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Roots, Routes, RUTAS

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Article abstract

In this article, author Natalie Alvarez examines how the Caminos and RUTAS festivals of Toronto's Aluna Theatre harness the interactional, mass gathering of the festival and its high visibility to form a theatrical commons grounded in a heterogeneous and intercultural Americas, one that includes Latin American, Latinx, Indigenous, and Afro-Caribbean artists that have historically been excluded both from the Eurocentric vision of "Latin America" and Canadian performance histories. With a producing mandate to foster Canadian-hemispheric cultural exchanges, Beatriz Pizano's and Trevor Schwellnus's curatorial practices aim to generate alternate genealogical routes of Canadian performance history for a new generation of artists to travel. The performance routes of these festivals speak to the critical role festivals can play in directing—and redirecting—transnational flows of knowledge and artistic production. But Pizano and Schwellnus's curatorial aims are also driven by an interest in how festivals like RUTAS and Caminos can generate a structural shift in the kinds of artistic traditions that are sustained on Toronto's stages and the ways in which they are sustained by fostering hemispheric collaborations and co-productions. The RUTAS and Caminos festivals demonstrate very powerfully the work that a theatrical commons can do to advance alternative producing structures and transnational coalitional politics.

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NATALIE ALVAREZ

In this article, author Natalie Alvarez examines how the Caminos and RUTAS festivals of Toronto's Aluna Theatre harness the interactional, mass gathering of the festival and its high visibility to form a theatrical commons grounded in a heterogeneous and intercultural Americas, one that includes Latin American, Latinx, Indigenous, and Afro-Caribbean artists that have historically been excluded both from the Eurocentric vision of "Latin America" and Canadian performance histories. With a producing mandate to foster Canadian-hemispheric cultural exchanges, Beatriz Pizano's and Trevor Schwellnus's curatorial practices aim to generate alternate genealogical routes of Canadian performance history for a new generation of artists to travel. The performance routes of these festivals speak to the critical role festivals can play in directing—and redirecting—transnational flows of knowledge and artistic production. But Pizano and Schwellnus's curatorial aims are also driven by an interest in how festivals like RUTAS and Caminos can generate a structural shift in the kinds of artistic traditions that are sustained on Toronto's stages and the ways in which they are sustained by fostering hemispheric collaborations and co-productions. The RUTAS and Caminos festivals demonstrate very powerfully the work that a theatrical commons can do to advance alternative producing structures and transnational coalitional politics.

Dans cet article, Natalie Alvarez examine comment les festivals Caminos et RUTAS du théâtre Aluna de Toronto mettent à profit la dimension interactive et rassembleuse et la grande visibilité de ces événements pour créer un lieu commun théâtral enraciné dans une Amérique hétérogène et interculturelle, lequel regroupe des artistes latino-américains, latinxs, autochtones et afro-caribéens qui, jusqu'ici, ont toujours été absents de la vision eurocentrique de l' « Amérique latine » et des histoires de la performance canadienne. Les commissaires de ces festivals, Beatriz Pizano et Trevor Schwellnus, ont pour mandat de favoriser les échanges culturels entre le Canada et l'hémisphère sud, et leurs pratiques visent à appuyer d'autres parcours généalogiques à partir desquels une nouvelle génération d'artistes peut traverser l'histoire de la performance au Canada. Les circuits sur lesquels s'appuient ces festivals témoignent du rôle crucial que peuvent jouer de tels événements dans la façon d'orienter—et de réorienter—la diffusion du savoir et des productions artistiques à l'échelle transnationale. Mais les objectifs de Pizano et de Schwellnus sont dictés, aussi, par l'effet que peuvent avoir des festivals comme les leurs sur les types de traditions artistiques que peut soutenir la scène torontoise et les moyens empruntés pour soutenir ces traditions en favorisant les collaborations et les coproductions panaméricaines. Les festivals RUTAS et Caminos sont un témoignage éloquent de ce que peut accomplir un lieu commun théâtral pour faire progresser les formes de production alternatives et les coalitions transnationales.



It's a Friday night in November 2015 and I'm giddily holding on to another woman in a black box space at Toronto's Artscape Daniels Spectrum. We're learning to dance the salsa. It's Caminos, Aluna Theatre's biennial festival of new works in progress or *propuestas* (proposals), which alternates yearly with Aluna's two-week ROUTES | RUTAS festival of established works from across the Americas. The black box is packed with people on their feet: some, like me, stumbling through the moves with tight *gringo* hips, others swaying effortlessly with an empanada and beer in hand. Carmen Aguirre is our dance instructor who guides us through different dance styles and the tightly interwoven narrative of *Broken Tailbone*, a work-in-progress that traces genealogies of dance traditions in Latin America, her involvement in Chile's underground resistance during the Pinochet regime, and her romantic forays in the Latin American dance halls of Vancouver and Toronto. It's *autobistoria-teoría* performed, a mode of storytelling and history-making advanced by Mestiza cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa through which radical women of colour write themselves into being in ways that are social, relational, and political.¹

