

The Far-off Edge of Things: A tragi-comedy

by

Virginia Page Jähne

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English, Theatre, Film and Media

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Abstract

The Far-off Edge of Things is a full-length postmodern stage work for voice and multi-media which exists in a liminal space between Realism, Magical Realism, and The Absurd. This is a story about barriers to relationships, paralleling a story about barriers to accessibility, juxtaposed with a devolving story in which the non-disabled are disabled by environmental events. The vortex of the narrative challenges socio-political concepts and psycho-myths which continue to misinform ableist constructions of disability. Further, the play confronts the intersection of disability and climate change, a connection which may seem surprising until one realizes that persons with disabilities are disproportionately and adversely affected by climatic events as a result of their systemic exclusion from disaster planning. To that end, the setting is a catastrophic climatic event; rising water from sea ice melt in Hudson's Bay causes a reversal of the Red River and creates a giant tidal bore which will imminently flood Manitoba.¹ The play imagines this large-scale climatic event set against the small-scale human narrative of the protagonist, Morgan, a person with disability, and Giles, her partner and caregiver, who struggle, both literally and metaphorically, to keep their heads above water. Morgan, trapped in a malfunctioning lift while the flood waters rise, enters an Absurdist world when the crossed wires of the lift emergency phone connect her to an emergency measures conference room in which the attendees are focused upon building a ramp at 'The Far-off Edge of Things' for her, while saving themselves at 'The Centre of Things.' The play is followed by an informal critical essay explicating *The Far-off Edge of Things* and its construction, as well as the defence presentation.

¹ "Climate change has caused the massive Kaskawulsh Glacier in the Yukon to retreat so much that its meltwater abruptly switched direction [from northerly to southerly], in the first documented case of 'river piracy' in modern times (Weikle)."

Acknowledgements

Most of all, thanks to my husband Joachim Bernhardt Jähne, whose emotional strength, patience, and love sustained me while I jumped through myriad hoops on crutches and he struggled with Parkinson's Disease. The word caregiver took on new meaning. Heartfelt thanks to my family and friends for their support throughout my late academic 'career.' Special thanks to my advisor, Dr. William Kerr, whose theatrical knowledge and perspicacious dramaturgical advice were invaluable throughout the process. Thanks, also, to the members of my defense committee, Dr. Nancy Hansen and Dr. Warren Cariou. Dr. Hansen's mentorship and generosity as I blundered to a more complete understanding of disability, and Dr. Cariou's guidance concerning representations of Indigeneity, were crucial. I am indebted to my readers: Maureen Taggart, A.R.I.A.M., president of Shoestring Players, who gave unstintingly of her theatrical insight and support; Per Brask, dramaturg and retired professor at The University of Winnipeg who taught me not to bore an audience; Dr. Katrina Dunn and Dr. Vanessa Warne, Associate Professors at The University of Manitoba who each offered encouragement and a perceptive lens; and Marilyn Szajcz, music educator, who has unfalteringly counselled me to use my voice in song and on the page. My gratitude to the University of Manitoba and to the professors whose passions are contagious. Thanks to Graduate Program Assistant, Anita King, whose kindheartedness is as significant as her university navigation skills. I am especially grateful for the camaraderie of my colleagues, Kerri Woloszyn, Annah Coleman, and Jessica Bound who helped this septuagenarian believe that she belonged at university. In addition, I acknowledge the financial support of The University of Manitoba Faculty of Graduate Studies during two years of study and The Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Culture which awarded me the 2019/20 C.D. Howe Institute Fellowship in Creative Writing.

For Jochen

The Far-off Edge of Things
A tragi-comedy

by

Virginia Page Jähne

...and although it was the birds that had brought us
together, our story became a human story after all - Kenn
Kaufman, Kingbird Highway

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Cast of Characters:

MORGAN: Associate professor of Ornithology, obsessive birder; i.e., twitcher, brilliant wing-nut. She has a very large ornate tattoo across her upper chest - VOX.

GILES: Morgan's partner, associate professor of Astrophysics, dull men's club member, obsessive stargazer, nerd.

BRAN: Morgan's staunch ally, a full-size raven puppet/puppeteer with attitude and a penchant for pecking and shredding.

LOU: Dr. Lou Crane-Mercier, Métis storyteller, part-time greeter, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology professor emeritus.

MADAME ROUGE: Drag-artist with flaming red hair, fortune-teller.

MAYOR: Politician, team player.

PREMIER: Politician, not a team player.

CHIEF EMERGENCY COORDINATOR: Bureaucrat.

PUBLIC WORKS: Engineer.

PUBLIC INFORMATION: Publicist.

SOCIAL SERVICES: Social Worker, can only aid persons in wheelchairs.

FIRE: Fireman.

POLICE: Policeman.

FINANCIAL RISK: Accountant.

DOGS FIRST: Dog lover, can only save dogs.

Use of character doubling/tripling may be achieved through emblematic hat switching or similar. Morgan, Giles, and Madame Rouge should not be doubled, however, these and other combinations may be considered:

Mayor/Police/Financial Risk/Emergency Coordinator; Lou/Social Services/Fire/Dogs First; Premier/Public Works/Public Information.

Production Notes:

Accessibility is the default. Accessibility onstage and backstage is as essential as accessibility front of house.

A wheelchair-enabled person, or person with mobility impairment, must be cast as Morgan.

The program should be in an accessible format so that speech functions can be utilized. Closed captioning for persons with hearing impairment, or smart-caption glasses, as well as live described audio for persons with impaired vision should be intrinsic to the aesthetics of the production rather than an appendage. These should be viewed as a creative opportunity.

One production, minimally, should be 'relaxed' theatre. Service animals are welcome.

