

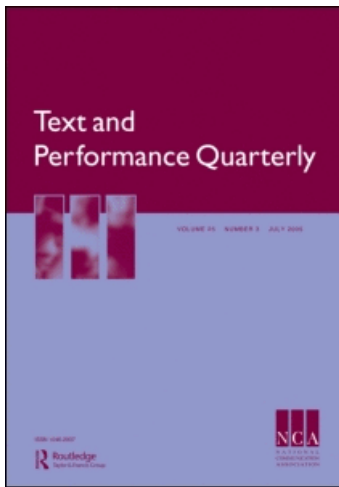
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# Love is a Battlefield: The Performance and Politics of Same-Sex Marriage in North America

Peter Dickinson

*This essay examines the politics of same-sex marriage in Canada and the United States alongside its performative representation on stage in both countries. I argue, via Freeman, that marriage as an institution bestowing rights upon private individuals needs to be decoupled from the wedding ceremony, a ritual event that asks a participatory public to avow, or disavow, the form and force of its connections with each other, and with various state apparatuses in or against whose name those connections are made. In so doing, I move from J.L. Austin to Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, whose Love Art Laboratory project uses the wedding ceremony to initiate a different sort of repeating with respect to the Iraq War, whereby “I do” becomes “I do not.”*

*Keywords:* Same-Sex Marriage; Ritual; J.L. Austin; Annie Sprinkle; Beth Stephens; Iraq War

In November 2005, American queer performance artist and political gadfly Tim Miller brought his most recent solo creation, *Us*, launched at P.S. 122 in New York the previous September, to the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. It is in part a frenetic romp through the original cast recordings of the classic era of Anglo-American musical comedy—from *Gypsy* and *My Fair Lady* to *Oliver!* and *Man of La Mancha*. These shows, we learn, helped shape and define Miller’s queer adolescent identity during an especially fraught period of American history, when the nation, as now, was divided over both foreign and social policy issues. Thus, Miller’s reminiscences of how, as a sixth-grader in southern California, he planned to flee to Canada to avoid the Vietnam draft (he was anticipating a long war) are related against the backdrop of Mitch Leigh, Joe Darion, and Dale Wasserman’s 1965 Tony Award-winning

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adaptation of Cervantes, about another kind of national inquisition and mass exodus. And relating why, during the same period, he spoke with an English accent, Miller reveals a pronounced nostalgia for the homosocial communities of boy pickpockets and bachelor professors on offer in the most famous works by Lionel Bart and Lerner and Loewe, respectively.

*Plus ça change.* Indeed, given the invasion of Iraq and the debates over same-sex marriage rights that necessarily frame Miller's performance, *Us* is also, more proximately, a searing indictment, on the eve of its reelection, of George W. Bush's administration. As Miller hastens to point out at the start of the show, Bush's immigration and civil rights policies discriminate against bi-national same-sex couples, forcing Miller and his Scots-Australian partner to live daily with the possibility of having to relocate outside the USA in order to remain together (an issue Miller first explored in 1999's *Glory Box*). Watching Miller's performance alongside my show tune-loving partner, Richard, it was hard (despite our own pronounced ambivalence on the issue) not to feel smug and self-congratulatory, especially given how recently Canada, under Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin, had legalized same-sex marriage in Bill C-38.<sup>1</sup> Miller plays to such sentiments shamelessly, especially when, near the end of the show, he describes a visit to the Rainbow Bridge that connects Canada and the United States at Niagara Falls, and how this becomes the perfect metaphor for his own domestic situation. To the strains of Barbra Streisand belting out "Don't Rain on My Parade," from *Funny Girl* (1964), Miller notes that his visit just happens to coincide with an annual tug-of-war contest waged between Canadian and American federal law enforcement officers. Imagining himself as the rope, Miller sees himself being pulled between both countries, not wanting to leave the land of his birth and his greatest artistic success, but, as the robust Royal Canadian Mounted Police's victory portentously suggests, finding that the escape route to Canada he planned at age ten may in fact have to be traveled after all.

Flash forward to June 2006. A year has passed since Bill C-38 became law. However, Canada has a new minority government, and Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, acting on a campaign promise, and in defiance of public opinion polls, has vowed to re-open the debate around same-sex marriage by holding a free vote on the issue in late fall. In this, Harper is following the lead of Bush, whose desultory support for a proposed constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage failed to gather enough votes in the US Senate earlier the same month. According to *New Yorker* staff writer Hendrik Hertzberg, Bush's lukewarm endorsement of the legislation was a "performance piece, a political pageant aimed at energizing the Christianist wing of the Republican 'base' for the midterm elections while distracting public attention from the Iraq war" (29). Likewise, Harper's barely believable posturing over the vote (soundly defeated on December 7, 2006) was at once a cynical sop to the religious right in his party and a way of avoiding close public scrutiny of his government's decision, soon after taking power, to extend Canada's combat role in Afghanistan through to February 2009. Playing, like Miller, to partisan local audiences, Bush and Harper enjoyed a momentary *coup de théâtre* around marriage that overshadowed the larger funereal dramas being played out on the world stage.

In this paper, I want to explore, among other things, the language of love and war that has attended the performative representation, public reception, and private regulation of the North American same-sex marriage debate in various local, transnational, and global contexts. What is at stake, I ask, in the very performance of publicity and privacy inherent in the marriage ceremony itself? That is, how does the public assent of private persons to enter into a conjugal/legal relationship bring with it not only additional privacy rights but also enact (in a Habermasian extension of J.L. Austin) said persons' full entry into the "bourgeois public sphere" via the performative utterance of "I do"? More to the point, how and why are those stakes raised when such performances are opened up to what Michael Warner has called "counterpublics of sexuality and gender" (*Publics* 57)? Are these counterpublics then at risk of being coopted, "normalized," and de-radicalized, as Warner himself contends (see *Trouble*), by the very institutional structures they seek to transform? Or might those institutions, including the institution of marriage, be exposed as only tangentially—and comparatively recently in modern history—connected to the discourses of heterosexuality and the family with which they are routinely aligned? And might this, in turn, allow for a twenty-first-century *ritual* reinvention of the public sphere as a truly radical experiment in participatory democracy? As my italicization of the word "ritual" is here meant to suggest, in my analysis of these and related questions, I want to focus as much on the theatre of, and the different audiences hailed by, the performative representation of same-sex nuptials, as on the promiscuous political ideologies and affective embodiments underscoring them. The specific acts of same-sex marriage I examine in these pages are, for practical and theoretical reasons, largely those confined to the stage; I do not attempt, in what follows, any sort of ethnographic account of individual couples' ceremonies. Rather, I want to use the heterotopic, mimetic space of the theatre to examine how traditional definitions of marriage might be otherwise imagined, and how, in the process, a theatre public might be both radicalized and radically transformed.

