

---

**Theatre Research in Canada**  
**Recherches théâtrales au Canada**

Theatre Research in Canada  
Recherches théâtrales au Canada

## **Julie Burelle “Encounters on Contested Lands. Indigenous Performances of Sovereignty and Nationhood in Québec”**

Martha Herrera-Lasso González

---

Volume 40, numéro 1-2, 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1068266ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068266ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

Éditeur(s)

Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama, University of Toronto

ISSN

1196-1198 (imprimé)

1913-9101 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

Citer ce compte rendu

González, M.-L. (2019). Compte rendu de [Julie Burelle “Encounters on Contested Lands. Indigenous Performances of Sovereignty and Nationhood in Québec”]. *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada*, 40(1-2), 170–172. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068266ar>

agonizing position and litany of fatalities, and to repeat rote facts does not immerse Alvarez in the experience of perilous sanitation and a century of disenfranchisement but positions her relative to this. This encounter, which she names “a necessary precondition of unlearning” (162), relies upon narrative yoked to sitedness and listening to others bear witness. Presence at this performance, the briefest of all Alvarez’s field studies, is without doubt the most transformative, leading her not to play at being another but reckoning with her actual situatedness as a descendent of settler-colonists.

## BURELLE, JULIE

### ***Encounters on Contested Lands. Indigenous Performances of Sovereignty and Nationhood in Québec.***

Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019, 232 pp.

MARTHA HERRERA-LASSO GONZÁLEZ

*Encounters on Contested Lands* joins an ongoing conversation around the challenges and possibilities of decolonization from the perspective of Performance Studies, and represents an important contribution to decolonial thought and practice across the Americas. Specifically, it broadens this conversation by offering a much-needed investigation, in English, of decolonization and performance read in relation to Québécois claims of sovereignty. The project reveals Quebec as a place of competing sovereignties, focusing on contemporary encounters between Indigenous peoples and what Burelle calls the *French Québécois de souche*—French-speaking white descendants of early French settlers, who were colonized by the British and later by Anglo Canadians. Burelle pushes against a long-time narrative of Quebec as a colonized minority, and makes visible the white possessive logic that connects English and French Canadian colonial projects, highlighting how Quebec’s history of suffering and practices of selective remembering have been used to assert a *Québécois de souche* nationalist project. Through her analysis of a range of cultural and political performances, Burelle exposes the discursive and performative strategies of dispossession of Indigenous peoples that have made this project possible, arguing throughout that Quebec’s imagined community is still unable “to accommodate (let alone comprehend) the concept of Indigenous sovereignty” (16). As a settler scholar, Burelle does not shy away from her positionality as *Québécoise de souche*, and offers a range of strategies for settler scholars to engage productively with their own accountability. Burelle’s introduction explicitly outlines her choices in nomenclature and citation, acknowledging the politics of naming and the importance of positioning theory in relation to the places and peoples discussed.

*Encounters on Contested Lands* deals primarily with performances in Quebec, a province coexists with the Abenaki, Anishinaabe, Attikamekw, Cree, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Inuit, Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Mohwak and Naskapi nations. In the case of the Marche Amun in chapter

three, the performance extends beyond these provincial borders and into Ottawa, and in the last chapter, the two case studies go south into Kumeyaay lands on what is now San Diego, California, and Maya communities of Central America. The book begins at the Oka stand-off—when in 1990 the Mohawks of Kanehsatà:ke resisted the construction of a luxury golf course and condominium project on the pine forest and burial site still under their stewardship—and ends with a reflection of the Idle No More movement that began in 2012 and continues to oppose Canada's Bill C-45. The project takes on diverse forms of performance, from dramatic texts, mise-en-scenes, film documentaries, legal cases, visual art pieces and a range of activist protests. This diversity allows Burelle to engage with Indigenous performance not only as aesthetic practice, but “as situated speech acts performing diplomacy and legal and historical ties to the land” (17).

The first chapter is an analysis of Alexis Martin's 2012 *Invention du chauffage central en Nouvelle-France*, what Burelle calls a “missed encounter” where the famous Quebecois playwright attempted to stage reconciliation without fully admitting to Quebec's role as oppressor. Burelle reads these moves in relation to Marc Lescarbot's 1606 *Theatre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France*, exposing theatre's role in producing national memory, and arguing that historically, Quebec's becoming as nation has been built through a parasitic relation with Indigenous bodies. In his re-telling of Quebec's history—a performance that Burelle reads as reconciliation in absentia—Martin attempts to render Indigenous peoples visible while at the same time, re-enacts strategies of erasure such as failing to cast Indigenous actors in the first production of his play.

