12 Toward and Away: The Dramatic Tension of a Queer & Trans Canon

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There are probably as many definitions of queerness as there are queer people. As a sexual and gender identity it serves both as an umbrella term encompassing many identities and as a label specific for a single person's identity. This plurality is important to my understanding of queerness, as is its stubborn refusal to be rendered intelligible through language. It is, and can be, many things, but for the purposes of this project, a personal favorite is: gender and sexual identities which exist outside, or in opposition to, the cisheteropatriarchy.

Queer theory also has its favorite definitions, common threads including the ability to make the non-queer seem strange, the inability to fit within the constraints of cisheteronormative society (Rinaldi 2015: 85), or "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin 1995: 63). This chapter employs queer theorist José Muñoz's definition of queerness as the horizon: queerness as existing always in the reaching toward something that does not quite fit in our present universe, pushing back against our current boundaries. His queerness definition "is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (Muñoz 2009: 26). It is desire and dissent that guide this chapter's exploration of a queer and trans canon. A canon—canons—not yet here, but burning with promise.

Desire and dissent are irrevocably linked. Desire for dissent, for some of us, is borne of anxieties of assimilation, of fear of irrelevance through normalization: "Without antipathy, is there just apathy? Without something to fight against, does the once edgy avant-garde of queer theatre disappear?" (Small 2018). Queer theatre-makers (such as Shakina Nayfack, Kate Bornstein, Tim Miller, Jill Dolan) have often argued that not all LGBTQA + theatre is *queer* theatre, that queer theatre must push back against tradition both in form and content. Small cautions that this queer dissent should let go of the old tropes, even if the social world has not caught up: "Today's queer theatre need not be reactionary vis-à-vis an intolerant America—it should instead strike out on its own as a force for political alternatives, resistance, and utopia" (Small 2018).

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His words push back against the fear that a queer canon must always exist in relation to the traditional canon.

By that definition, a queer canon is unreachable, and yet always reaching. It pushes back against the boundaries of the traditional canon while pushing forward into an imagined queer future. It is in this space that a queer canon resides, in the push and pull, the tension between visibility and legibility, between desire and dissent. This tension "embodies a resolute despair due to a feeling of exclusion from mainstream society and a paradoxical desire to remain out of it" (Badenes 2015: 33).

Queer canons make their home in this paradox. We, as queer and trans theatre-makers, are pulled ever toward canonizing projects just as we push away from their call for stability, assimilation. This chapter aims to unpack the tension between these impulses, the desires, and powers that pull us toward and push us away from a queer canon.

Definitions of a trans canon are harder to find. For this project, I am defining a trans canon as performance pieces conceived/written/performed by and about trans people (taking inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois's "Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre" essay, 1926). Trans theatre exists here in relation to queer theatre, in that not all trans theatre is *queer*, just as not all LGBQ + theatre is queer. This paper then will refer primarily to "a queer canon" inclusive of trans works that also queer form/aesthetic/structure, though it is occasionally necessary to separate for clarity.

Finding the queer in the traditional canon

The trademark of the traditional academic canon is its stability. Some authors may come and go as works once considered new or avant-garde become normalized to the point of a classic. But usually, a few familiar names haunt us no matter which anthology or syllabus we encounter. Canons can't, by nature, include every existing work. They are the works that stand the test of time, works that tenaciously hold the public's respect, never wavering in value.

A queer canon, then, can queer the very idea of canonization through its instability, its impermanence. Trans theatre is especially in motion, as is transition, the very concept of *trans*. It is not, and should not, be captured and made a permanent fixture the way Shakespeare has— though I'd love to picture a world where dozens of colleges produce *Hir* (Mac 2016) or *Sagittarius Ponderosa* (Kaufman 2021) every season.

Any stable canonizing projects for queer theatre (anthologies, syllabi, season selections, etc.) necessarily mark themselves in one specific moment of queerness. What was transgressive at that moment will someday, and possibly even through canonization itself, become naturalized. A queer canon today will be queer theatre history tomorrow, and a new canon—or several—will emerge. Despite this paradox, canonize we do, and probably always will.

Philosopher Umberto Eco referred to this as an effect of our human need "to make infinity comprehensible" (Beyer and Gorris 2009). But the desire to canonize queer performance has an additional impulse behind it—to make *ourselves* comprehensible, at least within the structures of the traditional canon.

