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Analyzing the Role of Theatre in Integrating Immigrants into the Host Society through Communicative Action

Asgarian, Saeid

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Analyzing the Role of Theatre in Integrating Immigrants into the Host Society
through Communicative Action

by

Saeid Asgarian

A THESIS

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Abstract

Western societies are growing and changing rapidly with an increase in immigrants over the last two decades. Every year, many people with different cultures and backgrounds immigrate into modern societies, such as Canadian society. One of the responsibilities of these modern societies is to help immigrants integrate into their new society in a multiplicity of ways. In this research, I analyze how theatre as a social tool can help integrate immigrants into a Canadian context, specifically Calgary, Alberta. This research aims to show how theatre can positively affect the integration of immigrants into their new society leveraging both social and performance studies sciences.

Anchored in the theories of social scientist Jürgen Habermas, I define the terms ‘society’ and ‘modern society’ and identify success criteria for integration in said ‘modern society.’ I then conduct an overview of various definitions of theatre and performance experiences utilizing the theories of seminal stage directors Bertolt Brecht, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, and Augusto Boal. In doing so, I attempt to create a framework and understanding of the characteristics of this art form which will support my analysis. I propose a relationship between the commonalities in these theatre styles and Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action. In addition, I apply this framework further by leveraging the theories of Nelson Goodman and Irving Goffman to illuminate how a theatre group can be a small sample of society in which to practice the theory of communicative action.

Finally, using a Practice as Research (PaR) methodology, I share qualitative data obtained from two case study performances I created and directed in my graduate work, *Green Key* (2023), and *Absence* (2023), where I demonstrate how I used the theory of communicative action in rehearsals. This research asserts that theatre can significantly impact the audience's lifeworld,

awareness, and perspective. In this way, it can benefit the integration of unintegrated groups such as immigrants.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Saeid Asgarian. Direct quotations from Canadian and immigrant artists and data used throughout have been extracted and compiled from collaborative works with those artists covered by Ethics Certificate REB22-1810 issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) for the study “Analyzing the role of theatre in the integration of immigrants into the host society” issued on April 11, 2023.

Acknowledgments

This thesis was a great adventure for me, helping me understand how I can help immigrants whose identity is very similar to my own. I have been an immigrant for most of my life and have always faced the challenge of who I am and what I should be. As an artist, it is not easy to create a show for people with different identities than you, and this research was an attempt to build a bridge between these differences so that we can create a better world.

I dedicate this research to all the people who, for any reason, had to endure loneliness and difficulty explaining to others their human perspective of this world. I dedicate this study to those who could not be born in good conditions but, with strength and effort, have created a better scenario for themselves and others.

There were people without whose help this research would not have been possible, and I would like to thank them. I am grateful to my dear wife, who accepted the hardships of living with an artist during all these years of my artistic and research activities. Whenever I was tired and disappointed, she gave me the power and hope to continue.

I am grateful to my mother, who taught me that a person's happiness is equal to the number of good things they do for others and the world around them. This was my main impetus for starting this research.

I am grateful to my father, who never liked my shows but taught me to respect different opinions and allowed me to create my world how I liked it.

Thanks to all my friends, colleagues, and professors at the University of Calgary for helping me become a better artist and researcher.

I would like to thank my dear supervisor, Professor Christine Brubaker, for trusting me and allowing me to develop in an excellent environment. She helped me to be a better person and

artist and patiently guided me to find myself, my artistic world, and my research path in this new society. She is not only a great supervisor but also a very good friend to me.

Finally, I am grateful for all the people who light a candle in the darkness of this world, even one candle.

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Introduction

As the global movement of people continues to shape modern societies, the challenge of integrating immigrants into their new environments has become a pressing issue. This research aims to delve into the potential of theatre as a facilitator for this integration, and thus shed light on a topic of significant societal importance.

I am an Iranian director, dramaturg, and playwright. I studied theatre directing at Tehran University and immigrated to Canada in 2022. I have lived as an immigrant for many years and have previously collaborated with immigrant and refugee groups, such as Afghans living in Iran. In 2018, I worked with these refugees for three months, creating scenes and performances that reflected their lives and situations in Iran. Due to these experiences, and my own as an immigrant, I am well-versed in the challenges of integrating into a new society. I have come to understand how theatre as a collective art can aid in the integration of immigrants into their new society.

In this research, I define concepts of society and integration from the perspective of Jürgen Habermas as well as scholars who are closely aligned with his theories and have expanded this work. His theory of communicative action is fascinating to me; I view it as a pathway to achieve integration in modern societies, although, in my opinion, he did not describe the role of art and theatre as a means of communication very successfully. I explain why theatre can be essential as a type of communication, and a highly effective tool for integration, helping people understand the perspectives of the other, particularly in situations where there is a linguistic difference. I acknowledge that I have chosen Habermas, a white male from the Western tradition as the primary lens of this study, and as such, there is a narrow range of

perspectives with regards to gender, racial diversity and contemporary analysis in this study.

Still, I believe that the theory of communicative action can be a gateway to a better society and create better circumstances for all people with all their differences.

In the first chapter of this research, I define the concepts of society, modern society, and integration through the sociological perspectives of Mohammad Reza Nikfar and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. I aim to elucidate the challenges faced by modern individuals in modern society through the theories of Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Walter Benjamin. I next examine the concept of immigration using Canada as an example of a modern society grappling with the issue of immigrant integration. This lens illustrates why a new immigrant in Canada may face challenges in integrating with their new society-

Chapter Two introduces theatre's role and function in society and its potential to address these issues. I examine the theories and methods of four seminal directors from Western theatre tradition: Augusto Boal, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, and Peter Brook. I identify commonalities between these artists and illuminate characteristics shared amongst all theatre and performance styles. These directors were chosen for their different methods to showcase that despite their crucial differences, the various styles of theatre share three common points: theatre's collective nature, the theatre's liveness in a specific place and time, and the need for communication between at least two people.

In the third chapter, I utilize Habermas's theory of communicative action and identify why theatre can be more effective than any other art form in facilitating communication and integrating people into society. Theatre's unique characteristics of collectivity, liveness and co-presence, its powerful connection with its audience through the simultaneous engagement of their real, social, and mental worlds, and its impact on the worldview (lifeworld) of people,

society, and culture, make it both a communicative action unto itself, and a facilitator of other communicative actions. Theatre can effectively communicate with immigrants through its visual and nonverbal features - an essential advantage as language is often a barrier for many immigrants, especially in the early years of their lives in a new environment.

In Chapter Four, I share my experiences as an immigrant artist in Canada, providing a personal and detailed explanation of the challenges immigrants may face in their new society. My struggles to understand the context in which I was working led me to create a show for Canadian audiences with Canadian actors. It was through this work that I discovered that this production group can be understood as an example of a small society. Using the theories of Nelson Goodman and Irving Goffman, I further analyze the production group as a site where communicative action can be practiced and tested and, therefore, an opportunity for integration. I present the findings from a case study of one of my MFA shows, *Green Key*, which leveraged the beginnings of these theories. By documenting the process of creating the show and its results, as well as examining similar professional productions, I identify common mistakes, confirm positive values such works can have, and propose how to create a better theatre/performance related to the integration issue.

In Chapter Five, I analyze a second case study, a theatre project called *Absence* which involved my collaboration with Canadian and immigrant artists where we used communicative action to integrate group members. Our goal was to create a powerful representation of societal issues in our show without any dialogue so that audiences with different languages and cultures could instead understand it through images and sound. At the beginning and end of this project, the participants (the production group) answered questionnaires. The end data of these questionnaires supported the theories presented in this research. I conclude that by using theatre

as a tool for communicative action, testing new theatre styles, playing with the concept of language in shows and performances, and involving more immigrants as members of the production team or audiences, it is possible to significantly help immigrants integrate into their new society.

Chapter One

Integration and Immigrants in Modern Society

Understanding and analyzing society as a cohesive whole is essential to research which examines how theatre can be effectively utilized to help immigrants integrate into modern society. This chapter attempts to describe the theoretical framework for understanding modern society through a social sciences lens and the complex dynamics of immigrant integration within said modern society. Throughout human history, many interpretations have emerged around the meaning and definition of society, often focusing on particular aspects of society rather than understanding it as a cohesive whole. Such dispersed viewpoints rarely yield satisfactory outcomes because they neglect the vital responsibility of characterizing a true and accurate understanding of society. This chapter attempts to close that gap.

In popular discourse, society usually assumes two leading roles, each of which has a different philosophical significance. The first perspective perceives society as a group with unique characteristics that separate it from other groups. The second perspective sees society as a composite of differences and similarities between its individual components. Mohammad Reza Nikfar, a contemporary Iranian sociologist whose perspective aligns closely with Jurgen Habermas' view, speaks to this in his article "Belonging, not Belonging"¹:

The term society within the context of a nation can be understood in two distinct ways.

The primary definition encompasses the nation as a community, representing a collective identity. In contrast, the secondary meaning emerges when the nation's cohesion and

¹ This article is in Farsi, and Saeid Asgarian has translated some parts into English for this research.

stability depend on shared historical narratives, language, religious beliefs, cultural practices, and even common racial or ethnic backgrounds. (3)

This second view of society relies on culturally myopic viewpoints. The members of this society consider certain domains (e.g: governance, education) to be solely theirs, to the extent where members outside of this society are considered to be outsiders or foreigners. This idea can be based on historical indigeneity, historical memory or ideology in that region. Complicating this is the inclusion of genetically based beliefs, (or genetic determinism), whether racial or cultural. As Nikfar describes “This has been considered a fallacious concept in the annals of intellectual history” (4). Nevertheless, this notion's persistence and influence within various belief systems and identity-centric policies can be seen. Nikfar asserts that:

This proprietorial issue stems from the fact that it references genuine phenomena but assigns them erroneous labels and misinterprets their significance. The authenticity lies in a set of symbols endowed with a rich and distinctive symbolism perpetuated through narratives. Its existence is rooted in its history, not the other way around, and its history does not mean its continuation. The fight over this view is a fight over narratives, a fight over whose voice is heard. (4)

It is, therefore, imperative to recognize that a region's historical narrative cannot include its entire contemporary identity. Therefore, even though the use of the term culture may refer to a society's ontological foundations, it cannot represent the whole because there is a lack of a single, widely recognized definition of culture. In order to clarify this issue, I need to consult well-known definitions of the term culture. The first and most widely cited definition of culture comes from B. Taylor's significant book *Primitive Culture*. Taylor offers a foundational articulation of culture as “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals,

custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society” (1). Alternatively, Leslie A. White, in the *Britannica Encyclopedia*, articulates a distinct perspective on culture as “behaviour peculiar to Homo sapiens, together with material objects used as an integral part of this behaviour. Thus, culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements”. And finally, David Crystal defines culture in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* as “the way of life of a group of people forms patterns of thinking and behaviour passed from one generation to another. This concept includes beliefs, values, language, political organization, economic activities, techniques, and art forms” (312, 313). These definitions highlight various aspects of culture, with some focusing on its social attributes and others on its hereditary dimension. However, they fail to clearly establish whether culture is the creator or product of its components. Consequently, culture alone proves insufficient to comprehensively define a society, as it encompasses diverse definitions, none of which can fully encapsulate the entirety of a society's essence.

There is another way to examine society, focusing on structures and social gaps. Philosophers such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel have discussed this in detail. Simmel, for instance, in the article “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, explained how different social classes and conflicts come about: “The decisive fact here is that in the life of a city, struggle with nature for the means of life is transformed into a conflict with humans, and the gain which is fought for is granted, not by nature, but by man” (17-18). Simmel then references Nietzsche's perspective, saying:

Nietzsche may have seen the relentless struggle of the individual as the prerequisite for his full development, while socialism found the same thing in the suppression of all competition – but in each of these the same fundamental motive was at work, namely the

resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social technological mechanism. (11)

In his text, Simmel explores the profound impact of urban living and the evolving societal structure on the modern individual. He posits that this new way of life amplifies rationality within modern man and intensifies resource competition. Simultaneously, Nietzsche's perspective on modernity is rooted in his disdain for the contemporary lifestyle characterized by a dependence on money, the world of commerce, and the structure of metropolises. Both Simmel and Nietzsche concur that people in this emerging world, entangled in a web of monetary dependencies and urban existence, are compelled to become increasingly rational and specialized as they compete. However, Simmel and Nietzsche did not directly mention the emergence of competitiveness amongst the different social classes. To address this, it is imperative to refer to the opening lines of Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx asserts that:

...the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (74)

Marx mainly focuses on the divisions of social classes and how this is characterized by material and wealth distribution, especially during the early phases of capitalism when mass production gained popularity. Money became the critical link between everything, bringing about this mass production of goods in modern societies. Thus, it might be argued that these social classes and the economic relationships among them *characterize* modern society. It is

crucial to understand, however, that focusing only on wealth and material goods is not enough to fully capture the range of societal dynamics, as these categories frequently miss the essential components of discrimination. Discrimination is a broader term that extends beyond conflicts over social status and includes many oppressed groups whose struggles are not sufficiently addressed by looking at them through conflict and compromise. Examples of the societal dynamics that go beyond conventional class-based assessments are the struggles immigrants have integrating into their new environments and overcoming social isolation. These problems are not limited to social class, money, or compromise and conflict and as a result, attempts to characterize modern society only in terms of its social classes or economic structures ignores the complexity of the existence and rights of diverse people and groups. In order to obtain a thorough understanding of contemporary society, we need to embrace a more complete framework that considers the diverse facets of discrimination, identity, and human rights.

