

# The Steveston Noh Project

## *The Gull* as Intercultural Redress Theatre<sup>1</sup>

Only in the last few decades has the wartime internment of Japanese Canadians entered public consciousness with the accumulating weight of histories, memoirs, novels, photo exhibits, historic sites, and even a recent children's opera, thanks to the passionate energies of Japanese Canadian artists and historians.

— Daphne Marlatt, “How *The Gull/Kamome* Took Flight”

Nearly twenty years after the government redress settlement with Japanese Canadians, the Vancouver theatre company Pangaea Arts began work on a Canadian Noh play about two brothers from Steveston, BC, who return in 1949 after their family's World War II internment. *The Gull's* play-script, created by Canadian poet Daphne Marlatt, unfolds the tensions between forced uprooting, reclaimed space, and multi-generational trauma negotiated by survivor witnesses. As Jean Miyake Downey observes, such an artistic grassroots redress initiative signals the resonance of ongoing and unfinished work: “*The Gull* is a powerful expression of historical fear, shame, and grief that still haunts Canada's Pacific Coast and reaches back into Japanese Canadian diasporan family connections” (n. pag.).<sup>2</sup> In the play, as the brothers return to fish the BC coast, they are confronted by a startling seagull figure who embodies the ghost of their mother; as the lead character in the role of the *Shite* (pronounced sh'tae), she is a forceful yet anguished presence who challenges them for neglecting her during the internment and also urges them to return to her natal Japan.

The stories of the internment's aftermath are animated through the multi-artist, intercultural collaboration process that came to be known as the Steveston Noh Project (SNP).<sup>3</sup> Co-directed by Japanese Noh master Akira Matsui and American Noh artist Richard Emmert, the SNP interrogates the limits of the official state apology through its focus on multiple registers of family, community, political, ethical, and Buddhist priorities. As Richard Emmert suggests, the

play-script by itself does not constitute Noh theatre, since the interrelationship between “music, movement, and text” is integral to the art form (“Preface” 10-13). Thus, despite the limitations of imaginative reconstruction, in this article we seek to engage the multi-artist process that led to the convening of the intercultural creative team, the training of the artists, the development of the play, and the performances of *The Gull*.<sup>4</sup> Through its staged negotiation between Japanese, Japanese Canadian, and North American theatre artists; its bilingual production in Japanese and English; and its multiple modalities of stylized Noh and Western dramatic realism, the SNP as case study is suggestive of the contribution that intercultural theatre might make to unofficial redress practices “from below” in contemporary Canada.<sup>5</sup> We see artistic contributions as essential to a multi-focal process that is often necessary long after official ceremonies, apologies, and reparations are over.

A contemplative ethos integral to the Buddhist roots of classical Noh further extends the intercultural redress possibilities of the SNP (Downey n. pag.).<sup>6</sup> Because Buddhism has been cultivated in the West over the past four decades by Tibetan and other traditional teachers, and because it encourages a contemplative ethics, the Buddhist register of Noh opens up a space in which difficult intercultural questions, in the context of reckoning with historical injustice, might be sensitively engaged.<sup>7</sup> In fact, we suggest that the Buddhist contemplative ethos threaded throughout the dramatic action, design, pacing, choreography, and thematic structure of the SNP may potentially be generative of ethically attentive witnessing positions within the play and among diverse audience/reader positions. From this standpoint, as two academic women from variably privileged locations, we ask how the play works to unsettle our complicity (along with other settler beneficiaries) with uneven power relations in the Canadian state via its intercultural and Buddhist ethos. Joanne Tompkins’ notion of intercultural theatre as producing a “diversity of contact points” for a “heterogeneous audience” (qtd. in Knowles and Mündel xv) suggests that critical dislocation and new possibilities for encounter may happen precisely in the spaces in-between, arising from dissonance between two or more cultural, subjective, or linguistic modes.

From the perspective of state beneficiaries, acknowledging complicity is neither an end of nor an alibi for taking responsibility in an ongoing redress process. As theatre scholar Julie Salverson points out, an ethical witnessing stance involves a risky process, based on “the willingness to step forward without certainty. The goal is relationship, not success” (246). In our project, we align with a stance that requires self-interrogation from those who have

benefited from state actions, without succumbing to critical paralysis or retreat in fear of “appropriation” or “getting it wrong” (Salverson 250-51). “Getting it wrong” may in fact be part of the ethical practice, an opportunity for critical unsettlement. A stance of openness to critique and a willingness to further rethink and rework ideas as an unfinished process may be conducive to the difficult practice of critical interculturalism as a mode of responsibility-taking within unofficial redress initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

