

Queer Utopian Theory for Transformative Change in Theatre Organizations

by

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Abstract

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Canadian theatre has the potential to incite social change but inequitable working environments within theatre organizations have hindered this prospect. The sector needs new frameworks to improve conditions for arts workers. Inspired by several scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, and Lee Edelman, I look to the concept of queer utopia to address inequities within the theatre sector, with a focus on the role of theatre organizations. By defining Queer Utopian Theory (QUT), analyzing calls to action in the Canadian theatre sector, and employing three focus groups, I created a Queer Utopian framework for Canadian theatre organizations to answer the research question: *What is the utility of the concept of queer utopia in addressing inequities in the Canadian theatre sector?* My research found that relationship building, embracing fear, and subverting socio-political norms are aspects of QUT that are of utility to organizational leaders who wish to foster equitable environments.

Keywords: queer utopia, Canadian theatre, focus groups, landscaping, process design

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Art serves as a vital conduit for social change and individual empowerment, shaping society in profound ways (hooks, 1995). In my decade-long career as an arts manager and producer within the Canadian theatre sector, I have observed theatrical spaces utilized as avenues for transformative change and as institutions of disempowerment. I began my career as a stage manager for theatre, which meant that, from the age of 18, I was put in charge of facilitating artistic spaces (e.g., rehearsal rooms, performance venues, etc.). These rooms usually contained arts workers and leaders from various backgrounds, and all their well-being became part of my responsibilities. I took the caretaker role quite seriously, and as I became familiar with the inequities that exist within the sector, I transitioned into managing and producing for arts organizations. The impetus to make this transition was fueled by my belief that the only way to make real change was to become part of theatrical institutions and influence how organizations facilitate their spaces. Beneath the surface, many challenges hinder the sector's growth, specifically the need for new frameworks to address inequities outlined across call-to-action documents in the Canadian theatre landscape. As I have grown as an arts manager and producer, I have observed that many factors influence the theatre sector such as theatre educational institutions, the funding system, theatre organizations, and arts workers. My thesis research focuses on the latter two while acknowledging the importance of the formers. This project is an important endeavor because as an art form, theatre has the potential to inform, interrogate, and advocate for social change, but working conditions can hinder this process (hooks, 1995; Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019; Rathje, Hackel & Zaki, 2021).

It is important to note that the definition of theatre, in this context, is broader than plays performed on a stage and includes multiple forms of performing arts (e.g., dance, music, film,

poetry, drag, etc.). During the COVID-19 pandemic, arts practitioners had to adapt to digital content to maintain their audience (Cox, 2020). This shift can be seen through the introduction of funding programs such as the Canada Council for the Arts' Digital Now initiative which was launched in the Spring of 2021 (Hill and Knowlton Strategies, 2021). Kershaw et al. (2011), even before the pandemic, wrote that theatre and performance "are a part of yet apart from the disciplines that constitute them, therefore they are trans-disciplinary, always operating in yet-to-be-defined intersections between disciplinary fields" (p. 66, as cited in Tilley, 2024, p. 214). Additionally, the definition of a theatre organization includes presentation houses, producing companies, non-profit organizations, collectives, and arts service organizations (ASOs).

Alongside the rise in social movements such as Black Lives Matter over the last several years, inequities based on race, gender, economic status, and other factors within the Canadian theatre sector have been revealed (Hernandez, 2020; Kubur, 2023). For example, MacArthur's (2015) report on achieving equity in the Canadian theatre sector showed that there are still significant gender disparities among artistic and business leadership in arts organizations which negatively impact the experiences of many arts workers. Moreover, through research projects and call-to-action documents, scholars and artists have highlighted several areas that need improvement such as education, policies, and budgeting (Balancing Act, n.d.; Glory & Fiati, 2020; Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019; Means of Production, n.d.; National Endowment for the Arts, 2023; SEARA, 2023). Barriers caused by scarcity and meritocracy often leave arts workers feeling unsupported and compelled to fend for themselves, ultimately fostering a culture that promotes a strong sense of individualism (Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019).

In academic scholarship, queer theory, a branch of critical theory that has roots in activism, has been invoked to explicate gender and sexuality and to explore resistance to norms

and injustice (Oxford Reference, 2024). Therefore, I chose to draw on queer theory as a theoretical framework for my study. In the 1980s and '90s, the first wave of queer theory arose concurrently with the dissipation of the broader use of utopian theory (Seeger, 2021). However, the release of José Esteban Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* in 2009 marked a surge of research into queer utopia as a concept. His book presented a counterargument to the anti-relational, individualistic queer theory that came before. According to Muñoz (2009), queerness and queer futurity are methods of navigating the world that help individuals see beyond present-day plights to a communal, utopian future. Throughout this project, I explore how Queer Utopian Theory can guide the Canadian theatre sector towards a similar queer utopia.

This thesis makes two arguments. First, that a comprehensive definition of Queer Utopian Theory, especially related to its potential beyond sexual politics, does not currently exist. Second, that, once defined, Queer Utopian Theory can serve as a versatile theoretical framework across various domains, specifically within Canadian theatre organizations. My intention is not to claim all these ideas as my own, but by reviewing and analyzing literature that has examined, theorized, and applied queer theory as well as concepts of utopia, to combine these ideas into one proposed Queer Utopian Theory of my own making. To examine the strength of these two arguments, I explored several examples of applications of queer utopia, both theoretically (as in the work of Muñoz) and practically (in sectors such as theatre performance, criminology, environmental justice, and education). These previous applications aided in developing a theory of queer utopia, which was utilized to address my research question. This research project does not aim to outline and address the needs and experiences of marginalized communities because I do not speak on behalf of all members of these communities, regardless of how I identify. What

this research project does aim to do, however, is assist theatre organizations in remaining adaptable and receptive to individual needs.

My interest in exploring the intellectual and applied opportunities posed by queer and utopian theories led to the following research question guiding this thesis: *What is the utility of the concept of queer utopia in addressing inequities in the Canadian theatre sector?*

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review first describes some of the urgent conversations and calls to action occurring in the Canadian theatre sector related to theatre organizations. The call-to-action documents that I refer to throughout the thesis include research studies and reports as well as resources, toolkits, and recommendations put out by various collectives and initiatives such as *The Black Pledge*, the 35/50 Initiative, Means of Production, and Balancing Act. This chapter then reviews relevant academic scholarship on the notion of queer utopia, its roots in queer theory, and its applications.

2.1 Urgent Conversations and Calls to Action in the Canadian Theatre Sector

Scarcity

In economics and social psychology, scarcity refers to the discrepancy between wants/needs and the resources available to meet those wants and needs (National Geographic, 2024). This discrepancy plays an instrumental role in creating precarity within the theatre sector. Rosenfeld (2021) wrote that “competition is an intrinsic part of the design of nonprofit theatre” (para. 4). In Canada, Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts (SEARA) (2023) documented the disparity in access to financial stability through granting services between Canadian theatre organizations and artists. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the challenges to the sector, and SEARA (2023) noted that freelance arts workers were much less likely than organizations to receive financial support during the closures, leaving them more vulnerable. Mississauga Arts Council’s (2021) report on mental health in the arts recommended the prioritization of emotional well-being across the arts sector. However, a scarcity mentality contributes to key issues in the arts sector such as overwhelm, burnout, poor work/life balance, and high employee turnover (LeSage, 2021, p. 4).

Additionally, Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) noted that “conditional inclusion” plays a role in the demographic of freelance arts workers who are compensated by arts organizations (p. 24). Their text about Indigenous pathways described both brick and thread sensibilities. In short, brick sensibilities refer to individuality and rigidity whereas thread sensibilities allow for more fluidity and flexibility. Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) argued that braiding the two sensibilities together is the best path forward for integration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of being. However, conditional inclusion is present when an organization creates roles that appear open to anyone but must abide by the organization’s brick sensibilities to maintain job security.

Meritocracy & Intersectionality

Meritocracy, which García-Sierra (2023) named a myth, is the belief that effort and ability are the two factors that contribute to achieving success (p. 385). However, meritocratic beliefs are ignorant of additional factors that an intersectional lens can offer. The concept of intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which was originally named to address the experiences and needs of Black women, has grown over time to refer to the impacts of existing at various intersections of lived identities such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, and so on (Coaston, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991). For example, individuals who experience lower incomes are more likely to feel the negative effects of meritocracy (Brook et al., 2017; Brook et al., 2019). MacArthur (2015) described what Rina Fraticelli coined the “Invisibility Factor” which signified the lack of women in leadership roles (p. 1). MacArthur’s (2015) report showed a 70/30 disparity between men and women in roles such as artistic director, director, and playwright. Brook et al.’s (2017) report also documented the gender pay gap in the arts sector making it more challenging for women to succeed even when in a leadership position. In Canada, women, on average, earn 89 cents for every dollar earned by men. With an intersectional lens, these wage disparities are

even more pronounced among marginalized groups (Canadian Women's Foundation, n.d.). The call for intersectional gender equity in the arts continues in Alberta with the 35/50 initiative that invites companies to commit to hiring 35% BIPOC and 50% women or non-binary people in paid, professional roles (Geddes et al., 2020).

Another initiative that pushes for intersectionality in the Canadian arts sector is Glory and Fiati's (2020) *The Black Pledge*. They wrote, "the white supremacist framework which dominates our society oppresses Black people and permeates through the leadership and organizational structure of the live-performance sector" (p. 2). Citing Crenshaw's (1991) definition, *The Black Pledge* highlighted how individuals who are at the intersection of multiple oppressed and underrepresented communities experience even more barriers and argued that anti-Black racism cannot be addressed without intersectional approaches.

Calls to Action

In my analysis of various call-to-action documents, three overarching thematic areas emerged. These thematic pillars--education, development, and training; policies and processes; and budgeting and monetary contributions--dominate the applied literature in this field. This next section expands on the significance and relevance of these thematic pillars to the theatre sector.

1. Education, Development & Training

Two distinct types of education, development and training, arose consistently from the literature throughout my research. The first type consisted of internal training, specifically equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice (EDIAJ) training, for staff (e.g., employees) of a theatre organization. Calls to action that focus on the Black community, gender equity, disability rights, and Indigenous rights called for in-depth and, most importantly, ongoing training focused on areas such as anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, disability issues, and

Indigenous issues (Geddes et al., 2020; Glory & Fiati, 2020; Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019; National Endowment for the Arts, 2023).

The second call for education focused on the professional development and training programs offered by theatre organizations for freelance arts workers. Primarily in Toronto, Ontario, Means of Production (n.d.), a collective of Technical Directors and Production Managers, has highlighted the importance of mentorship opportunities for production roles to encourage a safe, equitable, and supportive work environment. Additionally, Glory and Fiati (2020) encouraged tuition-free development of leadership positions for Black individuals, invitations to events, and reserved spots for the Black community in training programs. Similarly, the National Endowment for the Arts (2023) called for training to be offered to individuals with disabilities, as well as an assessment of current programs for accessibility.

2. Policies & Processes

Several call-to-action documents addressed policies and processes within theatre organizations, asking organizations to internally audit their processes from an anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive lens (Geddes et al., 2020; Glory & Fiati, 2020). Two recurring areas of focus were programming and hiring. Several specific considerations were brought forward such as representation beyond tokenization, harassment reporting, outreach, recruitment, retention, and dependent care (Balancing Act, n.d.; Geddes et al., 2020; Glory & Fiati, 2020; National Endowment for the Arts, 2023). National Endowment for the Arts (2023) stated the necessity of thorough procedures for the dissemination and communication of these policies to staff and contractors to ensure that they are understood.

Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) described the process of bringing individuals from underrepresented communities into organizations as “ethical hosting” (p. 50). They discussed the

importance of considering different sensibilities (i.e., thread sensibilities) when inviting Indigenous panelists or speakers to work within an organization. Many logistical assumptions within white, middle-class communities may not be true for others. Some examples included access to a bank account, the ability to pay out of pocket and be reimbursed, and reliable transportation (Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019, p. 51).

3. Budgeting & Monetary Contributions

Financial barriers were a commonly cited inequity between theatre organizations and freelance arts workers. Means of Production (n.d.) called for increased budgets in many production areas such as design budgets, fees for additional members of the production team, transportation, and support crew. Similarly, Balancing Act (n.d.) outlined the importance of financial support for childcare to alleviate the barriers for freelance arts workers with dependants. Multiple advocacy documents, including *The Black Pledge*, the 35/50 Initiative, and SEARA, urged organizations to provide financial support through monetary contributions to advocacy groups and mutual aid initiatives (Geddes et al., 2020; Glory & Fiati, 2020; SEARA, 2023). Incorporating these considerations from the outset is crucial for the budgeting strategies of theatre organizations. Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) asserted that financial contributions without foundational learning and relationship building can ultimately lead to further harm to underrepresented communities.