The second chapter analyzes two award-winning documentaries—*L'Empreinte* (2014) by Carole Ploquin and Yvan Dubuc, and *Québécoisie* (2014) by Mélanie Carrier and Olivier Higgins—that look to Indigenous culture in order to redefine *Québécois de souche* identity. The book challenges the Métis-turn performed by both films—where settler identity is read through a history of *métissage* in order produce a claim to nativeness equal to that of Indigenous peoples. Burelle shows how these “fictions of blood” are employed to legitimize a French colonial project and Quebec's current political demands.

Chapter three is again concerned with documentary, but in this case, it takes up four films by Indigenous artists as they encounter the Reserve. Abénaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin's *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), which deals with the 1990 events in Oka; *Mesnak* (2011), directed by Yves Sioui Durand (Huron-Wendat), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to a fictive Reserve in Quebec; and two Innu films produced by the Wapikoni Mobile project that tell of Reserves as spaces of healing—*Tour de Char* (2009) by Jean-Baptiste Bacon-Riverin and Malcom Riverin, and *L'Enfance déracinée* (2013) by Réal Junio Leblac. In her reading of these films, Burelle shows how settler colonial violence continues to operate in these spaces, while arguing for the Reserve as a space of agency, showing how it has been shaped by Indigenous forces through “ingenious tools of survivance and (re)surgence” (87).

Chapter four focuses on two endurance performances as they encounter the Indian Act: Nadia Myre's (Anishinaabe) visual-art piece *Indian Act* (1992–2002) and the 2010 Marche Amun 300 mile (500kms) protest led by a group of Innu women. In her reading of these interventions, Burelle thinks of Indigenous endurance as ontology and as a resistance tactic that renders visible the continuing gendered violence of the Indian Act. The last chapter addresses two performances of repatriation: a transnational adaptation of the Mayan play, *Xajoj Tun Rabinal Achi*, devised in 2010 by the Montreal-based company Ondinook, and an

ongoing legal case of bone repatriation involving the Kumeyaay nation and the University of California, San Diego. In juxtaposing these performances, Burelle relies on Chadwick Allen's trans-indigenous methodology to show how Indigenous practices of ancestor repatriation echo each other across the continent. From this analysis Burelle develops the concept of "performative repatriables," a trans-indigenous performative strategy through which remains as well as living bodies render visible Indigenous mourning, presence and epistemologies.

The encounters analyzed in the book expose the current conditions of settler-state violence—be it objective, subjective or systemic—that sustain Canada's and Quebec's colonial projects. While Burelle avoids any hopeful optimism, many of these case studies "labor to imagine an alternate future that is predicated on decolonization" (17), and in her analysis, Burelle offers a concrete (and cautious) example of how to participate in decolonial projects as settler scholars.

## KNOWLES, RIC

### ***Performing the Intercultural City.***

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017, 274 pp.

CHARLOTTE MCIVOR

Ric Knowles' eagerly anticipated *Performing the Intercultural City* continues and expands the work began by his succinct but enormously impactful 2010 *Theatre & Interculturalism*. In it Knowles issued a clarion call for scholars and practitioners to reimagine intercultural performance practices as emerging most importantly "from below" (79) and driven by artists of colour from migrant and diasporic backgrounds living in urban centres, not by elite (white) Western auteur practitioners.

In retrospect, *Theatre & Interculturalism* was the tipping point into a "new" wave of intercultural performance theory which emphasizes the processual and centralizes migrant, diasporic and/or artists of colour as the key grassroots drivers of constantly evolving hybrid performance practices which test and politicize the evolving and contested nature of "cultural" identities of individuals and/or groups. *Theatre & Interculturalism* was indeed swiftly followed by Knowles' 2011 co-edited special issue of *Theatre Journal* with Penny Farfan on "Rethinking Intercultural Performance" which extended this turn through the voices of other scholars including Daphne P. Lei, Leo Cabranes-Grant and Diana Looser among others whose influential articles in this issue further cemented the proliferation of methodologies and theoretical frameworks associated with this new intercultural turn. Since then, book-length studies pushing at the limits and possibilities of Knowles' new interculturalism have consistently appeared including Royona Mitra's *Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism* (2015), Leo Cabranes-Grant's *From Scenarios to Networks: Performing the Intercultural in Colonial Mexico* (2016) and my own, *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland: Towards A New Interculturalism* (2016).

Nevertheless, Knowles' book-length realization of his vision for a new interculturalism which illuminates the work of a thrilling range of theatremakers of colour and/or from