The creative process of the SNP suggests a commitment to ethical intercultural collaboration, as modelled by the core creative team’s practices of apprenticeship across sites of difference. The idea for a Japanese Canadian story presented in traditional Noh style was Heidi Specht’s; as artistic director of Pangaea Arts, she had already spearheaded many intercultural endeavours with project and production manager Lenard Stanga, and had herself trained in Noh dance and chant with Richard Emmert (Knutson 9).<sup>9</sup> Specht asked Matsui to play the lead role of the *Shite* as well as to direct and choreograph the play. Additionally, she asked her former teacher Emmert (a long-time student of Matsui’s) to train the actors in the techniques of Noh performance, to lead the chorus, and to compose the music.<sup>10</sup> The core creative team further included Wakayama mask-maker Hakuzan Kubo; Japanese Canadian actors who played the role of the *Waki*, the elder of the two Canadian-born fishermen brothers, and the *Ai*, an older Japanese fisherman; as well as a Filipino Canadian actor who played the *Wakitsure*, younger brother.<sup>11</sup> Performances were produced at locations of historical importance to the communities most affected: two staged readings were held at the Gulf of Georgia cannery (now a historic site) and at the Nikkei Cultural Centre in Burnaby, BC (May 2005), followed by six performances of *The Gull* in the plaza at Richmond City Hall (May 2006).<sup>12</sup>

Collaboration between theatre artists is usually integral to any dramatic production, so in this sense, the dynamics of the SNP may be unremarkable. Yet in an intercultural and transpacific collaboration such as the SNP, attention to asymmetries (especially of power and privilege) is essential; this requires conscious strategies of apprenticeship that support a relational ethics. We define apprenticeship as involving an approach of “standing under,” as Krista Ratcliffe terms it in *Rhetorical Listening*, rather than claimed “mastery” of diverse experience or practices (28). Such a stance is indicated in the SNP through the extensive time and energy commitments necessary for the participants to develop cultivated awareness of historical, cultural, and subjective contexts. Apprenticeship undertaken as “standing under” may

partially unsettle the agency accrued by culturally privileged subjectivities. In this project, for instance, non-Japanese theatre artists and the playwright were in the position of being tutored and led by the culturally specific priorities of the Japanese Canadian story and the Japanese Noh aesthetic, as well as by the co-direction of Matsui and Emmert.

Pangaea Arts' productions have developed within a surge of transnational and Canadian interest in intercultural theatre. From the earliest scholarly conversations, we note a debate between universalizing priorities (exemplified by critics like Erika Fischer-Lichte, directors like Peter Brooks, and productions such as Brooks' *Mahabharata*) and more nuanced attention to postcolonial and diasporic priorities promoted by critics like Rustom Bharucha (see *The Politics of Cultural Practice* and "Somebody's Other") and Patrice Pavis ("Introduction"). Bharucha's essay "Somebody's Other: Disorientation in the Cultural Politics of Our Times" points to how early intercultural theatre practices were embedded in ethnocentric and ahistorical colonial systems of power, oppression, and orientalism. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel's "*Ethnic, Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*" offers contemporary Canadian engagement with such questions. Critics in this volume suggest how intercultural theatre is no longer concerned with finding universal truths that unite cultures, but rather with highlighting specificity and difference. Indeed, in his introduction to the *Intercultural Performance* special issue of *The Canadian Theatre Review*, Knowles suggests that "in spite of a shaky history internationally," in which Western artists were often guilty of having "exoticized, commodified, and decontextualized cultural forms" from elsewhere, "a kind of grassroots interculturalism-from-below has been evolving, in which productive exchange takes place across multiple sites of difference" (3-4). Knowles' acknowledgement of a "grassroots" movement does justice to the burgeoning field of small-scale theatre companies such as Pangaea Arts, which are changing not only the field of intercultural theatre in Canada, but also theatre more generally.<sup>13</sup> In this instance, contemporary intercultural theatre's commitment to staging "contact points" across "multiple sites of difference" suggests its productive contribution to the theatre of redress that invites multiple actors into a space of complex engagement, witness, and responsibility-taking.

From the outset of the SNP, every effort was made to involve Japanese Canadian and/or Japanese artists as the lead artists in the creative team.<sup>14</sup> Specht first invited Japanese Canadian Joy Kogawa, author of the post-internment novel *Obasan*, to write the script. She declined, but suggested

instead Daphne Marlatt because of her close engagement with Japanese Canadian history and culture since the 1970s. In 1975, as part of a collaborative team led by interviewer and translator Maya Koizumi, Marlatt edited an oral history of the uprooted fishing community of Steveston, BC, published as *Steveston Recollected*. This was followed by a collaboration with photographer Robert Minden on a long poem, *Steveston*.<sup>15</sup> Marlatt, then, is no stranger to intercultural and artistic collaboration. Further, as Downey notes, the play-script is a collaboration with Japanese Canadian storytellers and writers: “Marlatt cast the creation of this play out like a fisherman’s net, interweaving a Steveston fisherman’s ghost story and the poetry of Joy Kogawa, Roy Miki, . . . and the late Roy Kiyooka into the lines” (n. pag.). Thus, Marlatt underscores the significant contribution of her Japanese Canadian contemporaries to both the redress movement and to coastal BC literary culture. The intertwining of Japanese Canadian voices, partly drawn from the stories embedded in the earlier oral histories and partly from the words of the three poets, produces a deep texture of collaboration that is crucial to this practice of ethical interculturalism.

