focal unit and social centre outside of scheduled rehearsal hours, where parties and informal get-togethers frequently include both resident and visiting theatre professionals and members of the community. Not surprisingly, conversations tend to revolve around the current project. Individual shows, then, evolve through an intensely focused creation-and-rehearsal process in which a group of theatre workers engage in concentrated interaction with one-another and with the community through an extended period of creative isolation and immersion. As Jan Kudelka said in an interview about her production of Another Story (from which this essay takes its title), "the positive thing about collective drama is that when it works in a community, you end up getting a bonding sense with that community."[9]

Theatre workers in Guysborough are either part of the community in and about which they write-- Gay Hauser and Cindy Cowan lived and raised their families there, and Jenny Munday remained in the town for a time even after her stint as artistic director ended-- or, more often, are billeted with local residents throughout the workshop and rehearsal processes, often with the same people over several shows. This has resulted in a number of close and long-standing friendships among women of the Co-op and the town, friendships which, finally, are a part of the production and reproduction of theatre, and of cultural values, at Mulgrave Road and in Guysborough County. In its most immediate form, this results in the representation of women from the community as characters in the plays, representations such as Mary Colin Chisholm's portrait of a prominent Guysborough citizen, Co-op Society member, and friend, in her play Safe Haven, a character actually performed by the playwright in the revival at the Blyth Festival, Ontario, in 1993. More significantly, however, as Gay Hauser suggests, the ways in which women's plays are produced at the Co-op reproduces the social interaction of the women that are the plays' subjects and audience. Portraying these women theatrically, she claims, reinforces "bonding" within the company: "Rural women aren't aggressive," she continues. "What gives them strength is their friendships, their open dependence on each other, and their community. The result is if they need to mobilize to help each other they can do so quickly."[10]

I have suggested that "women's plays" at Mulgrave Road incorporate an interconnected and associative range of intertexts among the plays themselves, to a degree that other plays that have been produced at Mulgrave Road do not. The pattern for this was set by the 1980 collective creation, One on the Way (See Figure #1), the Co-op's first play created explicitly by and for women (with musicians Michael Fahey and Stephen Osler), which developed out of the original quilting monologue in The Mulgrave Road Show, and out of a workshop held by Gay Hauser at Guysborough Municipal High School. "Conceived," as the program says, by Gay Hauser, and created by director Svetlana Zylin and actors Mary Vingoe, Nicola Lipman, and Hauser herself (who was five months pregnant at the time), the play used an evocative associative structure to deal with social issues having to do with pregnancy and motherhood that were of direct concern to rural women in 1980; it contained echoes of and references to material from the earlier collective creations, The Mulgrave Road Show (1977), Let's Play Fish (1978), and The Coady Co-op Show (1979); and it also anticipated characters and situations that were later developed, for example, by Cindy Cowan in Spooks (1984), and Jan Kudelka and the company (including Cowan and Vingoe) in Another Story (1982), a collective creation about the daytime "soaps" and the women who watch them. These shows, in turn, inspired and were reflected in others, in an expanding intertextual (and intertextural) pattern that, among other things, insists