Let me be clear: in no way do I wish to be aligned with the largely assimilationist social politics of neoconservative public intellectuals like Andrew Sullivan, in the United States, or neoliberal poster boys Kevin Bourassa and Joe Varnell, in Canada. Their respective positions, arrived at differently, are nonetheless coeval: same-sex marriage is a fundamental human right, bestowing upon queers that ultimate marker of full citizenship—access to official, respectable coupledness and family recognition. However, neither do I endorse without question the discourse of exceptionalism that seems to me to characterize much of the recent work of anti-social and anti-reproductive queer theorists (see, for example, Edelman). Thus, I agree, on the one hand, with both Michael Warner and the Law Commission of Canada that we must move "beyond" questions of conjugality and the whole "recognition drama" in debating the terms of marriage as legal institution (Warner, *Trouble* 131).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, I also want to redirect our attention to the ritual dramas embedded within the gay wedding ceremony as theatrical production, one that stages, however tenuously and temporarily, a "participatory public" based on activist spectatorship. This kind of spectatorship, according to Jill Dolan, takes the shared sense of

belonging fostered by the performance itself as a potential model for other forms of social interaction, encouraging audience members “to be active in other public spheres, to participate in civic conversations that performance perhaps begins” (*Utopia* 11). In shifting the focus from rights to *rites*, I am following the lead of Elizabeth Freeman. In her book *The Wedding Complex* she argues compellingly that the “forms of belonging” enacted in the wedding ceremony and the formal legitimation enfranchised in marriage law are not reducible to one another. Further, she contends that multiplying “the sites, scenes, and rituals” produced, on a small scale, by the former can lead to “participation in larger group endeavors” aimed at remaking the world via means of social interaction not institutionalized by local state apparatuses (167, 168). As Freeman puts it:

The power of the wedding lies in its ability to make worlds through doing symbolic and aesthetic work on affiliation, attachment, and belonging, and in the way it preserves exactly what it claims to renounce: cultural possibilities for organizing social life beyond either the marital or mass imaginary. This constitutive contradiction between what weddings can do and what marriage law really does might be one reason people cry at weddings. (44)

To put this another way, as the main question I want to take up in the remainder of this paper: to what extent can a queer performance of “I do” function simultaneously as a performatively queer “I don’t”? That is, how might we read the alternate forms of kinship enacted via the queer exploitation and theatricalization of what Chrys Ingraham has called the “wedding-industrial complex” (25–76) as signaling a conscious disidentification from other forms of coupling or private partnerships sanctioned by the state, including the associated political and commercial relationships that shore up the “military-industrial complex”? This returns me to my opening detour through Tim Miller and the proximate relationship between same-sex marriage and the war on terror in Canada and the United States, and provides, also, one possible answer to the question: why gay marriage now? In the transnational (in)security state that has grown up in North America post-9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, Republican Senator Rick Santorum has called the defense of traditional heterosexual marriage “the ultimate homeland security” (quoted in Hulse A19). What such rhetoric suggests to me is that local performances of queer weddings pose a particular challenge to dominant social formations because they demonstrate that what unites us most in terms of global politics is, to paraphrase Judith Butler, a shared sense of the tenuousness and vulnerability of *all* our attachments to others (*Precarious* 20). As Butler has noted elsewhere, in connection with Sophocles’ *Antigone*, marriages, like funerals, are “forms of doing” that performatively repeat and reinstate kinship as a scandalously public ceremonial relationship that is inherently equivocal and contingent (*Antigone* 57–58).<sup>3</sup> This might be why so many of the theatrical representations of (same-sex) marriage I examine below are interrupted and/or framed by funeral rites.

I explore the performative and political backdrop to these and other questions by first reviewing both the deconstructive and dramaturgical uses to which J.L. Austin’s most famous example of performative utterance has been put by queer theory. My

aim here is to show how performance theory's own longstanding interest in questions of ritual and repetition contributes productively to a similar reimagining of the social relationships envisioned by and enacted in the wedding ceremony. I then turn to discussions, representations, and enactments of same-sex marriage in recent theatre and performance art. After focusing briefly on Cheek by Jowl's and Charles Mee's queer takes on two of Shakespeare's more iconic marriage plots, I compare the New York premieres of Paul Rudnick's *Regrets Only* and Terrence McNally's *Some Men*, both conventionally realist dramas that anchored the 2006/7 subscription seasons at the Manhattan Theatre Club and Second Stage Theatre, respectively. I conclude by examining in more depth the ongoing *Love Art Laboratory* project of the now four times married performance and visual artists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens.

In direct response to both the "violence of war" and the "anti-gay marriage movement," and in collaboration with various friends, family, and communities, Sprinkle and Stephens have combined theatre, film, the internet, activism, and, once a year, a "performance art wedding," as part of a seven-year "love-experiment" based on the themes and colors of the chakras, and structurally inspired by Linda Montano's 1984–1998 durational performance piece *14 Years of Living Art* (see [loveartlab.org](http://loveartlab.org)). In January 2007, Sprinkle and Stephens' third wedding ceremony took place in Calgary, as part of One Yellow Rabbit Theatre's twenty-first annual High Performance Rodeo; it was the first time the event was open to the public (previous weddings in New York and San Francisco were by invitation only, although both ceremonies were streamed live over the internet) and it also resulted in Sprinkle and Stephens becoming legally married for the first time. I examine, then, the intersection of local and trans-national politics enacted in this latest ceremony, as well as the larger genealogy of feminist and queer ritual protest and activist spectatorship Sprinkle and Stephens' wedding archive engages.

### Performance's Modes

Notably, political debates around same-sex marriage in the North American public sphere since the mid-1990s have coincided with the emergence of J.L. Austin's 1962 text *How to Do Things with Words*—and especially his discussion therein of the exemplary "I do" utterances normally exchanged at weddings—as foundational to the ongoing development and refinement of queer theories of performativity. Here I am referring especially to the pioneering work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In a pair of dialogically linked essays published in the inaugural issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* in 1993, the two scholars redirect attention to the queer possibilities, and infelicities, implicit in Austin's theorization of speech acts. To be sure, the recourse to Austin is somewhat grudging and decidedly instrumentalist (especially in the case of Butler, who appears to have turned to Austin, largely by way of Derrida, in an effort to clear up what she claims were misunderstandings and misapplications of the theory of gender performativity she outlined in *Gender Trouble*).