At the developmental stage of the SNP, the actors and chorus members, along with Marlatt, undertook substantial training in Noh dance, chant, and music with Matsui and Emmert in a series of workshops held over a two-year period. Marlatt also travelled to Japan to undertake further training, including attending Noh performances.<sup>16</sup> With respect to maintaining cultural integrity, Marlatt suggests that she was “not interested in writing a play that would be some kind of fusion theatre,” implying that the Noh and Western theatre elements would each maintain their specificity to create a particular Japanese Canadian story (“How *The Gull*” 24). Features of each tradition stand distinctly next to the other in *The Gull*, suggesting how an intercultural practice need not subsume one culture into another. The development process of the SNP indicates some of the deep practices of cultural apprenticeship, which may be required of those who seek to engage ethically in ongoing redress processes.

Additionally, the decision to produce the play-script and performances in both Japanese and English foregrounds the inter-community commitments of the SNP and furthers the “in-between” experience for diverse audience members and/or readers. When actors playing the older Issei characters spoke or sang in Japanese, this conveyed generational, linguistic, and cultural tensions. As critic Beverly Curran explains of the first Issei generation, “[I]n Canada, they were Japanese; in Japan, foreigners. The notion of authenticity

and the state of being neither here nor there seems a very appropriate theme for translation theatre . . . a performance of translated tongues and bodies” (117). Different communities engaging the legacies of the internment might include residents of Wakayama Prefecture, the coastal Japanese region where most of the BC fishing families originated; the Issei, first-generation Japanese Canadians; their second- and third-generation descendants (Nissei and Sansei), who are often more comfortable with English; and diverse members of the non-Japanese community. The play’s use of untranslated Japanese words and phrases underscores the Gull/Mother’s identity as Issei as well as the cultural and familial rift that results from her sons’ inability to communicate with her. Her speech reveals both her vulnerability to systemic misunderstanding and her resistance to neo-colonial erasure of her particular linguistic and cultural identity. In contrast, the brothers have partially lost their ancestral language and with it part of their connection to their mother and heritage. Likewise, for some younger generation audience members, the Japanese passages in the performance would be lost in translation, a sign of fractured family, cultural, and linguistic ties. Communication is thus vexed in *The Gull*. Yet the Noh medium enables other modes of connection across linguistic borders through sound and movement. When the *Shite* dances her dance of grief, her sons come to understand her suffering. Perhaps gesture and dance such as the *Shite*’s might bridge misunderstanding within the family, community, and broader non-Japanese society. The different registers of spoken Japanese and English in the performance and play-script mean that diverse characters and audience members experience linguistic dislocation differently. For non-Japanese-Canadian audience members, such a temporary shift in cultural access and agency might enable the insight of “standing under” (Ratcliffe 28) necessary to ethical intercultural redress work.

Further, an encounter with Noh theatre for most Canadian (Japanese and non-Japanese) artists and audience members requires apprenticeship to its cultural and aesthetic norms, because its style is very different from that of Western theatre. A Noh play involves ritualized and stylized movements, non-linguistic vocalizations, and chanted text by the chorus and main characters. Four musicians who play three types of staccato drums and an atonal flute provide musical punctuation and rhythm. The two acts in a Noh play are subdivided into a series of chanted rather than spoken musical passages. Further, the contemplative tempo of the music and the choreography conveys a dream-like quality in opposition to realistic character blocking

and movement. Costumes are usually lavish as are the masks; props, on the other hand, are minimal, as is the stage decor. It would thus be essential for any classroom encounter with *The Gull* to spend time watching archived productions of other Noh plays.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Gull's* play-script, Marlatt combines aspects of two traditional categories of Noh plays: a “Woman Noh,” in which the *Shite* (or lead actor) plays a woman, and a “Ghost Noh,” where the *Shite* plays a restless ghost haunted by an unresolved past. Most Noh plays involve the co-presence of the spirit world and the human world, whereas such interaction is rare in contemporary Western theatre. Liminality in the play also manifests through the interspecies depiction of the *Shite's* character, which mysteriously manifests as both gull and woman. As the production's mask-maker explained, he “could not [make] a straight gull mask . . . is she a gull? Is she a woman?” (Specht and Kubo n. pag.). In *The Gull*, the *Shite* plays the Ghost/Gull/Mother who needs to be released through her Japanese Canadian sons' witness to her traumatic past and through remembered echoes of Buddhist chanting at her girlhood temple back in Japan. As Susan Knutson points out, the mother is caught within several nets of social suffering: “The unresolved pain of the ghost in *The Gull* flows directly out of the person's cruel internment and separation from her family during the war, but it is also tightly wound together with the female roles she played in her life . . . it is she who bears the full brunt of history's assault” (11). The other primary Noh characters, the *Waki* (the witness to the *Shite*) and *Wakitsure* (the *Waki's* companion), here presented as the Gull/Mother's sons, tell a different story of loss and reconnection to the BC coast. They must witness their mother's story, along with the *Ai* (the interlude actor and narrator of the background story of the *Shite* or the place), an old fisherman from the coast, and the *Ji* (the chorus). While Noh is not typically concerned with historical verisimilitude, here the characters are survivors of the Japanese internment and their story activates a narrative of political and ethical reckoning.