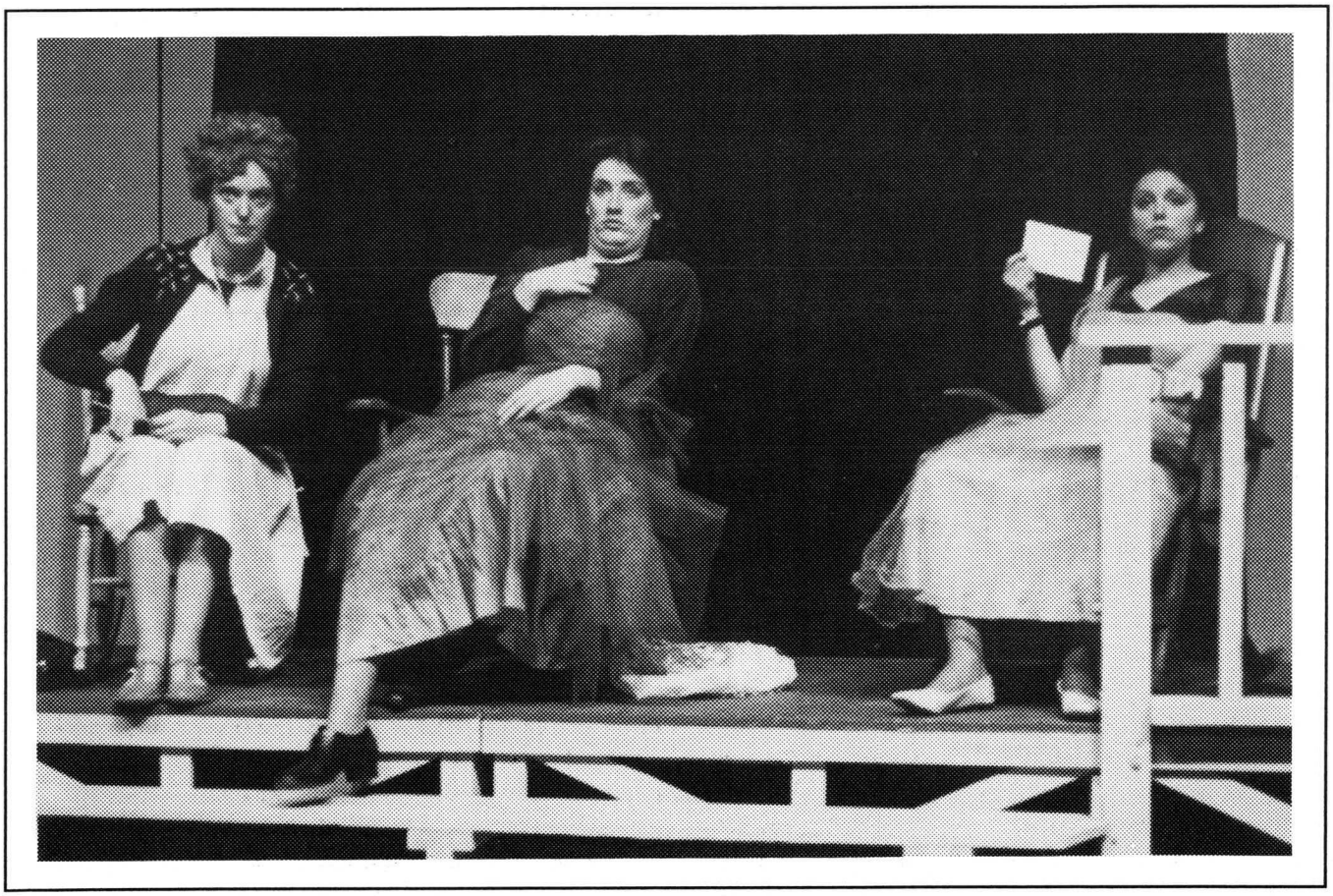

Figure 1. "One On The Way" by Gay Hauser. Left to right: Gay Hauser, Mary Vingo, and Nicola Lipman

on the recognition of work of all kinds performed by women, including creative work, and refuses to let it be lost.[11]

The intertextuality of these productions derives directly from their modes of production, and it is typical of women's theatre at Mulgrave Road. It also combines with the productions' immediate and recognizable references to and reflections of their specific social and cultural contexts in Guysborough County to open the shows outward to the audience as community. It attempts, that is, to create an interactive dramaturgy in which the subject is at once writer, performer, and audience, and in which participation in the theatrical event functions as a constitutive act of the participant as subject.[12] Achieving their sense of authenticity from a structural grounding in shared experience, rather than from authenticating documents or objects, as in the documentary collective creations of companies such as Theatre Passe Muraille, or from shared prior political commitments as in the work of explicitly constructed Marxist or feminist collectives, these plays root themselves more fully than do most Canadian collective creations in the community that they share with their audiences. Moreover, they tend to function more fully as collectives, even on those occasions when one playwright officially fulfils what Foucault calls "the author function."[13]