Aguirre's performance is, in these respects, emblematic of some of the signature features of Aluna's festivals and its curatorial vision. As I hope to demonstrate in these pages, the Caminos and RUTAS festivals harness the interactional, mass gathering of the festival and its high visibility to form a theatrical commons grounded in a heterogeneous and intercultural Americas, one that includes Latin American, Latinx,² Indigenous, and Afro-Caribbean artists that have historically been excluded both from the Eurocentric vision of "Latin America" and Canadian performance histories. My invocation of a "theatrical commons," here, draws on Maristella Svampa's examination of the commons in the context of social movements across Latin America, which she positions as "a different view of social relations, based on the configuration or emergence of spaces and forms of social cooperation [as well as] the use and enjoyment of the common" (77). If these curatorial aims sound ambitious, well, they are. If they sound overly romanticized, that may be because of my bias. I have collaborated with Aluna Theatre since 2012 in the organization of its festivals with a particular focus on the festival's curated conversation series (or *conversatorios*). I am by no means an impartial observer: I am deeply invested in what I see as the tangible impacts of RUTAS and Caminos. These festivals are playing a critical role in reshaping the Canadian performance landscape and demonstrating how festivals can be put to work to redirect transnational flows of knowledge and artistic production toward more inclusive practices.

Roots

In the opening program note for RUTAS 2016 titled, "Connecting the Americas Through the Arts," Aluna Theatre Artistic Director Beatriz Pizano reflects on some of the overarching aims that have guided the festival since its inaugural events in 2012. In her brief history, she states that the company's dream was "to introduce Toronto audiences and artists to the rich theatrical traditions south of the border." The programming also aimed to reflect the company's "commitment to human rights, inclusion, and accessibility" (Pizano, "Connecting")—principles that Aluna has sustained throughout its six, and counting, festivals. The idea for a dedicated festival emerged from a series of solo performances, or *unipersonales*. But that

plan quickly evolved into the more capacious model of RUTAS proper, which launched in 2012 with an inaugural lineup of Mexican-American performance artist Violeta Luna, Colombian-American dancer-choreographer-puppeteer Federico Restrepo, and Chilean-Canadian actor-playwright Carmen Aguirre. From this 2012 experiment, Aluna's driving artistic team of Pizano and Artistic Producer Trevor Schwellnus recognized that their desire was to build capacity as a producing company and foster the development of new works with a view to the Americas. In Schwellnus' view, Canadian theatre is still in the process of finding its theatrical language, but the languages it currently draws upon derive principally from Anglo-European theatrical traditions, which reflect neither the diversity of Toronto's diasporic communities nor the expansive performance histories of the Indigenous, Mestiza, and Latinx Americas.³ With a producing mandate to foster hemispheric work, Pizano's and Schwellnus's curatorial practices aim to generate alternate genealogical routes of Canadian performance history along a south-north axis for a new generation of artists to travel.

Emerging from that 2012 experiment, Pizano and Schwellnus discovered that it was not exclusively the performances that they were interested in producing. The Aluna Café series of staged readings of plays by Latin American and Latinx playwrights at Aluna's studio space east of Toronto's Junction area made Pizano and Schwellnus realize that they were just as interested in the public conversations facilitated by artist-scholars as the performances themselves. In December 2012, for example, the Aluna Café marked Human Rights Day with a reading of *Saying Yes* by Argentinian playwright Griselda Gambaro. Part of a series of shorts, the play was first performed in 1981 at the Teatro del Picadero in Buenos Aires in solidarity against the military dictatorship. Playwright-director Guillermo Verdecchia led an introduction to the staged reading and facilitated a debate as to whether the story at the heart of the play about a hostile barber and a frightened client was really a parable for a public yielding in fear to injustice. Spirited conversations that begin with the play and extend beyond it are often a by-product of the particular genealogy of contemporary Latin American performance that is prioritized in Aluna's season and festival planning—a tradition in which performance offers a means of interceding in histories of political struggle. In the wake of the military dictatorships of the 1960s to 1980s, as well as the ongoing effects of colonization and neoliberal economic restructuring throughout the Americas, the twentieth-century Latin American theatrical tradition featured at the Aluna Cafés is marked by a responsiveness to the rights emergencies produced by these combined forces.⁴ The Aluna Cafés served as the impetus for the RUTAS and Caminos festivals as amplified opportunities to showcase politically-engaged performance and encourage dialogue. The *conversatorios* are, in this respect, an integral part of the programming and an extension of Pizano's and Schwellnus's commitment to the ways in which performance becomes a platform for knowledge sharing and a spur to political action.