There should be online access for those who cannot attend. The theatre should have multiple accessible parking spaces, as well as seating and washroom facilities for persons with disability.

Sets are minimalist, bordering on the Daliesque surreal, with a few naturalistic elements. The stage is divided into three areas, three levels, from low to high - SR lift, SL riverbank/DSL room in Morgan and Giles's house with a door, CS, exactly at the centre-line, conference room with two doors.

Above, large screen television. A camera gives a birds-eye view of the stage. Upstage, cyclorama for shadow puppetry, and projected scene titles.

Actors are in tableau when not speaking. Cross-fades and other lighting Fx create smooth transitions.

A forward slash denotes overlapping dialogue, a dash denotes interrupted dialogue, ellipses denote that the character is hesitating or a continuance by another actor.

Bran's generic 'Qourk' is the puppeteer's

expressive vocal interpretation of Morgan's sub-text and should be varied with other raven vocalizations such as a rolled grrr-grrr (comfort), kek-kek-kek (alarm), kaa, kruk, nuk, cluck, oo-oo, rattle, as well as trills. Bran swaggers when they walk, sometimes 'siding.'

ACT I

Scene 1

Projected: "You could not see a cloud, because no cloud was in the sky." - Lewis Carroll

Summer. Drought. A normal day.

Sound of moving water.

Set in shades of beige to brown like an old crinkled sepia-tone photograph. Dulled lighting.

USR, along the river bank, Lou pushes a shopping cart to DSC. They speak bolded dialogue in Michif. Lou's bolded dialogue is translated into English/French when Michif is spoken. Into Michif/French when English is spoken.

LOU

Call me Ishmael. [laughs at his own joke] No, really, you can call me Lou. Professor emeritus of ecology and evolutionary biology, and today's greeter. Bienvenue! **Welcome to Manitoba, the flat dry-bed of Lake Winnipeg** - murky waters. Lake Winnipeg was once a wide-reaching, ancient, inland sea so large, that when it drained, world sea levels rose over nine feet. I wonder, when did the sea decide to drain? Was it one small drip in a wrong direction?

As they walk, they pick up bits of discarded consumerism, pieces of old theatre sets and props, put them into their cart.

LOU

Did it make a small change that became unstoppable? Or was it just a small part of the cumulative effects of minutiae, seemingly insignificant, even mindless acts over time? [beat.]

Lou picks up another piece of discarded

consumerism, puts it into their cart.

LOU

Are all 'things' sentient? Perhaps the answer lies at the confluence of Indigenous and Western science. [beat.] Perhaps. [beat.] In the aftermath, silt and clay levelled the draining sea. **As my grandmother would say, "it smoothed all the wrinkles."** Squids, sharks, great sea turtles, and huge sea reptiles drowned in the silt and clay, their remains mudded in a fossilized plaster for all time. A tapestry in stone. But I digress. Here we are in the Anthropocene **a transient drip in geological time.** [beat.]

Lou picks up another piece of discarded consumerism, put it into their cart.

LOU

A time when humans impress their stamp on earth.

LOU

The clock is ticking
on this paleo
shoreline.

MORGAN

[sings pianissimo.]
The water is wide, I
cannot get o'er.

Lou pushes the cart, exits SL. Morgan's singing continues.

Scene 2

Projected: "The dream-child moving through the land Of
wonders wild and new, In friendly chat with bird or beast
- And half believe it true." - Lewis Carroll

Summer. Drought. A normal day.

Sound of moving water.

*Set in shades of beige to brown like an old
crinkled sepia-tone photograph. Dulled lighting.*

*SL Morgan and Giles sit in lawn chairs at the
peninsular point of land where the floodway re-
joins the Red River. They look across the
intersection. Their chairs form the base of a
triangle. A camera attached to a spotting scope
lies on the ground.*

Binoculars hang around Morgan's neck. She bird-

watches.

Self-absorbed, Giles reads Human Diversity by Charles Murray.

Bran, flies overhead.

MORGAN

[continues to sing.] Neither have, I wings to fly.
[laughs.] Where are my wings?

BRAN

[laughs.] Quork?

MORGAN

(to the audience)

When I was just a nestling, maybe three, I thought, actually, I expected my body to shape-shift into the ornithological-shape it was meant to be. I threw a tantrum when my mother told me that I couldn't grow feathers. A hopeless cause. I spent the summer flapping my arms, like an earthbound moulting bird, expecting to fly at any moment. At six, I was a card-carrying member of the National Audubon Society. I knew a lot of facts: [memorized.] There are 18,000 known species of birds all of which have common evolutionary ancestry in the theropod dinosaurs such as paravians. [beat.] Primordial scales evolved into feathers as these paravians shape-shifted for millions of years. They became Archaeopterges, the size of a raven, and flew into the skies [beat.] I thought life was made of facts then. [beat.] On my seventh birthday - I was barely a fledgling - I unwrapped a pair of German Steinheil binoculars. My talisman. Sometimes I looked through the objective lens, transformed my world into tiny, globular landscapes, as if I'd drunk a bottle of "drink me." I mean really...isn't the world a wonderland! So full of the unexpected! [beat.] We lived out past the black gumbo of the Hutterite farms then. I was a dirty, bruised, bloodied, bee stung, and scabbed free-agent. The feather-makers were my friends. They didn't mind my lack of birdiness. I learned all the Latin names! *turdus migratorius* [laughs.] the american robin! Summer days, I perched in black poplars, sighted yellow-bellied sapsuckers, vesper sparrows. [beat.] "I create for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with God's permission." [beat.] I crouched in thick moss among the jack pine while black-backed woodpeckers hammered. I nested in willow

wand along the Brokenhead where the buffleheads swim. I toe-heeled in rubber boots through the grass, held my breath, watched so carefully for killdeer, their speckled eggs camouflaged, easily trampled [beat.] I talked bird. The soft roll of bird on my tongue. They gathered around me when I PSHSHed! PSHSH!! PSHSH!! PSHSH!! "Shall I call thee bird, or but a wandering voice?" They told me stories. Nights I listened for the whip-poor-will and the great greys calling. I fell asleep to the beautiful words of birds. Dreamed of flight. When a corvus corax, a raven chick, fell from its nest, I set its wing, and so began my magical relationship with Bran, named for the patron saint of Celtic sea voyagers who used ravens to find land sans compass.