In act 1, the *Shite* as Ghost/Mother appears as a homeless gull that hovers, suspended, between the BC coast and her natal home of Mio, Japan (see fig. 1). She mourns her estrangement from Japan, her tenuous moorings in Steveston, and her subsequent dislocation from her husband and sons during the internment. The play stages her confrontation with her fishermen sons when they return to the BC coast eight years after the internment and her accusation that they abandoned her in a camp hospital after she fell ill from tuberculosis. Her sense of betrayal is doubled; she was “gulled” both by her family and by the Canadian government (Knutson 11). The audience learns that when the





Figure 1

Photograph by Michael Ford. Akira Matsui wearing Noh mask by Hakuzan Kubo in *The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project*. 2006. Courtest of Pangaea Arts, Richmond.

Gull/Mother was a young woman in Japan, she was lured by a photograph of her husband-to-be as a much younger man into coming to Steveston as a “picture bride” as well as by inflated promises of economic opportunity.<sup>18</sup> The mother’s story stands in proxy for the stories of many other Japanese women who experienced a kind of double exposure to gendered and political betrayal. In this way, *The Gull* and the SNP animate the multi-layered traumatic history and internment aftermath through the Gull/Mother’s diasporic unmooring: “lost bird caught in history’s torrent / having no home to call my own, no refuge in / the battering waves that come and come” (*The Gull* 1.2.44). Throughout act 1, Marlatt figures historical and temporal rupture through coastal imagery of the sea in full storm surge: “battering” waves and “winds of war” buffet the Gull/Mother who is caught between maternal attachment to her Canadianized sons and ancestral attachment to Mio (1.2.44; 2.9.69). While the play-script risks over-emphasizing the victim position of the mother, the power of the *Shite*’s performance when the Ghost/Mother confronts both her sons (and implicitly the diverse members of the audience, including settler beneficiaries of the Canadian state) counterbalances this perception. Her haunting presence on the stage is a sign of her resilience. Readers and



audience members are thus invited to consider the Ghost/Mother's determination and endurance, her intent to haunt and confront.

Unlike the unresolved past of the ghost in conventional Noh that draws from myth rather than from a documentary archive, this play stages persistent witness to historical suffering as an ongoing requirement of redress work. Marlatt notes, "As a writer, I can only serve as witness, as I have tried to do in *Steveston* and *Steveston Recollected*. As witness and reminder that such denial of citizens' rights is not forgotten as a black moment in our national history, only to be too easily re-enacted with other people in other situations" (Personal interview n. pag.). Relentlessly, act 1 and the *Kyogen Interlude* between the two acts confront the audience with details of the internment. The *Ji*, or chorus, gives voice to community memory:

Jl: . . . —condemned,  
families split and sent  
from the coast to camps far away,  
in icy crowded huts and ghost  
town rooms we were penned up  
in the frozen mountains. (1.4.53)

The interned, once condemned to "ghost / town rooms" in the interior, reclaim agency through haunting the marginal spaces of the nation and the broken narratives of belonging and citizenship.<sup>19</sup>

Marlatt explains that the state of being "gulled" by the promises of citizenship, only to be radically dislocated, is a central question in the play: "That's part of the story line, that sense of being taken in by the notion that you had rights because you had settled here or were born here, and then your rights, your property, your good name were stripped away. . . . So then what happens to your sense of home, where is home?" (Interview by Lenard Stanga 7). In *The Gull*, the *Ji* vocalizes the mother's consequent longing to return to her remembered girlhood home of Mio:

Jl: on the far shore of endless ocean  
.....  
. . . I pulled the bell rope  
in my father's temple, chanting  
Namu Amida Butsu, Amida Bu  
. . . o to pull  
that bell again, o the ache  
of this pull back to Mio. (2.8.68)

The echoing assonance of the repeated "o" aurally inter-knots loss, home, ocean, and Mio to convey the ache of unmooring. The "o" reverberates

from the stage to the audience members, and, potentially, across diverse communities in Canada.