In summary, to combat issues of scarcity, meritocracy, and other inequities in the Canadian theatre sector, the call-to-action literature recommended enacting actions such as developing education and training programs for arts workers, reviewing and assessing policies and processes, and engaging in budgeting that accommodates these initiatives, all with an intersectional lens. Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) emphasized that transformative organizational

change is not simply about implementing the calls to action, but rather about *how* the recommendations are integrated. With queer theory's emphasis on intersectionality, queer utopia comes into play as a framework to guide the planning and implementation.

2.2 Queer Utopia

Two key concepts are instrumental to my thesis: the notion of “queer” and the notion of “utopia.” Both offer theoretical tools to find new ways for marginalized communities to survive. In this context, “queer” refers not only to sexual orientation or gender identity but to the feeling of incompatibility with cisgender, heteronormative, colonial, and patriarchal systems (The New School, 2014). Additionally, “utopia” does not refer to a finite goal or physical space, but rather to a feeling of imagination and aspiration (Muñoz, 2009).

Based on Ernst Bloch's work, Robinson and Ilinskaya (2022) distinguished between two types of utopias: abstract and concrete. Abstract utopia is imaginative yet unachievable (e.g., sci-fi or magical futurity), whereas concrete utopia has more explicit guidelines and parameters, making it more attainable. Under these larger umbrellas, there are varying definitions of a “utopia.” While my work dances between abstract and concrete (theoretical and applicable) utopian sensibilities, my work follows two definitions of “utopia”:

1. Utopia as a "sense of political agency, possibility, community, and hope" (Cavalcante, 2019, p. 1716), and
2. Utopia as the imperative to imagine radical alternatives (Gogul, 2018, p. 359).

Throughout my research, white, colonial, patriarchal, heterosexual, and cisgender systems are referred to as normative and the “norm” (Gogul, 2018).

Queer Theory Influences

The body of literature about queer theory generation, application, and critique is vast. Given the applied nature of my thesis research, I focused on queer theory work that appeared pertinent to the generation of a Queer Utopian Theory. I determined three key concepts in this body of literature: queer space, queer time, and intersectionality.

Queer Space

After World War 2, the United States saw an influx of what Cavalcante (2019) called “gayborhoods” (p. 1718). Scholars have contended that the war effort brought individuals from across the country together, which led to the consolidation of what had previously been a “scattered queer landscape” into smaller gay communities (Cavalcante, 2019, p. 1717). At the time, these spaces were necessary havens for sexual non-conformity and experimentation. However, over time, the discourse around queer space has evolved and these historic gay neighbourhoods are facing critiques for a lack of intersectionality (Giesecking, 2020; Oswin, 2008; Rosenberg, 2017). For example, through accounts from lesbians and queers living in New York City, Giesecking (2020) identified exclusion based on gender, race, and class from the neighbourhoods that have historically prioritized gay, white, and cisgender men.

Utilizing data gathered from an anonymous American Midwestern educational institution, Pryor (2017) also critiqued siloed queer spaces to address the issue of “traditionally heterogendered institutions” (p. 35). Both Pryor (2017), and the research they drew from by Preston and Hoffman (2015), criticized how institutions tend to create segregated programs and support systems for LGBTQ students which perpetuate the othering of these students. While these programs can be useful, a demand for more well-rounded and holistic approaches has been identified. As part of a framework for building safe queer spaces, Hartal (2018) identified the

importance of additional spaces for distinct identity groups as part of the larger, inclusive space. Giesecking (2020) offered what they referred to as “constellations,” which represent the fleeting and fragmented queer spaces that queers experience while transcending the borders of a specific neighbourhood (p. 942). The constellation becomes a vast web of interconnected queer communities across distances such as schools, cities, countries, etc. This version of queer space was inspired by Halberstam’s (2005) innovatory view that queer spaces are not fixed, but instead are animated by queer people and practices.

Additionally, a particular form of queer space that emerged from the literature was the use of digital space. Users can craft their communities and identities through the algorithms on online platforms such as Tumblr, emulating real-life gayborhoods to achieve the utopia that Cavalcante (2019) described. In these digital communities, it is not necessary for the user to continuously educate their peers or fight to validate their identity because there is often a shared understanding of queerness, sexual orientations, and alternative relationship styles. Other examples of digital space used for a queer utopia are present in popular tv shows such as *Sense8*, podcast installations, and punk music, which challenged gender norms and "connotated futurity" (Brown, 2020, p. 436; Coloma, 2018; Keeling, 2019; Robinson & Ilinskaya, 2022). However, digital space as a healthy avenue for queer utopia has not gone uncontested. Within the same article, Cavalcante (2019) also referred to Tumblr's queer communities as a "queer vortex" (p. 1727). In these queer vortexes, the user is constantly surrounded by like-minded individuals. This can induce a "normalizing effect" that does not prepare the users for the realities of the outside world (Cavalcante, 2019; Coleman, 2019, p. 10). Coleman (2019) challenged the notion of normalcy entirely by explaining that striving for it merely becomes assimilation into a cis- and hetero-normative way of living which sacrifices the authenticity of queerness. Lastly, to

challenge the usefulness of digital spaces for queer utopia and to use the example of the television show *Sense8*, critics have described the show's navigation of utopia as abstract, as opposed to concrete (Robinson & Ilinskaya, 2022). This critique implied that the TV show relies more on wishful thinking than realistic guidelines for achieving utopia.

Queer Time

Inspired by Edelman's (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, the figure of the child has been utilized and disputed as a "symbol of futurity" (Essi, 2019, p. 246). Edelman (2004), Gogul (2018), and Zeffiro (2019) contested a reproductive future that capitalizes on the normalization of living a cis- and hetero-normative nuclear family life because it erases the existence of non-normative children. By challenging "straight time" (i.e., cis- and hetero-normative timelines for relationships and reproduction) and embracing "queer time" (i.e., cis- and hetero-non-conforming ways of navigating life and reproduction), an individual can imagine non-prescriptive, utopic ways of living (Brown, 2020; Coleman, 2019; Gogul, 2018; Halberstam, 2005; Robinson & Ilinskaya, 2022; Stewart, 2019; Zeffiro, 2019).

Reproductive futurity is produced through the repetition of the heterosexual life path (e.g., marriage and giving birth) (Stewart, 2019). Stewart (2019) and Muñoz (2009) agreed that homonormative politics (e.g., the legalization of same-sex marriage) advocate for queer assimilation into straight time because they enshrine queers into the cis- and hetero-inspired life cycle. However, through a retelling of Octavia Butler's sci-fi story *Dawn*, Gogul (2018) explained that "non-normative reproduction" can occur, encompassing birth and life cycles within queer communities and alternative relationship styles. Homonormative politics create Queer Utopian potential by landscaping a space that allows the child to be queered by their parents and their sexuality (Stewart, 2019).

The *No Future*-inspired discourse frames aging as a punishment for queers (Sandberg & Marshall, 2017). Edelman (2004) deduced that there is no future for queerness because of the present-day cis- and hetero-normative agenda. Muñoz (2009) challenged this when he proclaimed, "the future is queerness's domain" (p. 1). He encouraged the reader to move beyond nihilistic presentism and look at past mistakes and the politics of the day for insight into how to build a different, utopic future.

Intersectionality

Queerness without acknowledging intersectionality is ineffective for crafting queer utopias (Muñoz, 2009). Living in opposition to the cis- and hetero-normative, patriarchal, and white supremacist world is not an exclusively queer issue (Essi, 2019; Keeling, 2019; Muñoz, 2009). To sufficiently rewrite the current white, patriarchal, colonial rulebook that relies upon heterosexuality, various intersections of marginalized identities must be considered (Keeling, 2019).

Accentuating the necessity of intersectional world-making, Keeling (2019) mentioned how to have "the norm," society needs "the other." As previously mentioned, classifying the white, colonial, patriarchal, heterosexual, cisgender lifestyle as the "norm" and anything else as the "other" is a common thread throughout my research. To push the agenda that profits from cis- and hetero-normative reproduction, queerness and Blackness are necessary adversaries (Keeling, 2019; Zeffiro, 2019). Within the theorizing of the child and the heterosexual life cycle by authors such as Edelman, the child excludes children of colour, as well as "queer, transgender, disabled, and other non-normative children" (Gogul, 2018, p. 349). Gumbs (2011) stated that mere survival could be "quite a queer proposition" for Black communities (p. 133, as

cited in Essi, 2019, p. 248). Liberation needs to include individuals who are both Black and queer, not simply one or the other (Keeling, 2019).

There is an intrinsic relationship between cis- and hetero-normativity and age and ability (Gutierrez-Perez, 2017). For example, in their article on queering aging futures, Sandberg and Marshall (2017) wrote that allyship could be found between queer and crip studies because being non-disabled and neurotypical are included in what cis- and heterosexuality considers the norm. This definition of “norm” also relates to ageism because remaining non-disabled and neurotypical in old age has been labelled as “successful aging” (p. 2). Sandberg and Marshall (2017) argued that queer and crip studies could unite to break down the binaries between success and failure. Rejecting the binary “other” is crucial to challenging the concept of heterosexual normativity (Keeling, 2019; Sandberg & Marshall, 2017; Seeger, 2021).

Queer Utopian Thought

Muñoz (2009) coined the term *queer utopia*, which he described as being a horizon of possibility that transcends the limitations of here and now. Muñoz’s (2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* came at a time when most queer studies focused on anti-relational theory such as Edelman’s (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* which proclaimed that there is no future for queer people. Muñoz (2009) admitted that he experiences kinship with Edelman’s words, however, he is critical of the erasure of race and class in Edelman’s description of reproductive futurity. Underscored with themes of hope, Muñoz (2009) framed his version of queer futurity as contrasting with political nihilism. Through acts of resistance, imagination, and solidarity, queer individuals and communities can strive for utopia, creating spaces of belonging and liberation. *Cruising Utopia* is a provocative manifesto that calls for a radical reimagining of the present to move towards a more just and inclusive future.

In his chapter titled *Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative*, Muñoz (2009) discussed what he called “utopian performativity” as an ongoing methodology for acts of resistance to the status quo (p. 481). He wrote:

Capitalism, for instance, would have us think that it is a natural order, an inevitability, the way things would be. The “should be” of utopia, its indeterminacy, and its deployment of hope, stand against capitalism’s ever expanding and exhausting force field of how things “are and will be.” Utopian performativity suggests another modality of doing and being that is in process, unfinished. (pp. 637-638)

This final sentence accentuates the ongoing process, the constant striving for, of queer utopia.

Queer utopia and performance have been paired in other contexts as well. Along with many forms of popular media, theatre performance has a history of presenting queerness as villainous, predatory, and tragic (Page, 2021). One such example is Lillian Hellman’s (1934) *The Children’s Hour*, which presented lesbianism as dangerous and ultimately ended in the suicide of Martha, a lesbian character. This is, in part, due to the history of law which perpetuated homosexuality’s negative reputation. In early colonial times, homosexuality was classified as a criminal offence (Levy, 2019). In 1842, Samuel Moore and Patrick Kelley were the first two homosexual men in Canada sentenced to death for sodomy (HRC Staff, 2020). Later, their charges were adjusted to life in prison, and several years later, they were each released separately upon the revision of the laws. While history is riddled with different types of oppression such as these, there have also been many forms of resistance.

Developed through his time spent with peasant and worker populations, Brazilian director and theorist Augusto Boal (1974) coined Theatre of the Oppressed. Theatre of the Oppressed was developed in response to the arrival of the aristocracy which divided the ruling class from

the working class. According to Theatre of the Oppressed, all theatre is man-made and therefore all theatre is inherently political. This revolutionary method of theatre performance aimed to deconstruct the barriers put in place by the ruling class (Boal, 1974). Theatre for social change can take on many forms.

According to Farrier (2013), theatre performance has both abstract and concrete utopian potential by creating an environment where the body politic and suspension of disbelief can work together to imagine new, utopic futures and then realize them momentarily on stage. In other words, Farrier (2013) explained that “theatre serves as a stage upon which a queer utopic vision of the possible can be enacted” (p. 11). For example, queer time is a key characteristic of queer utopia. With careful consideration of tempo, rhythm, and timeline, time plays a crucial role in theatre performance (Farrier, 2013). By existing outside of normative or linear temporalities, theatre performance queers the concept of time. This is true regardless of if the show’s content features queer characters. Both Farrier (2013) and Muñoz (2009) alluded to queer utopia being a moment or an aspiration, as opposed to a finite place. Through theatre performance, a temporary community is created through affect, which mimics the fleeting nature of queer utopic experiences, both on and off stage.