Bran swoops, brushes Morgan's head.

BRAN

Quork! Quork! Quork!

Morgan watches Bran.

MORGAN

Bran was my first patient in the recoupery - my bird shelter. As the climate warms, bird migrations are shifting poleward. Birds fly into dangerous unknown territory, mistake windows for limitless worlds they can fly through. Sometimes fall-outs occur when an entire flock hits windows of tall buildings all at once. [beat.] I don't judge. I have my own misperceptions.

BRAN

Quork!

Giles looks up from his book.

GILES

(to the audience)

I'm an SOB. Spouse of a birder. A 'dude' in twitcher terminology. The first time I saw Morgan she was hitchhiking - part of a Global Big Day. I was on my way out of the city to get away from light pollution - astrophysics is my thing. The Delta Aquariids were active and I was expecting a fantastic meteor shower. [savouring the thought.] We were meant for each other. Morgan looked at the world through binoculars and I looked at the world through a telescope. Neither one of us wanted to look at the world as it was. Not even then.

Morgan looks through the binoculars. Bran does several loops, lands on Morgan's shoulder. Morgan lovingly bill-shakes Bran in greeting. Bran flies onto Morgan's head.

GILES

That day, I was driving a classic bird, my little blue Falcon.

Bran flies off.

BRAN

Quork!

Bran craps on Giles's shoulder as they fly off.

GILES

Bran!

MORGAN

- more like a turkey. I was in my own birdy-world as usual, listening for calls, watching. Giles stopped - I bumbled on and on about birding.

GILES

I waxed eloquently about astronomical observation and theory.

MORGAN

You might say we pair-bonded in what turned into a three-day mating ritual.

GILES

Our stars aligned.

MORGAN

Our nerdy birdy love story.

GILES

Morrígu, have I told you I love you lately?

GILES

Not Yet.

MORGAN

Not yet

GILES

I love you lately.

MORGAN

I love you lately.

MORGAN

Part and

GILES

counter-part.

They reach to each other.

Scene 3

Projected: "I didn't know it was your table..." - Lewis Carroll

Summer. Drought. A normal day.

Set in shades of beige to brown like an old crinkled sepia-tone photograph. Dulled lighting.

Conference room. A large window overlooks Winnipeg. Door with a prominent red neon EXIT/STAIRS sign. A second door with a prominent ELEVATOR THIS WAY sign.

Long table and chairs parallel to the apron. A red desk phone. A tray of coffee and Tim Horton's doughnuts. A placard "Courtesy of BG Fuel and Tims."

Large clock on the wall with oversized Roman numerals and TIME TO PREPARE printed in large letters. A long orange string is attached and thumbtacked to the wall.

Very large bright green button on the wall with the word UP on it. It may be attached to an old carnival High-Striker. A large mallet.

Attendees wear hats (or similar) emblematic of their profession, and perhaps name tags, as they enter from the ELEVATOR THIS WAY door. Attendees take their seats. The chair backs may be labelled. Lou looks for their chair. There isn't one. There is a mic at each place. The Mayor turns on a digital voice recorder with voice-to-print capability.

MAYOR

Testing. Testing. Testing.

The Mayor checks that the closed-caption text appears onscreen. The minutes of the meeting onscreen left, Lou's dialogue onscreen right.

Lou's bolded dialogue is translated into English/French when Michif is spoken. Into Michif/French when English is spoken.

MAYOR

That appears to be working. I call the meeting to order. I'd like to acknowledge that Winnipeg is located on the original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. This morning we have a distinguished consultant. I recognize Dr. Lou Crane-Mercier, storyteller, part-time greeter and ecology and evolutionary biology professor emeritus.

Lou tests their microphone.

LOU

Test tube! Test tube! Test tube!

Lou's microphone does not work.

LOU

Good morning! Tanisi!

The Mayor looks toward the door.

LOU

Thank you for inviting me to/ sit at the table.

MAYOR

Anyone seen the premier?

LOU

I look forward to sharing /observations.

MAYOR

Let it be noted that the Premier is in absentia.[beat.] First order of business, Emergency Coordinator, a brief statement?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Yes, thank you Mayor. We do not have a neighbouring city of like dimension that we can rely on in disasters. We stand alone.

LOU

Both Indigenous and Western science have demonstrated we're all connected. We live in a fragile and increasingly interdependent /world.

MAYOR

Thank you, EC. Public Works, have you anything to add?

PUBLIC WORKS

The floodway gates... which divert the Red River to the floodway...'one in the same' with Duff's ditch...are a significant part of the emergency plan.

LOU

Observed rising temperatures, glacial melt, erosion and permafrost disruption are manifesting /global repercussions.

PUBLIC WORKS

Duff's ditch is one of the world's greatest macro-engineering achievements.

LOU

You see this is all resultant of the GHE. The greenhouse eff -

PUBLIC WORKS

In the company of Stonehenge and the Apollo 11 moon landing. A ginormous achievement!

LOU

Perhaps that's too cryptic.

PUBLIC WORKS

Built for a 160 year flood!

LOU

Picture a frog in a pot of water on the stove. The water heats /slowly -

PUBLIC WORKS

Of course, after the "flood of the Century" in '97, there was the Red River Floodway Expansion Project.

