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can happen is offered by Becky Halvorson's analysis of Theatre for Living's *Practicing[sic] Democracy*. Using Bhabha's framework, she shows how the project went beyond Boal's Forum Theatre to exploit possibilities for setting up an uncomfortable encounter between performers and audiences that "serves as a workshop for igniting the democratic process, an emergency arena for slaying the monologic beast" (128).

Over the reader of this always insightful and frequently brilliant collection hangs one large question: given the energy, commitment, and imagination devoted to popular, political theatre, why has the nation continued a seemingly unstoppable rightward drift into neoliberalism? Ingrid Mündel's provocative piece on radical storytelling perhaps comes closest to an "answer." She hints at the ways in which the multi-vocalities of postmodernism and the emphasis on subjective individualism may diminish the chances of exposing the structural inequalities of the *status quo*: "In spite of PUENTE Theatre's desire to participate in struggles for social justice through staging true stories of Latina immigrants in *I Wasn't Born Here*, PUENTE Theatre's focus in this performance on personal injury and healing perhaps reframes systemic issues of racism and economic oppression in Canada in terms of individualized and historically un-moored expressions of hardship" (108). Historical mooring of the kind undertaken by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine* remains one of the challenges facing popular theatre. As Bray's essay makes clear, it is vital that popular theatre connects with any available social movement dedicated to resistance. Klein's conclusion points the way toward future popular theatre interventions as the cultural arm of such movements:

These are movements that do not seek to start from scratch but rather from scrap, from the rubble all around. As the corporatist crusade continues its violent decline, turning up the shock dial to blast through the mounting resistance it encounters, these projects point a way forward between fundamentalisms. Radical only in their intense practicality, rooted in the communities where they live, these men and women see themselves as mere repair people, taking what's there and fixing it, reinforcing it, making it better and more equal. Most of all, they are building in resilience—for when the next shock hits. (466)

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Tim Prentki is Professor of Theatre for Development at the University of Winchester, UK. He is a member of the editorial board of *Research in Drama Education*. With Jan Selman he co-authored *Popular Theatre in Political Culture* and is the co-editor of *The Applied Theatre Reader*. Palgrave Macmillan will publish his forthcoming book on the fool in European theatre in November 2011.

The Experience of *Imaginary Ordinary*

by Andrew Houston

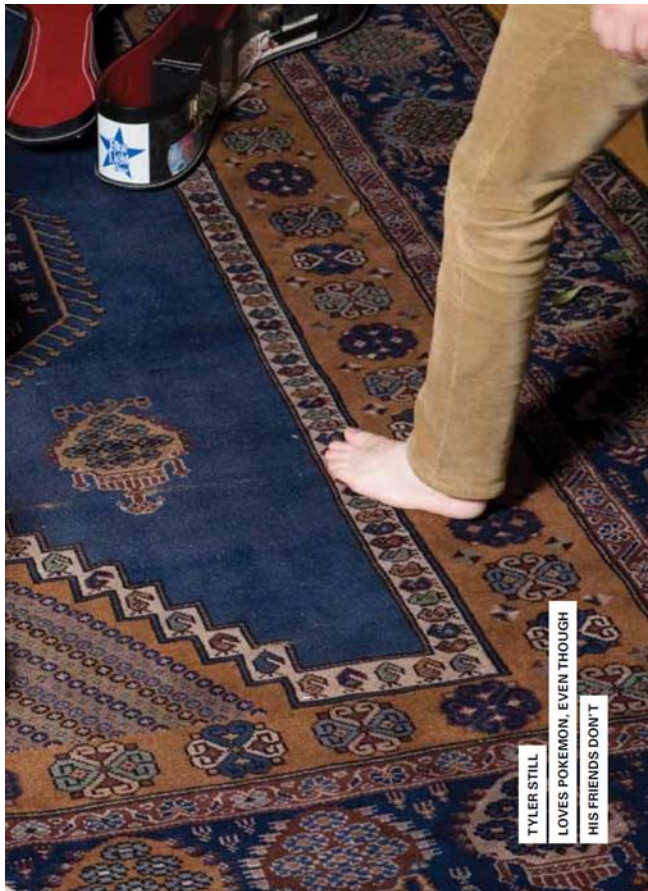
Imaginary Ordinary: A Community Mapping Project created by interdisciplinary artists Eric Moschopedis and Laura Leif (with Mia Rushton). Participants: residents of Crescent Heights, Regal Terrace, and Renfrew, Calgary, AB. 8 May to 29 August 2009.