Using another perspective, we can discuss what Nikfar describes as the “integration approach and, conversely, exclusion approach” (6). The politics of contemporary society revolve around the concepts of freedom versus collective control. Freedom is essentially the absence of laws governing individual behaviour, and collective control is the mechanisms designed to rein in the chaos of these individual interests. As a result, the society we live in is one in which individualism and collectivism coexist and compete. From this perspective, it is possible to argue that society is a gathering place of all opinions and groups. While it is true that these groups and viewpoints differ at times, modern society serves as a platform for these interactions. It allows each group to live with freedoms of their own while being simultaneously connected to and subject to a general system of laws. The crucial point here is that from the perspective of individuals who are not a part of society or, more accurately, are excluded from it, they may only

view their participation or role as functionary; they do not consider themselves a part of society because their perspective is outside of this system

If governments do not want to exclude anyone, they should consider differences and perspectives in order to include *all* residents within this circle of society. As a result, one accurate definition of modern society may be that a society is the sum of its differences and that it should be understood to include the perspectives of all its members. A unifying force is necessary in such a society to unite disparate viewpoints and social groups. This combination of the unifying force in a field of differences will foster a sense of solidarity and belonging without bias; this gathering force of all the societal differences is called integration.

Modern society can be understood as a cohesive unit where differences are embraced, and integration is seen as the glue holding these differences together. Here, it is essential to comprehend how this kind of society came to be, as well as the characteristics of its members. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber, a scholar with extensive theories regarding rationalization in Western society, argues that Protestant ethics are one of the factors driving changes in the social structures of Western nations. According to him, the distinctive quality of Protestant austerity is its ability to break barriers established by tradition and transform worldly actions and behaviour, particularly in the context of commercial and economic endeavours. This issue is centred around two main ideas: first, modern humans desire to rebel against the fixed, give up the traditional view, and challenge laws that had restricted them. The rationalization process began when humans rejected the definite and began to doubt what they had been taught. It has been demonstrated historically that the rise of Protestantism was also a protest against the expression of and legalities of Christianity at the time and a challenge to several then-accepted absolutes. The second point is that modern humans, who were taught in

Christianity to accept sufferings in this world to go to heaven, accepted Capitalism which exploited this spirit of suffering to force individuals to accept suffering again for economic progress and mass production. Thus, the Capitalist system gives money a special place in modern human life. As a result, modern humans modify their behaviour and communication to correspond to the increasingly critical role that the economy and money play in this new society, and several of their behaviours are highly influenced by economic relationships.

Simmel discusses the function of money on modern humans in society in his article “Money in Modern Culture.” He asserts that money becomes that absolute goal and describes it as “a continuing spur to activity... a goal which appears as the piece de resistance as soon as other goals give it space; it is potentially always there” (27). Money, in contrast to other goals and life priorities, can be aspired to at all times.

Furthermore, Walter Benjamin provides the following definition of money's function in contemporary society in “Capitalism as Religion”:

A religion may be discerned in capitalism – that is to say, capitalism serves essentially to allay the same anxieties, torments, and disturbances to which the so-called religions offered answers. The proof of the religious structure of capitalism – not merely, as Weber believes, as a formation conditioned by religion, but as an essentially religious phenomenon – would still lead even today to the folly of an endless universal polemic.

(2)

It follows that money, the new god in contemporary civilizations, plays a significant role in the lives of modern people. Although everything in this new society is controlled by money, modern humans have more civil freedoms than ever before, and they owe this freedom to the vast network of connections that money and metropolis have built. Nevertheless, this excessive

independence also makes them feel anonymous and incredibly alone. Simmel introduces the dynamic between the urban and rural and these ‘freedoms’ in “The Mental Life and Metropolis”:

If the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town, in which one knows almost every person he meets and to each of whom he has a positive relationship, one would be completely atomized internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition. Partly this psychological circumstance and partly the privilege of suspicion which we have in the face of the elements of metropolitan life (which are constantly touching one another in fleeting contact) necessitates in us that reserve, in consequence of which we do not know by sight neighbours of years standing and which permits us to appear to small-town folk so often as cold and uncongenial. [...] This reserve, with its overtone of concealed aversion, appears once more, however, as the form or the wrappings of a much more general psychic trait of the metropolis. It assures the individual of a type and degree of personal freedom to which there is no analogy in other circumstances. (15)

So, one can extrapolate from this “psychic trait’ in modern humans that they experience a new type of freedom in metropolises, and there is an experience of intense competition with others. This competition pushes people into specialization to maintain their position, but it also creates a great deal of fear and concern for one's own existence. Therefore, the characteristics of the modern human living in the modern world that we have covered thus far include: their curiosity and refusal to accept indisputable facts; their drive for growth and specialization; their abundance of freedom; but also, their loneliness, their constant sense of competition with others and the importance of money in their interactions with the world.

In order to proceed with framing this through the immigrant experience and understanding the process of integration, we must ask: Which groups are part of modern society? Integration has been referred to as the absorption and acculturation of foreigners, including immigrants and asylum seekers, however, the term can be expanded to those who are excluded and discriminated against including the unemployed, impoverished, and/or homeless. The nature of contemporary society is that groups of people who have become excluded and are in need of integration are varied. Therefore integration, defined as a force that unites despite differences, can be a framework and lens that extends to many. Integration is a measure of the successful or unsuccessful attempt to unite all groups in society. The key factor to remember is that, rather than blaming the excluded groups for their exclusion, any society's system should be able to understand the world from their perspective. On this note, Nikfar suggests that:

...the system rejects while pretending to open and collect. It tells those excluded that they need to adapt and that it is their fault if they do not. By doing this, the rejected individual is responsible for their rejection. When we approach inclusion through the lens of exclusion, we are granted a unique phenomenological perspective that enables us to identify systemic strains that are not visible through intra-systemic observation. (18)

Freedom and equality are the two main issues that need to be addressed when the system wants to view society from the perspective of the discriminated. Since the idea of freedom has the power to establish equality in contemporary society, it is more significant than equality itself. In a modern society, not all viewpoints are meant to align, but the idea of freedom fosters an environment in which we can live with one another's differences. The definition of freedom in modern society means the acceptance of equality, and equality means the loss of all concepts in a society's past, which has created inequality. According to this definition of freedom and equality,

there should be no distinctions between the citizens of contemporary society, and nothing (including language, culture, race, skin colour, religion, beliefs, abilities, class, and wealth) should prevent someone from accessing the resources of society. All social groups can be integrated if the system, in its various parts, can establish the conditions necessary for everyone to be able to achieve this freedom and equality. I want to emphasize once more how modern people living in cities have more freedom but also feel more alone and anxious than ever before. In this sense, they have greater freedom of action and autonomy as individuals as less is known about them in the metropolis. On the other hand, the freedom associated with equality refers to the capacity to exist and exert influence in an equal environment. When people can express and share themselves and their perspectives more easily. They experience less anxiety and loneliness and can now interact with a broad range of people. Even for modern humans, the ability to communicate under equal circumstances can alter how they view competition; I will go into more detail about this in the third chapter using Habermas' viewpoints.

What, then, are the essential elements of a successful integration into a modern society? The perception of freedom, equality, and ability to communicate are the significant and fundamental characteristics. Furthermore, by utilizing sociologist Talcott Parson's subgroups of this system, "economy, politics, law, and culture" (Nikfar 20), Nikfar identifies the following six criteria for successful integration into this modern society: "1- Economy: wealth; 2- Politics: participation; 3- Rights: immunity and equality; 4- Culture: freedom of speech and ethics; 5- Right international relations (satisfactory relations with other societies); 6- Right relations with the environment (good relations with future generations)" (21). Therefore, if theatre is meant to address the challenges of integration in modern society, it ought to address these six factors or incorporate them into its work.

Within this matrix of modern society, integration, modern humans, and success criteria, I analyze the immigration dynamic in Canada to highlight the unique characteristics of this group and emphasize the challenges they face.

Immigrants' Definition in Modern Society

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, an immigrant is defined as: “the process of coming to live permanently in a different country from the one you were born in” (2004). The word "permanently" can be understood as a long-term stay, indicating that immigrants wish to settle down in their new location for a length of time that will have a significant and lasting influence on both them and their new community. On the Canadian government's official website, the term "immigrant" is defined slightly differently. The difference arises from the fact that every government defines immigrants according to its own standards, meaning that the precise definition of immigrants can change among societies. The following is how the Canadian government defines an immigrant: “Persons who are, or who have ever been, landed immigrants or permanent residents are 'immigrants.' Persons who are 'Canadian citizens by naturalization' are also 'immigrants.' Persons who do not have Canadian citizenship and who are not landed immigrants or permanent residents are 'non-permanent residents” (2022). This definition of immigration can now be compared to the following on the website of the United States Department of Homeland Security: “Any person lawfully in the United States who is not a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or person admitted under a non-immigrant category as defined by the INA Section 101(a)(15)” (2022). The previously mentioned examples demonstrate how different definitions of immigrants exist. For instance, a person in the United States is no longer regarded as an immigrant after obtaining American citizenship. Different perspectives define different

kinds of immigrants in each nation, though an individual may continue to be considered an immigrant after obtaining Canadian citizenship.

Also, the distinctions among immigrants, expats, and refugees—each with their own definitions and requirements—can be significant in this context. For instance, the Canadian government's website defines a refugee as follows: “Refugees are people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution. They are not able to return home” (2019). Also, the distinction between an expat and an immigrant can be stated as follows: An expat or expatriate is simply defined as a person who lives outside their native country. Similarly, an immigrant is a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country. Only one distinction is made here – immigrants intend to stay in their new country indefinitely. Whether expats do or do not is unclear and the circumstances are unimportant. On the other hand, an immigrant may have chosen to immigrate to a new nation due to complex circumstances or limited opportunities in their home country. The primary distinction between these three categories is as follows: refugees have no option to return to their country of origin due to dangers there, whereas expats are free to return to their home country at any time due to favourable circumstances, negating the need for them to migrate to another area. However, while an immigrant's doors are open to return, it is likely that they have difficulties in their home country and would prefer to remain in their new country. This reluctance to return is one of the fundamental characteristics of an immigrant. One could argue that the immigrants in their place of origin struggled with social integration—a challenge that an expat is unlikely to encounter. In actuality, the immigrant was dissatisfied with the circumstances in their home country, or perhaps they felt negatively about their nation's relations with the rest of the world and future generations, or they had a problem within one or more of the previous instances of their home

country's economic, political, cultural, and legal spheres. In any event, the immigrants chose to emigrate because they were unintegrated people in their nation home country.

In the history of immigration to Canada, European colonial governments tasked with governing what would become Canada, did not “prioritize settlement during the majority of the 17th and 18th centuries” (“Immigration to Canada” 2013). At first, it seemed that neither the French nor the British governments were willing to invest the enormous sums of money or effort required to promote settlement. In France or Britain, migration to this land was also unpopular. However, the views of European governments shifted in the 19th century and more investment in their settlements resulted in a rise in immigration. One important point of immigration history in Canada began in the 1960s when Canada introduced “a point system to set merit-based standards for individuals applying to immigrate to Canada. Under this system, each applicant is awarded points for age, education, ability to speak English or French, and demand for that particular applicant's job skills” (ibid). With this system, “Canada welcomed over 437,000 new permanent residents (PRs) in 2022, according to data released by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)” (Kerkhoven 2023). I would emphasize that these people are from many different countries and cultures. For example, “In 2022, the following 10 countries were Canada's top immigration sources according to each immigrant's country of citizenship. India (118, 095 immigrants) 27%, China (31,815 immigrants) 7.2%, Afghanistan (23,735 immigrants) 5.4%, Nigeria (22,085 immigrants) 5.05%, Philippines (22,070 immigrants) 5.04%, France (14,145 immigrants) 3.2%, Pakistan (11,585 immigrants) 2.6%, Iran (11,105 immigrants) 2.5%. United States of America (10,400 immigrants) 2.3%, Syria (8,500 immigrants) 1.9%” (Sivakumar 2023)².

² It's important to keep in mind that many individuals who reside in Canada with a work or study permit before 2022 are not included in this number, but face similar difficulties integrating into current Canadian society.

In order to better understand the need for integration in this society, it is important to identify several differences between citizens and immigrants, as previously mentioned. This is because the nature of this research is such that it seeks to fill in the gaps between immigrants and Canadian citizens without any particular political point of view. The following section draws on both my personal experience as a new immigrant in Canada, as well as research from a variety of relevant sources.

The primary distinction for new immigrants is the financial resources available inside the Canadian economic framework. For example, new immigrants cannot obtain bank loans for purchasing a home; international students cannot compete with other students for significant scholarships in their field during their studies; and international students cannot obtain a Student Line of Credit from Canadian banks without the co-signer of a Canadian citizen. As well, international students pay significantly more in tuition than Canadian students. These limits apply only to immigrants who have not yet been given permanent residence (PR). All of these services are available to those who are granted a Canadian PR card. These discrepancies mean that before PR, life can be highly challenging for immigrants during their initial years in Canada. On the other hand, because most employers prefer Canadian work experience, individuals who enter Canada with an open work permit often struggle to find suitable employment, forcing many highly educated immigrants to work in low-paying, low-level positions. In addition, those who hold closed work permits are obligated to work under a certain employer, often leading to difficult circumstances for them. A UN specialist recently in Canada looking at immigrant workers' employment conditions observed that “Canada's temporary foreign worker programmes are a breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery” and urged that “the country to do more to protect workers and offer a clear pathway to permanent residency for all migrants” (United

Nations Human Rights, 2023). The Canadian government modified several pieces of legislation in response to this report. Although the Canadian government has rules for the country, it is crucial to this study that immigrants do not have access to the same resources as Canadian citizens regarding facilities and money. This problem might be one of the things keeping this population from fully integrating into Canadian society.