I have been concerned to this point primarily with the social production and reproduction of cultural values in women's plays at Mulgrave Road, but, of course, what is in question is not simply the transmission of cultural values based on territorial (as opposed to relational) notions of community rooted in landscape and history, but their transformation, including the (re)construction of gender.[14] These plays are, of course, socially produced, performed in the world, but they are also socially productive, "performed upon the world," as Louis Montrose has put it in reference to Renaissance theatre, "by gendered individual and collective human agents." Versions of society, of history, and of gender are instantiated, but they are also contested and, potentially, transformed.[15]

Transformation has been seen by feminist theatre critic Helene Keyssar not only as a theme, but as a frequently-employed structural principle in women's dramaturgy.[16] In this formulation, transformation replaces the essentialist, universalist, and "affirmative," in Marcuse's sense,[17] Aristotelian principles of reversal and recognition (of a pre-existing normative subject), with an activist encoding of the possibility of social change. It is possible to see a development in women's dramaturgy at Mulgrave Road of transformative modes of theatrical representation that not only reject traditionally self-contained patriarchal structures of linear narrative--reversal, recognition, and closure--but that also reproduce structurally and represent dramatically their own modes of production. Play after woman's play at Mulgrave Road[18] experiments "interstructurally" with and around forms in which community, and the circulation of community values, serve as both subject matter and organizing principle. These plays are different from one another, and they employ different strategies for cultural intervention, but they also seem structurally to "quote" one another much in the same way as they contain networks of situational and linguistic intertexts.

A brief look at a few representative plays by Co-op women will show more clearly how they function. Each of these plays eschews mystification or mythologizing in favour of directly and explicitly addressing concrete historical or social situations;[19] each replaces focus on a single central character with a structure in which the community itself functions as hero(ine); each employs, in its own way, interwoven strands of story and lyrical expression rather than traditional linear narrative; and each explicitly or implicitly explores issues that are constructed as having to do with women's cultural production, or the production of women's culture.

Mary Vingoe's Holy Ghosters, 1776 focuses on three strong women of three different cultures and generations at the precise historical moment of the Eddy rebellion and the battle that kept New Brunswick and Nova Scotia from becoming the fourteenth American colony. Holy Ghosters is typical of women's plays at the Co-op in that it is structured around an ensemble of actors playing a community of characters rather than around the story of its best-known (male) historical figure, Richard John Uniacke. In its first production the play was criticized for this by reviewers.[20] As Cindy Cowan remarks, "I suppose when you put a famous man on stage and then upstage him with three women you are inviting trouble."[21] But, in fact, the replacement of a unified central story line with an overlapping narrative structure, built around four stories at various stages of development over the course of the action, can more usefully be seen as the production's characteristic strength than as a weakness. This innovative structure functions in Holy Ghosters to create, for the audience as well as the characters, a diachronic sense of community over time that reflects the play's own relationship to its dramatic predecessors at Mulgrave Road.[22] In spite of the almost overwhelming sense of displacement that is the experience of all the play's characters, Vingoe employs three basic devices to create for the audience an oddly reassuring sense of constant change: 1) the vagaries of a problematized historiography (the question of who controls the historical record is implicit throughout); 2) an evolving, ever-changing tidal marshland setting, a landscape swept by "the ever-wind"; and 3) a shifting sense of both territorial and relational community in a dramatic action in which allegiances are unstable and interests divided, as family and other units dissolve, fracture, and re- assemble throughout the play. The contemporary Nova Scotian audience discovers, then, in the experience of displacement that they share with the characters and with one another, an ironic but unsentimental sense of continuity over time. The play ends, moreover, with the promise of renewed community among the women, as its two central women share a baked potato dug from earth scorched by the victorious British troops. The conclusion leaves the audience with a recognition of fragmentation and isolation as experiences that are or can be shared, a sense of dislocation that is also, ironically, located, as a "site" of potential change.[23]