Nevertheless, both Sedgwick and Butler single out the “centrality of the marriage ceremony in . . . Austin’s examples of performativity” in order to suggest, “[H]eterosexualization of the social bond is the paradigmatic form for those speech acts which bring about what they name,” and to ask, “[W]hat happens to the performative when its purpose is precisely to undo the presumptive force of the heterosexual ceremonial?” (Butler “Critically” 17). Answering this question, for each theorist, means first “undoing” the naturalness, stability, agency, and authoritative presence of Austin’s speaking subject, the “I” who names, and focusing instead on the discursive conditions, and conventions, that name that “I,” as, for example, heterosexual or homosexual, married or unmarried, ashamed or melancholy. Indeed, it is precisely by recuperating for analysis and discussion those specifically “unhappy” conditions Austin enumerates as contributing to a given utterance’s failure to do the thing it says it will do—a violation of accepted convention or procedure, the involvement of an inappropriate person or persons, the possession of an insincere thought or feeling (Austin 14–15)—that Sedgwick and Butler construct their affective and melancholic theories of sexual and gender identity as political and performative projects of disavowal, of ever fully or freely saying what one means or doing what one says.

This points, in turn, as Sedgwick has elsewhere noted, to the witness role within spaces and contexts of performative utterance generally, and the spatial context of the wedding ceremony more specifically. In her more recent work on performativity, Sedgwick has focused on what she calls “periperformative utterances.” These are utterances that are not in themselves explicitly performative in the referentially indicative and active sense described by Austin (i.e., they do what they say), but that “cluster around,” comment on, respond to, or even negate explicitly performative utterances (e.g., “I do not”). In elaborating this distinction, Sedgwick returns to the marriage ceremony “as a kind of fourth wall or invisible proscenium arch that moves through the world” demanding consensus from the community of compulsory witnesses it recruits to ratify “the legitimacy of its privilege . . . Like the most conventional definition of a play, marriage is constituted as a spectacle that denies its audience the ability either to look away from it or equally to intervene in it” (*Touching* 72). And yet, precisely by reminding us of the theatricality of the wedding ceremony, and by attempting to effect something of a rapprochement between linguistic and dramaturgical theories of performance, Sedgwick demonstrates that it is possible to disrupt and decentre the authority and direction of the performative event itself, by changing the terms of its reference, the space of its enunciation, or the response of its addressees.

Of course, Austin, like his student John Searle, famously dismissed theatrical utterance as “parasitic” and “etiolated,” spoken not in “ordinary circumstances” but as part of a “non-serious,” essentially fictive context, and so deliberately excluded from the purview of his analysis (Austin 22, see also Searle). But even Butler, who would later distance herself from theatrical applications of performativity in, for example, her Austinian examination of the illocutionary force of hate speech (see *Excitable*), first articulated her performative theory of gender (in *Theatre Journal*, no

less) as a way of “dramatizing” its social operations. In Butler’s now famous prescription, gender becomes “*a corporeal style*, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ itself carries the double-meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential’” (“Performative” 521–22). Moreover, in that same article, Butler draws equally from the phenomenological writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Victor Turner’s important anthropological/performance studies investigations of ritual social dramas (including weddings). In so doing, she points out that gender, like marriage, coheres as a normative concept and thus gains social legitimacy only to the extent that the “mundane” everyday enactments that underscore this illusion of coherence, and the “mundane” social audience that places its faith in the power of that illusion, are constituted in and ritually repeated over time (519–20).

Thinking, in this way, about both the “social temporality” (Butler “Performative” 520) of the wedding ceremony and the spatial relations of community witness it presupposes for its performative and political sanction (Sedgwick “Queer” 3), forces us to acknowledge that the “stylized repetition of acts” that helps constitute marriage as perhaps *the* preeminent human social drama in Western culture also reveals the general arbitrariness, internal discontinuities, and potential misapplications of such acts. This in turn suggests “the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style” (Butler “Performative” 520).

Here, let me suggest that Turner’s discussion of ritual as a liminal process, a threshold experience that has the potential to transform not just the participants involved but also the larger social order in which it is embedded, is a useful way to begin thinking about the “anti-structural” possibilities of queer weddings. That is, the same-sex wedding ritual need not simply reify the *de facto* equivalence of celebrant and legal subject, or of witness and compulsory arbiter of institutionalized norms, but might also earnestly imagine and playfully exploit different frameworks of everyday social relation and, by extension, political recognition. As Turner defines it, “anti-structure” is that moment in a ritual’s performance “when the past is [temporarily] negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance” (44). For Turner, such moments are played out not in the indicative mood, as Austin’s theories of performativity would have us believe, but rather in the subjunctive mood, that which expresses a “wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis” (83). A fantasy of “as if-ness” that corresponds roughly with Jill Dolan’s recent theorization of the theatre as a utopian performative space,<sup>4</sup> the subjunctive performance of marriage demands a rewriting of the traditional wedding vows. In such a rewriting the repetition of “I do take thee . . .” as an active expression of individual entitlement might be replaced by any number of activist invocations of collective possibility: “If we were to do this . . .”; “If we were to do this differently . . .”; or even “If we decided not to do this . . . what might we become?” Let me turn to some recent theatrical fantasies of “as if-ness” to explore more closely the structure and anti-structure of same-sex marriage’s ritual representation and repetition on stage.



### Marriage's Moods

Long before Edward Hall's Propeller Theatre made a vogue of the return to all-male casting in contemporary productions of Shakespeare, another British company devoted to bold re-interpretations of the classics, Cheek by Jowl (CBJ), wowed audiences with its same-sex take on *As You Like It*. Originally staged by co-artistic directors Declan Donnellan (director) and Nick Ormerod (designer) as part of CBJ's 1991/92 season, the production was revived for a world tour in 1994, with Adrian Lester reprising his star turn as Rosalind. That tour rolled into the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Majestic Theatre at the beginning of October for a week-long run that neatly coincided with Canadian Thanksgiving, thus affording Richard and I, on one of our earliest theatrical long weekends in New York City as a couple, a first glimpse of a company whose work we would come to follow most devotedly.

At the time, as a new PhD student only beginning to immerse myself in the emergent field of queer theory, what struck me was how simply—and how compellingly—CBJ's same-sex casting conceit laid bare the play's structural ambiguities and asymmetries around the theatricality of gender. This was exploited from the outset, with the entire cast assembling on stage as house lights dimmed, dressed in identical masculine uniforms of black pants and white shirts. As the actor who will eventually take on the role of Jaques (a swishy Michael Gardiner) here transposes and utters the famous lines from his "Seven Ages of Man" speech in Act 2, Scene 7—"All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players"—the actors playing Rosalind (Lester) and Celia (Simon Coates) cross stage left and stand apart from the rest of the company, their imposing male physiques impressed upon us visually in order to make all the more incongruous their subsequent transformation into demure *ingénues* of court, in full-length white gowns. And, indeed, when in Arden we are finally presented with scenes of Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) instructing Orlando (Scott Handy) in the art of wooing, it is hard not to interpret the spectacle of a man (a six-foot-tall black one, at that) playing a woman playing a man playing a woman as an explicit comment on the fluidity of gender and sexuality, and on the homoerotics of early modern theatrical practice more generally.