As knowledge sharing opportunities, the *conversatorios* (a Spanish neologism that conjoins conversation and conference roundtable) are designed to bring a diverse range of people together who might never otherwise be seated at the same table. In the 2014 RUTAS, for example, artists working in different media from documentary filmmaking, photography, dance, visual arts, and performance, joined activists, lawyers, researchers, elders, and community leaders to respond to the rights emergencies addressed in the festival's mainstage performances and commissioned shorts.⁵ *Conversatorios* addressed the devastating effects of Big Agriculture in the Americas in response to Violeta Luna's *NK 603: Action for Performer*



Dancers Victoria Mata and Lilia Leon in Aluna Theatre's *Nohayquiensepa* (*No One Knows*), directed and designed by Trevor Schwellnus, choreographed by Olga Barrios, with live visual artist Lorena Torres Loaiza, performed at the 2014 RUTAS festival. Photographer: Trevor Schwellnus.

& *e-Maiz* and Julio Pantoja's photography exhibit *Mujer, Maiz, y Resistencia*; urban displacement and renewal in response to Mapa Teatro's *Witness to the Ruins*; and deceptive treaty agreements in response to a commissioned verbatim short by Falen Johnson on the James Bay Treaty no. 9, to name a few.

The *conversatorios* are, in Schwellnus's view, about extending the impact of the performance work and seeing "where it goes on a social consciousness level." Aluna is not interested in festivals that cater to "window shopping" for the latest and greatest performance work, as Pizano puts it—a challenging imperative to avoid since international festivals are "first and foremost," as Ric Knowles observes, "marketplaces" (181). Rather, they are interested in how a festival might serve as a theatrical commons and gathering place to advance transnational coalitional politics. As Svampa argues, the commons offers a different view of social relations that hold the promise of new forms of resistance: "new resistances manifest themselves through the emergence of spaces of community and alternative forms of sociability, that is, [...] fields of collective experimentation that reclaim the production and reproduction of the common" (77). Svampa's examination of the commons extends the work of activist and co-founder of the Oaxaca-based Centro de Encuentros y Diálogos Interculturales (Centre for Intercultural Encounters and Dialogue) Gustavo Esteva and his meditations on what he calls "*ámbitos de comunidad*," or spheres of communality grounded in *amistad*, or friendship, through which one escapes "la prisión del individuo," or the prison of individualism (Esteva). While the idea of the commons is typically invoked as a way of imagining an alternate system of radical

democracy that operates outside the logic and imperatives of late capitalism, festivals such as RUTAS and Caminos demonstrate very powerfully the work that a *cultural commons* can do to advance a communal ethos in service of new kinds of democratic structures.⁶

Much of Aluna's curatorial energy is directed toward the creation of *ámbitos de comunidad* for the festival's two-week duration where artists, activists, scholars, and audiences are seeing the work, talking about the work, and sharing knowledge about the political issues the work addresses. The festival cabaret nights are critical to these curatorial efforts: they are free and open to the public; an opportunity to see short, experimental performances by emerging and established artists; and to dance, drink, and eat. For Pizano, these social nights have been pivotal to the realization of Aluna's larger aims to build a community of Latinx-Indigenous alliances and by all accounts—and based on the nightly turn-out numbers—they are succeeding: the cabarets, Schwellnus and Pizano tell me, have become known as a safe space for queer Latinx and Two-Spirited festival-goers.

The idea that a festival should be more than just “window shopping” takes inspiration from Patricia Ariza's Festival Alternativo (FESTA) in Bogotá, Colombia. The annual FESTA, which Ariza initiated in 1994, is a destination point for artists interested in politically committed works that advance new modes of expression and stylistic vocabularies. Pizano tells me that Ariza expects a commitment from festival attendees: she wants the festival attendee to be *there*, seeing all the shows and engaging in conversations—not only about the performances but also about the urgent political issues of the moment. Ariza's internationally renowned work—known for its capacity to broker conversations about regional political crises and, in Colombia's current political moment, how the terms and conditions of peace will be sustained in the wake of the country's ratified peace agreement with FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)—engages local communities on a large scale. Pieces such as *Vivir sin miedo*, a performance that decries rampant feminicide, brings the power of a mass public action to the stage with its ensemble of 50 women. This, for Pizano, is a crucial aspect of Ariza's work: she “involves the community,” Pizano emphasizes, while being “actively involved in the community” herself. Ariza's work demonstrates why “art is needed”: “Theatre allows us to talk about the place and local issues very openly,” says Pizano. RUTAS and Caminos take their cue from FESTA's insistence that the festival is uniquely positioned to harness the power of a population that has congregated at a shared site for a sustained period. As Pizano insists, it's “about encounters and discussions...an opportunity for artists to talk about the work and to get information about urgent issues.”