Jenny Munday's Battle Fatigue, (See Figure #2) even more clearly than Holy Ghosters, sets out to recover women's history, and is based on extensive personal research on the experiences of women in World War II. Munday structures the play around envelopes of flashbacks to three time periods, and, like Vingoe, around an ensemble of actors doubling roles and acting out different but parallel stories. Both playwrights, moreover, portray the coming together of women of different backgrounds and sensibilities to frame the possibility--not always realized--of new or different kinds of community among women who have made different and apparently incompatible choices. Both plays, then, echo the experience of the groups of women from different backgrounds in the communities, theatrical and other, through which they were produced. Battle Fatigue, moreover, makes its potential for intervention in the contemporary culture of its audiences explicit by framing its historical action within a series of present-tense scenes in which a feminist daughter stands in for the audience, as she and we learn from her mother about the older woman's wartime past. As the play ends, mother, daughter, and audience become aware that "the point is ... what do we do now?"[24]

Both Holy Ghosters and Battle Fatigue also move towards a characteristic of the "new textual form" called for by de Lauretis, in which "rational historical inquiry is continually intersected by the lyrical and

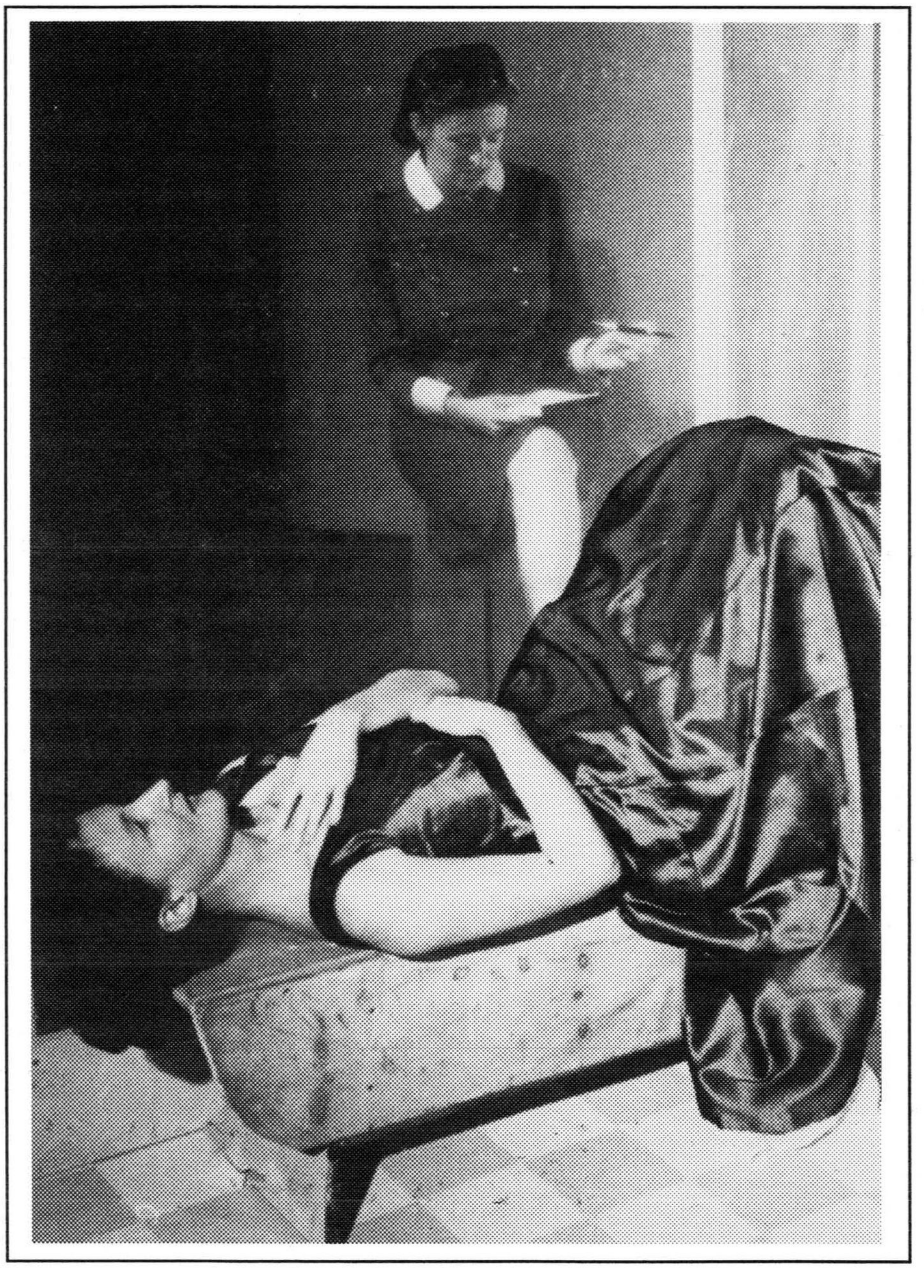

Figure 2. "Battle Fatigue" by Jenny Munday
Mary-Colin Chisholm as Frankie
Mary-Dale Steeves as Sally

the personal." Not only do both plays intercut the documented, historically verifiable "facts" with explorations of their subjective impact,[25] but they introduce lyrical passages, personal "arias" that problematize the historical and document what de Lauretis calls "the resonance of the (documented) historical event in the subject."[26] Holy Ghosters, for example, features a choric character, an ageless Acadian woman, Old Aboideaux, who wanders homeless on the marshes and whose Lear-like odes to wind and weather provide historical and poetic resonances even as the character embodies the direct and personal impact of abstract historical events such as the expulsion of the Acadians prior to the play's action. Battle Fatigue less clearly and less frequently employs the lyric mode--though scene-change songs are used effectively--but the play is full of subjective expression in personal narratives about the historical past that function as personal histories, or what might usefully be called "documentaries of subjectivity," recording, like Holy Ghosters, the material impact on people's lives of the abstractions of history.