And so the production has been analyzed by a host of other scholars (Bulman, Solomon). In retrospect, however, what strikes me as most bold (unwittingly so, perhaps) about this production is the implicit commentary on and critique of the institution of marriage it offers through its ritual "recasting" of the play's final scene in a same-sex paradigm. Donnellan and Ormerod, partners off stage as well as on, cannily insert their work into the discourse around gay marriage only then beginning to gather momentum in North America (as in Europe). They also bring out (quite literally) the performative and political impediments to marriage's successful enactment already embedded within Shakespeare's play.

Of particular importance, in this regard, is the fact that none of the four marriages that are to be celebrated at the play's conclusion—between Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Silvius and Phebe, and Touchstone and Audrey—is actually given, in Lisa Hopkins' words, "performative validity" (20). That is, no one actually

pronounces (in Austin's sense of the illocutionary function of the linguistic performative) any of the couples husband and wife: not the god Hymen, whom Rosalind (now divested of her Ganymede costume) initially drags on stage with the express purpose of accomplishing said task, and not Duke Senior, to whom Hymen just as quickly transfers the responsibility. As Hopkins notes, traditional comic closure is deconstructed in *As You Like It*, with the structural telos of the epithalamium seemingly set in motion by the Duke's closing rhyming couplet—"Proceed, proceed. We'll so begin these rites,/As we do trust they'll end, in true delights" (V. iv. 186–87)—immediately forestalled and undercut by Rosalind's epilogue. Her concluding address to the audience takes us out of the ritual temporality of Arden's free-play of anti-structural sexual possibility and returns us to the mundane social temporality of the play's real-world production (Hopkins 21). Equally important is the fact that this temporal switch is accompanied by a corollary shift in grammatical mood, with the actor playing Rosalind invoking the subjunctive: "If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me" (V. iv. 202–3). This switch gestures playfully to "the homoerotic foundations of the play's marital structure" (DiGangi 286), but also highlights both the dramaturgical and the social constraints imposed by the normative regulation of the sexed body in contemporary society. Given that all four of the couples about to be married in the fictional world of CBJ's production were, in reality, of the same sex, I read Donnellan and Ormerod's staging of the impossible subjunctivity/subjectivity of this scene (retrospectively, to be sure) as an explicit statement about the limits, at least at that historical juncture, of a different sort of marital relation/repetition. And here I take Shakespeare himself, as much as the institution of marriage, to be a performative stand-in for the problem of ever fully or completely re-stylizing or breaking with tradition.

The general seriousness with which I recall these interrupted nuptial proceedings being played (Orlando thinks long and hard before finally acceding to Rosalind's proposal, and Lester's Rosalind delivers her final epilogue soberly, in the harsher, more striated lighting previously associated with the closed social world of the court) also bears examination. The subdued comic tone can be interpreted as offering those audience members wont to embrace the production as a participatory plea for sexual tolerance and social recognition of gay relationships a cautionary warning about the potential costs of institutionalized marriage for any of its celebrants. To this end, that old-school queer Jaques' jibe to Touchstone (Peter Needham) that his "loving voyage/Is but for two months victualled" (V. iv. 180–81), and his postponing, in this production, of his withdrawal to the Duke's former cave hideaway in order to indulge his own favorite "pastime" of picking up men, should not merely be dismissed as sour grapes or unseemly and outmoded behavior. Rather, what Jaques has earlier identified (in Act 4, Scene 1) as his gender melancholia needs to be evaluated carefully in terms of what of queerness's political past (cf. Duke Senior's plangent homosocial reflections on his genuine affection for Orlando's recently deceased father, Sir Rowland), and what of its performative present (cf. the pansexual Eden Duke Senior creates out of his forest hideaway in Arden), must be sacrificed to the futurity of

marriage as sanctioned by the state (for instance, in the court of Duke Frederick, hetero-patriarchal customs like primogeniture still hold sway). Again, in CBJ's production of the play, the slipperiness of this particular slope is signaled by a trick of casting, with the benevolent libertine Duke Senior and the power-mad opportunist Duke Frederick both performed by the same actor (David Hobbs).

If the civil wars (between the two Dukes, and between Orlando and Oliver) that underpin much of the action in *As You Like It* are ultimately contained by the play's overarching teleology of marital (en)closure, the opening prologue of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reminds us that marriage can in fact be a literal spoil of war. Theseus, Duke of Athens, has won Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in battle, and he can barely contain himself in counting down the "four happy days" to their "nuptial hour" (I. i. 1–2). In contrast, Hippolyta sees the future tense of marriage "bending" time to a social contract that seems to foreclose on woman's desire (Theseus likens the moon, which he casts as the main impediment to the dawning of his wedding day, to "a stepdame or a dowager") and open out only onto the "young man's revenue": "Four days will quickly steep themselves in night,/Four nights will quickly dream away the time," is how Hippolyta describes her own suspended state (I. i. 5–8).

However, in Charles Mee's updating of Shakespeare's *Dream* in his recent multicultural romp *A Perfect Wedding*, it is the groom who gets cold feet. When Amadou disappears into the forest adjacent to his fiancée Meridee's family compound, she fears he intends to leave her at the altar, and so promptly gives chase. She is joined by the various members of her large and complicated family: her divorced parents, Maria and Frank; the parents' new lovers, François and Edmund; siblings Jonathan and Tessa; and their respective partners, Ariel and James. Amadou's own parents, Djamila and Vikram, and his younger brother, Willy, soon turn up, as does a posse of gay wedding planners, here updating Shakespeare's mechanicals in more ways than one. The play premiered in 2004 in Los Angeles, in a Center Theatre Group production directed by Gordon Davidson. Its Canadian premiere took place two years later, at Vancouver's Studio 58, a student-training program at Langara College that produces some of the most provocative theatre in the city. The Studio 58 production was guest-directed and guest-designed by Sherry Yoon and Jay Dodge, respectively; together, they form the artistic director and producer team behind Boca del Lupo, another highly respected local company known for its environmental, collaborative, and intensely physical approach to theatre-making.

Charles Mee is perhaps best known as the resident playwright of Anne Bogart's SITI Company, for which he has written several memorable "artists' plays," including *bobrauschenbergamerica* and *Hotel Cassiopeia* (about Joseph Cornell). Alongside this work, however, Mee has also been quietly rewriting the canon of ancient Greek drama as part of his "re-making project," pillaging the plots of Euripides and Aeschylus especially to make bold theatrical statements about love and war that might be relevant to twenty-first-century audiences. In the case of *Big Love*, for example, Mee scored the biggest success of his career by updating Aeschylus' *Suppliants* as a romance about mariticide set in a fantasy villa on Italy's Amalfi coast, where 49 of the 50 Danaids eventually murder their would-be husbands rather than submit to

arranged marriages of which they want no part. Indeed, in Mee's work death always closely shadows love, and funeral rites have an uncanny way of interrupting and upstaging the best-laid wedding plans.