Beyond FESTA, Pizano traces the roots of RUTAS to her experiences at The Magdalena Project, which she first attended in Holstebro, Denmark at the Odin Teatret in 2004. The Magdalena Project is a cross-cultural network for women in theatre, which has held over 100 gatherings for women artists internationally. The gatherings typically take the form of a festival comprised of critical discussions, workshops, performances, training sessions, demonstrations, and lectures, and it was this scope of opportunities and experiences for a collective that offered Pizano a vision of what's possible.⁷ But it was Schwellnus's and Pizano's shared experiences at the “Encuentro” in São Paulo, Brazil in 2013—the yearly “encounter” of the Hemispheric Institute, based at New York University, which connects artists, scholars, and activists through plenary and working sessions, workshops, “teach-ins,” and performances—that confirmed a model of what was possible in a festival-conference hybrid with a focus on

the Americas. The two-week RUTAS of mainstage performances and Caminos, its alternating sibling of new works-in-progress initiated in 2015 with Canadian Heritage funding,⁸ became the “Hemi” (as it’s called) of the north with a distinct focus, one that aimed to include Canada in conversations about the Americas and build bridges for Canadian artists across the continent. Canada has had limited inclusion in hemispheric theatre and performance studies to date, despite the field’s efforts to challenge US exceptionalism with a more expansive optic that considers the plurality of the Americas. In the past several decades alone, transnational labour agreements and waves of migration have closed divisions between Canada and Latin America. This increasing proximity was recognized by the initiation, in 2007, of the Canadian government’s “Americas Strategy” intended to increase relations with Latin America in several areas including democratic governance and human rights—an initiative that continues with Canada’s representation at the Organization of American States (OAS). Yet, the cultural sector in Canada has been slow to keep abreast of these developments and the performance traditions of the Latin American diaspora have limited representation despite its growing population. According to the 2016 Census results, Latin Americans are the sixth largest group in Canada to see population growth since 2006 (Galloway et al).⁹

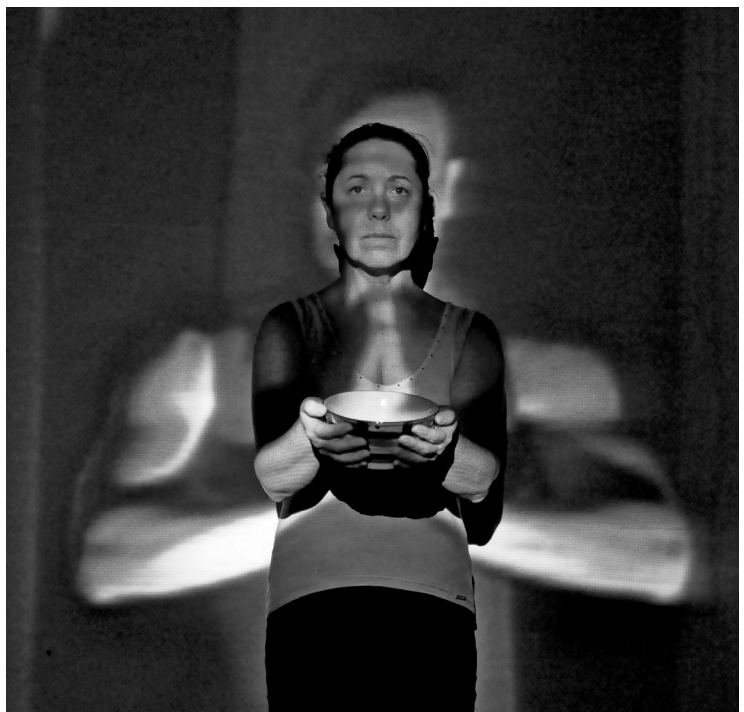
Cultivating a Panamerican perspective that includes Canada is part of Aluna’s broader curatorial mandate. Aluna takes advantage of the festival context as a high-profile platform to make these traditions visible and available to a Latin American diaspora in Canada, which has had limited opportunities to participate in a theatrical commons that includes its performance histories. As Schweltnus puts it, the goal is to “inspire local diasporas from the Americas—to say, ‘you are a part of this conversation.’ It’s an inspirational thing. And to bring in larger audiences to educate them. We don’t have to keep looking to Europe.” The festival’s high visibility, combined with its social and participatory dimensions, as the opening anecdote from Aguirre’s *Broken Tailbone* illustrates, allows it to function as a critical conglomerate that networks hemispheric cultural relations. That Aluna is succeeding in realizing its broader aims to, in Pizano’s words, “grow a community of Latin American artists and audiences” is reflected in its festival participant surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017: at its 2016 RUTAS festival, approximately 25% identified a country of origin from Latin America and 29.2 percent indicated Spanish as their first language; at the 2017 festival, 37.8 percent of festival audiences self-identified as Latin American, with 35.1 percent identifying Spanish as their first language.¹⁰ These percentages are significant in light of the recent Census data: in Toronto, 77,160 reported an ethnic origin from Latin America in 2016¹¹—roughly 3 percent of Toronto’s total population (Whalen).¹²