LOU

(quickly)
so by the time the frog realizes he's cooked, frog legs are on the menu. /We are all part of the primordial

PUBLIC WORKS

Just in case we have a 1-in-700 year flood.

LOU

soup.

PUBLIC WORKS

(sotto voce)
There were some sacrifices, of course.

MAYOR

Excellent! Thank you, PW.

PUBLIC WORKS

When the gauge at the James Avenue pumping station
[indicates screen.]

Onscreen: James Avenue pumping station.

PUBLIC WORKS

indicates that the Red River waters are high enough
to threaten Winnipeg, we raise the gates and the
water backs up into the floodway channel.

Onscreen: Floodway gates.

LOU

**My grandmother says, "Don't push the river. It flows
by itself."**

PUBLIC WORKS

[beat.] An impressive operation!

MAYOR

Thank you, PW.

PUBLIC WORKS

A tremendous engineering feat!

LOU

(quickly)
Manitoba is a sensitive, vulnerable /region

MAYOR

Thank you, PW.

PUBLIC WORKS

Stupendous!

MAYOR

Thank you, PW! EC, you have the flood plan well in
hand?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Yes, that's correct. Well in hand.

LOU

(quickly)
the current process of climate change is increasing
our /vulnerability.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

/And then, since the Flood-of-the-Century in '97, we
have the Portage diversion. All of this, of course,
necessitates sacrificing the rest of the province for
Winnipeg and The Centre of Things.

LOU

(quickly)
AND, the number of extreme events... The last
remaining intact ice shelf in the Canadian Arctic
/broke apart.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

/Side-bar here. We are looking for out-of-the-way
sites...at The Far-off Edge of Things... for
vulnerable populations in the unlikely event that a
major evacuation is necessary.

LOU

We're all vulnerable!

MAYOR

Excellent work EC!

LOU

(quickly)
Significantly, for Winnipeg's flood forecast,
Hudson's Bay ice is melting faster than predict -

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

As well, emergency contingencies, of course, are well
underway at The Centre of Things for the rest of
us.[beat.]

LOU

(faster)
Added to this, glacial recession has caused river
flow /reversal.

PUBLIC WORKS

'For all intensive purposes', our safeguards will
protect us from The Flood-To-End-All-Floods!

The attendees pat each other on the back.

MAYOR

Congratulations on your preparedness, team! We have everything under control!

Attendees applaud.

LOU

My grandmother says we are a clever animal, but not that clever.

MAYOR

[beat.] Portage & Main is safe for the foreseeable future!

LOU

We are experiencing a redistribution of life on /earth. Diversity is at stake! **My grandmother says, in the old days we used to have respect for everyone, /everything.**

MAYOR

Team, thanks to you, we are well prepared for anything Mother Nature unleashes... assuming there is equity participation with the province, of course.

Mayor pours a cup of coffee. Takes a doughnut. Attendees follow suit.

MAYOR

Does anyone have anything to add?

LOU

7.7 billion humans are at the edge of extinction.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

MAYOR

Any further business? [beat.] Good.

LOU

I -

MAYOR

Thank you Dr. Crane-Mercier for your invaluable consultation. Always happy to hear from the science community. I move that we adjourn.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Second.

LOU

Anyone heard of Wisakedjak and the flood?

Mayor looks for interpretation on the screen.

MAYOR

[beat.] I'm sure it's a good story, but we're out of time.

LOU

Noah?

MAYOR

Moved.

LOU

But -

MAYOR

Meeting adjourned.

Lou looks at the screen. His words disintegrate, float into the air, then disappear.

Scene 4

Projected: "Alice: This is impossible. The Mad Hatter: Only if you believe it is."- Lewis Carroll

Summer. Drought. Not a normal day.

Sound of moving water.

The riverbank. Continuation of Scene 2.

Morgan sets up the camera. Bran flies above, sometimes lands at her feet to peck at the tripod and camera, sometimes flies onto set pieces, etcetera. Flies off again.

MORGAN

That day I was on a Big Day. Birders around the world sighted 6,816 species in a single day. [beat.] Giles was with me. We were sitting here like this...the river on one side, the floodway on the other. Such a strange place. The floodway, placid, the Red roiling mud...natural and man-made intermingling. A prairie drought denied summer its greenness. The prairie grasses crinkled in the dry wind. Trees didn't grow, their leaves curled brown before their season. The Red reflected a sepia sky. Low water channeled over

its hidden bed, between its sunken banks. There was a sense of calm. The floodway was just a trickle in the drought. An abandoned rowboat trailed lazily, sometimes stuck in the reeds, not knowing that turbulence was ahead. [beat.] Like us. How were we to know that we were in a liminal space. At the edge?

The sound of the Bennu's wings whomping as time shifts.

MORGAN

Giles! Look!

Giles looks up from his book.

MORGAN

Impossible! It can't be! Look! A lifer!

Morgan hands Giles the binoculars.

GILES

What am I looking for my bird-nerd?

MORGAN

A Bennu (Ben-oo).

GILES

The asteroid 101955 Bennu? The impact hazard for earth!?

MORGAN

My astrophysicist-cum pessimist! Give me those!

Morgan grabs the binoculars, looks through them.

GILES

The NEO that has the potential to destroy the known world?!

MORGAN

An Egyptian Bennu. The mythological bird associated with the flooding of The Nile. The Bennu that flies across the chaos of the earth before it rebirths. Look! She's swooping onto those boulders! She's resplendent! Those wings! Like seraphim! My God! She's a crippler!

Morgan hands Giles her binoculars again. He looks through them.

GILES

What am I looking for again?

MORGAN

A mythological Bennu.

GILES

Where's the logic in that? If it's mythological, it doesn't exist.

Morgan grabs the binoculars and looks through them again.