Imaginary Ordinary. Peter Mark Keays and Eric Moschopedis, eds. Calgary: Eric Moschopedis, 2010. Photographs by Bryce Krynski, Mia Ruston, Eric Moschopedis, Laura Leif, Aviva Zimmerman. www.birdwatcher-yyc.ca.

"Too much art 'about place,' is more about art and the place of art than about the actual places where artists and viewers find themselves."

—Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Sense of Place in a Multicentred Society*

Many artistic directors of theatre companies across Canada think carefully about how their programming will reach out to a local community. Cognizant of good dramaturgical practice, aware of the latest business models, and no doubt having a solid understanding of their company's constituency, its demographic, and its niche, these competent people will then go about programming a season of productions. Often the content of these plays will resonate deeply with the artistic director's sense of who its audience is, or could be. The company will then market the season and will frequently use the word "community" to describe the "experience" of belonging a person might have if she or he was to attend these productions, preferably the entire season—at a discount price, of course—as these plays will address issues and/or identities and/or themes that this particular audience member will care about. I think we've all gone through this before, haven't we? No doubt the readers of *CTR* have been on both sides of these campaigns, having been both producers and consumers of these seasons. For the past several decades the formula has been remarkably similar, whether we're



"Tyler still loves Pokemon, even though his friends don't."

Project photos by Bryce Krynski, Mia Rushton, Eric Moschopedis, Laura Leif, and Aviva Zimmerman

talking about a theatre company in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, Vancouver, or wherever.

It seems to me that this strategy is mistaken in two respects: first, community isn't something that can be generated through marketing or other superficial ways that producers use to generate attention to artistic products; second, community is surely something much more multifaceted, layered, and complex than the feeling of unity that can sometimes occur between people attending a company's fundraising event or by being an audience of a performance. This is why *Imaginary Ordinary* is such an important book: it's an innovative documentation in the style of a curatorial catalogue of the event, *Imaginary Ordinary*, a community-mapping project that took place in the Calgary neighbourhoods of Crescent Heights, Regal Terrace, and Renfrew during the summer of 2009. Eric Moschopedis and Laura Leif, the artistic leaders of this event, facilitated a form of engagement with their neighbours that has many important lessons for theatre practitioners whose websites, mission statements, and season announcements would suggest are trying to do the same thing, but less effectively.

Before I review the book, here is an outline of the event upon which the book is based. On 8 May 2009, after weeks

of preparing the space (from fixing the roof to re-wiring and re-flooring), an abandoned storefront that constituted the home base of *Imaginary Ordinary* was opened. The storefront's location, on Centre Street, just north of Calgary's downtown core, made it an ideal space of operation to serve the surrounding neighbourhoods. The book describes the space as having a fun and funky décor where people could meet, socialize, and participate in various scheduled activities. Wall space was devoted to the display of various projects; there was a collection of comfortable chairs and a large table for gatherings, and even a modest kitchen space so tea and other refreshments could be served. From its opening until 29 August 2009, when it closed, the space was gradually transformed by the tangible outcomes of the project. Yet while the space filled up with interesting and engaging artwork, Moschopedis contends that the storefront, the most tangible component of the project, was always secondary. What was of primary importance was the engagement between the people involved in the project. He states:

Far more significant [than the set up in the space] were the ephemeral encounters that occurred in and out of the storefront. So as a way of generating engagement amongst the different constituents in the neighbourhood, nearly fifty different events were devised by community members and us. *Imaginary Ordinary* was always about the people and this was one way of bringing them together (51).