But the hope that the festival serves as the means to grow a community of Latin American artists and audiences is only part of the story. On the one hand, positioning the festival as a distinctly “Latin American” festival is crucial: it foregrounds the important redressive work the festival undertakes by elevating the profile of Panamerican performance traditions; for Pizano, it “breaks the stereotype of who we are” by showcasing work by Latin American and Latinx artists who have full control over their self-representation; it also debunks the other misguided stereotype that the politically engaged work characteristic of the Latin America performance traditions privileged at RUTAS comes at the expense of art. The assumption that politics compromises aesthetics quickly short circuits for festival spectators exposed to the work of Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, Mapa Teatro, Teatro de los Andes, Patricia Ariza and

Teatro La Candelaria, Violeta Luna, and Aluna itself, to name a few. But framing the festival as “Panamerican” with a Latin American focus comes at a cost. It chains Aluna to restrictive identity politics that delimit the degree to which they can embrace a Latin American positioning without being made reducible to it and, in turn, bracketed as an “ethnic” theatre company. As Pizano puts it, “I’m so tired of the definitions.” What does it mean, anyway, to be a Latin American festival or a Latin American theatre company? As Walter Mignolo has shown, the “idea” of Latin America is a European invention and an ongoing political project—from colonial expansion in the Americas in the fifteenth century through to the current geographies of late capitalism—that obscures its reality along with the heterogeneity of the hemisphere’s Indigenous, Mestizos/as, and Afro-Caribbean populations.

The 2014 RUTAS festival marked a shift, a coming to terms with the problems of “Latin American” as a category to describe the work of both the company itself and the festival. If the Americas were to be invoked, it would be a “Nuestra América” in the ethos of the Cuban writer and activist José Martí, which turned its back on the Eurocentric underpinnings of *Latinidad* and moved toward Indigenous populations as “Nuestra América’s’ historical foundations” (Mignolo 91). For the 2014 festival, Aluna established a continuing partnership with Native Earth Performing Arts, a collaboration marked by the invocation of Turtle Island rather than *las Américas* in the opening paragraph of its festival program note and a curatorial emphasis on what had previously been latent: the programming of Indigenous work alongside Spanish language works from across the hemisphere. Aluna’s collaboration with Native Earth is in stride with a larger “epistemic geo-/body- political shift” occurring across the Americas in the twenty-first century, which Mignolo charts in the last chapter of *The Idea*

Aluna Theatre’s
Nohayquiensepa (*No
One Knows*) with Beatriz
Pizano in foreground
and Carlos Gonzalez-
Vío in background,
performed at the 2014
RUTAS festival.
Photographer: Trevor
Schwellnus.





NK603: Action for Performer and e-máiz conceived and performed by Violeta Luna at the 2014 RUTAS festival, Daniels Spectrum, Toronto. Photographer: Julio Pantoja.

of Latin America. Advanced by Indigenous social movements, “Afros, women of color, gays, lesbians” — “actors that have been left out of the Eurocentric idea of ‘Latinidad’” (101)— these movements are “building an ‘after-(Latin) America’ grounded not in resistance but in a conceptual and epistemic “delinking” from the concept of Latinidad and its attendant geopolitics of knowledge, as I describe below (138).

In the context of these larger social movements in the Americas, the Aluna-Native Earth collaboration for the RUTAS and Caminos festivals is politically, conceptually, and historically significant in ways that would be lost if the partnership were celebrated within the familiar discourse of multiculturalism, with which Canada is so often identified. The curatorial efforts to map a “Latin,” Indigenous, and Afro-Caribbean Americas is about moving toward interculturalism as a critical consciousness that unseats the logic of colonial domination and “its body politics of knowledge” (Mignolo 138). As Mignolo puts it, “in order to delink and move forward, you need a new pair of shoes. If you do not invent a new pair of shoes, you remain kicking around in the old ones, the same ill-fitting system, begging for recognition and celebrating ‘multiculturalism’ while never reaching the crucial moment of ‘interculturalidad’ (which is ‘inter-epistemology’)” (138). Festival curation that maps the heterogeneity of the Americas and interlocking histories of colonial struggle is, at bottom, about working toward a decolonization of performance history and, as Pizano and Schwellnus put it in their program note for the 2014 RUTAS, imagining new possibilities for “how we live together.”

Routes

Medellín—Montevideo—Mexico City—Caracas—Bogotá—Edmonton—Ottawa—Toronto;
 Bogotá—New York—Toronto; Mexico City—San Francisco—Toronto;
 Valdivia—Vancouver—Toronto; Guatemala—Mexico City—Toronto.