MORGAN

Don't go all science and logic on me. [beat.] Myths are often metaphors. Maybe she's a metaphor. Look! She's sitting right there on that boulder. She's definitely a rare or an accidental. Look again!

Morgan hands Giles the binoculars. He looks through them.

GILES

I can't see her. Maybe you're seeing a whooping crane?

MORGAN

Giles! I know a whooping crane from a Bennu! The Egyptian Bennu has very distinct plumage...two long feathers on the crest, a white/crown

GILES

/She can't be a Bennu if the Bennu is a mythological bird.

MORGAN

My view of the actual and mythical aren't so rigid. I can believe the impossible. [beat.] Isn't she magical?

GILES

Your belief system always surprises me.

MORGAN

Who does it hurt? [beat.] She could be from a place where the impossible is possible! [beat.] It isn't so much what is believable but what we believe.

GILES

It isn't so much what we believe but what is believable.

Time shifts.

MORGAN

You know how the waves of mind drift? My thoughts drifted to the passenger pigeon, *ectopistes migratorius*. Before the White land grab, stories say they filled the sky.

GILES

The passenger pigeon was probably a myth, too.

MORGAN

No. It's been recorded. The last one was shot in 1901. [beat.] I admit, stories of their existence do have a mythological feel. Still, myths explain the human condition. Hold universal truths. Maybe the passenger pigeon holds a frightful universal truth. [beat.] How did five billion passenger pigeons, five billion of anything, become extinct?

Time shifts.

MORGAN

Hear that?

GILES

What?

MORGAN

Her voice! The sound of our better angels! She's luring me like Homer's bird-women!

GILES

I don't /hear

MORGAN

Quick! Get a photo! I'll text a Rare Bird Alert!!

Giles tries to figure out where to aim the camera.

Morgan reads as she thumb-texts into her cell.

Text on screen:

03/04/2021: #3013 egyptian bennu. rare or accidental sighting. probably female between juvenile and adult plumage. Good scope views. Seen by the floodway intersection with the red river. eliminated whooping crane, black-crowned and yellow-crowned night heron, tri-coloured. [a dozen happy and celebratory emojis]

Morgan takes a selfie with her cell.

MORGAN

Nailed the ID!

The selfie and text remain on the screen. The bennu cannot be seen in the selfie.

GILES

UFO sightings are up this year, too. [laughs.]

MORGAN

[fake laughs.]

Time shifts.

GILES

Morgan grabbed the camera and hurtled down the bank. Still laughing, I watched her solitary quest.

MORGAN

I knew no one would believe this mega if I didn't get a perfect image! A face-melter! I was nearly at 'flight initiation distance,' so close she might fly off, when my foot caught in a rabbit hole and terra firma became not so firma! I stumbled down the bank! Gravel like rollers under my runners! It was funny...in a Three Stooges sort of way. Flailing! Groping! I was impelled toward the turbid river and fell just short of the edge like an alluvial log left behind in the last ice-age. My camera fell into the flying current.

Giles stands, doesn't know what to do with himself.

GILES

Paralyzed, I watched Morgan stumble down the bank. Fall out of sight. My laughter flew off into the air, into the "rubbish heap of laughter."

Time shifts.

GILES

Morgan! Morgan! Morgan!

Time shifts.

MORGAN

I heard the whooshing wind of her enormous wings above me as she lifted high above the trees.

Giles sits.

GILES

I watched her. I could do nothing else. I cannot even tell if I was moving toward her or away from her. Time dilated.

MORGAN

I watched her. I could do nothing else. I cannot even tell if I was moving toward her or away from her. Time dilated.

GILES

I ran. Swooped her up.

Time shifts.

A wheelchair is hidden ESL. The wheelchair is loaded. An overflowing laundry basket in the seat, dirty laundry draped over the handles and arms, a backpack dangling, other detritus of an unkempt house, an empty bag of birdseed.

Giles retrieves the loaded wheelchair, pushes it to Morgan's side. He drops the dirty laundry, backpack, camera and tripod, etcetera, onto the floor.

Lx changes. The river bank becomes a room in Morgan and Giles's house.

Very clumsily, Giles assists Morgan into the wheelchair. He nearly drops her. Proper attention must be paid to safety during this exchange.

Bran flies onto Morgan's head.

BRAN

Quork! Quork! Quork!

Sound of the Bennu's wings whomping, flying across the house.

Scene 5

Projected: "How strange it is to be anything at all." - Lewis Carroll

Fall. Not a normal day. Pouring rain.

Set in shades of beige to brown, colourized here and there. The few colours pop.

Room in Morgan and Giles's house.

Bran sits on Morgan's wheelchair.

Off-stage the sound of galapagos finches, goldfinches, and a mourning dove in the Recoupery.

GILES

If I could go back.

Giles takes a pair of Morgan's bright coloured socks, with a large hole in the heel, from the dirty laundry, struggles to put them on Morgan's feet.

MORGAN

I went through all the stages of grief just to navigate - to get to some form of identity ownership on this disability thing - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. [beat.] Can you pull the left one up a bit more?

GILES

backwards and forwards and still I'm in perpetual mourning for what we once were.

MORGAN

But Giles! Giles is stuck between anger and denial! He is obsessed with fixing me! [beat.] Can you pull the right big toe so it's looser? [beat.] I may have wheels ...and some unreliable parts...but I'm not his Falcon!

Bran flies up in a flap.

BRAN

Quork!

Bran resettles on Morgan's wheelchair.

Giles pulls the socks off and starts again.

MORGAN

Can you adjust both heels a wee bit?

GILES

I can't fix this.

MORGAN

Maybe I don't need fixing. [beat.] Just straighten them a bit. [beat.] Okay. That's good enough. Thanks.