Political participation is similarly restricted. Citizenship is a requirement for voting in elections. All immigrant groups are affected by this issue, including those who received PR. The Canadian election website describes that: “To register and vote in a federal election, you must be a Canadian citizen aged 18 or older on election day and provide acceptable proof of identity and address” (Canada, Elections, 2023). However, “other than the ability to participate in Canadian politics, the most significant difference between a permanent resident versus a citizen is that permanent residence must be maintained. Once you are a Canadian citizen, you do not need to do anything to maintain your citizenship” (Major 2023). Receiving PR removes many barriers, but it also leads to fierce competition to declare one's identity and gain access to social resources, creating much stress for immigrants. On the other hand, due to the uncertain conditions in society, the immigrant is more cautious in their dealings and legal issues. In this way, during their initial years of residency in this nation, they have less freedom to express themselves. Nevertheless, immigrants do have access to the justice system, free medical treatment, and education. The health care system is free for citizens, permanent residents, holders of study or work permits, providing “reasonable access to hospital and physician services without paying out-of-pocket” (Canada Health 2023).

The issue of freedom of speech is also restricted to topics that are acceptable in Canadian culture. Immigrants typically find it easier to voice their opinions within their communities and

attempt to follow the same norms as non-immigrants outside of them. It should be noted that Canada currently enjoys excellent circumstances in the areas of international relations, freedom of expression, and consideration for the environment and future generations, among which is the wide range of artistic and cultural activities related to climate action that have been carried out in recent years. This is all part of Canadian culture. These positive points increase Canadian society's potential to integrate other groups, including immigrants. There are plenty of opportunities in today's society for immigrants to integrate. However, because of the social, cultural, political, and economic barriers, particularly for recent immigrants without permanent residency, this group typically faces challenges in their early years that make it difficult to see themselves as members of their current society. It also appears that there are barriers to communication between them and their new society, which is why many of them are, at least in their first years, more drawn to their specific cultural communities than to broader Canadian society. These communities can be seen as separated from society with the social eyes of the unintegrated, or as small circles outside the central circle of society. They would benefit from quicker integration, as would society, with the understanding that a more integrated society has a stronger political, social, and economic system.

Chapter Two

Theatre Definition and Identifying Commonalities in

Different Theatre Methods

Throughout human history, theatre as a form of human expression has evolved through different eras, geographies, and cultures of the world. My intention is to analyze and interpret seminal theatre styles to understand what common elements may exist across forms. In the *Oxford Dictionary* defines the word theatre in this way: “A place constructed in the open air for viewing dramatic plays or other spectacles” (Oxford 2023). This definition cannot capture the full potential of theatre because the concept of theatre has changed many times, and these changes have occurred historically in the Western world. Erika Fischer-Lichte's description of theatre can be used to describe it better. “The English word "theatre," as in many other Indo-European languages, derives from the Greek word theatron, which comes from thea ("show") or theâsthai ("to look on"). The word theatron was used to describe a gathering place for celebratory, cultic, political, and athletic events” (1). The term was used in a general sense to denote a place for watching a wide variety of events. She continues: “In English, the term "theatre" was first used in the fourteenth century to designate an open space where people could watch spectacles of various sorts. The term referred to any open space for watching” (2).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the term started to be used to specifically refer to institutional art theatre or drama, opera, and ballet performances. In the later 20th century, theatre surfaced as a part of western academia. Fischer-Lichte identifies that since the 1970s, theatre has turned into a key concept in the humanities and social sciences. One of the most pervasive concepts in much scholarly work over the past few decades is the term "theatricality."

It is used both for a variety of performances; for example, scholars writing about ritual describe rituals as “theatrical”-and for mise-en-scène beyond the theatre” (4).

All interpretations and definitions of the term ‘theatre’ (from ancient Greece to the present day) refer to a particular, special place, where events can occur. Further, it is a place where humans can experience live and/or new events. This dimension of theatre as unique and special is important because it distinguishes it as an environment separate from other environments, and people must be present in that special environment. In this space, information, or data (images, sounds, silences, symbols, and ideas), is constantly exchanged between people and performers. This exchange in the theatre space is essential because an audience and a performer need to connect with each other to create theatre. For the performers and the audience to collaborate and make a shared space, they both need to be mentally and physically present in that space. When this occurs, information is transferred between the two groups through words, sounds, movements, images, bodies, objects, symbols, designs, and silences. Each of them forces audiences to consider, analyze, and assess the performance. Furthermore, relationships in theatre are built on concepts and images that transmit information and meanings. This relationship can take on different forms and components in various forms of theatre and performance art.

Reviewing selected seminal theatre methods³ can clarify how conveying information and meanings is common in all theatre types. For example, in his book *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal introduces a new form of theatre process called Forum Theater in which he helps his audiences understand how they can invite transformation into their lives. he

³ I have selected Augusto Boal, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook’s methods as their styles are well-known, and they employed different theatre methods to engage with their audience. Knowing that these directors made their contributions in the previous century, I acknowledge that they may not reflect current contemporary discourse regarding performance. However, I assert that their work has significantly influenced Western theatre practice in the past 50 years.

uses the metaphor of the power dynamics and social system of chimpanzees to explain his reason for creating Forum theatre. He proposes that people should not simply accept their lives, and the hierarchy of power like chimpanzees, but should always maintain a critical view of our world and attempt to change their lives for the better.

The fat rulers stated that only by birth could one reach the top, by inheritance, or by special divine decree which no one knew for certain how to obtain, but that all were obliged to obey, under pain of coconut to the head. As we know, things seem to be as they are, though they are never as they seem to be. In tranquillity, those at the top ate their bananas with silken sensuality, while those below got the skins (76-77).

Boal also speaks to the human capacity to conquer our identity and our citizenship; the caveat, however, is that “we will only be complete citizens if we are capable of intervening in our society – in whatever aspect that does not please us – and transform it” (85). That is to say, in the Forum Theater, Boal posed the question, "What is the problem in your life?" and then used that question to set up a scenario on stage. He gave the audience an opportunity to play in front of an actor on stage and offer a solution to the issue with their act. According to Boal, it enables audiences to understand that they can always significantly improve their lives. By bringing the audience into the drama or stage, he attempts to strengthen the two-way communication between the audience and the performer. He seeks to empower the audience to speak their mind and express their views, and this facilitates deeper communication between audiences and Boal's team. So, communication (sharing information and meanings) between two groups (audiences and theatre makers) was essential in Boal's theatre. In fact, Boal wanted his audience to understand that there is no certainty in this world, and they can change their life conditions just

as they can change the drama in Boal's theatre. Boal creates a relationship between his theatre and its audience to help them think about changing their lives.

Other theatre methods can be examined to explain this issue further. For instance, despite profoundly different theatre styles, communication and the sharing of information and meanings were critical to the theatre methods of other important theatre makers such as Brecht, Brook, and Grotowski. Bertolt Brecht drew many of his theatrical theories from the Expressionist theatre director Edwin Piscator. His theatre was political theatre, and he may be best known for his highly specific technique of alienation. He wanted to remind the audience that what they were witnessing was not real but only performance, and they should not get emotionally involved in the character's circumstances or stage's atmosphere. He explains his theatre as follows in *Brecht on Theatre*

The spectator was no longer allowed in any way to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play. The production took the subject matter, and the events shown and put them through a process of alienation [Entfremdung]: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding (111).

Brecht was the leading creator of Epic theatre, the purpose of which was to make the audience think, question, and criticize various problems in their lives. German philosopher Walter Benjamin describes a feature of Epic theatre as a witnessing of someone who is assiduously following a process with all of his being. Epic theatre (as theorized by Brecht) presupposes, above all, that the audience this theatre seeks to draw is one that will watch the play in a comfortable manner, and, unlike a reader of a novel alone with his text, such an audience will always arise as a collective. Additionally, this audience—collectively—will typically feel

compelled to rapidly adopt a viewpoint regarding what it observes. However, Brecht believed the events performed on stage need to be of a nature that allows the audience to critique and compare them to their own experiences. Brecht was looking for a specific relationship with audiences similar to Boal, though they had different methods. Brecht's goal was to nurture the audience's critical view in his theatre and to foster a collective dialogue between the stage and the audience, encouraging them to reflect on their lives and bring about meaningful change in the real world.

This can be seen in other theatre methods. For example, in Grotowski's or Brook's methods. I want to touch upon their perspectives on the connection between their performance and the audience without delving too deeply into their theatrical style. Grotowski did not believe in a universal audience for his plays. Indeed, he insisted his plays required a particular audience. He believed that his shows were not for the man who wanted to unwind after a long day at work by going to the theatre. He agrees that everyone has the right to unwind after work, and many kinds of entertainment are available for this purpose, including music hall, cabaret, and certain types of films. However, Grotowski is interested in the viewer who genuinely needs spiritual support and who aspires to examine themselves by confronting the performance. Grotowski is interested in the observer who moves beyond a basic level of psychic integration, satisfied with their own small-scale, geometrical, spiritual stability, certain of their morality and lack of uncertainty. Who are constantly in the process of developing themselves, whose restlessness is focused on discovering the truth about who they are and what their purpose in life is. Regarding this, he states the following in *Towards a Poor Theatre*:

This matter is not determined by the social background or financial situation of the spectator, nor even education. The worker who has never had any secondary education

can undergo this creative process of self-search, whereas the university professor may be dead, permanently formed, moulded into the terrible rigidity of a corpse (46).

Grotowski, through his performances, sought to establish a connection for the audience, a “means for leading participants back into the elemental connections between people and their bodies, the natural world, and each other” (Brockett 495). He did so by working on the audience's subconscious. His ideal experience was that the audience would not perceive an ultimate or inevitable conclusion. His research into this connection can be seen in the final period of his theatre in the 1970s when he placed the actors and the audiences on the same level to enhance communication through a shared experience, or to break “down the blocks that stood between performer and audience” (ibid) and eliminate “the idea of theatre” (ibid). Grotowski sought out an audience-performer relationship that was a “meeting, not a confrontation; a communion where we can totally be ourselves” (ibid). As a result, his theatre had always been a place to create collective communication, allowing individuals to contemplate fresh aspects of the self and life, and to explore novel perspectives. As mentioned, this can also be seen in other theatre styles, such as Peter Brook's theatre.

Brook shared Brecht's belief that society needs changing—urgently. Like Brecht, Brook also understood that stating an idea is not enough for it to stick. rather, the theatre must operate by breaking open a series of habits with employing a variety of contradictory techniques to change levels and directions. However, Brook insisted that it was not enough to just show the audience contradictions that provoked thought. Brook believed “if audiences were to be made not merely to think, but to act, they had to be presented both with the situation that demanded action and with a sketch of their own irresponsibly passive reaction to it” (Mitter 98). In fact, Brook used specific techniques, such as working on stories from different cultures to tackle

philosophical questions with the intent to change people's lives. He wanted to create a performance experience that was new and unanticipated for audiences and required their reaction; he wanted his audiences to think about important questions in their own lives and then, most importantly, enact personal change. He talks about his artistic goals in *There Are No Secrets*: "The great eternal question that we ask ourselves is: 'How are we to live?' But great questions remain completely illusory and theoretical if there is not a concrete base for application" (62). Brook believed that the "theatre is a wonderful place to meet between the practical craftlike dimension, like in pottery, and the great questions of humanity, like life and death" (63). It is this double dimension, craft and philosophy, in Brook's world that makes theatre so valuable. He used this to explore the foundations of the creative process, famously so when considering how an artist may start thinking about the space when they are getting ready for a show. Is this space good or not? Does it have a purpose? Does it work? "If one takes as a starting point an empty space, then the only question is that of efficiency. Is the empty space insufficient? If the answer is yes, then one starts to consider what the indispensable elements are" (63). According to Brook, the foundation of the shoemaker's craft is creating painless shoes, while the foundation of the theatre craft is creating an effective relationship between the actors and the audience using very tangible elements.

As mentioned, building a relationship between the stage and the audience was particularly important to Brook. I do not intend to delve into the details of Brook's theatre style and his cultural vision, however, it is worth highlighting in the context of my research that Brook searched for roots, stories, and myths in many of his artistic projects because he believed a theatrical action could be potent and dangerous, and thereby release a hidden collection of thoughts, images, feelings, and impulses in the present moment. He believed that "working on

cultural roots could help to create a better connection between the performance and people” (Mitter and Shevtsova 101).

Theatre is a space for exchanging stories, images and meanings, and we can see this common point in all theatre styles, whether it is tragedy or comedy, musical or physical theatre, whether the performance tells a story or creates images, is participatory or documentary. I chose those four directors to show that this common point can be found in their perspectives regardless of their different theatre styles. If we consider all the various modern and historical definitions of theatre, we will see that theatre is a place for communication, dialogue, and a collective experience. This definition is unique to the theatre and separates it from other arts as a live collective art. These are the three characteristics (place for communication, collective and live art) that can make this art a suitable tool for the issue of integration.

The following chapters will examine the importance of these three characteristics in supporting immigrants' integration into modern society. In the following, I discuss how theatre can help immigrants integrate into modern society.