Queer Utopian Applications

Here, I describe how queer theory and queer utopia have been applied over the last several years in disciplines such as criminology, environmentalism, and education to provide a comparative portrayal of the potential of applying these theoretical constructs in applied settings.

Queering criminology has historically focused on piecemeal changes when a radical, holistic transformational approach is necessary (Copson & Boukli, 2020). Correctional Services Canada (CSC) is a large contributor to declining physical and mental health in incarcerated

transgender individuals (Boyer et al., 2019). The Canadian Human Rights Commission's (CHRC) incoming complaints from transgender individuals have "almost doubled over a fifteen-year period" (Boyer et al., 2019, p. 387). Essentially, the Prison Industrial Complex fosters heterosexual and cisgender conformity to the detriment of queer prisoners, which sparked a desire for new frameworks (Stanley, Spade, and Queer (In)Justice, 2012). In their article on queer utopias and criminology, Copson and Boukli (2020) described queer theory as a concrete utopian social theory that challenges reigning perspectives on social issues. In a practical sense, they described Queer Utopian criminology as a place where grievances can be aired, binaries are challenged, and where queer/trans identities are not separated from the rest of society.

The abolishment and rebuilding of the prison system is a recurring topic in queer justice conversations. For example, in a book on queer abolitionist strategies, Golomb-Leavitt, Becker and Valeriano-Flores (2023) recommended important Queer Utopian strategies for prison abolition such as moving away from us vs. them binaries in advocacy language.

Similarly, in their thesis on queer utopianism and environmental justice, Fox (2023) compared queer theory's deconstruction of binaries to the non-dualistic shift in environmental thought (p. 13). Prail and Jones (2023) discussed how, in the Western world, binaries such as nature vs. culture and human vs. non-human have led to the perpetuation of hierarchical thinking, placing certain (i.e., wealthy) humans at the helm. This binary mode of thinking plays a massive role in the climate crisis because it ignores the reality that the earth, the animals, the plants, and the humans require holistic, intersectional nurturing to survive (i.e., recognizing that life is an "ecology beyond human exceptionalism") (Fox, 2023, p. 13).

To determine the relevance of queer utopianism to environmental justice, Fox's (2023) study utilized auto-ethnographic research, interviews, and group workshops, focusing primarily

on genderqueer participants or individuals who are associated with Pride events in the Netherlands. The research uncovered three thematic pillars as the most relevant to queer environmental utopia: post-capitalism, justice-driven processes and moving beyond binaries (p. 1). Specifically, post-capitalism is to be made up of care, community, and needs-based organizing; justice-driven processes must be rooted in anti-racism and anti-patriarchal practices; and ways of being should be seen as a spectrum as opposed to binary categories (Fox, 2023, p. 48-63). While Fox's (2023) summary did not provide any practical steps that can be taken, the many characteristics they described are essential foundational considerations for queer environmental utopia.

In a more practical application and as part of Jones's (2013) inquiry into queer utopia, Rands, McDonald, and Clapp (2013) scoped how Queer Utopian thought can be used to improve classroom design. In their chapter on queering classrooms, they discussed characteristics of queer pedagogy that can support classroom design such as engaging in conversations that interrogate perceived norms and binaries. Their mode of thinking goes beyond queer utopia as a restricted proposition for only queer teachers and students. It is used as a model which guides all individuals to deconstruct educational norms and dream up new possibilities. Additionally, queer utopia promotes looking beyond needs related only to teacher and student, to who these individuals are outside of these roles (Rands, McDonald, & Clapp, 2013).

The present is consistently the effect of previous actions and is constantly changing based on new causes and effects (Rands, McDonald, & Clapp, 2013). Rands, McDonald, and Clapp (2013) introduced Julie Casid's notion of the verb "landscaping," which refers to actions that create the "isness" of a given moment (i.e., what that moment *is*) (p. 149-172). The landscape (noun) is the effect of landscaping (verb). However, like Farrier (2013) and Muñoz (2009),

Rands, McDonald, and Clapp (2013) described landscaping as continuing over time without a definitive end. The authors explained that typical classroom environments are landscaped in a normative way. That is, with desks set out in rows, with the teacher at the front, etc. The repetitiveness and predictability of this setup are normative and limit pedagogical methods. However, to queer the classroom toward a queer utopia, they argued that an act of queer landscaping is required. For example, they recommended challenging the repetitive *isness* of the normative classroom and questioning what the classroom can be. Is the classroom accessible? Is it set up in a way that best shapes learning, or does it simply allow the teacher visibility of the entire room? Is it a reflection of the individuals in the space and their needs?

A crucial part of queer landscaping is stepping into what is outside the “norm” and leaning into discomfort (Coloma, 2018). This concept is supported by previous work by Halberstam (2005) when she described place-making as a component of queer space.

In the pursuit of fostering a transformative educational environment, outlining practical examples inspired by queer utopia becomes essential (i.e., concrete utopia). An ethos of welcoming and embracing diversity sets the tone for an inclusive classroom (Rands, McDonald, & Clapp, 2013). As previously mentioned, the traditional classroom layout requires reconfiguration. Transparency is vital and educators are encouraged to openly acknowledge and discuss the intentional queering of the classroom landscape, setting the stage for what Rands, McDonald, and Clapp (2013) referred to as “radical welcoming” (p. 44). Encouraging the students to contribute ideas to the transformation empowers them to engage with the room and each other. The authors encouraged an activist mindset, rather than a solely academic one, fostering critical thinking and social awareness (Rands, McDonald, & Clapp, 2013).

Visual elements play a crucial role, and walls are adorned with images, colors, and artwork that challenge norms and celebrate diverse identities. Additionally, lighting can shape moods and help to create a comfortable space for all students. This visual transformation contributes to the overall atmosphere of acceptance and affirmation. Together, these practical examples incorporate Queer Utopian ideas into the classroom, so inclusivity, activism, and creativity can converge to redefine the traditional educational paradigm.

In summary, this chapter showcases how, in many instances, queerness and queer utopia are frameworks that activists and scholars alike turn to when looking to impart transformative change. However, despite consistent references to queer utopia, my research has also shown that a consistent definition of Queer Utopian Theory does not appear to exist. Therefore, utilizing this literature review on queer utopia, including its application as a theoretical framework in several areas such as theatre performance, classrooms, environmentalism, and criminology, and paying special attention to key thematic pillars such as queer space, landscaping, queer time, challenging binaries, and intersectionality, this section provides a detailed overview of the contributions that have led to my definition of Queer Utopian Theory. This chapter sets the stage (pun intended) for the Queer Utopian framework that I will apply to address my research question.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Mertens (2007) wrote that the central belief of a transformative paradigm is that power dynamics are a perpetual problem that must be continuously addressed. With a strong focus on the role of the theatre organization, and the power dynamics that come along with the relationship between theatre organizations and freelance arts workers, my research process was designed through this transformative lens. Epistemologically, a transformative worldview prioritizes the diversity and intersectionality of human experiences by fostering a relationship between researcher and community participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2007). Ontologically, my research presents a paradigm heavily influenced by poststructuralism and its constructivist belief that truth is subjective, worlds are co-created, and therefore more than one reality can exist (James & Busher, 2009; Oxford Reference, 2024).

The primary methodology to address my research question was focus groups with expert participants. However, I first needed to paint a clear picture of the topics for the participants, which I did through the amalgamation of knowledge on queer utopia and issues in the Canadian theatre sector. My literature review (Chapter 2) compiled pre-existing studies, recommendations, and calls to action in the Canadian theatre sector to identify the issues that must be addressed. It further provided a detailed account of the literature on queer utopia and its roots in queer theory. Next, I used this information to generate a definition of Queer Utopian Theory and, in turn, a Queer Utopian framework, which can be found in the next chapter (Chapter 4: Theory Generation). Chapter 4 led to the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A).

The Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A) includes three parts. First, I described the three thematic pillars that emerged from my call-to-action literature review (education, development & training; policies & processes; and budgeting & monetary contributions), then I

provided a working definition of Queer Utopian Theory, and third, I wrote a first draft of recommendations on how to implement Queer Utopian change in these areas. The purpose of the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A) was to share my initial research and gather feedback from the Canadian theatre community so that I could generate a final Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre (Chapter 6) as the final stage of my project. To gather feedback, I organized three focus group sessions.

Focus group methods follow the qualitative, constructivist paradigm, acknowledging that multiple realities exist subjectively, and worlds are created collaboratively (James & Busher, 2009). According to Fox (2001), constructivism makes several claims, including that learning is an ongoing process, knowledge is individual, and knowledge is socially constructed rather than innate (p. 24). Based on these tenets, multiple focus groups were essential to implement a constructivist critique on the feasibility of the Queer Utopian theoretical framework because they provided a space for individuals to come together in a social discussion to contribute to learning. The constructivist paradigm allowed for a collaborative epistemological approach between the focus group facilitator, the expert participants, and me (Liamputtong, 2011). Both the arts and queer theory are community-driven fields of engagement which benefit from co-constructed and diverse spaces. To further support such approaches, Huang (2010) emphasized the necessity of collaboration with “local practitioners” to develop good action research (p. 99).

During the final stages of writing, I replaced the term *financial planning* with *budgeting* to clarify that the recommendation addresses the budgeting process and budget priorities. Additionally, I adopted the term *organizational culture* instead of *company culture* to align with terminology used in the Organizational Development and Human Resources sector.

Sampling & Recruitment

The population for this study was Canadian theatre organizations and freelance arts workers hired by the Canadian theatre organizations. This study employed a homogenous focus group design, defined as when all the participants within one focus group have shared experiences or a shared understanding of the topic (Liamputtong, 2011). I chose this design to minimize the effects of power imbalances between arts leaders, staff, and freelance artists and to allow for more open and honest conversation. The three focus group categories in this study were as follows:

1. Leadership with Canadian theatre organizations,
2. Freelance arts workers hired by Canadian theatre organizations, and
3. Staff and consultants working with Canadian theatre organizations.

Following the work of Creswell and Creswell (2018) on qualitative data collection, participants were chosen purposefully. To recruit participants, a purposive sampling method was utilized, aiming to gather four to six participants per group. For the sake of this study, an expert participant was defined as having a minimum of five years of experience either as a freelance arts worker engaged by, or a leader/staff member working for, a Canadian theatre organization. Expert participants were approached through targeted reach-outs via email.

Ethical Review Process

This project was approved by the Royal Roads University's Research Ethics Board. There were several considerations when reviewing the project from an ethical lens including conflicts of interest, consent, and payment. Any biases or assumptions I may have come from my experience working as a freelance arts worker and as a staff member of Canadian theatre organizations. These biases include previously established opinions on the inner workings of

theatre organizations and how they engage with freelance arts workers. To mitigate any harmful biases, I employed focus groups which allowed expert participants from the performing arts community to review my recommendations and provide feedback and insight. Each expert participant reviewed and signed an Informed Consent Agreement (Appendix B) which outlined the parameters of the project, withdrawal of consent, confidentiality, and payment information. All expert participants had the option to receive a \$200.00 CAD honorarium or to volunteer their time in support of the project. Out of the 13 participants, 12 accepted the honorarium and one chose to volunteer their time. Additionally, the notetakers and the facilitator signed a Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix C). All documents were pre-approved by RRU's Research Ethics Board.

Data Collection

The focus groups took place on January 28, 2024, and February 5, 2024. Over the three, two-hour long sessions, there were 13 expert participants (five leaders, four freelance arts workers, and four staff/consultants), one facilitator, and two notetakers. The locations and organizations represented in the focus groups included Newworld Theatre (Vancouver, BC), Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance (Vancouver, BC), Citadel Theatre (Edmonton, AB), Theatre Outre (Lethbridge, AB), Persephone Theatre (Saskatoon, SK), The River Clyde Pageant (New Glasgow, PEI), as well as individual freelance arts workers and consultants from Vancouver, BC, Halifax, NS, Toronto, ON, and Winnipeg, MB. To prepare, each participant received the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A) two weeks before the focus group session. The sessions took place online using Royal Road University's Zoom interface, and all sessions were recorded for video, audio, and transcription. As per the Informed Consent Form, all audio and video recordings were transcribed and then erased.

Originally inspired by Rennekamp and Nall's (2008) recommendations for developing focus group questions, I had four question types in the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A): Opening, Transition, Key, and Ending (p. 4). However, the focus groups followed a semi-structured interview process to follow the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A) with room for exploration and deviation from the prescribed questions (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). The key questions were open-ended to incite deeper conversation based on the feedback of the group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Rennekamp & Nall, 2008).

While we initially touched on each question briefly, including introductions of each participant, we quickly found that the original questions garnered similar responses and that moving through the reading package one recommendation at a time, with a focus on question #4 ("What are your thoughts on how possible it is to implement these recommendations?"), heeded the most fruitful results. Having had the opportunity to read the package and take notes in advance, the participants followed a simple process by which each participant would bring up thoughts they had around a recommendation, and discussion would follow until everyone felt they had said everything they needed to say. Each focus group ran exactly the full two hours.