Before grad school, *Angels in America* was the only play I ever saw by an explicitly queer playwright on a syllabus. I've never been assigned a play by a trans playwright. Most of the expensive anthologies I purchased for my classes included no queer or trans authors, some had no images of queerness at all. These absences were daunting for me as a budding queer and trans dramaturg, staring into a future in theatre and deciding if I belonged. In *Meditations on a Queer Canon,* Michael Lipkowitz writes that we seek out works which "reflect our souls back at us" (2012: 12). When queer and trans authors are absent from our textbooks and our syllabi, our students lose out on this experience. They might, as I did, question their own place in theatre and higher education. As civil rights activist Marian Wright Edelman poignantly said, "you can't be what you can't see" (qtd in Newsom 2012).

Even more dangerous than these silences, however, were the moments of recognition I did find within the traditional canon. Queer and trans people have yearned for representation so deeply that we subsist on queerbaiting and tropes. As Heather Love argues, "longing for community across time is a crucial feature of queer historical experience" (Love 2007: 37). Many of the small moments of queerness I've found within the traditional canon are, at best, woefully outdated and willfully cis white male-centric, and at worst perpetuate violent stereotypes. The images I saw in school of gender or sexual non-conformity ended in the restoration of status quo or humiliation and death; *Twelfth Night* (1602), for example, offers both a return to gender norms for Viola and humiliation at gender non-conformity for Malvolio. And yet *Twelfth Night* is also the perfect example of queer attachments in the traditional canon. The gender-bending, cross-dressing, and queer pairings make the text a touchstone, and despite the tropes described above, *Twelfth Night* persists in this role.

Teaching classics like these comes with real-world consequences that educators and theatre-makers must attend to (as described by Miss Major, Cece McDonald, et al in *Trap Door* 2017). Trans women of color are particularly misrepresented, the trope of the "surprise trans woman" budding up in works like *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* (1976) or *M. Butterfly* (1988). These images seep into the mainstream, where actual trans women experience the consequences of "trans panic," a connection I have written about previously (Lefevre 2021). Continuing to present material with this trope without unpacking its real-world impact reifies and normalizes this conception of trans women.

Activist/artist Tourmaline describes the link between visibility and violence as an effect of the limitations and assumptions of work created by cisgender artists about trans subjects. Cisgender creators, Tourmaline argues, might be

spreading more images of trans people than ever before, but these images are often not accurate, and come with little attention to the material impacts:

> While trans visibility is at an all-time high, with trans people increasingly represented in popular culture, violence against us has also never been higher. The push for visibility without it being tied to a demand for our basic needs being met often leaves us without material resources or tangible support, and exposed to more violence and isolation. (Tourmaline)

Plays by cisgender heterosexual playwrights dominate the traditional canon; their distance from queer experience is strikingly visible in the use of queer lived experiences as plot points and props. The trans reveal trope is only one of many ways this canon misrepresents queer experience. Plays like *Tootsie* (1982) make a joke of trans identity. Djuna Barnes's *The Dove* (1928) and LeRoi Jones's *The Toilet* (1967) reinforce images of sexual repression and shame bursting forth into violence. Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1937) is part of a long legacy of plays reinforcing consequences for being discovered as queer. Tropes like "bury your gays," the "closeted homophobe," and the "flamboyant feminine villain" dominate.

The continued teaching of these problematic pieces (especially without more trans-aware critique) reinforces harmful stereotypes. But to ignore all these pieces or separate them into an historical canon is to perpetuate the idea of a "bad gay past" (a la Heather Love's *Feeling Backward* (2007)) and imply a neoliberal progression in which we look only at our past as shameful, less queer, and thankfully over. To erase our queer theatre history is to sever ties with our ancestors. But these are not ideal ancestors. "In attempting to construct a positive genealogy of gay identity," Love argues, "queer critics and historians have often found themselves at a loss about what to do with the sad old queens and long-suffering dykes who haunt the historical record" (2007: 32). What of the Bricks (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)) and the Mrs. Danverses (*Rebecca* (1939))? Or Irene in *The Captive* (Édouard Bourdet (1926))? My attachments to these characters intermingle with my frustration at the tropes and stereotypes they reinforce.