So it is with *A Perfect Wedding*, whose dramatic climax centres, in Act 2, around an impromptu burial ceremony for Meridee's grandmother, Georgette, who has suffered an untimely heart attack on her way to officiate at Meridee's wedding. This formal reversal involves a kinship ritual that momentarily suspends both audience and characters between life and death, with the rival sets of in-laws trading the literal mudslinging that closed Act 1 for a more dignified coming together to aid a disconsolate Frank (Raphael Kepinski) in digging his mother's grave. One of the most thrilling aspects of Yoon and Dodge's production of the play at Studio 58 was in fact how "earthy" they made things, with Dodge bringing something of Boca del Lupo's site-specific outdoor aesthetic to his improvised black box recreation of a forest floor, and Yoon clearly instructing her young actors to get as down and dirty as possible. Meridee's (Trisha Cundy) white wedding dress becomes an important symbol here; crisp and clean when she slips into it just prior to going off in search of Amadou (Hamza Adam), by the end of the play it is tattered and streaked with black mud. This, I argue, is a subtle visual telescoping of the subjunctive mood embedded in the more archaic version of the performative wedding vow included in *The Book of Common Prayer*, "Till death us do part," which just happens to be cited by Tessa (Emmelia Gordon) at the outset of the play as a promise impossible to keep.

The gay wedding planners, it turns out, also do funerals and know all the "basic rituals," and so they lead the assembled party in a Tibetan mourning chant for Georgette. Ever practical, planners Isaac (Jon Lachlan Stewart) and Dieter (Jason Andrews) also decide they shouldn't let all of their preparations for Meridee and Amadou's wedding go to waste—that they should, in Isaac's words, "have it for ourselves." And so Isaac, who earlier in the play claimed he was "not the sort who wants to just be leaping into the mainstream/and losing my/specialness" (Mee), formally proposes to Dieter, and Dieter duly accepts. This culminates in a grand, Bollywood-style dance number which in turn inspires Meridee to declare her true feelings for Ariel (Miriam Westland), and Tessa for Amadou.

However, while all of this was performed with joyously infectious abandon by Yoon's young, rainbow-colored cast, I couldn't help feeling that embedded within the mish-mash of ceremonial rites on offer in Mee's play is a caveat about the risks faced by minority groups, in particular, who seek to adapt their own "special" ways of being and becoming to dominant cultural traditions. I base this assessment, in part, on Djamila's (Melissa Oei) earlier attempts, in Act 1, to describe her ritual deflowering and female circumcision. What for her is a legitimate sexual and religious rite of passage is for the other characters—and presumably for most in the audience—only intelligible within a paradigm of "patriarchy and property/and handing girls over to new owners" (Mee), to whom they are thereafter bound. In other words, there might be something fundamentally gay about planning a wedding, but the institution of marriage remains resolutely straight-laced.

That the North American wedding industry is serviced largely by the labor of a queer creative class is the central ironic premise of Paul Rudnick's latest play, *Regrets Only*. A bagatelle of a comedy as thin as the Nan Kempner-like frame of its female lead, Christine Baranski, and shamelessly exploiting the prevailing cultural zeitgeist around same-sex marriage, the play premiered at the Manhattan Theatre Club in October 2006 under the direction of longtime Rudnick collaborator Christopher Ashley. Having just seen Raul Esparza's brilliant turn as the ambivalent, commitment-wary Bobby in John Doyle's stripped-down Broadway revival of Stephen Sondheim's *Company*, I admit to being especially eager to receive what I hoped would be the sharper edges of Rudnick's *aperçus* about the not-so-genteel protocols of marriage among polite society (to quote Sondheim's Joanne, "It's the little things you do together"). Michael Yeargan's set, with its hard right angles, gleaming surfaces, and abundance of cut crystal, seemed to bode well in this regard. That the political critique I was seeking from *Regrets Only* was, in the end, more muted than militant is perhaps a function as much of the play's strict formal adherence to the surface dramatic conventions of the drawing-room comedy as it is Rudnick's failure, on the level of content, to explore in any real depth the social and sexual inequities embedded within bourgeois conventions of marriage.

Nevertheless, as I surveyed the moneyed, mostly white, mostly straight, mostly post-Boomer audience laughing appreciatively at Rudnick's rapid-fire wit, I wondered how many of them were actually in on the play's biggest joke. That is, I wondered how many of them understood that amid all the gentle barbs and light comic banter exchanged by the characters, Rudnick was actually reflecting back to them—as he did in an equally safe and non-threatening way in the screenplay for *In and Out*—the queer foundations of their companionate marriages? There were enough to extend the run at City Center (and allow Richard and I a chance to catch a performance over the Christmas holidays), but not enough, apparently, to send the production to Broadway.

The play focuses on the relationship between Hank Hadley (George Grizzard), a successful fashion designer in the mould of Bill Blass, and his best friend and frequent muse, Tibby McCullough (Baranski), a Park Avenue society hostess. Tibby's busy lawyer husband, Jack (David Rasche), has for many years been more than happy to cede his marital duties as Tibby's social escort to Hank, and as Act 1 opens Hank is slowly returning to his role as Tibby's chaste gay walker following the death of his long-time partner. However, before Tibby and Hank can get out of the door, the McCulloughs' daughter, Spencer (Diane Davis), hijacks the proceedings, announcing her recent engagement. The ensuing family celebrations (in which Hank is warmly included) are in turn interrupted by a phone call. It's the President, and he wants Jack to come to Washington to help draft a potential constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Jack's resolve to do so, and Spencer's eagerness to apply her own legal mind to the endeavor, chafes against Hank's hitherto quiescent political sensibilities. As a result, he sets in motion a "what if" scenario designed to underscore the invisible (and illegitimate) sexual citizenship of an entire economic subgroup that works to ensure the smooth operation of bourgeois culture's presumptively heteronormative

social rituals. In other words, Hank uses his own myriad connections in the fashion world to call for a queer general strike. What would happen, Rudnick satirically (and subjunctively) asks, if all the florists, hairdressers, caterers, designers, make-up artists, and personal assistants in New York suddenly walked off the job?

The answer to this question, in Act 2, comes mostly in the form of a series of sight gags: Tibby in a fright wig; Tibby's mother, Marietta (played by the incomparable Sian Phillips), somehow managing to look chic in garbage bags; and the McCulloughs' wisecracking maid, Myra (Mary Testa, taking over from Jackie Hoffman), suddenly out of uniform, surprising everyone but Hank with the revelation that she will be joining in the job action. If these images do not cumulatively add up to an entirely satisfying examination of the differential rights that accrue to minority groups through the social contract, the play does theatricalize just how expansively the family compact can be opened up to different forms of affective attachment and performative belonging through its ceremonial rites—not least the cocktail hour. In this, as several reviewers have noted, Rudnick has crafted a *Philadelphia Story* for the twenty-first century, with Tibby and Hank's devotion to each other, like Cary Grant's and Kate Hepburn's, comprising perhaps the queerest form of marriage of all.