Data Analysis

Despite the difference in job positions across the three focus group participants (leadership, staff/consultants, and freelance arts workers), the discussions were not markedly different in terms of atmosphere, tone, or structure. All participants were respectful of each other while challenging ideas and asking for clarification when needed. Additionally, no participant dominated the conversations in any of the focus groups. The facilitator ensured that, if someone had not responded to a particular prompt, they were given the opportunity. As intended, the primary difference between the three focus groups was the perspective of the conversation

because each group interacts with theatre organizations differently (e.g., running them, working for them, or being contracted by them). I used thematic analysis to identify key themes in the focus group discussions (Liamputtong, 2011). Inspired by Onwuegbuzie et al.'s (2009) matrix of assessment, I created a chart to note each participant's response to each recommendation, then each focus group's response to each recommendation, and finally, the overall responses to each recommendation across all three groups. Using this information, and axial coding, I generated Table 1 which outlines key feedback themes, their related recommendation(s), and cleaned-up exemplar quotes for each theme. This process culminated with a recommendation-specific plan for implementing the feedback in the final process design.

Table 1

Key Feedback Themes, Related Recommendation(s), and Exemplar Quotes

Feedback Theme	Recommendations	Exemplar Quotes
Further clarification re: abolishing planning	Reco. 1	<p>"[C]onflicting feelings on the thoughts on...planning and planning not being important because I think I disagree with that." (FG2)</p> <p>"[T]his idea of foregoing planning in favor of a flexible model also comes up against the requirements of grant reporting very frequently." (FG3)</p> <p>"I will admit that I had a bit of a reaction to the idea of abolishing planning...it just didn't seem possible." (FG1)</p>

Challenges with scalability	Reco. 1 & 3	<p>"[T]hat's why I keep coming back to this idea of how can we look at the scalability of this? (...) what...can be useful from Queer Utopian theory?" (FG3)</p> <p>"It's a bit easier to do that on the smaller scale, whereas I feel like when we get to the talking about the larger regional theaters, I find that they are more beholden to the bottom dollar." (FG3)</p> <p>"[T]he idea of how a queer utopia works on a very small scale is very, very clear to me. The idea of how it works on a larger institutional scale is really unclear to me." (FG3)</p> <p>"I'm really curious what that 'right size' is that queer utopia fosters." (FG1)</p>
Incremental change and reshaping	Reco. 1-5	<p>"But those recommendations are an ongoing process. And not a goal unto itself. But a flexible cycle or evolution that each institution and process strives for and doesn't attempt to ever kind of say is a complete end point." (FG3)</p> <p>"[T]here's a positive in that we're open to updating the [demographic metric] tools (...) and then every year we have a chance to look at things with fresh eyes" (FG1)</p> <p>"[T]o work within shifts, rather than a radical reinvention, means to take baby steps." (FG1)</p>

Doing less better	Reco. 2	<p>"What really stuck out to me was the size and scale and being okay with doing less. And I think that is where companies are really getting stuck and getting caught up in going too big." (FG2)</p> <p>"I appreciate the self-awareness of the importance of doing less better and also the realism within this document." (FG3)</p> <p>"The myth of unlimited growth is quite harmful for our society and probably generally harmful for everyone." (FG2)</p> <p>"[T]he common narrative that a company must be continually growing to achieve success, again, feels like a narrative that is perpetuated by the granting industry." (FG1)</p>
Process over product	Reco. 2 & 4	<p>"For focus on product versus process. That's when we're fear based, right? Because we need the outcome to be controlled. The way in which I think this utopic theory is the most compatible and actually (...) possible is to queer how we look at process and product and to elevate process. As more important than product." (FG2)</p> <p>"I really appreciate that it is more about a process versus a product." (FG3)</p>

Challenges related to external funding system	Reco. 2 & 3	<p>"How do we make sure that [these recommendations] remain a priority when we go through leadership change. When we go through board change, when we go through (...) funders deciding that this isn't a priority anymore." (FG3)</p> <p>"We understand the realities of the funding that we have and the fact that if you're trying to churn out a certain number of productions every year or do a certain number of activities, you have less resources to go around." (FG3)</p> <p>"Another implementation hurdle that I see immediately is the requirements of grant reporting and funding reporting." (FG3)</p> <p>"[T]he competitive grant structure as it is right now does not support abolishing planning." (FG1)</p>
Budget allocations mirrors organizational priorities	Reco. 3	<p>"[T]he idea of 'afford' is quite subjective...what can I actually afford? And it's really just a question of priorities." (FG1)</p>
Unpaid labour and needs from freelance arts workers	Reco. 4	<p>"It's tricky because as a freelancer, I, wouldn't want to show up for unpaid meetings." (FG2)</p> <p>"How often [freelance arts workers are] asked to do so much explanation and take on so much emotional labour for free." (FG2)</p> <p>"[Y]ou have to speak up and feel empowered." (FG1)</p> <p>"[I]n order for artists in a room to be able to have agency, to be able to show up as their whole person, to have artistic sovereignty, they have to be able to activate that themselves, it is not something that is just gifted to them by the company." (FG1)</p>

"transparency on demand"	Reco. 4	"[T]here's an organization I was working with that implemented transparency on demand. It was a method in order to recognize that some people don't want transparency. [They] don't want everything to be transparent for their own safety, for their own mental capacity." (FG3)
Importance of roles and power dynamics	Reco. 4	<p>"For me, it's universal because there's a power dynamic at play in all [organizations]. There's an employee and an employer." (FG2)</p> <p>"[A]ccountability still goes back to that question of the folks in power." (FG3)</p>
The role of the theatre education institution	Reco. 1 & 4	<p>"I do wonder about...school and theatre school and how much of this could also be brought into the school system and queering the school system and how we do theater. (...) We don't have any of these admin roles taught in school in any way, shape or form." (FG2)</p> <p>"[O]ur educational institutions are not training performers and tech folks and folks who are entering the arts and culture sector how to read a contract effectively. There might be one half day workshop on everything about industry." (FG3)</p> <p>"This kind of systemic educational level. It can't just be the responsibility of that individual organization to change the culture." (FG3)</p>

Fear & failure	Reco. 1-5	<p>"As long as each [organization] isn't existing with the goal of becoming the next superpower. In practice, it seems like people get fearful or greedy. And it turns into this kind of colonial capitalists." (FG2)</p> <p>"How do we move beyond moving from this reactionary fear place in order to make this utopia?" (FG2)</p> <p>"I wish there was a guide for fear management." (FG2)</p> <p>"People are scared and there's a sort of whole culture fear around the idea of being canceled or not doing well enough." (FG3)</p> <p>"I wonder if there needs to be space to articulate the importance of failure." (FG3)</p> <p>"I think theatre companies are in a weird place where we're afraid of conflict, but sometimes conflict is actually important and necessary." (FG1)</p>
Reservations toward monetary contributions to individuals, consultants, organizations, or initiatives as accountability	Reco. 5	<p>"[E]ncourage monetary contribution to validate the commitment of an organization. I think that's a good starting point. But it feels like a starting point (...) I worry sometimes that organizations that are in a position to do so will be like we give money...and say we tick the box." (FG3)</p>
Accountability as a continuous circle, not a checklist	Reco. 5	<p>"I do like the theory and the idea of a cyclical model of accountability as it relates to this idea of the Queer Utopian. Value of process as a continuous circle and not seen as a checklist that could be completed." (FG3)</p>
Decentralized model of accountability	Reco. 5	<p>"I wonder about a more decentralized accountability process that doesn't just relate to one organization." (FG3)</p>
Queering as a verb	Reco. 1-5	<p>"For me, queering, when we verb queer, we're talking about (...) social disruption." (FG1)</p>

Shared values and collective advancement	Reco. 1-5	"It seems like there's a lot of values alignment across these different theatre companies, suggests something hopeful in terms of that shared capacity to push for larger, sort of structural sectoral change." (FG1)
Empathy and community awareness	Reco. 1-5	"What does it look like for [leaders] to build up their level of empathy, community awareness, self-awareness?" (FG3)

Note. Quotations have been edited for clarity. Format adapted from Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), p. 8.

Chapter 4: Theory Generation

Drawing on the findings of the literature review on the Canadian theatre sector and queer utopia, this chapter first defines Queer Utopian Theory (QUT) and then describes how QUT can be applied to Canadian theatre organizations. This chapter ends with the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A), which I shared with the focus group participants.

I propose the following definition of Queer Utopian Theory: A subset of Queer Theory, Queer Utopian Theory (QUT) is a framework for the subversion of social and political norms through interaction (i.e., how individuals exist around each other), collaboration (i.e., how individuals interweave with one another), affect (i.e., how individuals experience each other emotionally), reflexivity (i.e., how individuals respond to each other), and facilitation (i.e., how individuals lead and are led by each other). QUT relies on the undeniable truth that individuals exist in relation to each other, and that that relation leads to the creation of social constructs and hierarchies such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Redhead & Power, 2022). QUT provides a framework for the development of alternative modalities outside of normative, cisgender, patriarchal structures. The theory is particularly concerned with creating frameworks for the (subjective) betterment of life among disempowered social groups.

Queer utopia originated with Muñoz's (2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* which offered an alternative to the individualistic, nihilistic queer theory that came before (e.g., Edelman's (2024) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*). Still sitting within the bounds of sexual politics, Muñoz's (2009) queer utopia provided an intersectional approach to Edelman's (2004) reproductive futurity beyond homonormative ideals. While both Queer Theory and Queer Utopian Theory transcend sexual politics, QUT is heavily influenced by Muñoz's discourse around queer failure, hope, and a constant striving for.

Based on Muñoz's (2009) argument that queerness is temporally bound to the future, Queer Utopian Theory asserts that the definition of "better" (i.e., the utopia) is constantly changing and adaptable to the current context, whether in time, physical space, or relationally within a group of people. In essence, QUT does not view time as having a stagnant beginning and end, but as cyclical and fluid. While critics influenced by Edelman's (2004) *No Future* way of thinking may view this method as having an unachievable goal, and, therefore, as a fruitless effort, Queer Utopian theorists consider it inspirational, emphasizing an ongoing aspiration for progress, evolution, and learning through the queering of time (Muñoz, 2009). To do so, Queer Utopian Theory engages with the discourse around planning abolition versus abolishing planning as written by Razdar (2023). In his essay on the usefulness of planning with transformation, abolition, and queer space, Razdar (2023) argued that "the 'planning for' stance confers authority to so-called experts, leaving the rest of us with little power to make our own spaces" (p. 122). Through the queering of time, QUT works in tandem with this discourse by reimagining how we plan and opening dialogue between the individuals in each space in real time. In short, Queer Utopian theorists see sociopolitical transformative justice as a continuous endeavor without a distinct end. This means that as the sociopolitical landscape evolves, whether within time, physical space, or relationally, so do the intentions of QUT.

In summary, this definition of Queer Utopian Theory captures the findings of existing work related to queer utopia and articulates the information into one theory definition. To the best of my knowledge, this concept has not been defined as such, and my definition draws from the theoretical contributions of Bloch (1918), Brown (2020), Calvacante (2019), Coleman (2019), Coloma (2018), Copson and Boukli (2020), Cuboniks (2018), Edelman (2004), Essi (2019), Farrier (2013), Fox (2023), Gogul (2018), Golomb-Leavitt, Becker and Valeriano-Flores

(2023), Gumbs (2011), Gutierrez-Perez (2017), Halberstam (2005), Jones (2013), Keeling (2019), Muñoz (2009), Rands, McDonald, and Clapp (2013), Razdar (2023), Robinson and Ilinskaya (2022), Sandberg and Marshall (2017), Stewart (2019), and Zeffiro (2019).

4.1 Theory Application: Queer Utopian Theory as a Framework for Theatre Organizations

Here, I implement a framework based on Queer Utopian Theory to address the findings of the Canadian theatre call-to-action literature. The purpose of this step was to generate content for the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A). While this section is split into three categories, operational/foundational work, project-based work, and accountability, the intention is not to prescribe a linear path, but rather to establish a dynamic, circular process design. In doing so, I aim to unravel the constraints of individualism, emphasizing the necessity for continuous revisitation and adaptation as a community to collectively strive to reshape the landscape of the Canadian theatre sector through a Queer Utopian lens.

The Operational, Foundational Work

Implementing Queer Utopian Theory in the context of theatre organizations requires consistent revisiting and reworking of organizational culture, core programs, and budgeting processes.