The unsettled ghost figure is, in part, a product of the oral storytelling tradition in the Japanese fishing community of BC, where fishermen's tales featured ghosts haunting the coastline around China Hat/Klemtu, the main setting in *The Gull* (Marlatt, "How *The Gull*" 18). It is to these coastal fishing grounds that the Gull/Ghost/Mother returns to unsettle her sons' intent to fish the same waters that their father once worked. The stage directions in *The Gull* and the set design of the production emphasize that China Hat/Klemtu is a site of layered histories. To the early Japanese fishermen, the geography of this temporary moorage on Swindle Island in Finlayson Channel resembled a Chinese hat; for the Aboriginal people who lived there, it was named Klemtu ("How *The Gull*" 24-25). The setting underscores the intersections of the communities and histories of the coastal Aboriginal people with those of newer diasporas.<sup>20</sup> One set design element, in particular, signifies the geographical and historical specificity of this Canadian story and the convergent experiences of the Japanese and Indigenous communities. Traditionally, the wall at the back of a Noh stage features a painting of the Yogo Pine at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara, Japan, where the first Noh dance was performed. In the SNP, however, the traditional pine tree is transposed to a stylized painting of the BC coastline, which shows, in silhouette, the outline of the mountains, anchorages, and valleys of China Hat/Klemtu. Marlatt suggests that locating the main action of the play at China Hat/Klemtu was a way of putting these villages on "the Canadian literary map," thus affirming their importance in the regional and national imaginary ("How *The Gull*" 25).

Intercultural production elements in the SNP thus speak to multi-community political and ethical redress priorities. Design elements of Western realism share the stage with conventional Noh costumes, masks, dance, and musicians. In the SNP, the traditional Noh bridge-way is "draped" with "fishing nets with cork floats" ("How *The Gull*" 25). Additionally, the production stills and stage directions convey the use of modern props; when the fishermen brothers—the *Waki* and *Wakitsure*—first enter the stage, they carry a lantern, a net, and a gaff (1.1.41) (see fig. 2), and in the *Kyogen Interlude* between acts 1 and 2, the men drink whiskey from tin mugs and a bottle (*KI.5.57*). While the inclusion of these simple props would not surprise an audience accustomed to realist conventions, these are significant departures from traditional Noh, in which few props are used besides fans and bamboo poles.

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Figure 2

Photograph by Michael Ford. *Simon Hayama in The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project*. 2006. Courtesy of Pangaea Arts, Richmond.

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Figure 3

Photograph by Michael Ford. *Akira Matsui in The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project*. 2006. Courtesy of Pangaea Arts, Richmond.

Further, audience members (or readers) will note the jarring juxtaposition of intercultural costuming choices. In the production, the second-generation Japanese Canadian characters are dressed in 1940s-1950s woollen fishermen sweaters and rain gear and use Western props.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to such costuming of the *Waki*, *Wakitsure*, and the *Ai*, the *Shite* wears a traditional kimono, and she alone wears the masks created for the production (see fig. 3). Because they wear modern costumes, drink whiskey, and speak modern English, second- and third-generation Japanese, as well as non-Japanese, audience members are encouraged to identify with the two brothers. Further, the two brothers, despite the internment years, assert that their return to the Pacific coast is a homecoming; this stands in counterpoint to their mother's lament for her lost girlhood home. Act 1 opens with their affirmation, "we return at last" (1.1.41). Intergenerational tensions are further materialized in coastal tropes for location and dislocation. The sons are figured as "homing salmon" (1.1.43), looking for refuge in the ocean and river currents, while the mother is figured as a "hapless gull" who is "not at home," but rather "stranded" in "destiny's rough wind" (1.2.44, 45). In the third musical passage of act 1, the brothers and mother speak past each other out of different interpretations of their (dis)locations. To the mother, her sons are lost "Mio birds" on an "alien shore," while the brothers insist that "this salmon-coast is our home" (1.3.48). This figural tension conveys the crux of the mother's suffering in the play, for she not only wants to return to coastal Japan (in answer to the state's disingenuous invitation to "repatriate"), but she also wants her sons to go with her. In act 2, she scolds, "home—you must go," to which they reply, "what was home to you / Mother, is not home to us" (2.10.71). It is their different experiences that she and her sons must acknowledge in order for the mother to be released from her grief. A Buddhist practice of accepting change, as well as a redress practice of attentive listening and witness, is required for these characters to work through their tensions.

Zen-inspired aesthetics in Noh emphasize simplicity, spaciousness, and "reflective restraint," which are conveyed through the minimalist set and slow dance movements of actors (Nafziger-Leis 30). A number of production elements in the SNP thus evoke the Buddhist aspects of Noh. For example, the tempo and choreography involve stillness, sparseness, and contemplation, which reflect a Buddhist quality of sustained "deep and quiet energy" that Emmert suggests is required of the performers and musicians ("Making" n. pag.). The dialogue is delivered at a much slower pace than would be typical of "realistic speech" (Emmert, "Preface" 10). Further, "moments of

‘non-action’ and ‘spaces of silence’ are meant to convey the essence of Buddha-nature or awakened being (Nafziger-Leis 36). Marlatt also suggests that Zen tempo and movement in Noh are due in large part to the “meditative stillness” of the performers and to their intense “inner focus” which, in turn, creates “a vivid sense of inner engagement in the audience” (“How *The Gull*” 30). Such “vivid inner engagement” may open space requisite for the quality of ethical attentiveness that is central to the work of complex witnessing within intercultural redress initiatives.