GILES

Any illusion I had of control in my life is just that. An illusion. One day she was fine. The next day she is in a wheelchair [beat.] and I'm putting on her socks.

GILES

We've fallen into a new reality.

MORGAN

We've fallen into a new reality.

MORGAN

Off a cliff.

BRAN

Quork.

MORGAN

Can I tell you my flying dream?

Looming shadow puppets on the cyclorama depict the dream.

MORGAN

I was rowing a wee boat. A portolan was under my arm to navigate. Bran, like a sailor, at the helm.

BRAN

Aye-aye!

MORGAN

[laughs.] The Bennu was there. The uplift from their wings raised me aloft. [beat.] I watched as a huge tidal bore rolled toward me from a far-off shore. Terrified, I flew as fast as I could, my heart beating like black wings, then CRACK!! [beat.]

BRAN

(Mimics CRACK!)

MORGAN

Oh!

BRAN

Oh-oh!

MORGAN

I smashed through a kaleidoscope of glass! [beat.] I thought, this is death. [beat.] But it wasn't. When I

awoke, I had shape-shifted.

GILES

The shape of our world shifted. I can't get used to it...I don't want to...It's an astronomical adjustment. There's no respite for me. It's 24/7. It's more than a second job! It's all about Morgan. How is she and... Fuck. I know this sounds immature, ridiculous and selfish [beat.] but no one asks me, How are you doing, Giles?

Time shifts.

BRAN

How are you doing, Giles?

GILES

Thanks for asking, Bran! How am I doing?

BRAN

How are you doing, Giles?

GILES

I'm angry when I wake up. I'm angry when I go to bed. I dream angry!

MORGAN

Ira furor brevis est: animum rege: qui nisi paret imperat.

GILES

What is that supposed to mean?

MORGAN

Anger is a brief madness: govern your temper, for unless it obeys, it commands.

GILES

I'm angry at you! [beat.]

BRAN

How are you doing, Giles?

MORGAN

I know this is hard.

GILES

See? How can I be angry at you? What kind of person does that make me?

BRAN

Quork?

MORGAN

Being angry at a cripple is complicated.

GILES

(sighs)

MORGAN

Are you angry with me for being a cripple or with yourself for being angry with a cripple?

GILES

Will you please stop using that word?

MORGAN

Sometimes assigning the right word is impossible.

GILES

I'm flooded.

MORGAN

So am I. [beat.] Maybe the ark will come and save us.

GILES

I have to throw in a wash.

*Giles leaves the dirty laundry on the floor,
exits.*

MORGAN

And there Dr. Gottman, we have your classic divorce sign-posts, the four horsemen of the apocalypse; criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.

BRAN

Quork?

MORGAN

Avoiding the truth as a gulf widens between us.

*Morgan takes a red lipstick and a small mirror
from her backpack.*

MORGAN

Preening time, Bran!

Morgan applies her lipstick.

BRAN

Pretty bird!

MORGAN

I still see Morgan in the mirror..."At least I know who I was when I got up this morning although I may have changed several times since then."

BRAN

Morgan in mirror. Pretty bird!

MORGAN

(to self in mirror.)
Pretty bird!

BRAN

[laughs.]

Morgan gives Bran a loving bill-shake. Bran flies onto her head.

MORGAN

[laughs.] There is wisdom in a raven's head. [beat.] I didn't think I'd feel this way. People born with impairments understand their bodies as their identity. Who they are...no separation there. Why do I feel this disconnect? I'm myself and I'm not myself. "But if I'm not myself, who in the world am I? It's no use trying to be two people!" [beat.] Strangers stare - or do a quick look-lookaway double-take. What do they see? Such a paradox. It's human to stare and rude to stare, so I'm the to-be-looked-at and the not-to-be-looked-at. It's startling! [beat.] It's so much easier being the observer than the observed.

BRAN

Quork!

Bran pecks at the mirror. Morgan fumbles. The mirror falls out of her reach. Bran pecks at the mirror on the floor.

MORGAN

"Oh fleeting joys."

She looks down at the mirror on the floor.

MORGAN

"Oh, something lasting woe."

(sighs)

Oh, the daily dehumanizations. Isn't it curious that sometimes I'm hyper-visible...almost under surveillance... and other times I'm invisible. Like

yesterday. I was getting a latte in the mall when my wheelchair began self-propelling. A determined dogooder was pushing me where I didn't want to go! Her Winner's bag was hanging and banging on my handles and I kept saying, Thank you! I don't need to be pushed. Ad nauseam to deaf ears. Why must I be perpetually thankful for the wrong kind of help? [beat.] She was determined to do a good deed. It was terrifying! She pushed me to the far edge of the parking lot before she even asked where I wanted to go! I just wanted a latte! Then she said, Oh! You poor dear! How did this happen to you? and before I could say it's none of your business, she said, God bless. Such a tragedy. I'd rather be dead than be you. [beat.] I'd rather be dead than be you!

Bran flies onto Morgan's head.

MORGAN

And do I look like I'm in a petting zoo!? Why are people always patting me on the head!

Bran grooms Morgan's head.

BRAN

Quork. Quork.

Giles Enters.

Bran flies to Giles's shoulder and pecks hard.

GILES

Ouch! Cut it out!

Bran mostly stops.

GILES

I made your lunch. Paid hydro. Filled your water bottle. Your backpack is packed. I'm going to be late!

Bran continues pecking at Giles.

GILES

Fuck! Bran!

Bran pauses briefly

GILES

Do you want me to help you get dressed, or should I shower first?

MORGAN

You shower. I can wait.

GILES

Or should I make breakfast?

Bran continues pecking at Giles.

GILES

Where the fuck is NearCare?

MORGAN

Always too soon or too late.