Even the more overtly queer pieces that skirt the academic canon carry these same difficulties. In *The Boys in the Band* (1968), Michael laments, "If we could just learn not to hate ourselves quite so very much," and that quote could easily sum up the entire ethos of the play (Crowley 1968: 111). This play reinforces the trope of the depressed gay man, but it's also the first play that showed me the possibilities of queer friendships on stage. I am still haunted by seeing Angel sing "Contact," as she dies in *RENT* (1996), but I also carry her spirit with me in a long line of non-explicitly stated (though fanon—fan accepted canon) trans characters through whom I crafted and came to understand my own identity. Do we throw out all the works that showcase shame, self-loathing, and violence? Do we mark them as historical canon, museum pieces of queer theatre past? To ask more generations of queer and

trans theater students to find themselves in these tropes feels akin to academic hazing: my generation had to pull barely visible queer threads from between the cracks of Ibsen or Molière, so the next generation should as well. I don't want that for my students, and I don't want that for the field of theatre.

This instinct to separate canons into "the past" and "the present" falls short when developing a queer canon. Citing Broadway and off-Broadway as his main objects, theatre critic Christian Lewis argues that there are two distinct queer canons being presented: an "older gay theatrical canon" designed to subtly educate primarily cishet audiences, and a newer, queerer canon of contemporary texts with an updated politic and geared more for younger queer audiences. This sentiment is echoed across several other discussions of the queer canon, divided not always temporally but sometimes by intended audience (queer or cishet) or if the representations are positive or negative. But each of these divisions is built around binaries. If being non-binary has taught me anything, it's that the world is full of false dichotomies, that even spectrums insist that in order to be more of one thing you must be less of another. This is antithetical to queerness.

The language of queerness and transness is ever-evolving. The absence of overt/recognizable trans language in older texts often precludes them from consideration in a trans canon, but contemporary scholars and artists are finding themselves in these historical works anyway. In "Diversifying the Classical Canon," Barbara Fuchs contends that just as important as finding and crafting a contemporary canon is reintroducing silenced voices into classical canons (Fuchs 2016). I recently consulted for a colleague, Harley Erdman, on his translation of the Spanish Golden Age play *La Serrana de la Vera* by Luis Vélez de Guevara (1613). The original text never uses language of gender identity or transness. Those words didn't even exist in 1613. And yet, the title character asserts: "If you think that I'm a woman,/You're very much deceived:/I am very much a man" (Vélez de Guevara and Erdman 2019: 59). This line is one of many in which Gila describes an identity that would today be read as transmasculine. Erdman took it as his responsibility to both fairly translate the original text and also make visible the threads that connect Gila to contemporary trans characters.

Without the ability to dig into historical plays and pull out previously unnoticed gender non-conformity, a trans canon is limited to those works where transness is explicitly named and understood within a cisnormative society. This modernization of transness distances trans people from our own cultural legacy: "trans people remain largely historically isolated, adrift on the sea of history, with little access to knowledge of where we came from and who got us here" (Page 2017: 135). To ignore classic works then is especially harmful to trans theatre, as it reifies a common problematic discourse, "framing trans people as new, as a modern, medicalized phenomenon only now coming to light in the topsy-turvy post-gay marriage world" (Page 2017: 135). The traditional canon offers anchor points in history for trans theatre-makers. Moments of gender exploration. Character attachments.

Even *M. Butterfly's* Song Liling is finding a new place among trans reconciliations with the canon (Seid 2015). A trans canon must make space for discovery of these historical attachments, if only to say that at the time this canon project was developed, the way we view transness made these figures feel like kin. I'm not suggesting, as Michael Lipkowitz does, that we *owe* anything to the canons of our past (Lipkowitz 2012: 11). But maybe these canons owe us. Maybe the traditional canon owes us an opportunity to reexamine it through a queer lens. Maybe these texts owe us a chance to see ourselves.

The traditional canon does give too much weight to history, haunting our stages with well-worn pages, but a queer canon need not hold the same power. Instead, we might take inspiration from projects like *Callisto: A Queer Epic* (2016), which collages stories and source materials of queer past, present, and future into an interrelated web of queer becoming.

How we teach these materials is just as important as which texts we choose. If undergraduate education programs intend to expand their syllabi and seasons to include queer work, their classes must support this expansion through the tools of analysis they provide. Play analysis courses that break up texts into beats and scenes, objectives and obstacles, cause and effect, limit themselves to framework that may not serve queer texts. The form itself needs a queer lens as much as the content. Analytical texts that break plays down into traditional conventions and structures (like *Backwards and Forwards* 1983) are unprepared to analyze plays whose form itself is queer. The frequent use of Aristotle's *Poetics* and its influence on contemporary play analysis reinforces a traditional plot structure and prioritizes linear time, which serves to discredit the creativity of queer temporalities.