One aspect of the Ghost/Mother’s suffering is rooted in her (mis)perception of the radical separateness of the BC and Japanese coastlines. Her longing for her girlhood home becomes a “cord tangling [her] feet . . . so tightly it binds [her] / wandering spirit” (2.9.70). The temple bell-cord wrapped tightly around her feet is a trope for unreconciled memory. The Ghost/Mother grapples with her sons’ acceptance that life is governed by relentless change: “home, it changes like the sea’s / rough waves we ride / its changes constant, changing / our quick lives . . . caught, she turns this way and that, / desperate to understand / what they are saying—wave? change?” (2.10.72). Cultural memories of the ringing temple bell, triggered by the sound of a bell buoy in the harbour, and remembered communal chanting enable a transitional release: “in a lull we hear the name so faint / Amida Butsu / tossed by the waves / Amida Butsu” (2.11.74). The mother realizes that the same wind rings the harbour bell in China Hat/Klemtu and the temple bell in Mio: “turning [she] sees / ocean joining here and there / one current circles through” (2.11.73). The Gull/Mother’s release can only come with the understanding that the ocean cradling her childhood home Mio is the same ocean her sons want to fish from the coast of BC.

A poem fragment by Roy Kiyooka mediates this intercultural, intergenerational, and inter-coastal moment of connection: “nothing but a mouthful of syllables / to posit an ocean’s breath, the poet wrote / nothing but brine and a little bite of air” (2.10.72). Connecting “ocean’s breath” and “heart’s breath,” the *Shite* and the chorus, in Japanese and English respectively, pick up Kiyooka’s meditative lines as a chant:

SHITE (in Japanese): ocean singing ocean’s breath  
 JI: ocean singing ocean’s breath (2.10.73)

The ebb and flow rhythms of breath, body and ocean-tides merge to transform into the whispered echo of chanting: “a living tide of syllables / to wash out the line that divides / shore from shore in her / anguished mind”

(2.11.73). Within the Buddhist priorities of Noh theatre, redress work in *The Gull* is undertaken at the family and personal levels. After the Ghost/Mother confronts her sons, they offer her recognition and apology: “Mother, we failed to understand / how deeply you felt / abandoned there—forgive our blindness” (2.10.71). This suggests that reconciliation work needs to take place *within* communities broken by historical violence, as well as between survivors and perpetrator/beneficiary communities. Several testimonials from Japanese Canadian audience members suggest they felt a connection to this re-performance of their family stories (Fisher n. pag.).<sup>22</sup> According to Buddhist Noh priorities, the unsettled Ghost/Mother, her sons, and perhaps the community they represent, find some measure of healing in the play.

At this point, we note that our initial responses to the conclusion of the play were restless and vexed, informed by postcolonial, human rights, and feminist critiques of too-easy reconciliation. After being compelled by the play to witness the Ghost/Mother’s gendered and racialized betrayal, we found it hard to accept such a seemingly quick resolution to the complex weight of history. Yet, reading for cultural context, we also recognized that the Buddhist and formal priorities of Noh require that the witness of the *Waki* and *Ji* resolve the ghost’s unsettled journey. Our dilemma reflects debates within critical redress studies, such as those articulated in Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham’s essay collection, *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, as well as in the introduction to their edited special issue of *English Studies in Canada*, titled *Aboriginal Redress*. For an increasing number of critics, redress conceived of as resolution or closure is often seen as a betrayal of justice.<sup>23</sup> Henderson and Wakeham emphasize that the historical reckoning of state-initiated redress is incomplete. For example, they argue that the Canadian state’s staged apology for the Indian Residential Schools “has occluded broader consideration of the long history of colonial genocide” and its aftermath legacies (*Reconciling* 12-13). Like Wakeham and Henderson, we are concerned with the potential for the reconciliation/forgiveness mandate to displace the necessity of substantive historical reckoning required by multi-party actors. Yet, like Julie McGonegal, we are also sensitive to the way reconciliation within redress-from-below projects might at times coexist with resistance and critique, so that each category would not empty the other of its performative possibility (“Preface” xiii and “Introduction” 19).<sup>24</sup>

The official 1988 government apology to Japanese Canadians, who were “guests” in the Parliamentary gallery but not invited speakers, may be read as

the closing act in Canada's first performance of the official theatre of redress (Miki, *Redress* 3). This act, entitled "The Apology," performs the mature nation putting to rest its unsavoury past in order to confirm a multicultural and transnational future. Yet the SNP unsettles the certainty of the official performance by calling for ongoing reckoning within and across diverse national, community, familial, and spiritual registers.<sup>25</sup> Because the main action of redress appears to take place in the familial, personal, and spiritual domains, the play might invite a critique of seeming "quietude and resignation," similar to that advanced by critics like Roy Miki in response to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. However, we suggest instead that the SNP performs "complex reparative" work (McGonegal, "Introduction" 7).<sup>26</sup> While the Ghost/Mother's anguish needs to be witnessed by her sons and her restless spirit settled, national memory remains unsettled by the haunting presence of internment memory and requires ongoing attention. Each time *The Gull* is re-encountered in a production or classroom setting, the story of the fishermen brothers returning belatedly to the BC coast and re-narrating communal experience of state-inflicted injury and injustice reanimates internment history. Audience members, as well as students, scholars, and readers, might learn to see themselves as implicated in the critical work of redress and reckoning not only in this instance, but also with respect to other types of historical and ongoing injustice. Crucially, the SNP must be situated as one initiative within the continuum of committed work by members of the Nissei and Issei generations who, by their creation of a multi-site testimonial archive in literary, community activist, and museum projects, suggest the open-ended *labour* of redress.