Carol Sinclair's musical play, Idyll Gossip (See Figure #3), moves still further away from the formal realm of historical documentary and further towards both lyrical expression, through song, and the explicit exploration of rural maritime women as producers and transformers of culture. This play also employs an ensemble of actors to portray a community as its central character, but more clearly than in any of the other plays under discussion, this one both partakes of and is about women's circulation of cultural values through the arts, and women's reclaiming of agency in the construction of gender in the Maritimes. A metatheatrical musical created by Maritime women about Maritime women creating music, Idyll Gossip was inspired by stories of women such as Rita MacNeil, or the women of Mulgrave Road, who struggle against the overwhelming and functionally hegemonic resistance to women's participation in the performing arts within the conservative patriarchal culture of the rural Maritimes. The play's external action concerns itself with a group of rural women who form a band, gradually overcoming first their own and then their society's reluctance to take their musical aspirations and abilities seriously. However, the real life and energy of the play derive less from this narrative than from the songs that are performed by the women throughout, songs that demonstrate and assume the subjectivity of women as cultural workers and audience members. Ranging from satirical ("Shackwacky Blues") or parodic ("Girls Are Just Guys Played on 45") to deeply expressive in tone ("If You Think it Was Easy"), these songs cumulatively create a powerful sense of women's subjectivity. In fact, there is a sense in which the subjective--traditionally regarded as inappropriate to the supposed "objectivity" "natural" to the dramatic mode--takes over from and transforms the play's "real" external narrative, which by traditional wisdom is the essence of drama, but which in this play is often improbable, farcical, or absurd when compared to the expressive (and subjective) sensibilities, interpretations, and viewpoints of the women themselves, both actors and characters. A medley which ends the play by reprising several of its songs moves from "Hormones/ Can this be real?/Hormones/ It's the Way I feel!", to "We're getting into the action/ And we do it just like you/ But we move a little faster/ And we see it through and through." It concludes, literally and figuratively, with "self respect."[27]

These plays, then, like all of the women's plays so far produced at Mulgrave Road, function both as products of the cultural conditions, theatrical and otherwise, through which they have emerged, and as agents of transformation within those cultures. But it is important not to romanticize the involvement of Mulgrave Road in the community. Although the engagements that I have described above are central and essential, the degree to which the Co-op is capable of effecting meaningful cultural intervention derives in part from its existence at a point of intersection between cul-