Organizational Culture. Organizational culture refers to “consistent, observable patterns of behaviour” and values that create the working environment at an organization (Watkins, 2013, para. 5; Wong, 2023). Due to its focus on collaborative, non-individualistic procedures, an important step to applying a Queer Utopian theoretical framework to an arts organization is to landscape the organizational culture. As previously mentioned, landscaping encourages the participation of all individuals in any given context. In the context of a theatre organization, this could include leadership, staff, board members, long-term consultants, and whoever engages

with the company operations consistently. Inspired by Fox's (2023) research project which applied queer utopia to environmental action, one example of landscaping the organizational culture could be taking part in an initial scenario planning workshop, followed up with regular re-evaluation meetings. While there are many definitions to be found for scenario planning workshops, Fox (2023) described their version as a process that "guides people through a journey from dreaming about utopia into thinking more practically or strategically about what they can do" (p. 25). Their research process asked participants to imagine queer utopia through the three questions "[w]hat does a queer utopia look like to you?; In what ways are you already embodying/building/living this utopia in the present?; and What can you do to help further realise this utopia?" (Fox, 2023, p. 25).

In the theatre context, these questions can be adapted to work towards the goal of a utopian organizational culture. For example, what would your ideal (i.e., utopian) organizational culture look like? In what ways are you already embodying/building/living this ideal organizational culture? What can you do to help further realise this ideal organizational culture? The answers to the questions may cover a variety of categories such as communication styles, programming choices, and the layout of the office space. These considerations may be included for several reasons such as accessibility, alignment with values, and accountability.

Once the original landscaping has been determined, in keeping with Queer Utopian Theory, the process should not be considered complete. Staying true to the values of Queer Utopian landscaping as originally outlined by Rands, McDonald, and Clapp (2013), regular landscaping meetings and check-ins should be implemented on a daily or weekly basis to adapt to the constantly changing "isness" of the organizational culture (i.e., what the organizational culture is, based on factors such as who is in the space). Inspired by Razdar's (2023) writing on

abolishing planning, this ongoing process is meant to limit the number of finite decisions made in advance, allowing the organization to stay responsive to the ever-changing needs of the individuals coming and going from the company.

Additionally, training and development for the staff of theatre organizations were key recommendations that came out of the literature review on calls to action in the Canadian theatre sector. Through a Queer Utopian lens, the training should be ongoing and responsive to the organizational culture and programming as opposed to attempting to cover all bases with little context. For example, if a theatre organization's programming connects with specific communities (e.g., queer communities, neurodivergent communities, etc.), then the training and development opportunities for that season should reflect the individuals and programming involved.

Core Programs. The National Endowment for the Arts (2023) outlined the necessity of an internal audit of core programming. There was also a focus across the call-to-action literature on ensuring that organizations have programs for the development of new artists, especially those who have historically experienced barriers in access to training (Geddes et al., 2020; Glory & Fiati, 2020; Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019; National Endowment for the Arts, 2023). Because the theory prioritizes the everchanging needs of individuals, a Queer Utopian audit of core programming would ask key questions such as: What are the current barriers in accessing our programs, as either a participant or an audience member? Is our core programming reflective of the priorities and goals that came out of our foundational landscaping work?

Lastly, a crucial question when determining programming worth highlighting is: Are our operational and project-based budgets adequate to realize this project through a holistic, Queer Utopian lens? A common narrative in business suggests that a company must be continuously

growing to achieve success. However, what happens when the company size and workload become too large for leadership to fully integrate with on-the-ground staff? Queer Utopian Theory posits the idea of doing less well. Once a company grows to a certain size, it becomes more challenging for individual team members to retain autonomy in their work as there are more steps for approval. With a focus on collaborative, community-based work, Queer Utopian Theory encourages the prioritization of relationship building in the theatre sector, which becomes more challenging as the company grows. Queer Utopian Theory favours smaller, team-focused companies that can then collaborate with other companies in the local arts community, prioritizing the growth of team capacity over programming.

Budgeting. One of the first things I was taught when learning to be an arts producer was that a budget is a story. While budgeting was not explicitly mentioned frequently throughout my literature review research into calls to action, many of the suggestions in these calls require a budgetary allocation. It became clear to me very quickly that, for a company to truly embody a Queer Utopian perspective, the budget must reflect that. As mentioned earlier, Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) noted that there are many assumptions made that can create barriers between organizations and individuals (e.g., Access to reliable transportation and access to a computer or internet). A Queer Utopian framework that is working to deconstruct meritocracy would require an Artist Support Fund (or something of the like) that can account for these needs. Additionally, reserving spots in programming for Black or Indigenous individuals, providing accessibility resources, paying employees and contractors a liveable wage, and providing professional development opportunities through workshops or courses, all demands from across call-to-action documents, all require the money to do so. In short, holistic, intersectional, and in-advance

budgeting and a commitment to monetary contribution is necessary to realize a Queer Utopian operational foundation.

The Project-Based Work

Queer Utopian Theory, developed with Jimmy and Andreotti's (2019) insight on navigating conflict, assumes that there is no formula for relationship building. Successful relationship building relies on openness, flexibility, and operating in good faith (p. 57-58). In the theatre sector, given that many arts workers are hired on a project-to-project basis (e.g., the cast and crew of a show), new relationships are frequently formed.

Like the operational and foundational work, Queer Utopian processes for individual projects, such as rehearsal room culture and project-based budgeting, must follow a landscaping process as well as holistic budgeting to be reflective of the individuals and subject matter involved. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts (2023) outlined the importance of clearly communicating existing policies to freelance arts workers; however, a Queer Utopian framework acknowledges that the dissemination of these policies without discussion amongst the team and adaptation to the needs of the group can render the existing documents irrelevant. Milian and Wijesingha's (2022) study on the usefulness of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies in education found that one of the biggest issues in the implementation of EDI policies is the disconnect between those who wrote the policies and those who are meant to implement or be impacted by them (pp. 454-455). While policies are necessary documents to protect organizations and individuals alike, they must be implemented in a way that allows freelance arts workers to exist in relationship with them, instead of having the policy imposed upon them without explanation. Several landscaping techniques, such as individual meetings or the previously mentioned scenario planning workshops, can help the freelance arts workers

understand the policies, while also creating a space where the policies can be adapted to the project.

Supported by Razdar (2023) and Jimmy and Andreotti (2019), a crucial Queer Utopian reminder when engaging with different communities and individuals is that it is not possible to plan for every situation, and therefore not possible or desirable to avoid uncomfortable conversations. It is, however, possible to create an environment founded on care that fosters productive conversations around the issues that arise.

Accountability & Adaptability

In Queer Utopian spirit, accountability includes adaptability to changing needs. Viewing the process as cyclical and fluid allows for accountability through constant interrogation and adaptation. As a tool for accountability, Glory and Fiati (2020) encouraged monetary contribution to validate the commitment of an organization. Specifically, putting money towards collectives such as The Black Pledge, or to additional consultants, can assist in ensuring follow-through for organizations. Through a Queer Utopian lens, this could look like an advisory committee (paid or volunteer) either with fixed term length, or a changing team based on the goals and needs of a specific project. The key Queer Utopian value to remember is that the process is a continuous circle and not be seen as a checklist that has finite completion.

At this step of the research process, the information discussed throughout this chapter was compiled into a comprehensive Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A). The package was distributed to participants across the three focus groups and the insights gathered from participants were instrumental in developing the final Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre (Chapter 6).

Chapter 5: Focus Group Findings & Discussion

As previously detailed, I developed a reading package for the focus group participants that introduced my definition of Queer Utopian Theory and proposed concrete recommendations based on a Queer Utopian theoretical framework. To examine the recommendations' feasibility, I conducted focus group discussions with expert participants from the Canadian theatre sector. The goals of this phase were to determine the feasibility of Queer Utopian Theory as a theoretical framework and to collect feedback on how the theoretical framework and its recommendations can be improved. This process culminated in the Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre (Chapter 6).

Here, I combine the recommendation-specific findings with the recommendation-specific plan for implementing the feedback to create a clear link between the participants' feedback and how it was implemented. This section concludes with additional considerations such as knowledge sharing, collective advancement, fear, and Halberstam's (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*.

Recommendation #1: Landscape your organizational culture

The responses to the recommendation of landscaping the organizational culture reflected a generally positive outlook, with enthusiasm shown toward ideas such as tailored training, an Artist Support Fund, also referred to as an Emergent Fund, and the cyclical process. However, two specific challenges are worth expanding upon. These have been addressed in the Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre (Chapter 6).

First, participants expressed both interest and hesitancy in the discourse around abolishing traditional planning methods. As shown through the exemplar quotes in Table 1, there were participants across all three focus groups who understood the recommendation as asking

organizations to eliminate planning. However, there was one participant in FG1 who reflected what I had intended, that specific types of planning can allow for more collaboration, flexibility, and fluidity without limiting or erasing the individuals in the room.

I concluded that a further contextual explanation and definition of *abolish* was needed. In their Vox article, “The ‘abolish the police’ movement, explained by 7 scholars and activists,” Illing (2020) points to the nuance of the term *abolish* by asking scholars and activists why they deem abolishment to be a more “pragmatic reformist agenda” (para. 7). In the article, *abolishing* is discussed in the context of the movement to defund or dismantle traditional policing systems, particularly in response to atrocities like the murder of George Floyd. Abolishing the police involves a reimagining of public safety that reallocates resources away from conventional law enforcement and towards community-based alternatives such as mental health services, conflict resolution programs, and social services. The aim is to address systemic issues of racism and police violence by fundamentally changing how society approaches public safety and justice. In short, abolishing does not always mean eliminating (Illing, 2020). As Razdar (2023) stated, transformative justice cannot be realized without abolition.

Second, there was consensus among the focus group participants that Queer Utopian Theory as a framework is feasible among small to mid-sized organizations, but that there would be challenges with scalability. The participants specifically spoke to the challenges within large regional theatres or theatres with venues. These challenges included achieving buy-in from existing staff, sustainability across leadership changes, and managing differing perspectives with large staff.

In response to this, and while I do agree that Queer Utopian Theory is more easily applied to smaller organizations, I reiterated in the final process design that this document is not

meant to prescribe a singular step-by-step process. This section puts emphasis on the concept of incremental change which was brought up consistently throughout the focus groups in FG1 (leadership) and FG3 (staff/consultants). The next draft will place importance on the reminder that implementing Queer Utopian frameworks does not need to happen all at once. One participant in FG1 supported this idea by stating that they felt excitement about implementing Queer Utopian Theory on certain levels of their large organization, which felt more possible. As outlined in my definition of the theory and drawing upon Muñoz's (2009) words, Queer Utopian Theory is about striving for something, not about completion. Additionally, this relates to the focus group conversations around fear and failure, which I elaborate on towards the end of this chapter.

Recommendation #2: Audit core programs

The responses to Recommendation #2, auditing core programs through a Queer Utopian lens, demonstrated an appreciation for the recommendation's principles. Participants were enthusiastic about prioritizing process and relationships over product, pointing to their opinion that valuing product above process is a fear-based approach. Additionally, they saw value in doing less better, recognizing its potential for improving organizational effectiveness.

Participants affirmed that aiming for unlimited growth is harmful for everyone involved.

Participants supported challenging the conventional narrative, perpetuated by the external funding system, that growth in size is necessary for success, noting the potential for alternative approaches. This recommendation incited conversations around capacity, consent, self-care, and community care. However, participants also expressed a need for pragmatism, specifically related to the constraints of the current public funding system. They noted the importance of granting body priorities and reporting in receiving funding, alongside questions about

practicalities and roles in conducting audits. This caveat will be included in the final process design along with a reiteration of incremental change and ongoing processes.

Recommendation #3: Pursue holistic budgeting

The responses to Recommendation #3, urging holistic budgeting through a Queer Utopian lens, identified similar challenges as in Recommendations #1 and #2 in terms of scalability and the limitations of the funding system. One participant expressed concerns about the sector's heavy reliance on governmental funding sources and wondered about diversification through private funding opportunities. However, private funding has its disadvantages such as smaller awards, rapidly shifting priorities, and less support for questions and acquiring personal contacts (Cayuse, n.d.). Generally, there was a call for more clarity around implementing this recommendation, which I will address by identifying important questions to consider when budgeting. While the challenges associated with the funding bodies are very present (and likely require an entire other research project), Recommendation #3 aims to guide what can be done with the funding one has received. On that note, participants stressed the need to prioritize accessibility provisions within budgets, considering them essential components rather than optional add-ons. They agreed that financial constraints often (although not always) mirror organizational priorities, with resources allocated based on perceived importance.