It was in Philadelphia, in the summer of 2006, that Terrence McNally premiered *Some Men*, his non-chronological, episodic take on North American gay history from the 1920s to the present. However, by the time the play arrived at New York's Second Stage Theater, in March 2007, it had undergone substantial revision. Originally conceived as a play-cum-revue about gay men and the musical divas they supposedly worship (the Judys, the Barbras, the Lizas), the Philadelphia version of the play featured a large ensemble (including two female actors, Suzanne Douglas and Barbara Walsh) and its serial structure was anchored by as many live as canned musical moments. In tinkering with the show for its New York opening, McNally reduced the cast size (eliminating completely the female roles) and turned the remaining show tunes into a kind of incidental mood music for his *Cavalcade*-like exploration of eight decades of modern gay life. As a result, his diachronic take on that life comes across as an uncharacteristically glib rhetorical representation of successive moments of historical struggle that the playwright had previously mined in much more satisfyingly synchronic, and even dialectical, ways in earlier all-male-cast plays like *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Corpus Christi*. That marriage is represented in *Some Men* as the *de facto*—and dramaturgical—culmination of this struggle accounts in no small measure for my initial negative reaction to the play's overly hortatory tone.

That said, the play's particular (anti-)structure can be viewed, in some senses, as a staged battle between the indicative and subjunctive moods of performance. For while *Some Men* opens with the assembled company gathered to witness and celebrate a same-sex wedding in a swanky ballroom at the Waldorf, the solemnization of the vows is interrupted by the theatrical equivalent of Sedgwick's periperformative relays. A series of chronologically and spatially itinerant scenes ensues, imagining all that might have been, or all that might have been done differently, prior to the present-day frame of marital concupiscence. To his credit, McNally does offer up multiple "as

if” scenarios for the ways in which relationships of same-sex eroticism and kinship might be conceived as temporarily suspending the ritual repetition of straight time (most clearly and productively in the bathhouse and cyber-chat scenes); however, the fact remains that the play, aided in part by director Trip Cullman’s swift pacing and liberal use of blackouts, moves, in Jill Dolan’s words, “inexorably toward marriage as its final, most meaningful, right, true act of faith” (“Terrence”).

In concluding his play with “an emphatic ‘I do’” (Dolan “Terrence”), McNally forces his audience to accede dramaturgically and ideologically to the inevitable conflation of the theatrical rite this speech act performs and the political right it consequently stands in for. He also very nearly succeeds in evacuating previous scenes of the force of their periperformative protest, in which the failure to say, or the constraints placed upon saying, explicitly what one means, who one is, or what or who one desires paradoxically enacts a referential evasion of dominant regimes of social regulation and sexual prohibition. I am referring, here, to what for me remains the play’s most powerful scene, when a gay veteran of the Iraq war (played by Frederick Weller) approaches the ex-Army general father (Don Amendolia) of his closeted dead lover at the latter’s military funeral. Struggling to convey to the older man just what exactly his son meant to him within the rhetorical limits imposed by “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” becomes a productive circumlocutionary way for the younger soldier to preserve something of the alternative possibilities heralded by their relationship, of ensuring that that relationship, in Butler’s evocative phrasing, avoids “capture” within a circuit of heteronormative interpellation and legibility. As Butler puts it, in connection with her own analysis of the “incommensurability between performativity and referentiality” in the US military’s policy on homosexuality: “[O]ne of the tasks of a critical production of alternative homosexualities will be to *disjoin* homosexuality from the figures by which it is conveyed in dominant discourse” (*Excitable* 108, 125). Who would have thought that one of those figures might some day be marriage?

And who would have thought that legendary “post-porn performance artist” Annie Sprinkle would one day end up exploring both the personal politics and the performative possibilities afforded by the ritual repetition of this institution? So far in my analysis of recent theatrical representations of same-sex marriage, I have been focusing exclusively on male playwrights/theatre artists working within a more or less conventionally naturalistic style. These works have not afforded much opportunity to discuss the specific performative dynamics of the queer wedding ceremony itself, which is repeatedly postponed, interrupted, or only ever imagined as a hypothetical possibility. In turning to analyze Sprinkle and partner Beth Stephens’ ongoing seven-year *Love Art Laboratory* project, not only do questions of gender difference, and of women’s different social, political, and economic investments in the institution of marriage, come to the fore; the careful grounding of each of their successively staged weddings in explicitly feminist and Fluxus performance art traditions also asks us to consider how the very form of the evolving ceremonial contributes to a ritual re-imagining of the various modes of belonging said ceremonial both calls into being and into question. And, here, I argue that one very successful part of that evolution

has been the gradual merging—via, among other things, a strategic use of the internet and a variety of satellite installations and shows—of Sprinkle and Stephens’ at once private and public, local and global, audiences into an expressly theatrical counter-public, a participatory wedding party that asks us to rethink “the ways we understand marriage and the subjects who produce and are produced by it” (Conway 168).

Sprinkle, best known for exposing her cervix on stage in her one-woman illustrated performance piece *Post-Porn Modernist* (1989–95), first met Stephens, a multimedia artist and academic, in New York in 1989. The two became reacquainted in 2001, shortly after Sprinkle relocated to the west coast to pursue a PhD in sexology at San Francisco’s Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. In 2003, following the United States’ invasion of Iraq, the couple registered as legal domestic partners under California state law in order “to propose love as an alternative vision to the war” (loveartlab.org). When San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom started handing out marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples in early 2004, Sprinkle and Stephens made an appointment to tie the knot at City Hall, only to have the Supreme Court of California put a stop to these ceremonies a day before their scheduled wedding. And so they decided to draw on their own artistic training, and on their many contacts in the overlapping theatre, activist, and sex communities of which they are both a part, to create a series of “performance art weddings” to be staged in different locations across North America over the next seven years. Thus was born the *Love Art Laboratory*, a collaborative theatrical experiment based on the themes and colors of the chakras (the ancient Sanskrit system of body–mind energy wheels stretching from the base of the spine to the top of the head), and structurally (and politically) modeled on Linda Montano’s important performance piece, *14 Years of Living Art*.

The first year (2005) of Sprinkle and Stephens’ project was focused, as a direct counterpoint to the war in Iraq, around the themes of security and survival, and was inaugurated by the Red Wedding that took place at New York’s Collective Unconscious Theater on December 18, 2004. The collaborative participation not only of Montano but also of legendary Fluxus artist Geoffrey Hendricks in the ceremony is key to understanding how Sprinkle and Stephens are attempting to disrupt and displace the socially mundane act of marriage, turning its ritual repetition into an over-the-top, performative spectacle precisely in order to force us to examine how, as an institution, it comes to police the boundaries of acceptability in everyday life. Including, then, the preeminent performance artist of “everyday life” as part of one’s nuptial celebrations makes perfect sense.