Figure 3. "Idyll Gossip" by Carol Sinclair
Left to right: Jenny Munday, Emmy Alcorn, Mary-Colin Chisholm, Camille James, Beth MacCormack

tures, including its bringing to Guysborough theatre workers of different, and occasionally locally disruptive backgrounds, interests, and lifestyles. Mulgrave Road's efficacy rests in its being at once part of, mimetic of, and external to the community in and through which it works, a positioning which allows it both to celebrate and criticize that community, but one which is also fraught with potential and occasionally very real tensions and conflicts within the company and between the company and the community. In practice, and even in part as a result of these tensions, the company at its best functions as a transformative "fissure" in an often rigidly closed culture by introducing elements new to it, and by providing focal points for women and others who are members of the community, but are constructed by it as "other" or ex-centric. In part, then, the Co-op functions as a continually shifting and liminal community that is both transformed by and transformative of the culture and society of Guysborough County, but within parameters that, though fluid, are defined at any one time by the degree to which the company's shows are products of the culture which they represent. It may not be incidental to note, for example, that Mulgrave Road has so far been able to intervene only in very limited and almost imperceptible ways in the gendered construction of class, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation in Guysborough County, except perhaps insofar as its work has helped to make possible future interventions in these areas as the products of what is now a shifting cultural ground.[28] Neither is it incidental, however, given the cultural interventions effected by women within and through "women's plays" produced at Mulgrave Road, that change has been effected within the structure of the company itself, which can be seen, importantly, to serve as an exemplary employer in the town of Guysborough: Mulgrave Road's last three Artistic Directors, Jenny Munday, Allena MacDonald, and Emmy Alcorn, have been women. All of their predecessors in the position were men.[29]

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I want to end this essay, not with a conclusion or an invocation of closure, but with what I think of as "disclosure". The essay itself, of course, is both a product of and an intervention external to the workings of Mulgrave Road and the larger communities of Guysborough and the Maritimes. As a man, from urban Ontario, I have an outsider's tendency to romanticize my own discursively constructed pastoral understandings of both "the maritime sense of community," and "the community of women," and thereby potentially to gloss over practical problems, personal frictions, and less than ideal (or even adequate) material circumstances surrounding and shaping the production of theatre in an impoverished and isolated area.[30] As a theatre worker and member of the Mulgrave Road Co-op who has lived and worked in the Maritimes, moreover, and as an academic critic who has written about Mulgrave Road, I have a stake in celebrating and perpetuating the work of the company. I hope, nevertheless, that there is a limited liminal role for a paper such as this one in reproducing, with inevitable and perhaps constructive shifts, the work of Co-op women in the frame of another discourse; in supporting (and publicising) the production and reproduction of cultural work by the women of Mulgrave Road; and in the transmission and transformation of cultural values in the Maritimes.[31]

I would like to thank Christine Bold, Jennifer Harvie,

NOTES

1. Teresa de Lauretis, "Gramsci Notwithstanding, or, The Left Hand of History," Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), 92-3. The essay was first published in Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics, 4 (Winter 1978), with the title "The Left Hand of History."

2. De Lauretis, 92

3. Cindy Cowan, "Messages in the Wilderness," Canadian Theatre Review 43 (Summer 1985), 105. For a history of the early years of the company, see Richard Paul Knowles, "Guysborough, Mulgrave, and the Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre Company," in Larry McCann, ed., People and Place: Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1987), 227-246 (published with revisions as "The Mulgrave Road Co-op: Theatre and the Community in Guysborough County, N.S." in Canadian Drama/L'Art dramatique canadien 12, 1 [1986], 18-32). For a discussion of one representative version of the company's administrative structure, see Knowles, "Voices (off): Deconstructing the Modern English-Canadian Dramatic Canon," in Robert Lecker, ed., Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1991), 108-109.

4. Cowan, "Messages," 106.

5. Donna E. Smyth, Quilt (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1982). Smyth's description of quilting, p. 49, provides a remarkable parallel to the process of play production at Mulgrave Road that I am outlining:

> It was their quilt now, a thing they were doing together.... As the design became clear, so did all the stories.... They'd told each other these stories, all the time working and stitching. Watching how it fit together, becoming something other than the pieces they held in their hands.