In its 2012 program for Aluna's first iteration of ROUTES | RUTAS at Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, the program maps the Panamerican routes each production has travelled. Performance artist Violeta Luna's *Parting Memories*, part of her Border TRIP(tych) series, travelled by way of Mexico City, Luna's birthplace, through San Francisco where it was developed with the Secos y Mojados art collective, to the 2012 RUTAS in Toronto.¹³ Luna's solo performance, which emerged from her community work with immigrant women of the San Francisco Bay area, tracks the cross-border journey of a Salvadoran woman en route to the United States. From a square box of earth at the centre of the performance space, which eerily evokes a site of forensic excavation, Luna unearths a ball of string. She unravels the string and binds it around the spectators who stand at the perimeter of the performance space: the string knits spectators' hands together and leads to the wrists and hands of others until they are tied to each other in a network of criss-crossing lines that lead back to the mound of earth at the centre. In this act, Luna redraws the border as networked, embodied relations rather than an abstract Euclidean space, which the map only imagines. The piece documents the violence experienced by women undocumented workers consigned to travel through deregulated and denationalized border spaces where human rights violations occur with impunity. From a wider lens, the symbolic power of this redrawing of borderlines as a network of relations captures the complexity of transnational movements that shape the territories of the Americas and, in turn, the RUTAS festival itself.

Other works in the 2012 festival centre on the experiences of transnational migration. By way of Bogotá and New York, Loco 7's *Urban Odyssey* depicts a migrant's phantasmagorical journey to reach *el sueño Americano* through larger-than-life marionettes and haunting choreography with body puppets to imagine the unimaginable psychic and bodily transformations of uprooting and re-rooting in a new home. Other performances featured in the 2012 festival, however, track different kinds of transnational movements that run north-south, such as those by multinational corporations of the north as they look to territories of the south for resource and wealth extraction. Aluna's own Dora-nominated *Nobayquiensepa (No One Knows)*—whose development and tour routes run via Medellín, Montevideo, Mexico City, Caracas, Bogotá, Edmonton, Ottawa, and Toronto—is a “multimedia *cri de coeur* for victims of violence” particularly those impacted by the expropriation of Indigenous territories along Colombia's Magdalena River by Canadian mining companies (“panamerican” IO).¹⁴

The performance routes of the festival, which travel south-north with Toronto as their destination point, speak to the critical role festivals can play in directing—and redirecting—transnational flows of knowledge and artistic production. The well-trodden routes of colonial and Eurocentric histories of knowledge production typically run southward from an Anglo-European North, with limited inclusion of the intellectual and artistic traditions of the Global South.¹⁵ As Paula Moya insists in her examination of the geopolitics of knowledge,

The problem is that transnational flows of goods and resources affect the process of knowledge production just as they affect the production of any other commodity. Since its entrance into the emerging capitalist world-system some 500 years ago, Latin America is not and never has been situated as a *producer of knowledge*. The reasons for this are complicated, and have as much to do with the destruction of indigenous knowledge systems in the wake of the Spanish colonization of Mesoamerica as with Latin America's contemporary structural dependence on the United States. But the effect of this situation is that the knowledge that *is* produced in Latin America is much less likely to be published, disseminated, and attended to than the knowledge that is produced either in the United States or Europe. (82–83, emphasis in original)

In its efforts to strengthen Canadian-hemispheric cultural exchanges, the RUTAS festival is shaping the geopolitics of artistic production. Aluna's decision to map the travels of festival productions in its program is, in this respect, a strategic one, calling attention to its efforts to reverse the current and establish a Canadian genealogy of performance traditions that flows south-north, beyond an Anglo-European tradition. This is one among the many ways in which RUTAS and Caminos differentiate themselves from Toronto's other festivals with a global reach.

The *conversatorios*, too, hasten the festival's efforts to redirect colonial flows of knowledge production by forming new ecologies that prioritize the work of Latinx and Indigenous artists, activists, and scholars and dismantle disciplinary silos, which tend to regulate knowledge exchanges and police legitimate versus illegitimate forms of knowledge.¹⁶ In its 2014 iteration, when RUTAS moved to its new home at Toronto's Daniels Spectrum, *conversatorios* brought Teresa Ralli and Miguel Rubio of Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani who participated in Peru's truth and reconciliation process, together with Oneida elder Grafton Antone, Stó:lo scholar Dylan Robinson, Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi artist-scholar Jill Carter, and Brazilian Canadian artist-scholar Carla Melo, to engage in a comparative examination of histories of state violence and how performance engages in the fraught process of reconciliation and redress. A panel on femicide in the Americas, in response to festival performances of Tara Beagan's *In Spirit*, a play about missing and murdered Indigenous women, began with a solo response, *De Eso No Se Habla*, by Latinx performance artist Brittany Chávez. The ensuing conversation, featuring Chiapas-based art-activist Doris Difarnecio; activist and paralegal Audrey Huntley, co-founder of No More Silence; writer-artist-educator Shandra Spears Bombay; and scholar Pauline Wakeham, established points of contact among artists and activists working to address rampant femicide in their respective localities across the Americas. The discussion generated an acknowledgement of the kinds of continental coalitions made possible by the networks generated by these forums, which the very term "femicide" invokes: it offers both an analytic and legal framework to mobilize transnational action. As a direct translation of *feminicidio*, the term also signals the inversion of north-south flows and hierarchies of intellectual capital and emphasizes the significant body of knowledge on the subject generated by Latinx and Chicana researchers and artists.¹⁷