Giles takes his cell from his pocket. Bran continues pecking at Giles. Tries to grab his cell.

GILES

I'm late. I'm late. I'm late. Ouch! Why are we always working against someone else's clock! Rushing! Ouch! Bran! Quit it!

MORGAN

Too bad all the clocks aren't on crip time.

Loud insistent door knock off-stage.

BRAN

(Mimics knocking)

GILES

Finally!

Giles exits. Bran flies to Morgan's shoulder.

BRAN

(Mimics knocking)

MORGAN

[laughs.] Knock-knock

BRAN

Who's there?

MORGAN

Noah

BRAN

Noah who?

MORGAN

Noah who is my favourite bird?

MORGAN

Quork!

BRAN

Quork!

*Bran hops off Morgan's shoulder, picks up
Giles's dirty shirt and shreds it with
animosity.*

MORGAN

Bran! Giles's shirt!

BRAN

Calamity sum!

MORGAN

In calamite sum! Yes, you are in trouble!

Bran continues shredding.

BRAN

Calamity sum!

Giles enters. Tug of war with Bran.

GILES

That wasn't NearCare! It was TransitJust! they
wouldn't wait!

*Bran pecks hard at Giles's hand. Giles
surrenders the shirt.*

GILES

Bran, get back here!

BRAN

Get back here!

*Bran hops onto Morgan's wheelchair with the
shirt. Drops it. Fluffs out their feathers.*

MORGAN

What time is it!?

GILES

Sixish.

MORGAN

And what idiot said, "Better three hours too soon
than a minute too late?"

GILES

Why can't we even get a reliable ride?

MORGAN

Do I dare disturb the universe?

BRAN

Quork?

MORGAN

I'll fly.

BRAN

Quork!

GILES

Funny.

GILES

I'll take you.

MORGAN

You'll be late again.

GILES

I'll take you.

MORGAN

Have I told you I love you lately?

BRAN

Quork?

GILES

[beat.] Not yet.

MORGAN

Not yet.

MORGAN

I love you lately.

GILES

[beat.]

BRAN

Love you lately.

Bran nibbles at Morgan's fingers, makes soft intimate gurgling sounds, bowing gestures.

GILES

[beat.] I can't even.

Bran flies to Giles's shoulder again. Pecks hard.

GILES

Ow! Bran, get the fuck away from -

BRAN

Love you lately.

Bran flies off. Works at shredding Giles's shirt again.

GILES

I hate this.

MORGAN

I can see that.

GILES

Do you? [beat.] I hate everything about this. I hate having to say that I'm a caregiver. I even hate the word caregiver.

MORGAN

It's just a word.

BRAN

Quork.

GILES

It makes me sound like a saint.

MORGAN

Saint Giles?...How about minder? Custodian? Playmate! Caretaker? Personal Assistant? Zookeeper? [beat.] Warden!

BRAN

Quork!

GILES

You don't get it.

MORGAN

How about sanctus nolebant?

GILES

What the fuck is a sanctus nolebant?

MORGAN

A reluctant saint.

GILES

I don't want to be a fucking saint.

MORGAN

Well that's what makes you reluctant.

GILES

I hate being a caregiver.

GILES

I hate what it's doing
to us.

MORGAN

I hate what it's doing
to us.

GILES

To the point, I hate being your caregiver. I can't be honest with you. [beat.] Now I feel like a real S-O-B.

BRAN

S-O-B!! [laughs.]

MORGAN

Wow.

GILES

I don't feel like a saint.

BRAN

Don't!

MORGAN

I wouldn't worry about that. You're looking less and less like one!

BRAN

Don't!

GILES

If I'm honest, or impatient, or God help me, angry with you, I feel completely and utterly morally depraved! I have to hide my anger!

BRAN

Don't!

MORGAN

You've overcome that obstacle!

BRAN

Don't!

GILES

I resent your fucking wheelchair!

BRAN

Fucking wheelchair!

GILES

I resent that fucking bird doing a bad cover of everything I say!

BRAN

Fucking bird!

GILES

I resent my fucking resentment!

MORGAN

I resent stairs! [beat.] I resent stares! I resent being diminished because this world was constructed without a ramp.

GILES

Fucking ramps are all over the place.

Bran flies about in a real flap in tandem with Morgan's rant.

MORGAN

Ramps are a metaphor! A metaphor! I'm talking in metaphors! I resent all the micro-geographies that keep me on the periphery! I resent kitchen cupboards I can't reach. I resent having to leave our bathroom door off the hinges because the doorway is too narrow for my chair. I resent having to be carried upstairs to bed. [beat.] Well, maybe that's not so bad. [beat.] I resent that I can't go birding whenever and wherever I want! I resent that able-bodied is the default. I resent my world being made smaller and smaller. De minimus! I resent not being able to be physically present anywhere without having to plan ahead to the last detail. That I'm supposed to be grateful for any small concessions to a barrier-less society! I resent that I am barely an afterthought in a poorly retrofitted world! Either the locks are too large or the keys are too small! I resent that there are barriers so I can't reach even the lowest rung on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I resent that I'm not supposed to take up space. I resent that roads that took me places are now cul-de-sacs! I resent that exclusion is normalized. I resent being downsized! I resent social death! That I'm only considered a maybe conditional participant. I refuse to be a 'hidden one!' My world is shrinking and me along with it! I resent being otherized! I resent strangers asking

"What happened to you?" trying to affix a medical pathology on me so I can be safely categorized as 'other.' But I'm not just one thing! I'm not just one thing! [beat.] I resent that the 'normal' world sees me as better off dead!

BRAN

Qourk! Qourk! Qourk!

MORGAN

And Giles, this may come as a surprise, because well, it does to me, I resent your legs!

GILES

What?

MORGAN

To be completely honest, I wish you didn't have legs!