Theatre and Integration

If theatre contributes to addressing immigrants’ integration issues, in what ways does it do so? Furthermore, why is this question of particular importance in today's world? Many modern societies started to accept more new immigrants or asylum seekers several years ago due to the “population crisis and/or lack of labour force, production crisis, lack of skilled workers and other political, economic, and social reasons to cover their production and distribution system” (Nic 2023). Canadian society explained as an example in Chapter One that modern societies are accepting many new people, and this massive wave of newcomers with different

cultures and backgrounds to a new society has its advantages and disadvantages. It can lead to increased cultural diversity in society, with each individual bringing their own background, memories, and traditions. As a result, there is a need to bridge these differing perspectives and cultural norms within the host society. It is my assertion that one of the levers that can help to solve this problem is cultural and artistic productions, and theatre as a collective art can play a positive and influential role. In modern societies, the significance of this question is heightened by the influx of newcomers for various political, economic, and social reasons. Governments are compelled to “prioritize the integration of these discriminated groups to improve conditions for all citizens” (Nikfar 12). As mentioned, “the issue of culture is one of the main concepts of this crisis” (ibid), and theatre is a tool that can directly work with cultures, ideas, consciousness, stories, images, and beliefs.

The main problem related to this issue is that the theatre itself is a niche artwork in many modern societies. Theatre is a tradition for those of Western backgrounds, and many new immigrants do not attend the theatre. Also, it is prohibitively expensive, and the plays on stages primarily centre white/western European stories usually created by white artists. For instance, “in the fall 2022 theatre productions in Calgary, Canada, less than thirty percent of the people who created the theatre are from IBPOC communities” (Chromatic Theatre 2022). Keeping this crucial fact in mind, I would like to present various ideas related to the impact of theatre on culture and the integration issue.

Throughout the history of theatre, many artists have used their work to improve the lives of groups who have experienced “discrimination such as refugees, women, the homeless, the unemployed, the disabled, and immigrants” (Jeffers). However, I want to point out a specific view that needs more attention using Nelson Goodman's philosophical theory.

As asserted in the last part of this chapter, the theatre is a place to exchange information, ideas, images, and stories. In this way, theatre can improve audience awareness regarding their life. This awareness is also helpful for integration. Many theatre groups created their performances to familiarize their audience with the conditions and lives of discriminated groups in society, such as asylum seekers. In this regard, there are many examples, such as *The Odyssey*, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine. The play contained 36 actors who played one hundred and sixty-nine un-named characters in 62 scenes. Built on refugee testimony, “the text is not credited to any single author, and the names of forty-nine people are listed as having collaborated on the script” (Jeffers 70). Throughout this process, the group interviewed refugees willing to speak with them and the recordings were then returned to their French headquarters. One remarkable piece of staging that is often referred to in this production was the use of small trucks to move the actors on and off stage, and “at no point did any of the actors’ feet touch the ground” (71). The program under discussion was started and is being conducted by people who live in the states where refugees have fled to better understand refugees and inform viewers about them.

Apart from increasing audience awareness, an acting process can facilitate integration. Acting is essentially the investigation and enactment of a character’s viewpoint. Actors, especially those in projects dealing with psychological perspectives, gain the ability to see the world and problems from fresh angles, enhancing their understanding of diverse perspectives, which is a necessity for integration. While this is a valuable exercise in promoting understanding, it's beyond the scope of this research to delve deeper into this aspect as it is limited to only a few members of society. Nevertheless, it's important to acknowledge this craft when discussing the impact of theatre on the integration issue.

The next crucial point in this research is the process of producing a show by a group and then sharing it, which can be very effective in integration. To explain this idea better, I want to use Nelson Goodman's view about art. I should also mention the fact that Goodman never directly attributed this view to theatre and performance. This theory, however, has the potential to be examined and extended to the context of theatre and performance. Goodman expresses his view about art in *Ways of World-Making* as follows:

An abstract painting that represents nothing and is not representational at all may express, and so symbolize a feeling or other quality or an emotion or idea. For a work to be an instance of 'pure' art, of art without symbols, it must, on this view, neither represent nor express nor even be representational or expressive. Whoever looks for art without symbols, then, will find none if all the ways that works symbolize are taken into account. Art without representation or expression or exemplification-yes; art without all three-no. Things function as works of art only when their symbolic functioning has certain characteristics (60-67).

Goodman proposed the idea that every artwork either contains a representation, expression, exemplification, or a combination thereof. Therefore, the artistic works represent what we experience in our real life. I want to use this hypothesis to consider creating a theatre and its process as an artistic work and an opportunity for the theatre group's members to represent issues of their real lives in this process. In fact, when a theatre group wants to produce a performance together, their process and relationships can represent their social relations and issues in the real world. So, we can consider the process of a theatre group as a microcosm representing what happens in a real society. According to this hypothesis, producing a group show can be a symbol of society for further analysis and can also be a platform to help

integration as a group activity. In fact, another person is always needed to form a show (if we consider the common points in all the forms of theatre, we can see that another presence is always needed). Therefore, theatre is a collective activity, and people need to dialogue with each other for their common goal. If they want to create a performance, they need to hear each other's perspectives, understand, interact, and help each other to achieve their common goals. So, in any case, they need to communicate and interact with each other. This interaction is multifaceted during the production of a project, which means that all members must communicate, exchange information, and realize each other to get closer to their goal. This issue is precisely what can be observed in many interactions of contemporary life, so the process of producing theatre can be a representation and an example of what is happening in society. If this process is more connected to current conditions, it can be more connected to issues of modern society. The theatre process is an excellent platform for research on the issue of integration in society and simultaneously helps attend to the issues of integration. Furthermore, it can be emphasized that sharing the process results (performance) with the audience, facing others' views or criticisms, and creating a more comprehensive range of communication is necessary. If theatre groups who work with the discriminated groups of society mistakenly place their work in a limited and closed space, they cannot create a bridge between their members and society. Theatre can only create a bridge by sharing the group's results with others to witness and understand, and through this sharing, both performers and audiences can communicate about the performance's ideas.

Chapter Three

Communicative Action, Lifeworld and Theatre as a Social Tool

Philosopher Jurgen Habermas theorized that the problems within societies were due to the attitudes of its members. In his book *The Theory of Communicative Action*, he analyzed how societies evolved from magical and mythical frameworks of understanding to their current rational ones. Past societies attempted to give human characteristics to the causes and forces that formed the non-human world (nature) and the human world (culture); people in the past frequently synthesized these ideas through myths. They constructed myths for the things they could not understand or do and had no control over. As such, these myths held authority and power over humans and defied critique or revision. This kind of worldview is also evident in religions in which ideas are impervious to criticism and change. Thus, one of the distinctions between our current world and the mythological belief systems of the past is the capacity for criticism and revision. Mythical worldviews are far from making possible “rational orientations of action in our sense.” (Habermas vol.1 44). In addition, Habermas examines how the rise of Protestantism and the challenge to long-held beliefs within this movement, signalled the start of the spread of Protestant values and ethics in Western society. It (Protestantism) grew simultaneously with “expertise, science, and the law” (ibid). However, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, the increasing importance of money, law, science, and expertise in these new societies led to new issues for modern humans. The nature of Protestant ideas can be linked directly to the origin and beginning of this problem in contemporary Western societies; Max Horkheimer, on whom Habermas based his theory, stated the following in *Eclipse of Reason*:

By the very negation of the will to self-preservation on earth in favour of the preservation of the eternal soul, Christianity asserted the infinite value of each man, an idea that penetrated even non-Christian or anti-Christian systems of the Western world. By negating himself, by imitating Christ's sacrifice, the individual simultaneously acquires a new dimension and a new ideal on which to pattern his life on earth" (137-138).

This quotation points to the individualism of the Protestant ethos and was acknowledged as a new governing pattern in their lives. The purpose of identifying this is not to understand the Protestant worldview; instead, it is merely to understand the conditions for the emergence of capitalism.

In the first volume of the *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas asserts: "The Protestant ethic of the calling fulfills necessary conditions for the emergence of a motivational basis for purposive-rational action in the sphere of social labour, it satisfies, to be sure, only the starting conditions of capitalist society; it gets capitalism underway, without, however, being able to secure the conditions for its own stabilization" (228). Such an idea allowed modern humans to tolerate more significant pressure in the pursuit of wealth and knowledge. Their assimilation into the modern society system required them to suppress many of their desires in favour of producing more goods and making more money. As was indicated in the previous chapter, this type of person evaluates everything in terms of money, which serves as a mediator of exchange value. To them, everything is a transaction, and their mentality is shaped by transactions, which influences how they behave. "In this instance, their social relationships turn into purely instrumental relations" (ibid), and they stop being honest in their interactions with the outside world. As previously stated, the modern human experiences significant pressure, anxiety, and loneliness because of this issue. Consequently, Habermas offers his theory of communicative

action to improve human conditions in modern society. His theory wants to create the conditions for goal-seeking action to transform into communicative action between humans. Its definition is: “the interaction of at least two [humans] capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extraverbal means). The [humans] seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement (Habermas vol. 1 86).

However, it is important to note that this agreement is the result of a process of argumentation. Habermas describes this concept as follows: “We use the term argumentation for that type of speech in which participants thematize contested validity claims and attempt to vindicate or criticize them through arguments. An argument contains reasons or grounds that are connected in a systematic way with the validity claim of a problematic expression” (vol.1 18). It has as its aim to produce “cogent arguments” that are convincing in virtue of their intrinsic properties and with which “validity claims can be redeemed or rejected” (vol.1 25). Thus, this kind of dialogue signifies the beginning of communicative action in which various points and differing perspectives on a particular issue are discussed and opinions on the matter at hand are exchanged.

It is important to highlight the circumstances in which this dialogue will occur and the two primary components of communicative action: First, the system, and second, lifeworld, also known as lebenswelt. The system is simply a set of rules and frameworks for communication. Lifeworld is a more complex idea. Habermas describes the concept of the “lebenswelt or lifeworld as processes that are correlated in order to help achieve understanding” (Habermas vol. 1 70). A simplified definition of lifeworld might be all the influences and background – all that make up one’s understanding of the world and influence our ability to communicate.

Habermas' theory asserts that people who engage in communicative action will reach a consensus on the horizon of their individual lifeworld. Their background convictions form the basis of their lifeworld. Through this background information, the individuals communicate consciously and unconsciously to define situations; they also distinguish between their subjective, objective, and social worlds through their lifeworld to comprehend and navigate these different situations. The lifeworld also stores "the interpretive work of preceding generations" (ibid). As a result, the lifeworld serves as the conservative counterbalance to the disagreement that inevitably arises during any real process of understanding.

Thus far, we can understand communicative action as a type of consensus-based communication executed within a systematic structure and with the assistance of the participating individuals' lifeworld. However, in what context is this discussion and exchange of ideas taking place? It should be stated in response to this question that three objective, social, and subjective worlds serve as the foundation for dialogue, opinion, and information sharing. Habermas explains these three worlds or 'universes' as: "First, the world of physical objects or physical states; second, the world of states of consciousness or of mental states, or perhaps of behavioural dispositions to act; and third, the world of objective contents of thought, especially of scientific and poetic thoughts and of works of art" (106). They are attributed to the speakers' and listeners' own perspectives on the notion of communicative action. The search for consensus is undertaken by the actors themselves, who evaluate it in terms of truth, justice, and sincerity—that is, in terms of the "fit" or "misfit" (107) between the speech act and the three communicative worlds the actor chooses to relate to with their statement.

Such relations hold between an utterance and 1. The objective world (as the totality of all entities about which true statements are possible); 2. The social world (as the totality of

all legitimately regulated interpersonal relations); 3. The subjective world (as the totality of the experiences of the speaker to which he has privileged access)” (Habermas vol. 1 100).

In addition, every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding. Habermas outlines this issue as follows in the second volume of his book *Theory of Communicative Action*: “Communicative action relies on a cooperative process of interpretation in which participants relate simultaneously to something in the objective, the social, and the subjective worlds, even when they thematically stress only one of the three components in their utterances” (120).

It is important to explore why I think theatre differs from other arts in communication by defining these three worlds and referencing Habermas' theory of communicative action. According to Habermas, in order to improve society and the future of its citizens, modern people need to replace their goal-seeking rationality with the rationality that comes from consensus-based dialogue and communication. Pursuing this change can be the best way to integrate diverse viewpoints into modern societies as it creates a context where citizens are able to communicate with one another on equal footing and provides an opportunity for the expression of all opinions.

With reference to Habermas' theories, the following question must be asked: What are the functions and attributes of the theatre in terms of integration, considering the three communicative worlds (objective, social, and subjective)? As mentioned in Chapter Two, the theatre has three main characteristics: it is performed live and in the moment; it requires communication through images, dialogues, symbols, music, etc.; and it relies on collectivity. Due to their physical presence in the designated location and time of the theatre, the audience faces an objective world; they engage with the work as part of a collective event and in accordance with

established guidelines, which allows them to connect with this art from the social world. Additionally, because theatre is full of emotions, desires, ideas, thoughts, movements, sounds, and symbols, it can communicate with its audience through the subjective world. Therefore, as a result of theatre's three characteristics, it can effectively communicate with audiences from all three worlds—the objective, social, and subjective. The theatre survived over the centuries, despite significant technological advancements, and has maintained its place in our society because of its exceptional capacity to engage the audience in three different worlds simultaneously. This separates theatre from all other arts in terms of communication and impact on the audience and is the main reason that theatre can facilitate communicative action (not necessarily in the form of language) and integration of immigrants. Although Habermas' communicative action is designed based on the role of language in communication, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, performance can also communicate with the audience through all three worlds to express a concept or idea and persuade them to examine their feelings, thoughts and interpretations in relation to that concept. It should be mentioned that there is no guarantee that the audience and the performance will ultimately reach an agreement on the content of the performance.