In the best known of her durational art/life performance pieces, Montano spent the years 1984–98 in upstate New York following a rigid daily routine: she wore only clothes that were color-coded to match the chakra she was exploring that year; for three hours a day, she stayed in a similarly colored space; for seven hours a day she listened to a sound pitch associated with that color/chakra; and, at least for the first seven years of the project, she spoke in an accent chosen to evoke that color/chakra. As part of the project, each year Montano, an ex-nun, invited others to collaborate with her as part of an art/life residency she called “Summer Saint Camp.” In 1987, Veronica Vera and Annie Sprinkle spent two weeks at the camp wearing only yellow



and, not surprisingly, getting in touch with their “sex chakras.” At the end of the two weeks, Montano baptized the two women “artists,” an “intensely emotional” event for Sprinkle, then just making the transition from porn star to performance artist (Sprinkle and Vera 116). Above all, what Montano taught Sprinkle was that by living one’s life entirely in “art time,” by attending to the ritual possibilities of each moment, no matter how banal or quotidian, one begins to “wake up” to how the bourgeois public sphere, for example, insulates itself from critique in part through the privatization and normatization of habit (Montano 164). Thus, some rituals relating to sex, gender, and kinship, like opposite-sex marriage, are elevated to the status of an event—and one presumably worth repeating—while others are relegated the non-indicative, *sub rosa* category of caprice.

For Sprinkle and Stephens, then, each of their weddings inaugurates a new subjunctive temporality. The particular anti-structure of their annual live art/art-life nuptial celebrations—where the performative witnessing of Sprinkle and Stephens’ exchange of vows is always secondary to the witnessed performances of their friends and collaborators—sets the stage (quite literally) for the multiple “as if” scenarios of their life together that they will document throughout the coming year in still more performative modalities. These have so far included live body art and video installations (*Cuddle and Kissed*), full-scale touring theatrical productions (*Exposed*), happenings (*Zen for Head*), sex workshops, sermons, various lectures and talks, and year end reports and photo collages posted to their website. One of the “as if” scenarios encountered in the first year of the project was Sprinkle’s diagnosis with stage one breast cancer; true to Montano’s “art time” credo, and in an effort to expose some of the more material effects of the gendering of everyday married life, even this was turned into a performance. Among other things, Sprinkle turned the papers used to blot the iodine injected into the lymph nodes of her breast into a set of her famous “tit prints.” Sprinkle and Stephens celebrated their first (red) wedding almost six years to the day after Montano completed her *14 Years of Living Art* durational performance; fittingly, an audience participation version of Montano’s poem/chant, *Amore*, has been used to start the proceedings of each of their weddings celebrated thus far.

Officiating as Flux Priest at that first Red Wedding was Geoffrey Hendricks. His presence on stage with Sprinkle and Stephens says much about how their project, far more than any of the other performances examined in this paper, successfully decouples marriage as a legal institution from the wedding as a ritual event that makes possible a collective re-imagining of various forms of sexual and social belonging. This subjunctive process of community-making has a long artistic and queer genealogy, one in which, appropriately, straight divorce is anterior to gay marriage. I am referring to the fact that in 1971 Hendricks and his then-wife, Bici, celebrated the dissolution of their ten-year marriage in a collaborative performance event known as the *Fluxdivorce*; they invited friends and family to their New York apartment, where they had assembled various items they had accumulated during their life together—wedding documents, clothes, furniture, photographs, and other mementos. Using everything from scissors to a power saw, they proceeded to cut all

of these items in two. The guests then decamped to the Hendricks' back yard for a symbolic tug-of-war, in which husband and wife were themselves separated, with the men pulling him and the women pulling her, a gendered allusion to the fact that each partner was about to enter into a new, same-sex relationship. Present at that event was the lesbian author and art critic Jill Johnston.<sup>5</sup> When, 22 years later, she decided to take advantage of Denmark's recently passed civil union law for gays and lesbians and marry her Danish partner, Ingrid Nyeboe, Hendricks, who was to visit the country for a retrospective of his work, proposed that they turn the event into another *Fluxwedding* (the first such event, at which Hendricks also officiated, took place in 1977 between George Maciunus and Billie Hutching). The highlight of Johnston and Nyeboe's *Fluxwedding* was an improvised public procession, from Odense's City Hall to the Kunsthallen museum showcasing Hendricks' retrospective. The procession featured, among other things, a great dane as majorette, a red wedding chair borne aloft by attendants whose bodies were painted Hendricks' signature sky blue, dueling boom boxes, a violist playing Danish folk tunes, and an enormous blue wedding dress designed by Danish Fluxus artist Eric Andersen and worn by 30 of Nyeboe's teenage cousins and assorted friends.<sup>6</sup>

In her account of the event, Johnston is critical of only one element of Hendricks' masterminding of the nuptial rites, namely that the requisite wedding video did not include shots of the traditional family portrait session. His response was: "[T]he real family wasn't part of his script, only the 'art family' who helped create the event" (Johnston "Wedding" 220). I mention this because Hendricks' script seems to have found a decidedly more receptive audience in Sprinkle and Stephens, and their co-creators. Indeed, part of what is being "undone" in their wedding project is the idea that marriage is the institutional (and biological) precondition of the normative, nuclear family structure as it has variously been celebrated, defended, lamented, and mourned by religious fundamentalists, political pundits, and talk show hosts across North America. As I have already suggested, the three weddings that have been performed so far have been as much—if not more—about celebrating and collectively experiencing the quirky talents of their extended art (and sex) families (the recombinant inter-relations of which are truly mind-boggling) as they have been about singling out for approval and sanction Sprinkle and Stephens as a couple. To this end, when in the Red Wedding we finally get around to the exchange of marriage vows, Barbara Carrellas, tantric sex educator, theatre artist, partner of Kate Bornstein, fellow Montano collaborator, and the director presiding over the whole event, interrupts the proceedings and, in her self-styled role as the "anti-marriage fairy," hands out pieces of red paper to the assembled guests, instructing them to list ten reasons why marriage is wrong. And, in his role as Flux Priest, Hendricks crucially asks Sprinkle and Stephens to pronounce each other "*unlawfully wedded wife and love/art collaborator*," thereby subsuming the illocutionary force of their social and sexual relationship to the presumably more felicitous perlocutionary outcomes of their artistic collaboration.