The SNP thus conjoins intercultural theatre with the priorities of ongoing redress from below to enact a contemplative "ethical remembrance" project as a practice of "critical learning" (Simon 133).<sup>27</sup> Many intercultural theatre scholars are concerned with how the audience can be invited to participate beyond the experience of *catharsis* or entertainment, so that they are moved "to witness in ways that are responsible to . . . confronting the implication of stories that challenge normative structures of national belonging and of 'home'" (Knowles and Mündel xiv). As Knowles and Mündel note, "Salverson argues that a new kind of ethical and active relationship can emerge between teller and listener in staging stories that are cross-cultural or run against dominant perceptions both of 'Canada' and of racialized bodies" (xiv). Perhaps such possibilities of active ethical witness might be available to a diversely positioned audience/readership of productions and readings of



*The Gull*. The SNP encourages diverse audience members to move beyond empathy and toward ethical response-ability, in part through the liminal spaces of its intercultural practice. This includes the co-presence on stage of the spirit and human worlds; the interspecies connection between the gull and human (ghost) mother; the traditional Noh dance and costumes for some characters juxtaposed with the realist Western costuming and props for others; and the Japanese/English registers of the play. Each of these tensions creates an encounter that is generative of negotiation across disparity and difference, suggestive of a mode of unsettled redress that, in the case of settler-colonial Canada, is inevitably intercultural. The Steveston Noh Project's collaborative practices, critical dislocations, and Buddhist contemplative properties created space for complex responses from diverse audience members who were each called to engage ethically and actively with the labour of redress—a practice we hope to see taken up in further productions, staged readings, and classroom encounters where the unfinished work might continue.

#### NOTES

- 1 We are grateful to the Human Rights Literature Seminar at the ACLA and to CACLALS, where we first presented this work, and especially to Susan Gingell for her support of collaborative criticism.
- 2 We first found Downey's article on October 20, 2009 at [www.kyotojournal.org/10.000things/043.html](http://www.kyotojournal.org/10.000things/043.html), but this webpage no longer exists. Interested scholars can use the Internet Wayback Machine to access the archived article.
- 3 Following Pangaea Arts' reference to the overall creative collaboration process as "The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project," we will refer to the Steveston Noh Project as the "SNP" throughout this article to signify the multi-artist creative process, the intensive training and development period, and the theatrical production.
- 4 To some extent, our problem of "imaginative reconstruction" is one that many theatre scholars and theatre classrooms confront. Union restrictions prohibited a full video of *The Gull* from being recorded, so we are grateful to Pangaea Arts for allowing us to screen a video of a staged reading that featured a full cast. This was to be our only encounter with the dynamic energies of Noh performance featuring dance, chant, and instrumentation. Otherwise, we had to glean performance details from interview and/or introductory statements by Heidi Specht, Akira Matsui, Richard Emmert, and Daphne Marlatt, as well as from the articles by Susan Knutson and Beverly Curran.
- 5 Other examples include Colleen Wagner's *The Monument* (1993), produced by several companies in Canada and the United States, as well as in Rwanda by ISÔKU; *Rwanda 94*, created in Belgium by GROUPOV; and the South African production *Truth in Translation* that has played in Belfast, Rwanda, and the US. Together, these productions comprise a migratory transnational theatre of redress that suggests a productive role for theatre in

engaging transitional justice questions in post-conflict societies. Our notion of “redress from below” is indebted to Kiernan McEvoy and Lorna McGregor’s edited volume, *Transitional Justice from Below*, which emphasizes the role of grassroots actors in a field that has been largely defined by legal and political actors.