The breakdown between male "art" and female "craft" has been actively pursued, of course, by visual artists such as Joyce Weiland, whose famous "Reason over Passion" quilt provides a particularly apt example.

6. "Women's plays" at Mulgrave Road, with dates of first production, include: One on the Way (collective, 1980, unpublished); Another Story (collective, 1982, unpublished); Holy Ghosters, 1776 (by Mary Vingoe, 1983, forthcoming in Plays from Mulgrave Road, ed. Richard Paul Knowles [Jolicure, N.B.: Anchorage Press]); Spooks: The Mystery of Caledonia Mills (by Cindy Cowan, 1984, unpublished); A Child is Crying on the Stairs (collective with writer Nanette Cormier and based on her book of the same name [Windsor, Ontario: Black Moss Press, 1983], 1985, unpublished); A Woman from the Sea (by Cindy Cowan, 1986) published in Canadian Theatre Review 48 [Fall 1986], 62-110, and in The CTR Anthology, ed. Alan Filewod [U of Toronto P, 1993], 339-88); Beinn Bhreagh (by Cindy Cowan, 1986, unpublished); Idyll Gossip (by Carol Sinclair, 1987, Playwrights Union of Canada compuscript, 1987); Battle Fatigue (by Jenny Munday, 1989, published in Canadian Theatre Review 62 [Spring 1990], 50-74); and Safe Haven (by Mary Colin Chisholm, 1992, published in Theatrum 38 (April/May 1994), S1-S15). This list is somewhat arbitrary, in that there have been other plays by women, collective creations that were predominantly the work of women, and productions that were directed by women and/or cast women in central roles. Moreover, the plays that I have listed all involved men, in some capacity, as actors, musicians, designers, directors or technicians. I have, however, selected productions of plays that were identified by their creators as plays by, for, or about women.

7. Mulgrave Road has hosted or initiated many community-based projects within their theatre building around which theatrical activities revolve. These include such things as hosting meetings of GLOW (Guysborough Learning Opportunities for Women); initiating and hosting the meetings of a weekly creative writing workshop open to anyone in the community; producing interventionist plays and workshops on such things as child abuse (such as Feeling Yes, Feeling No), in local schools; school tours of Christmas shows, "Roadies," a theatre camp for children offered each summer; and so on. Interestingly, writing about the co-op, including my own, here and elsewhere, has tended to focus on the so-called "major productions," and to marginalize these other, equally important projects, many of which have to do with areas traditionally seen as "women's issues."

8. Cowan, "Messages," 105.

9. Jan Kudelka interviewed by Basil Deakin, "'Collective

creation' Another Story wowed audiences in Guysborough," The Chronicle-Herald/The Mail Star 6 April 1982.

10. Quoted in Cowan, "Messages," 106-107. It is true that many of the women in the community who have forged friendships with theatre workers have been those of sufficient economic standing to be able to afford homes with extra room to billet actors. This has often (but not always) meant that the theatre's connections have been with women in leadership positions within the community-- doctors, schoolteachers, and so on. There have been fewer direct associations with working-class women, and fewer still with the relatively large black community on the edge of town.

For a less sanguine account of the material conditions for the production of theatre in Guysborough than the one I have provided, told from the perspective of an Artistic Director of the company, see Jenny Munday, "The View From Inside the Electrolux," Canadian Theatre Review 71 (Summer 1992), 88-91.

11. See Cowan, "Messages," 108.

12. Insofar as the mandate of the company is the production of new work in and for Northeastern Nova Scotia, particularly Guysborough County, virtually all theatrical productions at Mulgrave Road serve this function, not just those that I have called "women's plays." The latter, however, although they are performed before a general audience, are distinctive insofar as they are pro-actively constitutive of an explicitly gendered regional subjectivity.