A dramatic work or a performance can be an opportunity in which a communicative action can be formed between performers and audiences and becomes a gateway to create an intersubjective, rather than verbal, connection; nonverbal connections can be helpful to an immigrant's integration due to language barriers, a common obstacle to their communication, recognition, and progress. It is this very obstacle that theatre can address. Performances can be a powerful platform to establish communication with immigrants through all three worlds to help

them better understand the new concepts around them, communicate better with their surroundings and, as a result, help them integrate into their new society more quickly.

If theatre is considered as a type of communicative action, one might argue that no reciprocal action is formed since spectators are passive in a typical performance configuration. However, referencing Jacques Rancière's theories in his book *The Emancipated Spectator*, theatre is the place “where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilized” (3). Rancière explains the description of the spectator's activity and asks: “Why identify gaze and passivity, unless on the presupposition that to view means to take pleasure in images and appearances while ignoring the truth behind the image and the reality outside the theatre? Why assimilate listening to passivity, unless through the prejudice that speech is the opposite of action?” (12). Since hearing and seeing are human means of communication that have the power to awaken an audience's feelings, desires, thoughts, and interpretations, they cannot be equated with passivity. Thus, “being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity”. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act, and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done, and dreamed. “Every spectator is already an actor in their story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story” (ibid 17). Each audience has a unique perception and way of thinking and feeling; at the same time, they are in collective action; they see and interpret the issues from their point of view, so it cannot be said that the audience is passive and has no influence on this communication.

Further to this, Habermas proposes a concept called normatively regulated action and explains it as follows:

The concept of normatively regulated action does not refer to the behavior of basically solitary actors who come upon other actors in their environment, but to members of a social group who orient their action to common values. The individual actor complies with (or violates) a norm when in a given situation the conditions are present to which the norm has application. Norms express an agreement that is obtained in a social group. All members of a group for whom a given norm has validity may expect of one another that in certain situations they will carry out (or abstain from) the actions commanded (or proscribed) (vol. 1 85).

As a result, the audience can sit in their chair and interpret a performance based on the rules and normatively regulated action between performers and audiences, but the audience is not passive in this communication. The audience's observation and interpretation of what they see is a type of an action or reaction, and the performer wants to see what the audience perceives and thinks about them. So, the audience's thought is a reaction to the performer's action, and it is part of this communication. This type of behaviour on stage is an honest attempt to build relationships with the audience.

Based on this explanation of how theatre can employ Habermas' theory of communicative action and play a role in the integration of immigrants, the question remains: what details are more important in a theatre to assist with integrating immigrants more effectively into society? To address this, I utilize the final three components of communicative action from Habermas' perspective: culture, society, and personality. According to Habermas, people interact with one another within the parameters of their society's social relationships, through the filter of their own personality, and in accordance with their cultural circumstances and laws. Culture is the body of information that communicators use “when they come to a

conclusion about something in the outside world” (vol. 2 138). He refers to the legal structures people leverage to “control their social group memberships and maintain cohesion” as society (ibid). By personality, he means the skills that enable a person to “speak and act, placing them in a position to participate in understanding processes and proclaim their own identities” (ibid).

Theatre and performance have the power to impact culture, society, and personality because they are collective forms of communication that engage audiences across all three worlds: objective, subjective, and social. Theatre as an art form is a type of communicative action and can also influence other communicative actions in our lives. As mentioned before, theatre communicates with its audience through all three communicative worlds so that it can improve people's awareness, and this awareness affects the personality, society, culture, and lifeworld. By raising awareness or encouraging the audience to see, hear, think, touch, participate, think, and interpret, theatre can change audiences' worldviews. In other words, during a show or performance, the actors and the audience are positioned in a relationship at a particular time and location. Both groups start to connect to their surroundings and the content of the performance. Furthermore, every performer and audience engages with a live, in-person performance through their specific mental and cultural backgrounds and lifeworld. These audiences experience this as a gateway to new communicative possibilities. It can change and improve their lifeworld and produces a new lifeworld for them.

But again, what details are most important in theatre to assist with integrating immigrants more effectively into society? The answer to this question is: if the content and components of a show/performance are more related to the lifeworld, feelings, wishes, thoughts and culture of the society and its citizens, it will establish a better relationship, and stronger communicative action with its audience, and thus have a greater impact on them. However, this issue is exactly the

Achilles' heel of many modern societies in their theatre and performance sector. In selecting and designing their shows, it is a challenge to know their audiences well and achieve a good relationship with their audience. This is a larger topic that the scope of this paper cannot fully address and yet it is the very question that drives my practice and fuels my critique of current mainstream theatre. As such, in my graduate work I tested Habermas' theory of communicative action through two theatre production case studies: *Green Key* and *Absence*. Using the theories of Irving Goffman, Nelson Goodman, and Habermas, I argue that the theatre production group can be a small sample of society and directly address the challenges of integration.

Chapter Four

A Production Group as a Small Sample of Society

The previous chapter explored the connection between theatre and communicative action, as well as the reasons why theatre fosters social awareness, communication, and integration. Indeed, I argue that communicative action is the solution for the integration of unintegrated groups in society because all perspectives of people are prioritized in this method. I further argue that theatre can be a tool to improve and assist with communicative action, and significantly impact the integration of immigrants into host societies. This chapter applies the theories of sociologists Erving Goffman, Habermas, and Goodman to a theatre production group as a prototype for exploring integrating immigrants and a means of practicing communicative action.

The scope of this thesis does not permit discussion of every one of Goffman's theories. However, to clarify this idea, I utilize Goffman's theory of *our presentation of self in everyday life* and how he likens it to performances by actors for an audience. Goffman theorizes that in every social interaction, we become an actor claiming a role, and as such, we must act in front of an audience. In this exchange, the performer and the audience recognize their subsequent roles and work to play them. He asserts that: "When an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be" (Goffman 24). What is worth noting here is how the audience is part of the dynamic in helping to execute the desired flow by, for example, ignoring the mistakes and slips of the actor or expressing appropriate reactions at the appropriate time. This relationship is mirrored in real life (in our communications) and in theatre (between

performers and audiences). It also happens between members of a theatre group who want to create a show together because they need to play different roles during this process. I refer to them as the production group.

If we consider the process and the performance of a piece of theatre, a show, as an artwork, from Goodman's view, the process of making and its final product can represent something like our community. On the other hand, according to Goffman's perspective, any relationship that happens in the social scene is similar to what is done in a show and its process. During its creation, many conversations, exchange of opinions, and thoughts are formed between the people of the production group; therefore, one can assert that the process of creating a show is full of social relations that are similar to the social relations in a society. As a result, from both perspectives, the production group of a show can be considered a small sample of a society that represents a real society. Likewise, there are many roles in this small sample; through their communication and social actions, these roles try to achieve their common goal. With all this, it is possible to design the process of creating a show to become a platform for performing communicative actions. In fact, the group of individuals who are creating the show (the production group) can be considered as a small sample of society, which is made up of people with different views and ideas, and these people try to reach agreements that lead them to a common goal through communication and teamwork.

Now, suppose there are both citizens and immigrants in this production group. In this case, this group can be an example of practicing Habermas' communicative action in smaller dimensions of society. It can also be a way to integrate unintegrated immigrants. In the framework of creating this show, the people of the group will attempt to understand other views

and lifeworld and look at the issues from new and different perspectives which can assist in their integration.

Methodology: Practice as Research

I tested communicative action as a catalyst for the integration of immigrants in the process of creating performance through two graduate theatre projects entitled *Green Key* and *Absence*, which I created in directing classes at the University of Calgary. *Green Key* was a class project that explored an immigration concept without using immigrant performers. *Absence* used Canadian citizens and immigrants working together as a production team. *Absence* was the main case study of my research and was conducted with a Certification of Institutional Ethics Review license (ID number REB22-1810) at the University of Calgary.

Employing an autoethnographic lens from my own experience as an immigrant artist in Calgary, I used a Practice as Research (PaR)⁴ methodology utilizing: experimentation, iteration, collaborative creation exercises, discussion and feedback, documented observations, and sharing of the work with audiences. I also gathered data through participant observations via surveys in *Absence* as per my ethics application. For the purposes of this study, ‘participants’ are defined as the group members (performers and creative team) in *Absence*.

⁴ Practice as research, in any disciplinary area, privileges action as a methodological imperative. In the arts, practice as research involves artist-researchers exploring, testing and extending a diverse range of creative methodologies and working across diverse contexts – exploring the relationship of creative interventions to both making and understanding the world. (Sjoberg)

Assumptions

I assumed that in the production of a show, people's viewpoints can be aligned to help them understand each other better and reach agreements on societal issues, thus promoting integration. To achieve and test this, I facilitated communication among the members during the show's production, allowing them to discuss integration criteria-related concepts and express their opinions. As an observer, I documented the outcomes of these interactions after each rehearsal to assess whether they helped align the members' perspectives on integration criteria. After reviewing my first project, *Green Key*, I identified my mistakes and used the insights to shape my second project, *Absence*, following a similar structure. I formulated specific questions based on integration criteria and asked the group members to answer these via an anonymized survey at the beginning and end of our process. By analyzing both the rehearsals and the members' responses to these questions, I aimed to determine whether using communicative action during the production process helped align the perspectives of members from different groups. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this approach could demonstrate that communicative action and theatre have the potential to facilitate the integration of discriminated groups, such as immigrants, in modern societies.

An Autoethnographic Perspective: Directing in Calgary as an Immigrant

Artist

Living and directing in a new cultural environment and language can be challenging. The most crucial element of doing a group and artistic activity is communicating with other members and understanding the worldviews in the group. Culture and language are the main elements of

communication; when both become new concepts for a person, they make communication difficult. To illustrate, sometimes you want to say something, but you do not know the common speech term of that concept among the people of this new society, or you want to say something, and you are not sure what meaning the word you want to say is exactly in this new culture and how other people will interpret your words. The issue of culture can affect our behaviour; for instance, hugging someone at a party for the first time can show respect and intimacy in one culture, but in another, it can be insulting and be viewed as disrespectful to the privacy of the other individual. For this reason, like many immigrants, I faced a significant challenge in establishing relationships with my colleagues and friends in this new environment. Learning the vast course of a new culture takes a lot of time, and my lack of knowledge about this issue made me unsure of how to direct a show in this new environment. I was unsure what concepts would be better to work on, how to convey them, and what my audience would think of them because I needed to gain more knowledge of Canadian culture. This lack of understanding resulted in technical errors and wrong design decisions that even an amateur director would not make. I was lost and confused about how to find the solution and connect with the Canadian audience and other audiences with different backgrounds and cultures in this society. Finally, one night, a new solution came to mind. I decided to focus my work more on the world of form and language in the theatre itself because, in this case, audiences with different backgrounds and cultures could better relate to the work and interpret its concepts.

My first attempt was in my directing class. I wanted to create a show called *Women* that focussed on Iran's situation. The play was about Iranian people, specifically Iranian women

protesting against the Islamic regime during ‘Woman, Life, Freedom⁵’ protests. I was aware that this university audience might not have the knowledge or understanding of this situation. In that performance, instead of turning to dialogue, I tried to advance the story through situations and form so that the audience could better understand the message of the show. While, indeed, the audience did not have enough information about Iran and its circumstances, I relied on the universal common language of image to help the audience understand the show's concept, atmosphere and message. This was what made me more convinced that theatre itself can be a means of communicating with the audience. At the same time, another important thing was that my lifeworld was changing during the rehearsals as the term progressed. I was becoming acquainted with new concepts and perspectives that I learned from working with my colleagues from different countries and cultures, and now I could better understand their worldviews.

Case Study #1: *Green Key*

Green Key was conceptualized without using any text or existing story. It focussed on the experience of the refugee. I asked seven BFA drama and acting students to join me in creating this performance. Two of them were Canadian, and the other five were Canadians whose parents had immigrated to Canada and, therefore, knew a language other than English. The only thing we knew at the start was that we wanted the piece to be participatory and interactive. I wanted to co-create this show with them to better understand their perspective on this issue as people born and raised in Canada. Indeed, I acted more as a facilitator in this project rather than a director. We began our project through rehearsing and iteratively testing ideas through exploration and

⁵ Woman, Life, Freedom is a slogan that originated within the women-led Kurdish movement. This slogan transcended its initial context and garnered global recognition following the 2022 protests in Iran, sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, who was in custody of Iran's morality police for “improper” clothing. The phrase rapidly became a universal rallying cry, symbolizing resistance against oppression and the fight for women's rights.

presentation. I wanted to rely on communicative action between group members to help our group achieve a common understanding of the refugee experience. I speak of communicative action “whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action, participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions” (Habermas vol one 285-286). I wanted to start talking to each other as the first step to defining who and what a refugee is and the challenges they face. In this respect, “the negotiation of definitions of the situation” is an essential element of “the interpretive accomplishments” required for communicative action (ibid). So, this negotiation defining the subject was the work - it was essential for our first step as we sought to reach an agreement to help us achieve our collective goal of creating this show.