- 6 While some scholars disagree, Cheryl Nafziger-Leis makes a convincing case for the integral Zen elements that have informed Noh aesthetics and priorities since the medieval period. Noh was developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by Zeami Motokiyo, who in his treatises on Noh emphasized Buddhist principles (27, 28, 31).
- 7 Daphne Marlatt’s engagement with the Buddhist elements of Noh was contextualized by her own long-time training in Tibetan Buddhist practice; see the interview with Roseanne Harvey in *Ascent Magazine*.
- 8 We are grateful to one of our anonymous assessors for challenging some of our invisible assumptions and catalyzing the practice of critical unsettlement we hope to cultivate.
- 9 Pangaea Arts’ mission statement explains that the company is “an intercultural, interdisciplinary world arts organization” that fosters “cultural interaction and the exchange of ideas between diverse communities” (Pangaea Arts n. pag.).
- 10 After years of apprenticeship in Japan, Emmert has become recognized there and internationally as a Noh master in his own right.
- 11 For further details about the artists involved in the production, see Susan Knutson’s article in *alt.theatre*.
- 12 Richmond, BC is paired as a sister-city with Wakayama City (Marlatt, “How *The Gull*” 29). Beverly Curran also notes that “more than 75% of the Japanese Canadian residents of Steveston still trace their ancestry back to Wakayama Prefecture. Akira Matsui . . . [also] from Wakayama . . . made his first overseas trip to Richmond when he came as part of a cultural exchange between the sister cities” (125).
- 13 In addition to Pangaea Arts, there are many theatre companies in Canada that focus on intercultural work, including Multicultural Theatre Space (MT Space) of Kitchener-Waterloo, Modern Times and Cahoots Theatre Projects in Toronto, Teesri Duniya Theatre of Montreal, and Theatre Replacement of Vancouver. For further insights on intercultural theatre practice, see Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert’s “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis” and Patrice Pavis’ *The Intercultural Performance Reader*.
- 14 Heidi Specht’s ideal casting would have had Japanese Canadian actors playing all the roles: “In the end, the cast was mixed, with four Japanese Canadians participating” (qtd. in Curran 127).
- 15 For more on what she calls the “migrations” of her Steveston project, see Daphne Marlatt’s *At the River’s Mouth: Writing Migrations*.
- 16 In addition to travelling to Japan to watch Noh productions and participating in Emmert’s workshops in Vancouver, Marlatt worked closely with him to understand the intricacies of Noh’s musical structure and dramatic style (see Curran and Knutson).
- 17 For more on Noh aesthetics, see Michael Ford’s “The Gull Production Stills” and listen to Heidi Specht and Hakuzan Kubo’s interview by the CBC program *North By Northwest* on Pangaea’s website under “Media About Pangaea Arts.” Also, see the webpage of the Japan Arts Council, where students can access videos of Noh performances.
- 18 Marlatt credits Mio museum curator Hisakazu Nishihama for the story of the “picture bride,” daughter of a Buddhist temple priest (“How *The Gull*” 18). As well, see Marlatt’s *Steveston Recollected* for a powerful testimony about the experience of being a “picture bride.”
- 19 As with the “postcolonial gothic” that has the potential to unsettle neo-colonial certainties, such generative haunting may be taken up as a “politics of memory” (Goldman and Saul

- 645). For more on these questions, see Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul's "Talking with Ghosts: Haunting in Canadian Cultural Production" and Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte's *Unsettled Remains*.
- 20 We are indebted to Renate Eigenbrod's paper "The 'look of recognition': Transcultural Circulation of Trauma in Canadian Aboriginal Literature" for drawing our attention to Japanese Canadian and First Nations' overlapping redress initiatives.
- 21 Set and props designer Phillip Tidd and costume designer Margaret McKea took the lead in pushing for authentic Canadian elements in the play. While McKea won a grant to research and create authentic Noh costuming, she also wanted the collaboration to be clearly visible at the level of costumes. This was also in response to Japanese Canadian members who found the workshop version of the play to be "too traditionally Japanese" (Specht n. pag.).
- 22 The translator of *The Gull*, Toyoshi Yoshihara, commented that Noh is an ideal medium for a re-visitation of the internment experience because it allows for expression of "quiet anger" (Abell n. pag.). Downey and Fisher further report that audience members whose fathers and grandfathers were among the displaced fishing community were deeply moved.
- 23 Many thinkers in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series advance similar critiques of the IRS TRC. See *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*, edited by Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné.
- 24 McGonegal's call for a "complex reparative project" is a timely intervention into the position taken by those postcolonial critics who "risk reductive" dismissal of "the gains of redress movements by focusing almost exclusively on their problems and contradictions" ("Preface" xiii and "Introduction" 7). Yet we are also concerned that her project may risk a conflation of performative categories like redress and reconciliation that we do not see as inevitable synonyms. For us, as for Wakeham and Henderson, redress suggests political agency constituted through extraordinary political mobilization and many decades of work, struggle, setbacks, and compromise undertaken by community activists, cultural workers, and public intellectuals (*Reconciling* 5).
- 25 Our concept of theatre as both metaphor for and performative practice of official and unofficial redress is informed by McGonegal's notion of the 1988 state apology to Japanese Canadians as a "theatrical display of national benevolence" ("The Future" 113) and Wakeham and Henderson's conception of the "drama of redress" in *Reconciling Canada*.
- 26 While Miki's view that "complex patterns of complicity, substitution, and containment," ensured *Obasan's* place in the early canon of multicultural CanLit is salient ("But What About" 135-44), McGonegal's intervention into a potentially dualistic reading that constructs an either "revolutionary" or "resolutionary" binary is also instructive ("The Future" 114). Significantly, Knutson does not read the "spiritual dimension of the play [as obscuring] the layer of political and social meaning" (15).
- 27 We would like to acknowledge the late Roger Simon, whose work on the ethics of witnessing and critical remembrance pedagogies is a touchstone for our collaborative work.

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