A higher education program hoping to do justice to queer and trans works must also contend with the gaps in their analytical frames, acknowledging that these tools have been developed to analyze structures of the traditional canon. These courses would benefit from pairing plays with analytical texts intended to unpack that particular form: E. Patrick Johnson, et al's *Blacktino Queer Performance* (2016), for example, offers in-depth analysis of the aesthetics formed by this subset of queer artists, a rare collection that focuses on the intersection of Black and Latino identities within queer theatre. *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer* (2015) offers analytical tools and case studies from dramaturgs working in a variety of queer performance modalities. The *Methuen Drama Book of Trans Plays* (2021) might be the first trans theatre anthology to date, and alongside the plays themselves, it offers critical analyses by trans theatre-makers utilizing gender theory, trans theory, and more.

In addition to queer theory and queer critical analysis, queer canons should also be explored through non-academic lenses. Adapting Cirus Rinaldi's project in "Queering Canons," these programs must also employ embodied research, valuing experiential knowledges alongside theoretical texts, and imagining a "co-involvement" between the material and its analyst (2015: 87). Some existing texts already do this kind of sensory work: Eleanor Fuchs's

"Visit to a Small Planet" is a personal favorite analytical tool that interrogates the physical and social world of a play, divorcing it from our own world, and acknowledging that the world of each play operates in its own unique way with its own perceptions of time, movement, weather, etc. (Fuchs 2004). Queer playwright Maria Irene Fornés was also known to employ embodied methods of creation, research, and analysis (Memran 2018). Her own writing was often sparked by moments of embodied work in rehearsal spaces, and to analyze it without embodied knowledges would be a disservice. A queer pedagogical approach, then, would include "teaching and learning in acknowledgement of our bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities" (Perry and Medina 2011).

Queer Canonizing Projects

In "Where are all the bisexuals?: Understanding the grey areas of LGBTQ representation," Emily White laments the lack of bisexual narratives and characters on the stage, stating, "there is really only one well-known and popular play that prominently features bisexual characters: Diana Son's *Stop Kiss*" (White 2015). Her argument is solid, but her word choice is most critical: she is looking not for *any* play that features bisexual characters (or a simple New Play Exchange search would solve her query), she is looking for one that is "well-known and popular." White's essay echoes how much legibility is tied directly to visibility, and for better or worse the projects described below are included because of that visibility.

It isn't that these canonizing projects are better or more researched, but their position as places/events/objects of power authored by voices recognized and accepted makes their impact more legible. Alisa Solomon, in her essay "Gay Theatre Gets Hammered by the Canon, Again" strikes back at *New York Times* journalist Jesse Green's attempt at creating one such canon (2018). Solomon argues that Green "makes a point of acknowledging that '[his] canon' may differ from others', though he blithely ignores the glaring difference: Only his glints off the glossy pages of a *Times* publication, helping to establish the record" (Solomon 2018). So much of the tension of a queer canon is who gets to set this record. Here, canons are explicitly connected to archives, to the way we record history. While a theoretical queer canon is only limited by one's imagination, the study of that canon is limited to the texts we write down, publish, anthologize, put on our syllabi, and teach. Queer archivist Jamie Ann Lee likens this to the way Judith Butler defines gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990): the process of archiving naturalizes knowledges, making invisible the hands and choices that crafted the archive (Lee 2015: 75–76). Similarly, plays are considered part of canon not because of some mysterious inherent value, but by individual actions repeated over time. Practice, or in this case canonizing, does not make perfect. It makes permanent.

The least permanent of these canonizing projects are the festivals. Companies such as La MaMa, Theater Offensive, National Queer Theater,

and the DC Center produce festivals each year. Though these festivals most closely mimic the ephemerality of other live performances, festivals serve to establish significance and value. Often tackling a yearly theme, the festival organizers are responsible for reading more plays and proposals than will ever reach an audience, narrowing it down to a handful. Each company has its own criteria for selection, usually an answer to one of the most common questions of dramaturgy: "why this play here and now?" This innocuous question allows small committees to decide what it means to be relevant, what is important in queer theatre today. The individuals in these rooms are not mysterious unknown forces, and yet their ability to sway the landscape of queer theatre is immeasurable. These festivals will be documented and the plays noted, while hundreds of other pieces fade into the background.