When we began our work, I realized that some people in the group did not know the differences between a refugee and an immigrant. It was evident that the group needed to understand what a refugee experienced during their asylum-seeking period. This topic once again showed the importance of lifeworld in communication. Most of the people in our group had grown up in the comfort of modern society and had not found the need to really engage with this issue, which is why the data available in their lifeworld regarding the issue of asylum seekers was different from the data available in my lifeworld as a recent immigrant. This conversation helped me understand the differences in our perspective on this issue and better comprehend the perspective of the other group members. For this reason, I obliged the group members to undertake research and study this topic by reading the stories of asylum seekers. After this research, when the team members came in armed with this new-to-them information their

behaviour, thoughts, conversations, and ideas about the subject had completely changed. Their increased knowledge changed their lifeworld through their understanding of the experience of refugees. To illustrate, in the first rehearsal, a young actor kept laughing and joking during the discussion because the subject was not serious to them. They did not understand that we had chosen a difficult and painful topic. However, this person at the second rehearsal, after they had engaged in the research became serious and listened carefully to everyone. When they were talking about the true story of a refugee, they got upset and began to cry. This person was the same as that person in the first rehearsal, but their perspective and understanding of the performance concept had changed, and now they were looking at this issue from a more informed perspective.

Collectively, we began to develop our ideas about the performance concept. We all agreed on a common word, which was ‘nightmare’. All the group members agreed that the refugee experience was like a nightmare, and we decided we should start our show by designing some nightmares. We discussed what a nightmare meant and what it looked like for us as individuals. I understood the difference between my lifeworld as an immigrant and the lifeworld of the Canadian group members, even through the types of images and nightmares that were defined because our minds had produced different images and nightmares depending on what we had encountered in our lives.

In the next stage, I asked the actors to begin creating their nightmares as a group and share them with us. In order to create an atmosphere of confusion and fear, the groups all turned off the lights in the room and used their mobile flashlights for lighting; this choice allowed them to dictate what they wanted us to see, and it meant we could not see other dark places. We agreed to use this idea for the lighting of the first part of the show: ‘The Asylum Seeker’s Nightmare’.

In the next rehearsal, I asked the group members to find connections between the refugee stories they had read and their own nightmares so that we could integrate the form of the group members' nightmares with the main story of the play. The ideas helped us to design the entire performance. For instance, one of the actor's nightmares included an unknown person coming into her dream and forcing her to search the house and find her sister through a game of hot and cold. We designed the same game to invite the audience to look for a green key in the show location; for us, the green key symbolized the green card many asylum seekers in the real world are looking for to escape the asylum situation. In another example, one of the actors dreamed that he had a chair and had to choose between his two friends to sit on the chair and eliminate the other, and he could never choose between his two friends in his dream. Similarly, we had read stories of asylum seekers that sometimes, when they are on the water, they have to choose between themselves and others to fit in the boat. That actor's nightmare has similarities to refugee stories, so we brought that idea into the show.

The performance existed in three different sections. The first fifteen minutes, audiences met in the theatre proper and watched different scenes and movement sequences that represented refugees' nightmares and established the quest for the green key. We then ordered the audience to leave the theatre and proceed to a different non-theatrical space (at UCalgary, this was the University Theatre lobby), like asylum seekers, so that they could continue the search for the green key. This audience was led by a 'guide' who spoke a language the audience did not understand. The audience continued on a 'journey' attempting to follow directions by this guide in this foreign language and encountering different scenes and obstacles. In one section, the guide announced that there was not enough space for everyone and that one of the audience members had to be removed. The audience had to choose who. This audience member was

separated from that group at that moment and did not continue on. The ‘journey’ continued through different corridors and areas inside and outside. Each time encountering another scene/instruction or obstacle – inspired by the nightmares. This difficult journey and these stressful encounters helped audiences to see themselves as refugees.

As a production group, throughout the show's creation and design, we made significant progress toward the critical goal of better understanding one another, viewing the show's subject from fresh perspectives, and coming to an agreement through communication. Indeed, having these conversations during rehearsals brought us closer despite all of our differences by improving our understanding of one another and the show's subject. This is something we did not have before this group experience.

Another interesting point was the connection the Canadian audience could make with the concept and atmosphere of our show. We shared our show with audiences at the University of Calgary, another short run at the Ignite Festival at the Pumphouse Theater, and five performances for the Chinook Festival again at the University of Calgary. In each run, most of the audience could connect to the show's content. Since we had made this show in collaboration with Canadian actors, we were unconsciously able to address the subject of the show from a perspective that would be understandable for Canadian audiences, and at the same time, non-Canadians could relate to the performance because we also consider immigrant’s perspective in the show's design. As a result, not only were we able to better understand each other within our group, but this also allowed the audience to better comprehend the content and performance. In Canadian theatre, we have many samples of collaboration between Canadian and immigrant artists. Sometimes directors or companies collaborate with immigrant artists, such as my collaboration as director in the project *All Good Things Must Begin* with Calgary’s Downstage

Theatre Society in November 2023. Sometimes, theatre companies like Puente Theatre centre work on cultural diversity through theatrical experience in Canada, and sometimes, immigrants set up theatre companies and collaborate with Canadian actors in their projects. For instance, “Mohammad Yaghoubi and Aida Keikhaei are Iranian directors who founded the "Nowadays Theatre” company in Toronto and collaborated with Canadian actors in their first project called *A Moment of Silence* in 2016, a show in English about the situation of Iranian women” (Meerzon 257). In the mentioned examples and others similar to them, there was an intention to create a bridge between perspectives and worldviews through cooperation between immigrants and Canadians so that the work can be better and more inclusive in communication with audiences with different backgrounds. These collaborations are excellent and helpful for groups, audiences, and, finally, the Canadian society as an example of a modern society, but more is needed. The method of these people cooperating and the atmosphere of the show's rehearsals and production process can also significantly impact the result.

The *Green Key* show experiment did not necessarily provide the conditions to help a refugee or immigrant integrate but rather was more of a Canadian show that explored and shone a light on a refugee's perspectives and lifeworld. Other groups in Canada have made efforts in the field of immigrant theatre in similar ways. For instance, *Shifting Identities* by Taiwo Afolabi and Kristen Sadeghi-Yekta, was “a workshop for students to learn to conduct interviews with immigrants and use data to create a performance” (Meerzon 460). Their project, *Green Key*, and other similar projects can build a connection between the two groups, but they still have an inherent weakness in terms of authentically representing the refugee experience as they do not include refugee people as members in the show process and as such, their point of view is only understood through the filter of Canadians' incomplete perspectives. In contrast, if these pieces

could directly involve immigrants or refugees creating a show together, members' understanding, and lifeworld would change. The members would have more opportunities to understand the refugees and immigrants' perspectives and situations. In addition, it may create a stronger connection between the show and the audience and hence a more powerful performance as the entire production team would have a better understanding of the main concept. It should be mentioned again that we had this problem in the *Green Key* project as we only used asylum seeker's *narratives* instead of working directly with those individuals. This issue motivated me to change the production process of my next show, *Absence*. This show is the main case study in this research, and I will discuss the process of testing communicative action and its effects on the integration of immigrants through the creation of this performance.

Chapter Five

Case Study #2: *Absence*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my previous drama project, *Green Key*, had a problem: it attempted to explore the experience of a certain group in society without working directly with those members of that group in the process of creating the show. While I did provide conditions in our show rehearsals in which the communicative action as defined by Habermas was practiced, for me this did not address my research question regarding how theatre can be a tool for integration of immigrants. I wanted to consider how our production group, as a small sample of the society, can test communicative action to integrate the different attitudes and alter lifeworld of those individuals. All these reasons gave me the impetus and idea to begin creating the *Absence* show.

I started this project with a Certification of Institutional Ethics Review license (ID number REB22-1810), and my question was how theatre as a social tool can help immigrants' integration into the host society. At the beginning of creating the *Absence* show, I knew very little about its theatrical content. - only that it would be made by an equal number of Canadian and immigrant artists living in Canada, and that it would speak to the issues of the members' lives in the society of Calgary, Canada. One of my goals for making this show was to communicate with audiences from different cultures and thoughts and, at the same time, provide an equal situation for all group members to share their ideas in the process of creating the show. Because of both goals, language was considered an obstacle for achieving these goals. If I wanted to create the show based on a specific language such as English, French, Dutch, etc., there was the very real possibility that some audiences would not understand or connect with the show. In addition, I could not create equal conditions between the Canadian and immigrant

actors in the group. As a result, I needed a form of performance that would be a new language in itself and would be able to communicate across and with different cultures. I have tried some methods of playing with language before. For example, in *The Container* by Claire Bailey, which I directed at the University of Calgary as a class exercise, I asked each actor to speak their dialogue in a language other than English, and for those moments, English subtitles were provided on both sides of the stage. Also, based on situations in the play, all the actors would suddenly speak English and then speak again in their other language. In that show, the issue of identity was important to me, and I used this technique to highlight how language's fluctuation and mutability is part of the identity issue of refugees and immigrants. Nevertheless, I needed a more inclusive and powerful performance form for *Absence*. I was looking for a way to remove the language and use bodies, symbols, and music as much as possible. I was also looking for a new idea and did not want to create a dance piece or a musical show with a specific language. This is why I designed the *Absence* show as a catwalk or fashion show utilizing bodies, symbols, and music so that the work could communicate with audiences from different cultures, and each audience member could have their own view and interpretation. Additionally, we did not use any dialogue in our show, which created an equal situation for the Canadian and immigrant actors of the group in playing their roles.

Since we had a limited budget and our rehearsal time was limited to one month, we needed actors with experience in performance. As a result, we held an audition and finally accepted five Canadian and five immigrant actors as part of our group. I had worked with three of the Canadian actors before, but the other seven were new to me. All of them had some experience in performing arts. The age range of the members in our group was from 19 to 43 years old. We had three Canadian female-identifying actors whose heritage goes back to

England, Spain, and the Netherlands and two Canadian male-identifying actors whose heritage goes back to India and Mexico. Similarly, we had four immigrant female-identifying actors from China, Iran, and Ukraine, as well as an Iranian male-identifying actor. The assistant director was also a Canadian whose heritage is from India, and our lighting designer was also a Canadian, and his heritage was also Canada. In addition, I was an Iranian immigrant living in Canada as a group facilitator and director.

Questionnaire #1

To test the experience of integration, and as per my ethics application, in advance of rehearsals I distributed a fourteen-question questionnaire to every member of the group. These inquiries were created using the integration criteria (1- Economy: wealth; 2- Politics: participation; 3- Rights: immunity and equality; 4- Culture: freedom of speech and ethics; 5- Right international relations (satisfactory relations with other societies); 6- Right relations with the environment: good relations with future generations). I discuss the responses in the following as well as provide one or two samples of responses to descriptive questions below to illustrate the nature of the responses of the group members in Canadian Calgary society.

The initial query was: “How confident and relaxed are you about your economic situation now that you live in Canada?” We had four possible answers: *very satisfied*, *a little satisfied*, *a little dissatisfied*, and *completely dissatisfied*. In response to this question, the average Canadian's answer was “*a little satisfied*”, and the average immigrant group was “*completely dissatisfied*”. The differences between the answers to this question showed a big difference in economic prosperity between the immigrants and the Canadian citizens of our group, which can be an

example of what is happening in Canadian society as a modern society. The second question was: “How familiar are you with Canada's economic development mechanism and laws?” The answers ranged from “*very familiar*” to “*very unfamiliar*”, and the average answer of all the people in the group to this question was “*unfamiliar*”. This answer showed that both groups needed to be better aware of their economic opportunities in this society, which could be an obstacle to integration.

Questions three and four were about the political system and political groups in Canada, which most of the people in the group were completely unfamiliar with and had little information about their plans and ideas. Question five was: “How important is the Canadian political situation to you?” The average of answers was “*a little important.*” The answers again illustrated a lack of awareness and sufficient participation of the people of the group in the political issues related to their society, which in some way shows the feeling of not belonging to this society and is considered an obstacle to the integration of people in the society. The next question was: “Do you feel a sense of belonging to Canada and the Canadian people? Why?” One immigrant member answered this question as follows:

I feel like I belong in the sense that I am respected as a citizen of Canada, but it is so diverse that it can feel difficult to associate with one identity. It is hard to define a Canadian identity because of its multiculturalism. Because I am an immigrant, I do not feel that I belong to Canada's historical past, but I do get to create and represent its future. However, because I am not a native speaker, sometimes the cultural language/slang does separate me from feeling like a Canadian speaker. I may speak the language fluently, but I do not always use common expressions and idioms/references.

In addition, a Canadian citizen member answered: “I somewhat feel a sense of belonging to Canada; however, that is only because I have lived here the longest. I do not really feel a sense of belonging to a specific country but rather a connection to the people I have there”. It must be acknowledged that the issue of the feeling of belonging to a society is an issue influenced by a complex web of factors i.e.: gender, sexual orientation, cultural dissonance, occupation/vocation, economic status etc.

The next questions addressed the individual’s impact on other people and society as a whole. In response to the question: “Is your opinion important to other people in this community?”, most members said that their opinion is “*a little important*” to other people. Again, it shows that both groups have some issues integrating into their community because they feel their perspectives are not important in their society. The hypothesis suggests that if other people were in this group, the answers might be different. However, the common point of the people of this group is that they are artists and work in the field of art. They all feel that they are not integrated into their society, so if we consider this group a small sample of society, we may suppose that many artists do not integrate well into this modern society, and there are no suitable conditions for their integration. To better explain, I provided selected answers from the group members from the questionnaire. I posed the question: “Could you defend your rights if a problem occurred for you in Canada?” One of them answered: “Not sure actually about what my rights are.” Another one said:

Because I am now officially a citizen and not a resident, I have earned more rights or status in my ability to be protected legally. If a problem occurs, I do think I have the privilege of a “white-passing” appearance that other people of colour may not have in situations where you might be treated differently. There are also rights I know I have but

am too scared to defend or display, even in Canada. Canada is supposed to be very LGBTQ friendly and is more than others, but in places like Calgary, it can be scary to proudly live open without judgment. Even if you have the right.