Recommendation #4: Foster an open communication climate

With Recommendation #4, fostering an open communication climate between theatre organizations and freelance arts workers, participants agreed that policies need to be implemented in a manner that allows for discussion and reflexivity. They underlined the importance of timing in policy communication, specifically ensuring everything is communicated with enough notice for the freelance arts worker to make an informed decision

about signing on but not requiring the freelance arts worker to do unpaid labour. Participants also encouraged freelance arts workers to advocate for themselves within organizational structures. There was widespread agreement on disseminating policies and extending relationships beyond contractual obligations to foster growth and collaboration. However, on the side of leadership and staff, concerns were raised about arts workers' reluctance to engage with policy documents and that landscaping requires a baseline understanding of one's own needs. One participant expressed that, for freelance arts workers to have artistic and personal sovereignty in a process, they must have the ability to speak to their needs because this is not possible for the company to provide.

For freelance arts workers, concerns around abuse of power from leadership and unpaid labour being demanded from them were flagged. The literature review on the Canadian theatre sector at the beginning of my research foregrounded the organization's role in fostering accessible and intersectional spaces for freelance arts workers. The process must be reciprocal, placing varying responsibilities on everyone involved. Transparency emerged as a key theme during the focus groups, acknowledging its importance from both the organization and the freelance arts worker. One participant proposed "transparency on demand" from the organization, to not inundate, confuse, or overwhelm those who do not need or want all the information, while still maintaining open communication.

Participants in all three focus groups stressed the importance of creating spaces for constructive dialogue, acknowledging power dynamics, and ensuring clarity in roles and responsibilities. Specifically, looking to leadership attitudes and hierarchical considerations in fostering open communication. An important consideration in this conversation was that the onus cannot be placed solely on the arts organizations and that the role of the theatre educational

system is essential. Participants pointed to the lack of education for administrative roles, leadership skills, and facilitation in theatre schools. Despite this, participants in FG2 still called for leaders to receive feedback without defensiveness and advocated for acknowledging power dynamics within organizations.

Recommendation #5: Adopt a cyclical model of accountability

Participants generally embraced Recommendation #5, which proposes adopting a cyclical model of accountability within theatre organizations and recognizing its relevance within the theatre sector and broader calls for action. They emphasized the importance of questioning existing norms, viewing failure as a learning opportunity, and continually evolving to align with organizational values.

While some participants appreciated the idea of using monetary contributions to validate commitment, a participant in FG2 expressed reservations about organizations with financial means using monetary contributions to tick the box of accountability. This participant advocated for ongoing action beyond financial means. There was consensus on the value of accountability as a continuous circle rather than a checklist. Additionally, participants explored various approaches to implementing the cyclical model of accountability. Suggestions included the establishment of decentralized advisory councils to promote collaboration, clear metrics for measuring accountability over time, and adaptation to evolving needs while maintaining patience in the process. Overall, the responses reflected a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with adopting a cyclical model of accountability, with an emphasis on empathy, community awareness, and alignment between policies and practices.

Additional Considerations

Several overarching, additional key contributions from the focus groups were not related to a specific recommendation. One participant pointed to the noteworthiness of queering as a verb, like landscaping as a verb, in challenging existing norms and shaping future trajectories. They described the parallels between the queering verb and social disruption. This connection between landscaping, queering, and social disruption will be highlighted in the final process design. Next, there was significance attributed to the recognition of shared values among theatre companies as a promising indicator for collective advancement within the industry. This concept can be realized through advocacy for collaboration and knowledge sharing across organizations, suggesting that collective efforts can lead to greater progress. Finally, closely related to the previous consideration, is the significance of empathy and community awareness among individuals in positions of power, underscoring the need for inclusive leadership practices to foster equitable and supportive environments.

Across the focus groups, participants felt that organizations are being slowed down by their fear. The themes of fear, failure, and fear of failure amongst organizations and leadership persisted throughout all three focus groups and warrant acknowledgment in the final process design. The type of fear that was cited on multiple occasions as a hindrance to the implementation of a Queer Utopian framework was the fear of doing or saying the wrong thing and therefore being cancelled or called out publicly. However, all participants acknowledged and agreed that fear and failure are part of the package and beginning to get comfortable with that idea is crucial to transformative justice in the theatre sector.

Muñoz's (2009) *Cruising Utopia* pointed to the concept of failure as a substantial component of queerness. Importantly, Muñoz (2009) described queer failure as an escape from

normative values. He wrote that queer failure follows a punk ideology where unachieving is not viewed with a negative connotation (i.e., it's viewed as the inability to achieve based on normative goals). He went on to write that normative failure paves the way for queer virtuosity. Halberstam's (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure* described failure as a crucial driver of growth and learning, highlighting the importance of intentionality in leveraging setbacks as opportunities for development. Muñoz's (2009) and Halberstam's (2011) perspectives on failure offer a crucial reframing for theatre organizations. While the focus group participants agreed that intention is not everything, there was a consensus that leadership needs to understand how to accept failure and take feedback without defensiveness.

With these findings, I have created the final component of my research, the Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre (Chapter 6), which synthesizes all the initial research with the focus group feedback. The goal of Chapter 6 is to be a resource for Canadian theatre organizations and as a jumping-off point for future research.

Chapter 6: Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre

Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre

A common narrative is that a company must be continuously growing to achieve success. But what happens when the company size and workload become too large for leadership to integrate with the on-the-ground staff? Queer Utopian Theory posits the idea of doing less well. With a focus on collaborative, community-based work, Queer Utopian Theory encourages the prioritization of relationship building. Queer Utopian Theory favours smaller, team-focused companies that can then collaborate with other companies in the local arts community, prioritizing the growth of team capacity over the growth of programming.

Once a company grows to a certain size, it becomes more challenging for individual team members to retain autonomy in their work because there are more steps for approval. However, this doesn't mean that regional theatres, companies that run venues, or larger organizations with lots of staff can't implement a Queer Utopian process design. Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti (2019) emphasized that transformative organizational change isn't simply about implementing recommendations, but rather about *how* they are integrated. Queer Utopian frameworks do not prescribe a linear path, and all organizations are encouraged to implement aspects that feel possible, creating incremental change in their companies. In my research, participants were enthusiastic about prioritizing process and relationships over product, stating that valuing product above process is a fear-based approach (which we'll get to shortly).

In this guide, you will find advice. As much as I would love to hand you a step-by-step, paint-by-numbers guide to reaching a queer utopia within your organization, by now I have learned that would not be in Queer Utopian spirit. The advice in this guide is non-linear and cyclical. It is not prescribing one thing. It is here for you to take, shape, and adapt with your community.

HERE IS A LITTLE BACKGROUND TO GET US STARTED...

A subset of Queer Theory, Queer Utopian Theory (QUT) is a framework for the subversion of social and political norms through interaction (i.e., how individuals exist around each other), collaboration (i.e., how individuals interweave with one another), affect (i.e., how individuals experience each other emotionally), reflexivity (i.e., how individuals respond to each other), and facilitation (i.e., how individuals lead and are led by each other). QUT relies on the undeniable truth that individuals exist in relation to each other, and that that relation leads to the creation of social constructs and hierarchies such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. QUT provides a framework for the development of alternative modalities outside of normative, cisgender, patriarchal structures. The theory is concerned with creating frameworks for the (subjective) betterment of life among disempowered social groups.

In my analysis of various call-to-action documents from the Canadian theatre sector, three overarching thematic areas emerged: education, development & training, policies & processes, and budgeting & monetary contributions.

Core Considerations

Abolish your perspective on planning.

Imagine you're the leader of an arts organization. What would be your initial impulse if I told you to abolish planning? It might be to feel shocked, confused, anxious, or concerned, and, as my focus groups showed, you would not be alone in these feelings. For a theatre organization, abolishing planning taken at face value is a ridiculous exercise when you consider health & safety, strategic planning, funding deadlines, succession, governance accountability, and general preparedness. However, I would argue that this initial reflex reflects a misrepresentation of the possibilities that abolishment brings. Scholars, activists, and theorists alike have argued that rather than an elimination, abolishment is to reimagine, dismantle, deconstruct, and reconstruct (which, in a way, is an elimination).

Daniel Razdar (2024) wrote that transformation and abolition are mutually inclusive. We can look at abolishing planning a bit more practically by thinking of it as transformative planning. Transformative planning is an ongoing process meant to limit the number of finite decisions made in advance. This allows the organization to stay responsive to the ever-changing needs of the individuals coming and going from the company. An example of transformative planning can be seen through a facilitation tool called landscaping.

Landscape.

Queer utopia promotes a focus on collaborative, non-individualistic procedures. Landscaping, as described by Kat Rands, Jess McDonald, and Lauren Clapp (2013), offers a framework, or perspective, on planning a space that requires participation and engagement from participants. Landscaping involves a wide variety of space-building and place-making techniques, developed by the individuals in the space, to shape and mold a more inclusive and equitable environment in response to ever-changing needs. In essence, the space becomes a landscape that requires nurturing when different variables are introduced. Determining the visual tone for the space through lighting and art is an example of landscaping, which may change based on factors such as time of day and individual light sensitivity. It is especially important to note that landscaping is reciprocal. Both parties, organization and contractor, have a responsibility to communicate needs, listen, and adapt as needed. It's important to remember the striving-for attitude inspired by José Esteban Muñoz (2009). While it's not always possible to meet every need at once, and completely avoid uncomfortable situations, it is possible to create an environment founded in care that fosters productive conversations around conflicts that arise.

Reframe failure.

Several queer scholars (e.g., José Esteban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam) have pointed to the concept of failure as a substantial component of queerness, acting as a catalyst for growth and learning. However, the fear of failure, specifically of saying or doing the wrong thing and being cancelled, has had a detrimental effect on the Canadian theatre sector. Throughout the

process design, I encourage everyone to take a Muñoz-inspired, punk ideology where unachieving is not viewed negatively, but instead as an opportunity to subvert normative goals (such as financial gain and product-over-process thinking). While the focus group participants agreed that intention is not everything, there was a consensus that leadership needs to understand how to accept failure and take feedback without defensiveness.

Recommendation: Landscape Your Organizational Culture.

As mentioned, landscaping encourages the participation of the people in the room. In the context of a theatre non-profit organization, this could include leadership, staff, board members, long-term consultants, and whoever engages with the company operations consistently. Once the original landscaping has been determined, the process should not be considered complete. Staying true to the values of Queer Utopian landscaping as originally outlined by Rands, McDonald, & Clapp (2013), regular landscaping meetings and check-ins should be implemented on a daily or weekly basis to adapt to the constantly changing “isness” of the organizational culture (i.e., what the organizational culture is based on factors such as who is in the space).

EXAMPLE: Inspired by Mo Fox’s (2023) research project which applied queer utopia to environmental action, one example of landscaping the organizational culture could be taking part in an initial scenario planning workshop, followed up with regular re-evaluation meetings. While there are many definitions to be found on the internet for scenario planning workshops, Fox described their version as a process that “guides people through a journey from dreaming about utopia into thinking more practically or strategically about what they can do” (p. 25). Their research process asked participants to imagine queer utopia through the three questions “[w]hat does a queer utopia look like to you?; In what ways are you already embodying/building/living this utopia in the present?; and What can you do to help further realise this utopia?” (Fox, 2023, p. 25).

In the theatre non-profit context, these questions can be adapted to work towards the goal of a utopian organizational culture. For example, what would your utopian organizational culture look like? In what ways are you already embodying/building/living this utopian organizational culture? What can you do to help further realise this utopian organizational culture? The answers to the questions may cover a variety of categories such as communication styles, programming choices, and the layout of the office space, for several reasons such as accessibility, alignment with values, and accountability.

Recommendation: Adopt a Cyclical Model of Accountability.

In Queer Utopian spirit, accountability includes adaptability to changing needs. Viewing the process as cyclical and fluid allows for accountability through constant interrogation and adaptation of the process. An emphasis on empathy, community awareness, and alignment between policies and practices will help to ensure that the process is a continuous circle and not a checklist that can be completed.

EXAMPLE: Establish a decentralized advisory council to promote collaboration. Through a Queer Utopian lens, this could look like a committee either with fixed term length, or a changing team based on the goals and needs of a specific project.

EXAMPLE: Monetary contribution to validate the commitment of an organization and assist in ensuring follow-through for organizations. (e.g., paying the advisory council, putting money towards collectives such as The Black Pledge, or to additional consultants).

Recommendation: Audit Core Programs.

A Queer Utopian audit of core programming would ask key questions such as: what are the current barriers to accessing our programs, as either a participant or an audience member? Is our core programming reflective of the priorities and goals that came out of our foundational landscaping work?

There was a focus across the call-to-action literature on ensuring that organizations have programs for developing new arts workers, especially for those who have historically experienced barriers to access training. Additionally, training and development for the staff of theatre non-profits were key recommendations from the literature review on calls to action in the Canadian performing arts sector. Through a Queer Utopian lens, the training should be ongoing and responsive to the organizational culture and programming as opposed to attempting to cover all bases with little context.