The historically limited south-north flows of intellectual and artistic capital also result in a significant amount of educational labour that Aluna must take on: a Canadian theatre



A staged reading of Falen Johnson's *Treaty 9*, commissioned by Aluna Theatre for the 2014 RUTAS festival at Daniels Spectrum in Toronto, featuring Jessica Carmichael, Layne Coleman, Rosary Spence, Herbie Barnes, Christopher Stanton. Johnson's verbatim theatre piece was based on the transcriptions discovered in Daniel MacMartin's 1905 diary of the making of Treaty no. 9. Screen grab of archival video.

studies curriculum that remains largely grounded in Anglo-European traditions means that group ticket sales for university classes are limited unless the value and legacy of the Latin American artists featured in its festivals can be sufficiently “sold” in its marketing materials; and for audiences accustomed to repertoires drawn largely from Anglo-European theatrical traditions, the RUTAS production team must make extra efforts to extol the merits of these artists based on acclamations, prizes won, and impact. The very need for such concerted educational and marketing efforts points to the festival's status as, for the moment, “alternative.” But the “alternative” in the case of RUTAS does not describe a parenthetical place of contained impact in relationship to its establishment sister festivals. If RUTAS is “alternative,” it is so by virtue of its having materialized an alternative institution to do festivals differently and make visible artistic traditions and practices that have been less visible in textbook theatre histories. As an alternative institution, the RUTAS festival has the capacity to make a structural shift in the kinds of artistic traditions that are sustained on Toronto's stages and the *ways* in which they are sustained by fostering hemispheric collaborations and co-productions. The festival's success, in short, lies in the ongoing partnership between Aluna and Native Earth Performing Arts as well as in the artistic relationships among Latinx and Indigenous artists in the Americas that it has been building steadily and cumulatively since 2012.

This sustained commitment is another way in which RUTAS differentiates itself from other initiatives, such as Soulepper Theatre's inaugural Guswenta Gathering, a one-week festival in October 2017 featuring Indigenous theatre, art, and dance organized by contracted First Nations curators Falen Johnson and Cole Alvis. The curiously timed festival, a few weeks prior to the opening of Native Earth Performing Arts' annual Weesageechak Festival, meant that a significant number of its feature artists were committed to performances at Soulepper when they would typically be in rehearsals for Weesageechak. For well-established institutions



A staged reading of Falen Johnson's *Treaty 9*, commissioned by Aluna Theatre, and featuring Jessica Carmichael, Layne Coleman, Rosary Spence, Herbie Barnes, Christopher Stanton, performed at RUTAS 2014, Daniels Spectrum, Toronto. Screen grab of archival video.

like Soulpepper with large operating budgets, one-off initiatives like Guswenta (there have been no further editions of Guswenta to date) monopolize Canada 150 and Canadian Heritage funding that might otherwise go to the sustained efforts of smaller companies like Aluna and Native Earth. Government funding makes possible Soulpepper's singular gesture of inclusiveness toward Indigenous artistic production in Canada while its season repertoire, largely representative of the dominant settler culture, remains intact.

As the presence of RUTAS and Caminos in the hemispheric festival circuit grows, Pizano and Schweltnus intend to increase capacity for continental co-productions building on the artistic relationships the festivals foster. For Pizano and Schweltnus, the festivals are "not just producers planning" but about "bringing artists together." With their sixth year of festival curation behind them, Pizano and Schweltnus are now taking stock of the routes they have created for transnational collaborations. Deepening its partnership with Native Earth, Aluna intends to maximize the durational and sustained nature of festival planning to nurture new, Panamerican artistic relationships. The future of RUTAS and Caminos will see festival planning take the shape of three-year developmental cycles for hemispheric co-productions between artists in Canada and artists in localities across the Americas. RUTAS and Caminos will, in this sense, continue to model what is possible in the "alternative" festival by maximizing its potential to serve as an agile, responsive structure for Panamerican *interculturalidad* as both a critical practice and a critical consciousness. For Pizano and Schweltnus, that's the dream. If this sounds ambitious, well, it is. If this sounds far-fetched, follow the routes for another six years and see.