I asked the team members: “Are you satisfied with the status of art in Canada?” One of them said: “No, I think Canada needs to take more pride in its art, and people need to support in the way they support art in the States, specifically Drama.” The other member also said: “Both yes and no. When I moved to Canada, I was surprised by the financial support of any art activity, even if it was a student project and not so professional. But, on the other side, considering America and Europe’s level of visual arts, mostly cinema, they are not even comparable!” In the final question, I asked them: “What can be done to improve relationships between people in our society? How can art and theatre help this issue?” One said:

Improving understanding and courtesy can help. Art and theatre can play a helpful role by creating shared experiences and encouraging empathy by promoting cultural understanding, which leads to reduced prejudice and enforces a sense of connection among people from different backgrounds. Also, it helps individuals understand others' attitudes and joys. By seeing the world through different lenses, people can understand better and have more compassion. Theatre can also increase awareness about social issues. Artistic works can act as catalysts to bring attention to important societal issues. And the other members said:

The biggest thing that can be done is creating a space for people to converse without feeling shut down by their beliefs. I think theatre and art can be instrumental in this by telling stories of people we would normally never have a chance to meet. I really enjoy interactive pieces. For example, Marina Abramovic had a piece where you could sit at a

table with her and connect to her without talking. Or the Van Gogh exhibition that allows you to immerse yourself into his work, trying to understand a person we will never meet.

From all the answers and referring to the integration criteria, most of the group's members, as artists, have challenges integrating into their modern society, and immigrants have more challenges than citizens. On the other hand, most of them also believe that art and theatre can effectively improve living conditions and positively impact social changes.

The Rehearsal and Performance

In the first rehearsal, most people in the group did not know each other, and since they were from different cultures, it was difficult for them to communicate with each other. My most important role and the most difficult challenge was introducing intimacy and building trust among the group members. To address this I started the group activities with two ideas: 1. At the beginning of each rehearsal, we formed a circle and discussed a particular topic for 30-45 minutes. I called this exercise 'Circle'. While several of our immigrant members of our group had language barriers, the group utilized physical 'charades' and 'guessing' to ensure their opinions were shared with the group. This was fun activity for everyone and after several weeks, these individuals began to share with more self-confidence. Indeed, one later told me that they felt our rehearsal was a safe space for them. 2. We played games. The games helped our group as it allowed members to communicate through their bodies, have fun, and get closer to each other.

As a first step in our rehearsals, I separated people into groups of two to introduce themselves to each other. Then, I gathered all the members in a circle and asked everyone to introduce their partner to the group. I had two goals from this exercise: 1. To help the members

understand that listening to each other is very important in our project process. 2. To help people realize that we must support each other in this project to reach our goal. Strengthening this idea in their minds would help us to develop the spirit of teamwork and create more intimacy in the group. In the next step, I explained the general idea of the project and the process of creating it to the group members so they could trust the project and know what they would achieve.

We continued to do Circle and play games for several rehearsals. To ensure inclusion, we started our conversation with simple questions like: “What is your favourite movie? Why do you like this movie? Where is your dream city? What is most interesting to you in this city?” Answering these questions would help the members discreetly give us information about themselves so that we could get to know each other better. At the same time, we noticed differences in our views that interested us; for instance, one member of our group loved the superheroes of Marvel movies, but another member hated such movies, and both freely expressed their opinion. Our members could find a space to express their views in a peaceful atmosphere and hear other people's opinions with different attitudes or cultures, which created a sense of trust, intimacy and enthusiasm among the members.

As I said, another interesting point was that in the initial rehearsals, some members who were immigrants were embarrassed and spoke less because they could not speak English as fluently as other group members. However, as time passed, due to the trusting atmosphere in the group, these people began to talk more, and they became less worried if they said a word wrong or if they used grammar incorrectly because they felt that they were among their friends.

We also played games that were creative and forced people in the group to work collectively. One example is a game where I invited an actor to act out a specific story written on a card. Then, I added another actor to the scene, whose job was to play a new story at the same

time as the previous actor (they participate with different circumstances/stakes in this scene). Furthermore, they had to try to speak in a language other than English to communicate with the first actor. In another game, inspired by Michael Chekhov⁶, I would show a painting to the group and ask them to create a physical representation of their understanding of the painting collectively with their bodies. Then, I would ask one of them to step outside of the form to see the group from the outside and to make changes to that form. After that, I switched them with another person to change the form again. This game helped us get to know each other's world view better, the bodies to communicate with other bodies, and the group members to be more comfortable in the group. The bodies needed to be comfortable with each other because the actors wanted to create our show with their bodies rather than dialogue.

As rehearsals progressed, we stopped playing the games and changed the type of questions that were asked in the Circle. We began to introduce the ideas raised in the Circle into our show's story and design. Some questions asked were: “What bothers you more than anything else in our society? What does your dream society look like? What was the worst and best thing that happened to you in our community? Are Canadian government policies vital to you? How do you follow these policies? What do you know about the ways of economic development in Canada? What is the most helpful thing in our lives?” These questions helped us to surface our experience of ourselves and our society. As each member spoke about the questions from their point of view, we began to understand these issues from different perspectives. We did, however, find commonality in some topics. The first issue was loneliness. Most of the team members suffered in some way from the inability to communicate with other people in our society and

⁶ Mikhail Aleksandrovich Chekhov (16 August 1891 – 30 September 1955), known as Michael Chekhov, was a Russian-American actor, director, author, and theatre practitioner. He was a nephew of the playwright Anton Chekhov and a student of Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski referred to him as his most brilliant student (Rollberg).

tolerate loneliness. Of course, some believe that being alone can be pleasurable to some extent but being alone too much and feeling misunderstood causes suffering. In Chapter Three, I talked about the concept of loneliness and the problems it creates for modern humans, and the members discussed the same issue. Integration is exactly the solution for this issue.

Another concept that was discussed was violence. Members believed that in the new society and especially in social media, violence has found new forms and appears with new masks. Another issue that was discussed, and indeed the group reached an understanding of, was the lack of economic equality, and the lack of equal access to resources and opportunities for all residents, which makes some people more prosperous and others poorer every day. Another issue that the group agreed on was that most of the things that politicians say are lies, and in a general sense, lies have formed the core of the world of politics; for example, the war between Russia and Ukraine was discussed, and while almost all of the members agreed that many countries introduced themselves as friends of Ukraine, these countries did little to help during the war. The next issue the group agreed on was that the force to help modern humans continue their lives is the force of love, which means loving someone or something. This force can motivate a person to get up from bed and work for someone or something they love, so this became one of the essential concepts of our performance. Additionally, recognized as a factor influencing modern human life is that we have to perform specific and similar tasks in a specific system every day until we die and are removed from the system. This routinizing of daily life became an essential concept in our performance, introducing a quality of absurdity to our show.

We talked about various issues in our society, and with all the differing opinions, we finally agreed that concepts such as loneliness, violence, love, unequal economic situations,

political lies, and routine life could be the main concepts for our show. Moreover, all these concepts are understandable for most cultures and perspectives.

The key element in our communication process was the Circle; it facilitated understanding and agreement. For instance, one of the group members felt very strong about the inequality in the distribution of financial resources in society. Their logic was that the root of this problem was that the tax system that created this financial inequality. However, when they heard other members' words and could see this issue from other members' points of view, their perspective shifted. The important thing was that the conversations with others helped us look at different issues from a new angle and better understand others and society's problems.

Based on these concepts and our rehearsals, we made a story where the actors performed a fixed task with different appearances, like models in a fashion show. In the middle of the stage was a restricted area with a tree inside, like a tree in *Waiting for Godot*⁷ by Samuel Beckett, which represents hope and life, and the models were not allowed to enter that area (we were inspired by *Waiting for Godot* because its concepts of absurdism and loneliness are close to our show's main idea). One of the models decides to disrupt this process, enter the forbidden area, and touch the tree after becoming interested in another model. On the other hand, the other two actors gradually wore clothes similar to Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, and those two were guards of the forbidden area and the tree. The main character of the story does everything to change this situation, showing his interest in his love and showing others that they can change their situation, but others so neglect him that he commits suicide. Then, the other actors mourn for him. After mourning, they continue their previous work in a more violent and brutal form until the violence in their appearance reaches the highest level. At this point, they

⁷ *Waiting for Godot* is a play by Irish playwright Samuel Beckett in which two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, engage in a variety of discussions and encounters while awaiting the titular Godot, who never arrives (Itzkoff).

stop and take the main character's body out of the restricted area, go into it, hug each other as if they have just realized what they have been missing, and then start cleaning the space and leaving the stage. Then, the light comes again, and the audience sees a scene exactly like the show's beginning. However, this time, another person is standing in the place of the show's main character, as if this story is going to be repeated every time for one of the people in the group. It was our main story, and we created it together in the form of a fashion show through communication in our circles. Our actors came and left the stage with only clothes, objects and symbols, and our hope was that the audience would make connections between the symbols and the events in order to understand the performance. We wanted our audience to make personal and powerful connections to the images and we knew they would read multiple meanings on our performance. This was desired and indeed, we believe this range of understandings created a stronger communication between our show and its audiences.

Our intention was to tell more than just one story. We did this through design elements and performance gestures. For example, at the show's beginning, the clothes of a group of models became increasingly indicative of wealth, and the clothes of another group became more and more representational of poverty. At one point, those wearing the poor clothes, were not allowed to enter one of the stage doors because that area was only for people who wore expensive clothes. The show's main character tried to stop this process, but he was suppressed again and finally left alone. In the form of this show, anything could be a symbol of something else, and the audience, while following the main story, could perceive and interpret various events from their point of view and relate them to each other. As well, they could read multiple meanings.

For the music, we selected songs from different cultures and languages as a group to act a soundtrack for the fashion show. We built in cultural specificity as well. In the part where the actors were supposed to come over to the corpse and mourn, I asked each actor to mourn for it as they mourn in their own culture. Since our audience came from different cultures and languages, such ideas could help them recognize their point of view, language, and customs in the show and establish an affinity with the performance.

This group effort resulted in a performance where audiences could engage and recognize their perspective and interpret its symbols and story through the lens of their culture. They could watch, comprehend, and relate to our show. In addition, a strong and positive relationship had formed between the team members, and we had gained a better understanding of each other. Our shared knowledge and information about many issues increased, and we looked at and engaged with many issues of society from new perspectives. The key to our success was using communicative action in the rehearsals. If we consider this group as a small sample of a modern society in which the representation of the society, the communicative action between us, gave a positive response, then this action and theory may be used and examined on a larger scale to help integrate more residents of society.

Questionnaire #2

At the end of this experience, our group members answered questions that were the same as the first questionnaire, with the addition of a few new questions. To the question: “How familiar are you with the political system in Canada?”, most members now said “*very familiar*”. I can surmise their answers changed because we talked about it in our Circle. Each of us had some information about the political system; however, when we shared our information in the

Circle, we created a more comprehensive knowledge about this issue. There was the same change in response to the question: “How familiar are you with the cultural norms in Canada?” All members, specifically immigrant members, responded that they knew more about Canada’s cultural norms. However, in answer to the question: “How familiar are you with Canada’s economic development mechanism and laws?”, most members said that they were still unfamiliar with this, which shows that we could not either: share comprehensible information about this issue; or we did not have enough information related to this topic in our group and our rehearsals. The group then answered this question: “Do you believe that every member of society can influence the lives of all citizens? How do they do it?” One member said:

I believe that every individual has a responsibility. Through everyday interactions, people can influence others through their behaviour, attitudes, and choices. Positive actions, such as kindness, empathy, and support, can inspire and uplift others, while negative actions can have adverse effects. Influence varies from person to person, and systemic factors like power structures, societal inequalities, and access to resources can shape the extent to which individuals can influence the lives of all citizens. Nonetheless, every individual has the potential to make a difference, however small, in shaping the world around them.

The other member from immigrant members of the group answered a composite answer - made up of many:

Each and every individual hold significance, as their actions can influence the quality of life for other creatures. Even simple acts, such as preserving the environment for future generations or providing aid during crises like floods, earthquakes, and famines, can have a far-reaching impact. As parents, teachers, and friends armed with knowledge, we possess the potential to shape the way our families and society as a whole think,

ultimately leading to an improvement in the lives of both our current generation and those yet to come.

I asked them: “What can be done to improve relationships between people? How do art and theatre help this issue?” They answered this question after experiencing *Absence* as follows:

Art and theatre help improve relationships between people because you can create fictional stories to share what you wish the world to be. It is an educational platform, if you want, where people come together to listen to the same message. People that might feel theatre is not for them sometimes feel like that because they have only seen classical Eurocentric theatre like Shakespeare. My parents do not speak English and find Shakespeare to be gibberish, but we watched at Vertigo a production of *Goblin Macbeth*. It was regular English retelling of *Macbeth* with goblin prosthetics and music. It refreshed the text and my parents found it so cool and entertaining. Maybe theatre has been a lot about white people and their regular lives so a cool new musical with dance and different cultures will reach a new different demographic. If you want to teach about love and a healthy relationship maybe you write a play to share with audiences what healthy love looks like. You can highlight problems with theatre and decide what you want to say about the at issue.

Another person answered:

I think an important part of improving relations between people is stepping away from the idea that the world is black and white. There is a right and a wrong answer. Everyone has their own experiences and opinions which have been formed through our lives. As soon as someone says something we do not agree with slightly, we immediately shut down and do not want to interact with them. I think art and theatre can help show us the

perspectives of people that we may never truly understand. We can see the path it took them to get here today, and even if I do not agree with them, I can still connect with them and understand that I can also be wrong.