EXAMPLE: If a theatre non-profit's programming connects with specific communities (e.g., queer communities, neurodivergent communities, etc.), then the training and development opportunities for that season should reflect the individuals and programming involved.

Recommendation: Pursue Holistic Budgeting.

A crucial question when determining programming worth highlighting is: Are our operational and project-based budgets adequate to realize this project through a holistic, Queer Utopian lens? One of the first things I was taught when learning to be an arts producer was that a budget is a story. While budgeting was not explicitly mentioned frequently throughout my literature review research into calls to action, many of the suggestions in these calls require a monetary contribution. It became clear quickly that, for a company to truly embody a Queer Utopian perspective, the budget must tell and support that story. Many assumptions are made that can create barriers between organizations and individuals.

EXAMPLE: A Queer Utopian framework that is working to deconstruct meritocracy (the idea that if you're talented enough, you'll get the job) would require an Artist Support Fund (or something of the like) that can account for these needs.

Reserving spots in programming for Black or Indigenous individuals, providing accessibility resources, paying employees and contractors a liveable wage, and providing professional development opportunities through workshops or courses, all demands from across call-to-

action documents, all require the money to do so. (Again, doing less well). In short, holistic, intersectional, and in-advance budgeting is necessary to realize a Queer Utopian operational foundation.

Here are some important questions to ask while budgeting:

1. Do the rates in this budget reflect the living wage in my region?
2. Have I consulted with the appropriate individuals to determine if the fees are suitable for the scope of work the project entails?
3. If the project is low on funding, have the individuals I'm hiring consented to the rates and or in-kind/volunteer hours required to complete the project?
 - a. Have I been transparent about the constraints I'm working with?
4. Which line-item accounts for the physical and emotional impact the project may have on participants? (e.g., an Artist Support Fund for counselling, physical therapy, etc.)
5. Where is accessibility accounted for in the budget and is there a human attached to the execution of the accessibility plan? Are they paid appropriately?
6. Which line-item in the budget accounts for unforeseen circumstances such as additional hours for arts workers or increased material costs?
 - a. And is this contingency a separate line item from the Artist Support Fund? (Hint: it should be).

Recommendation: Foster an Open Communication Climate.

Queer Utopian Theory reminds us that there is no formula for relationship building. Successful relationship building relies on openness, flexibility, and operating in good faith. In the theatre sector, given that many arts workers are hired on a project-to-project basis (e.g., the cast and crew of a show), new relationships are formed frequently. Research identified the importance of creating spaces for constructive dialogue, acknowledging power dynamics, and ensuring clarity in roles and responsibilities. Transparency emerged as a key theme of my research, noting its importance from both the organization and the freelance arts worker.

EXAMPLE: The organization can employ “transparency on demand” to avoid inundating, confusing, or overwhelming those who do not need or want all the information, while still maintaining open communication.

Importantly, freelance arts workers need to advocate for themselves and their needs within organizational structures. For the freelance arts worker to have artistic and personal sovereignty in a process, they must speak to their needs because this is not something that is possible for the company to provide. Remember that the process must be reciprocal, placing varying responsibilities on everyone involved.

EXAMPLE: The National Endowment for the Arts outlined the importance of clearly communicating existing policies to freelance arts workers, however, a Queer Utopian framework acknowledges that the dissemination of these policies without discussion amongst the team and adaptation to the needs of the group can render the existing documents irrelevant.

While policies can be necessary documents to protect organizations and individuals alike, they must be implemented in a way that allows freelance arts workers to exist in relationship to them, instead of having the policy imposed upon them without explanation. Several landscaping techniques, such as individual meetings or the previously mentioned scenario planning workshops, can help the freelance arts workers understand the policies, while also creating a space where the policies can be adapted from project to project.

Closing Considerations

To sum up, I want to point to the noteworthiness of queering as a verb, like landscaping as a verb, in challenging existing norms and shaping future trajectories. Throughout my research, there was significance attributed to the recognition of shared values among theatre companies as a promising indicator for collective advancement within the industry. This concept can be realized through advocacy for collaboration and knowledge sharing across organizations, suggesting that collective efforts can lead to greater progress. Empathy and community awareness underscore inclusive leadership practices to foster equitable and supportive environments and work towards a queer utopia.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

I began this research project on the premise that art is a vital tool for shaping social landscapes, instigating change, and empowering individuals. However, poor working environments in the Canadian theatre sector are hindering socio-political advancement potential. Guided by the work of several scholars such as Muñoz, Halberstam, and Edelman, I have answered the research question: *What is the utility of the concept of queer utopia in addressing inequities in the Canadian theatre sector?* My thesis made two arguments: one, that a comprehensive definition of Queer Utopian Theory beyond sexual politics did not exist; two, that, once defined, Queer Utopian Theory can inform frameworks and process designs to improve upon working environments in the Canadian theatre sector, specifically within theatre organizations. To do so, I provided a literature review and analysis on queer theory, queer utopia, and the Canadian theatre sector, and created the Focus Group Reading Package (Appendix A) for three focus groups, concluding with the Queer Utopian Guide to Organizational Change in Canadian Theatre (Chapter 6). Chapter 6 provides an abridged, informal version of the study and its results through core considerations and five recommendations for theatre organizations. After all the reading, writing, talking, and analyzing, I conclude that there is not a single utility of queer utopia, there are many. Maybe the number of utilities and possibilities for Queer Utopian applications is even infinite.

So, now that the guide is created, what is next? While the future of the research remains to be seen, I have identified two (and a half) possible paths for the continuation of the project. First, the creation of a course or workshop that organizations can attend to learn more about the Queer Utopian Framework and its implementation. Second, a case study with a Canadian theatre

organization that tests the effectiveness of the framework. Lastly, future research can look like experimentation with Queer Utopian frameworks in several different sectors.

While social context and individual needs are always changing, one can think of Queer Utopian Theory as the cheesecloth that organizational frameworks and decisions are filtered through. By embracing the fluid and dynamic nature of Queer Utopian Theory, organizations can foster a vision of the future that is not only transformative but also endlessly hopeful, driving us toward a more equitable and vibrant Canadian theatre sector and beyond.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Reading Package

Hello Expert Participant!

Thank you for agreeing to contribute your time and expertise to my thesis project, which asks: *What is the utility of Queer Utopian Theory in addressing the inequities within the Canadian theatre sector?*

In this project, I use the term *theatre* in a transdisciplinary way. This includes companies that, while being named theatre companies, produce multiple forms or a combination (i.e., digital/theatre hybrids, film, dance, music, installations, etc.)

This PDF contains your Focus Group Reading Package. How you prepare for the focus group session is up to you – you may want to come prepared with notes or questions, or you may simply read the required material in advance.

The required reading in this package includes a brief introduction to Queer Utopian Theory, the calls to action in the Canadian theatre sector, and my proposed application of Queer Utopian Theory as a framework to address the inequities in the Canadian theatre sector. The package also includes the focus group questions.

After the focus group sessions, I will analyze your feedback and generate a final Process Design document for my thesis. For more information about Process Design, see this short YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSpw3sCNnQU>

Thank you so much for participating. I look forward to reviewing the feedback after the sessions. Feel free to reach out with any questions!

Warm regards,



Maria Zarrillo (they/them)
Researcher

This package is not intended for public circulation; the work is the intellectual property of Maria Zarrillo.

Pre-Focus Group Required Reading

Please see the extended version in the optional reading section for proper academic citations.

Defining Queer Utopian Theory

Queer Utopian Theory, as a branch of Queer Theory, posits the continual pursuit of a better society by queering time, challenging societal norms and embracing a holistic, intersectional approach in our interactions with individuals.

The primary tool employed by Queer Utopian Theory to remain adaptable and reflexive is called landscaping. Landscaping involves a wide variety of space-building and place-making techniques, developed by the individuals in the space, to shape and mold a more inclusive and equitable environment in response to ever-changing needs. While landscaping requires the individuals in the room to participate and engage with the space, an example of this could be determining the visual tone for the space through lighting and art.

Calls to Action from the Canadian Theatre Non-Profit Sector

In my analysis of various call-to-action documents, three overarching thematic areas emerged:

- education, development & training
- policies & processes, and
- financial planning & monetary contributions

Education, Development & Training

Two distinct types of education, training and development arose consistently throughout my research. The first being internal training for staff and members of a theatre non-profit organization. Calls to action that focus on the Black community, gender equity, disability rights, and Indigenous rights called for in-depth and, most importantly, ongoing training focused on areas such as anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, accessibility, disability issues, and Indigenous issues.

The second call for education focuses on the professional development offered by theatre non-profit organizations for freelance arts workers. Primarily in Toronto, Ontario, Means of Production (n.d.), a collective of Technical Directors and Production Managers, have been highlighting the importance of mentorship opportunities for production roles to encourage a safe, equitable and supportive work environment. Additionally, Glory & Fiati (2020) encouraged tuition-free development of leadership positions for Black individuals, invitations to events, and reserved spots for Black community in training programs. Similarly, the National Endowment for the Arts (2023) called for training to be offered to individuals with disabilities, as well as an assessment of current programs for accessibility.

Policies & Processes

Several call-to-action documents aimed to address policies and processes within theatre non-profit organizations, asking organizations to internally audit their processes from an anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive lens. Two recurring areas of focus were programming and hiring. Several specific considerations were brought forward such as representation beyond tokenization, harassment reporting, outreach, recruitment, retention, and childcare. The National Endowment for the Arts stated the necessity of thorough procedures for the dissemination and communication of these policies to staff and contractors to ensure that they are understood.

Financial Planning & Monetary Contributions

Financial barriers were a commonly cited inequity between theatre non-profit organizations and freelance arts workers. Means of Production called for increased budgets in a variety of production areas such as design budgets, fees for additional members of the production team, transportation, and support crew. Similarly, Balancing Act outlined the importance of financial support for childcare to alleviate the barriers for freelance arts workers with dependants. Multiple advocacy documents, including The Black Pledge, the 35/50 Initiative, and SEARA, urged organizations to provide financial support through monetary contributions to advocacy groups and mutual aid initiatives. Lastly, incorporating these considerations from the outset is crucial for the budgeting strategies of theatre non-profits and to not further harm underrepresented communities.

Queer Utopian Theory to Address Inequities in the Theatre Non-profit Sector

I am exploring the application of Queer Utopian Theory as a framework to address inequities in Canadian theatre organizations. My literature reviews found that issues of scarcity and meritocracy can be addressed through education, training, and development, policies and processes, and financial planning and monetary contributions. Additionally, an intersectional lens is crucial every step of the way.

While this section is split into three categories, the intention is not to prescribe a linear path, but rather to establish a dynamic, circular process design. In doing so, I aim to unravel the constraints of individualism, emphasizing the necessity for continuous revisitation and adaptation as a community to collectively strive to reshape the landscape of the Canadian theatre sector.

The Operational, Foundational Work

Implementing Queer Utopian Theory in the context of Canadian theatre organizations requires consistent revisiting and reworking of company culture, core programs, and financial planning processes.

Recommendation 1: Landscape the Company Culture.

Due to its focus on collaborative, non-individualistic procedures, an important step to applying a Queer Utopian theoretical framework to an arts organization is to landscape the company culture. As previously mentioned, landscaping encourages the participation of all individuals in any given context. In the context of a theatre non-profit organization, this could include leadership, staff, board members, long-term consultants, and whoever engages with the company operations on a consistent basis. Inspired by Fox's (2023) research project which applied queer utopia to environmental action, one example of landscaping the company culture could be taking part in an initial scenario planning workshop, followed up with regular re-evaluation meetings. While there are many definitions to be found on the internet for scenario planning workshops, Fox (2023) described their version as a process that "guides people through a journey from dreaming about utopia into thinking more practically or strategically about what they can do" (p. 25). Their research process asked participants to imagine queer utopia through the three questions "[w]hat does a queer utopia look like to you?; In what ways are you already embodying/building/living this utopia in the present?; and What can you do to help further realise this utopia?" (Fox, 2023, p. 25).

In the theatre non-profit context, these questions can be adapted to work towards the goal of a utopian company culture. For example, what would your ideal (i.e., utopian) company culture look like? In what ways are you already embodying/building/living this ideal company culture? What can you do to help further realise this ideal company culture? The answers to the questions may cover a variety of categories such as communication styles, programming choices, and the layout of the office space, and may be included for several reasons such as accessibility, alignment with values, and accountability.

Once the original landscaping has been determined, the process should not be considered complete. Staying true to the values of Queer Utopian landscaping as originally outlined by Rands, McDonald & Clapp (2013), regular landscaping meetings and check-ins should be implemented on a daily or weekly basis to adapt to the constantly changing 'isness' of the company culture (i.e., what the company culture is based on factors such as who is in the space). Inspired by Razdar's (2023) writing on abolishing planning, this ongoing process is meant to limit the number of finite decisions that are made in advance, allowing the organization to stay responsive to the everchanging needs of the individuals coming and going from the company.