In concluding this paper, I think it is important to point out that Sprinkle and Stephens' third nuptial ceremony, the Yellow Wedding (2007), which was organized

around the themes of courage and power, marked a departure from the ritual patterns established in their previous two celebrations in a number of significant ways. (The Orange Wedding took place in San Francisco in July 2006, and a fourth Green Wedding was celebrated in Santa Cruz on May 17, 2008, two days after the California Supreme Court overturned a ban on same-sex marriage in that state.) Chief among them is the fact that this wedding is the first to be celebrated outside the US, with Sprinkle and Stephens taking advantage of Canada's same-sex marriage statutes to get legally married for the first time in a ceremony performed as part of One Yellow Rabbit Theatre's annual High Performance Rodeo, an international festival of the performing arts held every January in Calgary, Alberta. To a certain extent this shifts the focus from subjunctive performative rites of the sort I have been examining above (i.e., what a wedding might suggest about and through the ties that bind) back to indicative political rights (i.e., how a marriage defines one, and what it gets one). Sprinkle acknowledges as much when she comments to Calgary's gay newspaper on the different benefits accrued through California's domestic partnership laws and Canada's same-sex marriage laws (Hatch 10). In this respect, Sprinkle and Stephens are also acutely aware (or were made aware) of the local political resonances of their choice of Calgary as the site of their third wedding. For while same-sex marriage is indeed legal in Canada, the traditionally conservative province of Alberta (home to Prime Minister Harper) was for a long time the lone holdout in complying with the revised parameters of the Civil Marriage Act brought into effect in 2005. Then Premier Ralph Klein threatened to invoke a provision in Canada's Charter that allows federal and provincial legislatures to override certain legal, expression, and equality rights for a temporary period of time. Sprinkle and Stephens tell all of this in their own inimitable way on their website:

We are told that while Calgary has gay marriage rights, there are still a lot of people against gay marriage and who want to abolish it. So we will make our wedding into a public relations fest and a unique performance art event to celebrate our queerness and generate more love for each other and with the Calgary community. (loveartlab.org)

And yet to a certain extent the question of rights remains moot, not least because recognition of Canadian marriages between same-sex partners is highly unlikely in the US, where most state legislatures (including Massachusetts and California) have strict domiciliary requirements, and where the 1996 Defence of Marriage Act explicitly exempts states from recognizing same-sex unions entered into in other regions. Thus, while acknowledging that the battle over gay marriage is far from over on either side of the Canada-US border, it seems to me that to best understand—as Sprinkle and Stephens wish us to understand—how this battle is linked to other battles being fought over, or in the name of, difference in other parts of the world, we need to redirect our attention, in the above quote from the two brides, to how publicity is conjoined with festivity to suggest a possible reimagining of human social relations. Recall that Sprinkle and Stephens were not collaborating with their familiar American circles of friends, family, and fellow artists. Instead, they worked with the staff of High

Performance Rodeo, especially curator and director Michael Green and stage manager Kenna Burima, to marshal a group of local talent (action poet Sheri-D Wilson, dancers Matthew Popoff and Emmanuel Piron, video artist Liss Platt, aerial performer Stephanie Norn, and the drag king troupe The Fake Mustaches, among others) to “make a wedding” through the *doing* of their performances (loveartlab.org).

This element of creative surprise, combined with the fact that the entire event was also open to the public for the first time—a public that is asked to accede formally and actively to its receptive role—suggests, finally, that the privatization of the marital proscenium is breechable. It is possible to join ritual performance with activist spectatorship to reconfigure both marriage’s modes and its moods. For it is precisely the “as if-ness” of Sprinkle and Stephens’ weddings, the repetition of their very contingency, that highlights the nascent, and potentially radical, counter-public that might productively emerge from the “unhappy” relationship between saying and doing that Austin identified in the marriage ceremony. That is, built into the performative (anti-)structure of their queer wedding rites is, necessarily, the following periperformative question that should give any configuration of subjects seeking to solemnize their relationships pause: what if one had to make the case for the legitimacy and felicity of the rights accrued through marriage as one might have to make the case for the rights sundered through war? This, as we have seen with Iraq, would not necessarily be any safeguard against (il)locutionary insincerity, but it might compel additional forethought as to the potential perlocutionary consequences.

## Notes

- [1] The Bill passed a third and final vote in the House of Commons on June 28, 2005, by a margin of 155 to 133. The Netherlands and Belgium had previously legalized same-sex marriage in 2001 and 2003, respectively. Spain (2005) and South Africa (2006) have since also enacted legislation recognizing same-sex marriages among their citizens. Following a recent Supreme Court ruling, California is poised to join Massachusetts as the only US states authorizing same-sex marriages; Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, New Jersey, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Oregon, Washington, and the District of Columbia all permit same-sex civil unions or domestic partnerships.
- [2] In the “Beyond Gay Marriage” chapter of *The Trouble with Normal* (81–147), Warner uses the phrase “recognition drama” to refer to the exceedingly “normative dimensions” of the relationships marriage names and affirms (i.e., the opposite-sex or same-sex monogamous couple), and all those other modes of affective and social belonging it excludes. As Warner puts it:

One can easily imagine ceremonies with a difference—in which people might solemnize a committed household, ironize their property sharing, pledge care and inheritance without kinship, celebrate a whole circle of intimacies, or dramatize independence from state-regulated sexuality. A movement built around such ceremonies could be more worthwhile and more fun than the unreflective demand for state-sanctioned marriage. Indeed, some people already experiment in these ways. Why do they get no press? (133–34)

In December 2001, the Law Commission of Canada, established in 1997 as a tacit advisory board to the Canadian Parliament and Justice Ministry, submitted a report called *Beyond Conjuality*, which argued, among other things, that the functional realities of contemporary family and household configurations necessitated a fundamental rethinking of traditional legal definitions of marriage, going so far as to recommend the creation of a formal legal mechanism by which adult citizens could register the full panoply of their personal relationships and partnerships, including gay and straight couples, adult children living with parents, siblings or friends sharing a house, and so on. The report, alas, was shelved.

- [3] Elsewhere, in arguing that the “topic of gay marriage is not the same as that of gay kinship,” Butler claims that marriage, as an institution, not only forecloses on other constitutive “sexual possibilities that will never be eligible for a translation into legitimacy,” but also constitutes them temporally as “the irrecoverable and irreversible past of legitimacy: *the never will be, the never was*” (“Is Kinship” 102, 106).
- [4] Dolan writes (using the subjunctive):

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense . . . Utopian performatives, in their doings, make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better. (*Utopia* 5–6)

- [5] My description of Hendricks’ *Fluxdivorce* and Johnston’s own subsequent *Fluxwedding* is derived from two accounts provided by Johnston; see her “In the Meantime, Art was Happening” and “Wedding in Denmark.”
- [6] For an excellent analysis of how these “indeterminate and unharmonizable” aspects of the *Fluxwedding* produce an oppositional aesthetic that “queers” the traditional marriage ceremony through inversion, chance, and the sublime, see Conway.

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