I asked them: “How was the *Absence* show’s process for you?” One of our actors said: I am satisfied with being a part of the production process for a performance that dares to state fresh perspectives. It encourages people to ponder the most glaring and unquestioned habits of humanity, those often adopted greatly because they are fashioned, or others are doing the same. It is a relentless cycle of imitation, keeping up with societal trends, and chasing after wealth and luxury—a path that finally leads to submission to the influence and wealth of the rich people, all while very few people pause to question their status. Instead of the philosophy of creation, which aims for a state of perfection that surpasses the one we inherited from previous generations, striving to make it better for all.

Another’s answer was: “The process of working on the *Absence* show was a valuable opportunity for me. It allowed me to boost my self-confidence as an actor in a foreign country, demonstrating that it is not challenging to connect with individuals from diverse cultures and language backgrounds”. In the next question, I asked the team: “What was the difference between the *Absence* project and other theatre projects you’ve experienced before?” One said: “It was different. It was fun and inspiring. The team is great. Everyone is so different, but we are helping each other to meet the same goal”.

Also, I asked: “How was your relationship with other artists in this group from the beginning until the end?” One said: “I got very comfortable with the cast, and it remained that way. No problems with anyone and good vibes all around”. Another one answered: “I think

really good! We all were able to connect and support each other very quickly, and I feel a stronger bond with this group of artists compared to any other show I have worked on”.

One individual shared their answer as follows:

At the beginning of the project, I found it hard to connect with everyone because I was shy at first, and I wasn't as comfortable with everyone. I was worried everyone would think that I was annoying or too loud, so I stayed a little bit more composed. But the more I am able to spend time with people the more I open up. I also found that rapid changing in front of everyone did help break so of the ice as well. but as soon as I got closer to everyone, I feel like we were able to make jokes be goofy and have fun during every rehearsal. I also felt very supported by everyone in the cast, and I'm very happy to have become friends with everyone.

And in the last question, I asked them: “Could the *Absence* show have an impact on your artistic perspective? If yes, how?” One said: “I personally am much more invested and interested in film. This show gave me the inspiration to also pursue theatre, because now I understand that theatre can encompass so many artistic forms, that it can be just as powerful as film”. And the other one answered:

Definitely! It has opened my mind and perspective on the definition of theatre. I now appreciate work like this that in the past I might have considered unimportant and unprofessional. In the end this work has fulfilled me more in the way I am able to impact an audience. It has also inspired me to freely create art that is non-dialogue. I now have plans for shows I want to create that I would not have thought of before. I appreciate the work of devised theatre and have learned that if you trust the process, you can create

something from nothing. It has connected myself more to my emotions and strengthens myself reflection on what I want to show as an artist.

An attempt was made to refer to a set of responses from all members of the group to better articulate the impact the *Absence* project had on its members. Also, in the conversation with the audience, they said that they were able to make a strong connection with the show and had many different interpretations of its events. This strong connection between group members and between the show and the audience was our group goal, and we could achieve it with the help of an intentional use of communicative action theory in our rehearsals. *Absence* is an example of a theatre that was able to help with the issue of integration because it brought the members and their views closer to each other and improved the awareness, lifeworld, and knowledge of the members in different fields, and it is helpful for their integration to each other and their society. *Absence* is a model that can be done in diverse and more creative ways by other theatre groups in modern societies so that theatre can help the integration of unintegrated groups such as immigrants.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

My theory of how theatre can contribute to integrating immigrants into the host society is two-fold. First, as a communicative action, theatre can affect the perspective and lifeworld of its audience, which will, in turn, influence the audience's other communication actions. Second: the production process of a show can be an opportunity to practice communicative action between different groups and points of view. In fact, in the creation of a piece of theatre, two groups with different ideas, views, and lifeworld exchange opinions in pursuit of a common goal (to produce a show), and this pursuit may foster better understanding of each other. A theatre production group can be considered a small sample of society, and as such, can be extrapolated to the expansion of communicative action at a broader level in society. The process of making a theatre performance is one of the opportunities to increase communicative action and facilitate integration.

This research forwards accepted definitions and understandings of modern society and integration, leveraging the concept of society as a platform for gathering all its components, including contradictions. An important characteristic of this platform is that modern humans in modern democratic society experience freedom and independence more than ever in our history due to the size and magnitude of this type of society. However, with this freedom and independence also comes loneliness and anxiety. The role of money and its effects on modern humans and human relationships is a critical factor in this dynamic.

Integration is a force that can hold everything together in society, even opposing views and groups. However, for success in integration, governments need to consider integration criteria for the whole of society and not only certain groups. These six criteria include: 1-

Economy: wealth; 2- Politics: participation; 3- Rights: immunity and equality; 4- Culture: freedom of speech and ethics; 5- Right international relations (satisfactory relations with other societies); 6- Right relations with the environment (good relations with future generations).

Habermas' theory of communicative action can be a helpful tool to reduce the loneliness and anxiety of modern humans, improve human relationships in modern society, and help to integrate the unintegrated or unseen groups of society.

Theatre as a collective event, performed live in a specific place and time can facilitate integration, and more than any other art form can effectively communicate with the audience through three mental, real, and social worlds, affecting their emotions, thoughts, unconsciousness, and lifeworld. Throughout this paper, I've identified how, in Canada, there are significant challenges facing immigrants. If theatre artists want to participate and assist in the integration of immigrants in this society, their work should address all six criteria of integration, and adapt to the specific characteristics of the immigrant experience. In this regard, many immigrants cannot communicate effectively due to cultural and linguistic differences, and therefore, creating spaces to gather both the integrated and unintegrated together is critical. Theatre is an opportunity to create such spaces and as an artistic form, it can allow for communication without using specific language or culture. These spaces will facilitate connection and relationship-building with others and the surrounding environment, having a positive impact on their integration experience. Furthermore, if the production team knows their show's content and its audiences well, they can prioritize a strong communication between the show and its audiences ensuring both groups (performer and audiences) have a clear connection to their own lifeworld.

Theatre, as an artistic means for communicative action, can influence individuals, helping the audience and production team see issues from new perspectives, increasing their awareness and thus helping their lifeworld evolve – a key element of facilitating integration in society. Further to this, the production *process* of making a performance can be a critical platform for communication. A production group on a show is a cross-section of society, whose activities and products represent or simulate real life. In this group, like in real society, everyone has a role, and people need to communicate with each other to achieve their common goal. Therefore, theatre can help integration not only through improving awareness and lifeworld but also through the process of creating it.

My experiences as an immigrant artist and my collaboratively created performances *Green Key* and *Absence* are examples of theatre that can assist with integration. Our success can be attributed to our use of communicative action in rehearsals through games and the collective creation approach. As well, the show's concepts and events were related to the actual lives of the people who created it and its audiences.

I want to emphasize that, due to the limitations of this research, I have focused on addressing this issue within the specific scope of this study. However, it is essential to highlight the results obtained from the analysis of the second part of this research, *Absence*. When we engaged with real people from both the citizen and immigrant groups, their presence and perspectives significantly influenced our show, resulting in changes to its details and outcomes. In producing a show, it is crucial to consider the impact of collaborating with individuals from diverse groups and perspectives.

Finally, there are two other points that I believe are important to this consideration of theatre as a tool for integration. The first is that theatre pieces created within a university

research context can be an opportunity to generate new knowledge about the integration experience. As universities are sites to investigate social issues and critique the world around us through a variety of research methods, the creation of new artistic works for integration through PaR can contribute to meaningful knowledge creation. As Habermas asserts: “it is the space between theory and practice where this self-reflection happens” (17). Theatre students' performances in an academic setting dedicated to this type of inquiry are an excellent opportunity to test new ideas and theories to improve people's lives in a modern society.

Second, when we work with unintegrated groups in society, such as immigrants, we do not need to focus only on the sad and challenging parts of their experiences. Many of these people have indeed had complicated pasts, but they have come to this new society with hope for the future. This focus of ‘celebratory theatre’ and its lens on different cultures can be more “pertinent and more impactful than we had previously understood” (Kandil 163). Theatre can help immigrants experience acceptance for who they are, affirm their value and importance, and harness their contribution towards a better future for themselves and society as a whole.

By relying on scientific theories and practical methods, we can understand theatre as a social artistic tool that can help integrate immigrants into modern societies such as Canada. I hope that this research concept grows in the future with new ideas and artistic productions to help all people experience a better life in their society.

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Appendix

Absence Performance (Questionnaire 1)

1- How are you confident and relaxed about your economic situation in Canada?

very satisfied

A little satisfied

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

2- How familiar are you with Canada's economic development mechanism and laws?

very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

3- How familiar are you with the political system in Canada?

Very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

4- How familiar are you with Canada's different political party platforms?

very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

5- How important is the Canadian political situation to you?

very important

A little important

Not Important

6- How familiar are you with the cultural norms in Canada?

very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

7- Is your opinion important to other people in this community?

very important

A little important

Not Important

8- Do you believe that every member of society can influence the lives of all citizens? (Please explain your answer)

9- Do you feel a sense of belonging to Canada and the Canadian people? Why?

10- Are you satisfied with the status of art in Canada? Please explain your answer.

11- How is the Canadian government's relationship with the world? How much do you think this relationship affects your current and future life?

12- What can be done to improve relationships between people? How do art and theatre can help this issue? Please provide an example.

13- How can artistic activities, especially theatre, help you?

14- Do you feel good about living in this society? What can be done to make you feel better about it?

Absence Performance (Questionnaire 2)

1- How familiar are you with Canada's economic development mechanism and laws?

very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

2- How familiar are you with the political system in Canada?

very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

3- How familiar are you with the cultural norms in Canada?

very familiar

A little familiar

Unfamiliar

Very unfamiliar

4- Is your opinion important to other people in this community?

very important

A little important

Not Important

5- Do you believe that every member of society can influence other citizens' lives? (Please explain your answer)

6- Do you feel a sense of belonging to Canada and the Canadian people? Why?

7- Are you satisfied with the status of art in Canada? Please explain your answer.

8- What can be done to improve relationships between people? How can art and theatre help with this issue?

9- How can theatre help you?

10 – How was the Absence show’s process to you?

11 – What was the best moment in our rehearsals for you?

12 – How was your relationship with other artists in this group from the beginning until the end?

13 – What was your biggest challenge in this process?

14 – Does the Absence show could have an impact on your artistic perspective? If yes, how?

Informed Consent Form



Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

(Saeid Asgarian, Theatre University, Drama department, saeid.asgarian@ucalgary.ca)

Supervisor and PI of Project:

(Christine Brubaker, Drama Department) - Email Address: christine.brubaker@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project:

(Analyzing the role of theatre in integrating immigrant and Canadian citizens in Calgary, Canada)

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Purpose of the Study

Analyzing the role of the theatre in integrating immigrants with citizens.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

In this research, we will have a show where half of the actors will be Canadian citizens and acting students at the University of Calgary. The other half will be immigrant artists who have just arrived in Calgary. The rehearsals of this work will be about three weeks on average. A topic will guide each rehearsal to activate conversation and create a launch pad for theatrical creation. Proposed topics include but are not limited to: The Modern World; Gender; Economy and Politics; Art; Immigration; Absurdity; Love; Violence; Mourning; Routine; Longing; The End, and we will work on these topics in our rehearsals. We will discuss each topic and share our perspectives with other members; after that, we will try to make some gestures based on our topic. In the next step, we will discuss gestures and try to find more details about gestures. In the final step, we make a dramatic situation based on gestures, and actors try to find a solution for that topic in their roles. In this step, each member can say stop and change their role with another actor. At the beginning and the end of this common experience, team members will answer a questionnaire about their conditions in Calgary. After working on our topics, as a group, we will

express our work through the design and use of clothes, images, forms, lights, movements and music. Actors can theatricalize their ideas by using painting, dancing, text, or images to make a show together. From the first until the middle of our workshop, I will be a facilitator, and from the middle until the end also, I will be a director to gather members' ideas in the workshop to make a show with members. Also, participants will be our actors and designers to share our theatre with audiences in September 2023. We will record a video from the final show, which you can use for your resume. We will pay 100 CAD to each participant joining this research.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

“There are several options to consider if you decide to participate in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No.”

I grant permission to share my name and email: Yes: ___ No: ___

I grant permission to make a video from the final show: Yes: ___ No: ___

I grant permission to have my gender and age: Yes: ___ No: ___

I grant permission to take pictures from the rehearsal process: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: ___ No: ___

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks:

We will have some physical activities in rehearsal that can make you a little tired, but it will be your choice to join each rehearsal. Also, we do not have any insurance support for immigrant members in the university, and immigrant members should use their insurance for any problems during rehearsals and the final shows. In addition, it is possible that talking about some situation like immigration make you a little sad. It would be best if you were responsible for your feelings, and talking about difficult moments in your life is completely optional during the show.

Benefits:

This experience can be an opportunity to learn different perspectives and other people from different cultures. Also, you will discover many theatrical rehearsals in this workshop, and the final show will be a Canadian artistic work in your resume. Also, we will pay 100 CAD to each participant.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Just Me (Saeid Asgarian) and Christine Brubaker will have access to any information, and we do not share your personal information with the public).

Participants are free to withdraw four months after data collection.

No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questionnaire. There are no names on the questionnaire. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results. Also, The anonymous data will be stored on a computer disk for five years, which will be permanently erased.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes: _____

No: _____

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address or phone number)

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact: saeid.asgarian@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.