Based on the documentation in the book, the experience of *Imaginary Ordinary* was rich and diverse, including many clever, user-friendly ways for people to experience their surroundings, and in so doing, connect with neighbours and others sharing this space. For four months in 2009, "just up Centre Street," Calgarians were treated to all manner of collectively organized activity. There were excursions, some in groups, such as the psycho-geography inspired Urban Wander nights, and some were set up for exploration solo or in pairs, where participants were invited to borrow 'do it yourself' kits that offered guidance and the equipment for unique journeys, from bird watching in the nearby parks to a romantic drink for two in a destination to be discovered. There were also all manner of events organized in the Centre Street location, from collective cooking projects based on locally purchased foods, to quirky themed crafts events, dances, and tributes to local community members.

There was obviously no limit to the imaginative potential of all the various activities that made up *Imaginary Ordinary*, but even more important than the hip style and execution of this event, was the openness and generosity this project extended to the people who took part, from the surrounding neighbourhoods and from across the city. The idea that artistic work can be based on the interaction of local people, regardless of age, race, socio-economic background—all



"Renay reads 'End of the World' fiction. Nick's first car was a Pontiac Trans Am."

Project photos by Bryce Krynski, Mia Rushton, Eric Moschopedis, Laura Leif, and Aviva Zimmerman

engaged in simple, fun tasks—begs a reconsideration and re-evaluation of the expectations held about place, art, and the way they may combine to *reimagine* community. By stimulating ideas from the public, rather than attempting to captivate and entertain them with a staged performance; by respecting their contribution, rather than positioning them as distant, removed audience, the artists of *Imaginary Ordinary* ask the public to think about their own ideas and expectations about where they live and the kind of living they may experience in this place.

The book *Imaginary Ordinary* is full of exciting photographs by various artists connected to the project; it's edited by Moschopedis and Peter Mark Keays, and it's published by Moschopedis himself. The layout of the book seems to do justice to the event in that it is fun to read and look at; it's accessible if a bit confusing (e.g. there are no page numbers), and every page is brimming with clever, quirky reminders that this book is documenting a unique event in a particular location. To the credit of Moschopedis and his fellow artists, the book serves as documentation but it is also a primer—a

how-to guide for anyone adventurous enough to create a similar event in one's own neighbourhood. In fact, in a pamphlet that accompanies the book, Moschopedis offers his consultation to anyone who wants to do so.

The book's content is framed by two essays that help to contextualize the work. Richard Smolinski, a Calgary interdisciplinary artist and self-described resident of Regal Terrace, begins *Imaginary Ordinary* with "Happening Just North of Downtown Up Centre Centre: Reconnaissance and Reconfiguration in *Imaginary Ordinary*'s Community-Mapping Project." The concluding essay by Melanie Bennett, "The Extraordinary of *Imaginary Ordinary*" connects the work with relational aesthetics and poses important questions concerning the agency of the work; that is, is this project as wide-reaching and transformative as it claims to be? Between these essays, highlights of the book's content include great photographs together with interesting comments about people in each shot, such as "Tyler still loves Pokemon, even though his friends don't" on a picture of a young guy playing guitar, or "Renay reads 'end of the world' fiction," and "Nick's first car was a Pontiac Trans Am," the caption on a couple sharing an intimate embrace. In all of the photos, subjects are looking away from the camera, so that, on some level, their identities are a mystery. I think this is the experience most of us have with our neighbours; we know a few things from watching and casual conversation, but mostly the people next door are a mystery. The captions seem to offer an opening into this mystery; they seem like confessions that could've been shared in the kind of interaction encouraged by the project.

In keeping with the project's mission to facilitate numerous expressive modes and opportunities to all those who showed up to share in the event, there are two sections in the book devoted to feedback and thoughtful contemplation from participants: one is entitled "*Imaginary Ordinary*: Thoughts" and the other, which expands the typical art event demographic, is called "*Imaginary Ordinary*: A Family Perspective." In both sections there is evidence of just how effective the project was for providing a user-friendly context for discovery. The book makes clear that the event was transformative in the way it brought various people together in the place they all call home, but also for the way it provided an opportunity to gain respect for this home.