Similarly, queer theatre companies must acknowledge the platform they have and its impact on canonizing projects. Trans Theater Lab has taken up this responsibility, naming that they are using their visibility to make space for more trans playwrights to tell our own stories. Companies like National Queer Theater and 20% Theater Company focus their labors on underrepresented voices and narratives. Several companies, such as SNAP! Productions and About Face Theatre center community education in their missions, creating a queer canon accessible to cishet audiences. Each of these companies has the power to create their own vision of a queer canon through season selections and new play development/creation.

Even more impactful than queer theatre companies, I argue that anthologies and academic texts can be the longest-lasting and most influential canonizing projects. The names alone can tell you a lot about common threads in these projects: *Places, Please! The First Anthology of Lesbian Plays*; *Forbidden Acts: Pioneering Gay & Lesbian Plays of the 20th Century*; *Staging Gay Lives: An Anthology of Contemporary Gay Theater*. And the list goes on, divided nearly every time by gender. Identity spaces can be important, but the near-constant binary gendering of these anthologies is disruptive to a queer canonizing ethic. Beyond the binary reinforcing, these texts have also been critiqued for their inability to represent the community fully, an admittedly unwieldy challenge for a small anthology. Jill Dolan recognizes the weight of this challenge, noting that Kate McDermott, editor of *Places, Please!*, cannot be expected to represent the entirety of lesbian playwriting in one anthology, but that she still chose "such a one-sided, reductive sampling of lesbian experience, and such a uniformly classical-realist selection of writing styles that the anthology is hardly representative at all" (Dolan 1987). *Forbidden Acts* received criticism for its inclusion of several cishet authors, and *Staging Gay Lives* was critiqued for its centering of white masculinity. None of these texts feel like a queer canon in 2020, but each of these texts are taught yearly.

Despite academia often being the source of canonizing projects, the barriers and borders of academic knowledges can stand in opposition to the ethics of a queer canon. As Mel Chen explains, "the internet must be acknowledged as a potent archiving resource; even as it is understood to be transient, 'non-credible,' 'unreputable,' 'unofficial,' and 'disordered'" (Chen 2017: 151). It's

impossible to ignore that these labels are so similar to the definitions (and my lived experience) of queerness. That knowledges can be devalued for their accessibility is also deeply concerning. Those qualities may in fact be what makes the internet so well suited for queer archiving. Chen argues that critical archive theory has made space for new ways of imagining the archives, but the work can be pushed further:

> A queer of color approach to the archive requires a genuine receptivity to the material effects of archival sources in skewed or odd relation to state archives. This includes new media, including internet forms. Those that have been relatively democratized offer us new architectures of access and of archive-building. (Chen 2017: 152)

Modern media have made space for queer performers to connect with a canon differently; listicles, blogs, and digital platforms like Zoom make sharing queer performances more accessible, especially those ephemeral arts which rarely make it into printed text.

These spaces have also democratized critique. A critique of the male-dominated industry already, The Kilroys List premiered in 2014, compiling a list of plays by "women, trans, and non-binary authors." The List's initially tenuous explanation of their inclusion of trans identities (which has since been clarified and updated), alongside the desire to create a trans-specific canon inspired a response project: The Killjoys lisT. The lisT was spearheaded by trans playwright and academic Joshua Bastian Cole, and was the first time I ever saw a collection of trans plays listed together.

Canonizing a Queer Body (of) Work

One of the most common assumptions about a theatrical canon is that it consists of texts. If a canon is only composed of text-based theatrical works, queer performances that exist in ephemeral, non-text forms will be left behind. A queer canon should be inclusive of drag performances, autodramas, experiential projects, cabaret, solo shows, and all the other kinds of queer performances that don't make it into the written canon.

Written archives lack the tools to record these works. Performance descriptions only go so far, leaving out the sensory and experiential components of performances. Images leave out the movement, the sound, the texture. With each attempt to produce a tangible archive of a queer canon, more of these gaps emerge.

The solution is not as simple as learning new archival methods to document, disseminate, and canonize these works. Queer archivist Michael Conners Jackman asks that we honor those works which exist only in the body or are temporally locked, suggesting that "resistance to documentation must be understood as the prerogative of artists for whom performance is neither future-oriented nor intended to be reproducible" (Jackman).