Additionally, training and development for the staff of theatre non-profits were key recommendations that came out of the literature review on calls to action in the Canadian performing arts sector. Through a Queer Utopian lens, the training should be ongoing and responsive to the company culture and programming as opposed to attempting to cover all bases with little context. For example, if a theatre non-profit's programming connects with specific communities (e.g., queer communities, neurodivergent communities, etc.), then the training and development opportunities for that season should reflect the individuals and programming involved.

Recommendation 2: Audit Core Programs.

National Endowment for the Arts (2023) outlined the necessity of an internal audit of core programming. There was also a focus across the call-to-action literature on ensuring that organizations have programs for the development of new artists, especially for those who have historically experienced barriers in access to training. A Queer Utopian audit of core programming would ask key questions such as: what are the current barriers in accessing our programs, as either a participant or an audience member? Is our core programming reflective of the priorities and goals that came out of our foundational landscaping work?

Lastly, a crucial question when determining programming worth highlighting is: Are our operational and project-based budgets adequate to realize this project through a holistic, Queer Utopian lens? A common narrative is that a company must be continuously growing to achieve success. However, what happens when the company size and workload become too large for leadership to fully integrate with the on-the-ground staff? Queer Utopian theory posits the idea of doing less well. Once a company grows to a certain size, it becomes more challenging for individual team members to retain autonomy in their work as there are more steps for approval. With a focus on collaborative, community-based work, Queer Utopian Theory encourages the prioritization of relationship-building in the non-profit sector, which becomes more challenging as the company grows. Queer Utopian theory favours smaller, team-focused companies that can then collaborate with other companies in the local arts community, prioritizing the growth of team capacity over programming.

Recommendation 3: Pursue Holistic Financial Planning.

One of the first things that I was taught when learning to be an arts producer was that a budget is a story. While financial planning was not explicitly mentioned frequently throughout my literature review research into calls to action, many of the suggestions in these calls require a monetary contribution. It became clear to me very quickly that, for a company to truly embody a Queer Utopian perspective, the budget must tell that story. Jimmy & Andreotti (2019) noted that there are many assumptions made that can create barriers between organizations and individuals. For example, access to reliable transportation and access to a computer or internet. A Queer Utopian framework that is working to deconstruct meritocracy would require an Artist Support Fund (or something of the like) that can account for these needs. Additionally, reserving spots in programming for Black or Indigenous individuals, providing accessibility resources, paying employees and contractors a liveable wage, and providing professional development opportunities through workshops or courses, all demands from across call-to-action documents, all require the money to do so. (Again, doing less well). In short, holistic, intersectional and in-advance financial planning is necessary to realize a Queer Utopian operational foundation.

The Project-Based Work

Recommendation 4: Foster an Open Communication Climate.

Queer Utopian Theory reminds us that there is no formula for relationship building. Successful relationship building relies on openness, flexibility, and operating in good faith. In the theatre sector, given that many arts workers are hired on a project-to-project basis (e.g., the cast and crew of a show), new relationships are being formed frequently.

Queer Utopian processes for individual projects, such as rehearsal room culture and project-based budgeting, must follow a landscaping process as well as holistic financial planning to be reflective of the individuals and subject matter involved. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts (2023) outlined the importance of clearly communicating existing policies to the freelance arts workers, however, a Queer Utopian framework acknowledges that the dissemination of these policies without discussion amongst the team and adaptation to the needs of the group can render the existing documents irrelevant.

While policies are necessary documents to protect organizations and individuals alike, they must be implemented in a way that allows freelance arts workers to exist in relationship to them, as opposed to having the policy imposed upon them without explanation. Several landscaping techniques, such as individual meetings or the previously mentioned scenario planning workshops, can help the freelance arts workers to understand the policies, while also creating a space where the policies can be adapted to project.

It is not possible to plan for every possible situation, and therefore completely avoid uncomfortable conversations. It is, however, possible to create an environment founded in care that fosters productive conversations around the issues that arise.

Recommendation 5: Adopt a Cyclical Model of Accountability.

In Queer Utopian spirit, accountability includes adaptability to changing needs. Viewing the process as a cyclical and fluid allows for accountability through constant interrogation and adaptation of the process. As a tool for accountability, Glory & Fiati (2020) encouraged monetary contribution to validate the commitment of an organization. Specifically, putting money towards collectives such as The Black Pledge, or to additional consultants, can assist in ensuring follow-through for organizations. Through a Queer Utopian lens, this could look like an advisory committee (paid or volunteer) either with fixed term length, or a changing team based on the goals and needs of a specific project. In summary, the key Queer Utopian value to remember is that the process is a continuous circle and not be seen as a checklist that can be completed.

Focus Group Questions

Opening Question

1. What is your name, pronouns, and field of work/experience related to this research study?

Transition Question

2. What prompted your desire to take part in this focus group?

Key Questions

3. Were you familiar with Queer Theory or Queer Utopian Theory before reading the resource material?
4. What were your initial impressions when reviewing the recommendations draft?
5. Were there areas of the recommendation draft that were confusing to you?
6. What are your thoughts on how possible it is to implement these recommendations?
7. What were your thoughts on the theoretical framework of Queer Utopia? (e.g., when did it make sense, and when did it not make sense?)
8. What were your thoughts on the compatibility between the definition of Queer Utopian Theory and the inequities in the Canadian performing arts non-profit sector?

Ending Question

9. Is there any additional feedback you would like to provide?

Expanded Queer Utopian Theory Definition (Optional)

Queer Utopian Theory, as a branch of Queer Theory posits the continual pursuit of a better society by queering time, challenging societal norms and embracing a holistic, intersectional approach in our interactions with individuals (Copson & Boukli, 2020; Farrier, 2012; Fox, 2023; Golomb-Leavitt, Becker & Valeriano-Flores, 2023; Muñoz, 2009; Rands, McDonald & Clapp, 2013). Based on Muñoz's (2009) argument that queerness is temporally bound to the future, Queer Utopian Theory asserts that the definition of 'better' (i.e., the utopia) is constantly changing and adaptable to the current context, whether in time, physical space, or relationally within a group of people. In essence, Queer Utopian Theory does not view time as having a stagnant beginning and end, but as being cyclical and fluid. While critics influenced by Edelman's (2004) *No Future* way of thinking may view this method as having an unachievable goal, and, therefore, as a fruitless effort, Queer Utopian Theory considers it inspirational, emphasizing an ongoing aspiration for progress, evolution, and learning through the queering of time (Muñoz, 2009).

Queer Utopian Theory engages with the discourse around planning abolition versus abolishing planning as written by Darian Razdar (2023). In his essay on the usefulness of planning in relation to transformation, abolition, and queer space, Razdar (2023) argued that "the 'planning for' stance confers authority to so-called experts, leaving the rest of us with little power to make our own spaces" (p. 122). Through the queering of time, Queer Utopian Theory works in tandem with this discourse by limiting the amount of pre-planning and opening dialogue between the participants in each space in real-time (**Rands, McDonald & Clapp, 2013**).

The primary tool employed by Queer Utopian Theory to remain adaptable and reflexive is called landscaping (Casid, 2011, **as cited in Rands, McDonald & Clapp, 2013**). Landscaping involves a wide variety of space-building and place-making techniques, developed by the individuals in the space, to shape and mold a more inclusive and equitable environment in response to ever-changing needs. While landscaping requires the individuals in the room to participate and engage with the space, an example of this could be determining the visual tone for the space through lighting and art (Rands, McDonald & Clapp, 2013).

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I am enthusiastically inviting you, _____ [Name], to participate in a focus group as part of my master's thesis research. My name is Maria Zarrillo, and I am a student in the Master of Arts in Justice Studies program at Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia. My thesis research project is titled *Queer Utopian Theory for Systemic Change in Performing Arts Non-profits*. I have worked in the performing arts sector as both a freelance and an employee Arts Manager (e.g., Stage Manager, Producer, Production Manager) for over a decade. Additionally, I have a bachelor's degree in Theatre & Film, with a minor in Human Rights, from the University of Winnipeg and a diploma in Theatre Production from Langara College's Studio 58. This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master's Program.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my research is to provide a new option, in the form of a recommendations document, for the improvement of operational practices in performing arts non-profits. I will create a first draft recommendations document based on two content-analysis-based literature reviews. I am inviting expert participants such as you to focus groups to gather valuable feedback to improve the recommendation document's feasibility, quality, and rigour. I am available to answer questions at any time by email or over the phone at [email address] or at [phone number]. This study has been approved by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board; my credentials can be confirmed by contacting my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. matthew heinz, at [email address].

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of this study or not.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may withdraw at any point until the end of the focus group session. In case of withdrawal from the study prior to the focus group, you will not receive an honorarium. If the withdrawal occurs after the focus group session, your name will be removed from the participant list and you will not be quoted with attribution. In this case, if you have chosen to accept an honorarium for your time with the project, you will receive a reduced honorarium of \$100 CAD. Your anonymized contributions will remain part of the overall data set, however, because they cannot be separated from the focus group proceedings.

RIGHTS OF EXPERT PARTICIPANTS

If you withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation, there will be no negative consequences to you. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact The Office of Research Ethics at Royal Roads University at [email address]; [phone number].

FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES

Time Commitment: 4 hours (1.5 hours prep / 2 hours focus group session / .5 hours follow-up)

Focus Group Session Date: February 5, 2024 from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

Prep work: Estimated 1.5 hours of reading and preparation prior to the Focus Group Session

Compensation (please check one):

- \$200 CAD honorarium (paid by cheque and mailed the date of the Focus Group Session)
- I choose to volunteer my time to the project at no charge.

One week prior to the session, you will receive a digital copy of the maximum 5-page recommendations draft to review and take notes. During both the prep work and the session, you will evaluate the document based on five core categories: initial impressions, areas of confusion, the feasibility of execution, the relevance of Queer Utopian theoretical framework, and the relationship between the theoretical framework and the identified needs in the performing arts sector. There will be a facilitator and a note-taker for the session, which will be recorded (video, audio, transcripts). The session recordings, transcripts, and notes will be analyzed and referenced in the final thesis. All video and audio recordings will be erased after transcription. The session's visual and auditory recording and any written notes may be referenced word-for-word or paraphrased throughout the final thesis, including the final recommendations draft. You will get the opportunity to review the second draft of the recommendation document after the session and provide written feedback within a specific time frame before it is finalized. The thesis will be published on Royal Road University's online repository, ProQuest, and Library and Archives Canada.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- a. Your name AND/OR profession and city of residency will be published in the thesis.
- b. Participants will be informed of the potential risk of fellow group participants discussing details outside of the focus group, and thus participants will be advised to share information with that in mind. As a result, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as some participants may share information outside of the group.
- c. All information gathered in these interviews will be stored on password-protected computers. The transcripts will be archived for potential future research projects; video and audio recordings will be erased upon transcription.

- d. Contact and payment information will remain confidential.

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____ [NAME], consent to the following being included in the final published thesis:

- My full name: _____ yes no
- My job title: _____ yes
- My city/province of residence: _____ yes

If you checked yes to receiving an honorarium, please fill out your mailing address:

SIGNATURE OF EXPERT PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “*Queer Utopian Theory for Systemic Change in Performing Arts Non-profits*” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study voluntarily. I have been given a copy of this form.

Expert Participant

Date

Maria Zarrillo, Researcher

Date

Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement

I, _____ [NAME] agree to take on the role of Facilitator/Notetaker in Maria Zarrillo's (referred to as the "Principal Researcher" master's thesis research titled *Queer Utopian Theory for Systemic Change in Performing Arts Non-profits*).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my research is to provide a new option, in the form of a recommendations document, for the improvement of operational practices in performing arts non-profits. I will create a first draft recommendations document based on two content-analysis-based literature reviews.

I am available to answer questions at any time by email or over the phone at [email address] or at [phone number]. This study has been approved by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board; my credentials can be confirmed by contacting my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. matthew heinz, at [email address].

I, _____ [NAME], agree as follows:

1. To keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, recordings, transcripts) with anyone other than the Principal Researcher;
2. To keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession;
3. I will not use the research information for any purpose other than the facilitation of the focus group sessions;
4. To return all research information in any form or format to the Principal Researcher when I have completed the research tasks;
5. After consulting with the Principal Researcher, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Principal Researcher (e.g. information stored on computer hard drive).

Facilitator/Notetaker:

(Print name)	(Signature)	(Date)
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Principal Researcher:

(Print name)	(Signature)	(Date)
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