Imaginary Ordinary was one of the highlights of my summer because of multiple reasons: Reason one—I met a ton of friendly people. Reason two—I had a chance to voice my opinion on numerous occasions. Reason three—it is a one of a kind experience. Reason four—I am more aware of what is around me in the community right now. Reason five—I had an opportunity to participate in many activities I thoroughly enjoyed. Reason six—it provided me with curricular activities like bird watching in my spare time—Fallan Curtis, age 10. (68)

The events organized are too numerous to go into here, but suffice to say there was an opportunity to suit just about everyone's taste—to converse, to show and tell, to play music, to dance, to garden, and to generally draw upon the everyday, “ordinary” surroundings and through the right perspective and imaginative approaches, perform community.

To conclude, I want to revisit the writings by Smolinski and Bennett that contextualize the book because they both touch on the possibilities that *Imaginary Ordinary* possesses for theatre practitioners and the relationships that may be fostered between artists and their communities. In addition to situating the practices of *Imaginary Ordinary* in the historical context of Allan Kaprow's Happenings in New York City of the early 1960s, Smolinski's essay places the reader in the location, as he provides an important orientation on the cultural stakes:

Located north of the city's downtown core of petro-wealth bolstered corporate office towers, posh boutiques and high-rise condominium complexes, *Imaginary Ordinary's* theatre of operations was not a popular cultural destination, but a well-established residential sector featuring small independent businesses and tree-lined streets” (8).

Bennett speaks to how Moschopedis and Leif wanted *Imaginary Ordinary* to challenge the assumption that experimental art must be shocking, overly abstract, or difficult to understand. How, according to relational aesthetic scholars such as Grant Kester, *Imaginary Ordinary* is clearly a departure from the tradition of object making art, be it a painting or a theatre production. Rather Moschopedis and Leif are “context providers,” whose projects thrive in the facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities. Bennett also asks important questions about efficacy and outcomes; following Kester, she addresses what might be perceived as the rhetoric of Moschopedis and Leif, as they position themselves as the vehicle for an unmediated expressivity on the part of the community. Moreover, she wonders if *Imaginary Ordinary* is ultimately seen as an opportunity for a group of artists to temporarily assume the interests of this community for the purposes of career advancement.

Significantly, there is space in this book for this criticism of the project's mission and outcomes. Moschopedis and company have left room for a questioning of the complex network of motivations, expectations, and understandings that exist in all communities. As performance theorist David George reminds us, “the word ‘experience’ derives etymologically from the French ‘to put to the test.’ Experience is an experiment. For all too long theatre has been categorized as a form of representation when it is actually an experiment in creating alternatives” (17). *Imaginary Ordinary* provides a useful and enlightening documentation of an “experience of community,” a successful experiment in both the generation of community and performance that theatre companies across

Canada would do well to adopt and develop in their own contexts and with their own neighbours.

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Andrew Houston is a faculty member of the Department of Drama, Speech Communication, and Digital Arts at the University of Waterloo. Most recently he was a participating artist-researcher in *Garden // Suburbia*, a site-specific soundwalk-animation of Lawrence Park, Toronto, which premiered as part of the Performance Studies International conference at OCAD in June 2010.

In the Medieval Fashion: Community as Performance in *The Midnapore Cycle*

by Tamara Haddad

On the evening of 10 June 2010, Mieko Ouchi's *The Midnapore Cycle* debuted at the St. Mary's University College campus in Calgary. Supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP), and the Glenbow Museum among others, the play involved, along with award-winning playwright Ouchi, two of Calgary's best-known theatre figures: Marilyn Potts and Bob White. Marilyn Potts, director of *The Midnapore Cycle*, has been teaching drama and directing plays in Calgary for the past forty-two years and had been working on securing funding for this production for three years. Dramaturge Bob White is perhaps best known for his long tenure as Artistic Director at ATP. The production also involved St. Mary's students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administrators in addition to theatre professionals.

The goal of *The Midnapore Cycle* was to produce a site-specific performance concerned with the historical significance of the land on which St. Mary's University College is situated. This two-hour historical review began with “The Creation of the Land” and ended with two important events: the 1999 fire that destroyed Lacombe Home and the college's