Alternative methods of sharing these works already exist; friends share stories in the oral tradition of spilling tea at a kiki, a drag queen passes traditional knowledges (and tucking tips) to her drag daughter in the greenroom, a trans elder helps a newly out trans girl find her voice. As queer people, we have always found ways to share our knowledges, our lived experiences, our cultural products outside the academy and in the margins of the historical record. We invented whole languages (such as Polari) to share knowledge without detection. We carry in our bodies the muscle memory of old choreography, the taste of hairspray after setting our face, the scars of binding or tucking with ace bandages instead of nylon, the hum of a few notes from some 80s ballad, the goosebumps from the first time we saw someone who looked like us survive the end of the show.

Queer archivists have already started exploring ways to connect our queer knowledge sharing to archival work. The link lies in our ability to reimagine archival bodies, to reimagine the body *as* archive, experiencing, interpreting, holding, sharing (Lee 2015: 74–75). Taking up Lee's thesis, this more expansive body (of) work queers the limitations of archiving the traditional canon. Queer canons can be found in more than books; queer canons exist in the body of queer performers, but they also exist in rehearsal halls, in dressing rooms, in night clubs, chipped teeth, and makeup pallets.

Claudia Nolan, a friend and colleague, recently wrote an essay examining dramaturgy through the lens of fungi (2020). Above the soil, fungi appear in clusters: a grouping here, a whole patch there, one lone little toadstool. Below the soil, she explained, was an entirely different story. Mycelial networks—interconnected filaments hundreds of miles long—offered underground, complex pathways for knowledge and resources to be shared. This is how I envision a queer canon existing, growing, connecting. Above the surface, there are the festivals, anthologies, blogs, syllabi, and visible canonizing projects. Below the surface, queer communities spread their own stories, connect plays with readers who'd adore them, and share resources and methods. A web of queer communications would tangle and weave the visible canons together with all of those works that cannot, and maybe should not, be archived in the same way.

This process was visible in my own work with Queer&Now (a queer and trans performance collective). A queer canon consisting of drag, physical theatre, and dance theatre was critical to our aesthetic and discourse. Several words and moments from this unofficial canon made their way into our lexicon as shorthand. The way a student of the traditional canon might say "this scene feels a little *Romeo and Juliet* to me," or compare the DMV to *Waiting for Godot*, folx in Queer&Now would reference moments from our canon to communicate inspirations, ideas, connections, or questions. Sasha Velour's rose petal reveal to Whitney Houston's "So Emotional" on *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2017), for example, may not appear in queer play anthologies, but it survives as drag canon. So do Busy Drag Queen, the "park and bark," and fan codes. These stories were shared through YouTube videos watched together on the floor of the rehearsal hall, gifs passed back and forth in the group chat,

memories of unrecorded experiences re-performed by its witnesses, second-hand remembered choreo taught to each other during breaks. There was no drag archive, no anthology of house shows to turn to in our research, but there was the collective knowledges of the dozen or so queer and trans artists in our company.

A queer canon is a slippery thing. It yearns for connection to the past but aches at the way the past haunts it. It strives for inclusion and rails against assimilation. A cohesive queer canon, then, might be as impossible as a cohesive queer community. On the surface, it may seem fragmented and messy when compared with the curated perennials of the traditional canon. But, like the fungi, queer canons need not be visible and legible to be real.

Within, around, and through this queer canon, trans canons might also bloom. Trans theatre-maker Emma Frankland facilitated a 2019 Stratford Festival workshop titled, "Toward a Trans Canon." Despite the title, it seems Frankland and her collaborators were just as torn between the desire to create and the impulse to destroy canons. Participants in the workshop came to following the conclusion:

> Perhaps trans identity is too diverse to be gathered together in the idea of one canon? Rather than move towards the idea of a singular canon, we realized we need many […] They interlink and crossover, creating beautiful spiraling patterns, Venn diagrams of intersecting violence and joys, but something specific about the trans experience is that, on some level, one must experience it alone. (Frankland 2020)

I agree with Frankland that each of us experiences transness in our own way, and in that way, we craft our own canons. Each of us individually crafting these canons, however, becomes a massive collective dissent. And collective dissent is at the core of trans history. After all, the Stonewall Rebellion wasn't a solo show.

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