13. Michel Foucault, The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 101-120.

14. The distinctions between territorial and relational notions of community are derived from Derek L. Phillips, Looking backward: A Critical Appraisal of Communitarian Thought (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). Phillips defines territorial communities as those determined primarily by geo-political boundaries, and relational communities as those determined primarily by the nature and quality of inter-relationships among membership with shared interests. What I am describing as being forged in Guysborough by the work of the women of Mulgrave Road is perhaps usefully seen as a relational community, or community of interest, existing within the boundaries of an isolated rural territorial community, in which the memberships of both territorial and relational communities have traditionally been marginalized.

15. See Louis A. Montrose, "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," in The New Historicism, ed. H. Aram Veeser (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 23.

16. Helene Keyssar, Feminist Theatre (New York: Grove Press, 1985).

17. See Herbert Marcuse, Negotiations: Essays in Critical Theory (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 88-133.

18. A group of plays that include the collective collaboration with Nanette Cormier, A Child is Crying on the Stairs, and Cindy Cowan's three plays, Spooks, A Woman from the Sea, and Beinn Bhreagh, are partial exceptions to the patterns I am examining here, and require separate treatment. Cowan's plays, moreover, especially A Woman from the Sea, seem to take and to invite a radical feminist approach which I don't feel is appropriate for or available to me as a male critic, unlike the materialist feminist theory on which I am drawing (but which I hope I am not appropriating) here. For a kind of radical feminist approach to A Woman from the Sea, see Yvonne Hodkinson, Female Parts: The Art and Politics of Female Playwrights (Montreal & New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), 133-158.

19. See de Lauretis, 92. Interestingly, again, Cindy Cowan's Spooks and A Woman From the Sea would seem to be the only exceptions to the general rule that plays by women at Mulgrave Road have avoided mysticism and mythologizing. In the former, Cowan attempts to deconstruct media manipulations of the story of a young girl accused of setting fires in her parents' home in 1921; and in the latter she tries to construct a radical feminist and socially conscious myth of origins and other things.

20. See, for example, Barbara Senchuck, The Chronicle Herald/The Mail Star (Halifax), 3 November 1983.

21. Cowan, "Messages," 108.

22. Cowan notes that Another Story was instrumental in leading Vingoe "to initiate her own production, Holy Ghosters," "Messages," 108.

23. For a more detailed discussion of Holy Ghosters on which this discussion draws, see Richard Paul Knowles, "'A Sense of History Here': Mary Vingoe's Holy Ghosters, 1776," in The Red Jeep and other landscapes: A Collection in Honour of Douglas Lochhead, ed. Peter Thomas

(Sackville & Fredericton, N.B.: Mount Allison U & Goose Lane, 1987), 20-27.

24. Munday, Battle Fatigue, 74.

25. The primary source for Holy Ghosters is Thomas Raddall's novel, His Majesty's Yankees, but Raddall is famous for his original and detailed historical research. Moreover Vingoe also drew extensively on primary sources, notably John Robinson and Thomas Rispin's (1774) Journey Through Nova Scotia. Battle Fatigue is based on an extensive series of interviews with Maritime women of Munday's parent's generation who lived through the Second World War.

26. De Lauretis, 92.

27. Sinclair, Idyll Gossip, 64-5.

28. The Co-op has addressed some of these issues, in productions such as Victory! The Saga of William Hall, V.C. in 1981, which told the story of the first Nova Scotian, and the first black man to win the Victoria Cross, in the battle of Lucknow; Mary Colin Chisholm's Safe Haven (1992), which treated the intrusion of AIDS into the community; and Another Story, in which class is at least implicitly at the heart of the play. These interventions have been important, and if vestigial are in no way insignificant. Rarely, however, has the Co-op faced racism, classism, or homophobia in the community itself head on, at least to the time of this writing.

29. MacDonald's stint in the position, in fact, began as a co-Artistic Directorship with Lorne Pardy, but Pardy resigned before they had completed their first season and MacDonald remained in the role for a three-year term.

30. For examples of these various difficulties, see Munday, "The View from Inside the Electrolux."

31. Since this paper was written Mulgrave Road, sadly, has abandoned its co-operative structure. It now operates under the auspices of a Board of Directors made up of artists and members of the community. The Board appoints the Artistic Director and the company's administrative staff.