Notes

- 1 On the *autobistoria-teoría* as a self-knowledge practice that is social and relational see Pitts.
- 2 I invoke “Latinx” here as a gender-neutral alternative to Latina or Latino.
- 3 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and paraphrased remarks by Beatriz Pizano and Trevor Schwellnus are taken from an October 2017 interview.
- 4 It is important to emphasize that Aluna’s curatorial interest lies in a particular genealogy of political performance in Latin America, which should not be seen as representative of the expansive range of continental performance traditions, which also include more commercial enterprises.
- 5 The *conversatorios* for the 2014 RUTAS were made possible by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Connections Grant.
- 6 The potential of RUTAS to generate a transnational theatre commons finds an important parallel and antecedent in the US-based Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC), a national movement comprised of Latinx artists and scholars that “uses a commons-based approach to transform the narrative of the American theatre, to amplify the visibility of Latinx making, and to champion equity through advocacy, art making, convening, and scholarship” (Latinx Theatre Commons). The LTC is a flagship program of HowlRound, a digital platform for theatremakers.
- 7 Suitably, the festival theme for the year Pizano attended in 2004 was “Roots in Transit”: “In cultural terms roots usually represent an existing identity to which people belong and which they sometimes wish to acknowledge. Roots in Transit would like to propose a different image: active, germinating, sprouting roots that point outwards, forwards and upwards. Roots which allow us to stand upright autonomously and move. Roots that give a boundless sense of future. Roots like seeds that we plant in the air, in the water, in places far away from the earth where we were born, or roots that lead us back into our environment of origin after having travelled across foreign landscapes” (Varley). I am struck by how this metaphoric rethinking of roots aligns with the festivals’ curation, which does not reduce presenting artists to their identity positions but uses ethnic “roots” as points of connectivity (and routes) across the hemisphere.
- 8 Since 2012, RUTAS has been supported by a host of granting agencies: Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the Metcalf Foundation. In 2014, Canadian Heritage funding made possible the creation of Caminos, what Aluna refers to as “mini-RUTAS,” devoted to *propuestas* or works-in-progress, which cycles biennially with RUTAS, effectively allowing Aluna to turn its Panamerican events into yearly festival offerings.
- 9 Aluna’s efforts to include Canada in discussions of the Americas are in stride with other scholarly and critical activity, which I document in the two edited volumes, *Latina/o Canadian Theatre and Performance* and *Fronteras Vivientes*. Both volumes feature work by scholars and artists who engage critically and self-reflectively in questions concerning Canadian *latinidad* within a hemispheric and comparative framework. These efforts also align with those of the Canadian Consortium of Performance and Politics in the Americas, a SSHRC-funded research network led by Peter Kulchyski at the University of Manitoba, which works in conjunction with NYU’s Hemispheric Institute to advance

- the research of Canadian scholars that sits at the intersection of performance and politics in the Americas.
- 10 My sincere thanks to festival producer Sue Balint for these audience survey results. The significant increase in Latin American and Spanish-speaking participants in 2017 is partly explained by Aluna's collaboration with Convergence, a graduate student conference run by the Hemispheric Institute, hosted that year by York University and organized to coincide with Aluna's *Caminos*. The Hemi Encuentros and Convergences attract a significant body of scholars and artists from across the Americas.
- 11 See Statistics Canada's 2016 Census Profile for Toronto.
- 12 The RUTAS festival surveys, of course, do not capture data on the non-native Spanish speakers, artists, students, scholars, and community organizers in attendance who are interested in hemispheric approaches and for whom the festival serves as a critical fulcrum.
- 13 For a vivid analysis of Violeta Luna's *Parting Memories* see Levin 184–189.
- 14 For a detailed analysis of Aluna's *Nobayquiensepa*, see Ric Knowles and Jessica Riley's "Aluna Theatre's *Nobayquiensepa*: The Intermedial Intercultural and the Limits of Empathy," as well as chapter seven of Knowles's *Performing the Intercultural City*.
- 15 My thanks to González for her important paper, "International Literacies, Performance Studies and the Decolonial Turn," which she shared with the working session, "Decolonizing Methodologies and Settler Responsibility in Theatre and Performance Studies" at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research. Her sharp insights helped further my thinking on these issues.
- 16 For more on these arguments concerning the regulating effects of disciplinary thinking, see Jack Halberstam's analysis of Michel Foucault's posthumously published lectures, *Society Must be Defended* in *The Queer Art of Failure* (10).
- 17 On the analytic and legal implications of the term feminicide, as well as the significance of the term within a body of Latinx and Chicanx scholarship, see Fregoso and Bejarano.

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