GILES

Are you still talking in metaphors? You've lost me.

MORGAN

If everyone in the entire world had no legs, the world would be made for people without use of legs, and I wouldn't be disabled, would I? Disability is a social construct!

GILES

I can't help being normal.

MORGAN

What the fuck is normal? It's a stupid dryer setting! Normal compared to whom? The word is always used to make me feel abnormal. I don't even remember being normal. Ever. I only ever did a bad emulation. I'm not even sure that you've ever been 'normal.'

GILES

I see through a different lens.

MORGAN

I see through a different lens.

BRAN

Quork!

MORGAN

Oh my God, Giles. Did you just roll your eyes at me! This is textbook Gottman!

BRAN

God-man!

GILES

Fuck Gottman. Sometimes I look through my telescope and wish I were on a different planet. Anywhere in the solar system. Hell, anywhere in the galaxy - any galaxy - the universe. Anywhere but here with you. [beat.] Did I say that out loud?

MORGAN

You did.

BRAN

God-man!

GILES

I can't believe I said that. I am super-cluster fucked.

MORGAN

You are.

BRAN

Cluster-fuck!

GILES

I can't help that we're a lie!

MORGAN

I thought you were my ally!

GILES

I need some time to process.

MORGAN

I'll take a fucking bus.

BRAN

Fucking bus!

GILES

I said I'll take you.

MORGAN

You'll be late again.

GILES

It's pouring. I'll take you.

MORGAN

I can get there myself. [beat.]

LX on Scene 6, conference room attendees as they

prepare for the meeting.

MORGAN

Fuck. I just need you to help me get my shoes on first.

Giles and Morgan fadeout.

Scene 6

Projected: "Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing. Turn your toes out when you walk and remember who you are" - Lewis Carroll

Fall. Not a normal day. Pouring rain.

9:30 AM Emergency measures meeting. Conference room colourized here and there with bright ties, scarves, hats, or similar. The few colours pop.

The attendees are seated.

Madame Rouge carries an oversized carpet bag. Her hat is a massively feathered crown like a bennu.

The Premier turns on a digital voice recorder with voice-to-print capability. His travel brochure is still on the table.

The minutes of the meeting onscreen left, Madame Rouge's dialogue onscreen right. Madame Rouge's dialogue is translated into both English and French.

PREMIER

Testing! Testing! Testing! I call this emergency measures meeting to order.

MAYOR

I'd like to acknowledge that Winnipeg is located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree -

PREMIER

Etcetera. Etcetera. [looks at clock.] I have a plane to catch, people. I move we suspend the rules and get right down to business.

The Premier flips through the travel brochure.

PREMIER

Second.

Indigenous drum sound. Attendees look for the sound source.

PREMIER

Oh! Excuse my Borborygmus! [pats stomach.] Need my morning fuel.

The Premier pulls a bag of Costa Rican coffee from their briefcase.

PREMIER

My own special Costa Rican blend.

The Premier makes their own. Attendees pour cups of coffee, eat doughnuts. The ELEVATOR THIS WAY door bursts opens.

Madame Rouge enters with aplomb.

MADAME ROUGE

Hiieee! Bonjour bitches! Here I am! The Winnifamous Madame Rouge! [beat.] Donnes moi une bonne bizou.

Madame Rouge kisses the Mayor and Premier, air kisses the attendees.

MADAME ROUGE

Mwah! Mwah! Mwah! [beat.] Oups! This isn't the Psychic Fair meeting, is it!? Oooh! I just used an interrobang!

MAYOR

Mais non, Madame Rouge, but since you're here, would you consider?

The Mayor holds out their palm. Madame Rouge pulls up a chair, holds the Mayor's palm. The attendees are engrossed.

MADAME ROUGE

Ouien. What is your question?

MAYOR

The next election, Madame Rouge?

MADAME ROUGE

[beat.] Hmmm...I see the future. You are coming through! Ouien...Ouien...Ouien. You may rely on it,

mon petit chou!

The Mayor is chuffed. The Premier proffers their palm.

PREMIER

Et moi, Madam Rouge?

Madame Rouge holds the Premier's palm.

MADAME ROUGE

Oui. I see the future. Hmmm. Non...Non. Reply hazy, monsieur.

PREMIER

Try again, madame.

MADAME ROUGE

Hmmm. Maintenant. Oui! I read you. Non. Non. Alors! Maudit cette une bonne beach!

The Premier takes back his palm. Hides his brochure.

PREMIER

[laughs.] Utter claptrap!

MADAME ROUGE

Vrais cadeaux.

PREMIER

[badly pronounced.] Merci! [beat.] Moving on to the real business at hand [laughs at his own joke.] EC, you asked for this emergency meeting?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Yes. Well, it's more of a situation we're monitoring...I have a number of concerns...I'm talking off the top of my head here... [beat.]

Madame Rouge is drawn to the doughnuts. She takes a snow globe from her bag, shakes it and peers into it. She eats and speak simultaneously. She is sialoquent. The attendees ignore her.

MADAME ROUGE

Putain! This doesn't seem to be working properly.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

[beat.] This isn't normal.

MADAME ROUGE

Alors! Where's the snow? Calisse! I see the ice in Hudson's Bay melting.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Even after the drought we had last summer, now with this wettest September ever recorded...

MADAME ROUGE

Calisse! I see the Red River changing its flow.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

It doesn't look good.

MAYOR

What? I understood that the levels were below normal...2.5' at James Avenue.

PUBLIC WORKS

James is 24.3 feet! 'All over sudden', we've activated all flood pumping stations!

Onscreen: James Avenue pumping station working.

MADAME ROUGE

Calisse! I see the Red and the Assiniboine becoming one.

PUBLIC WORKS

We've never seen anything like this before. Makes '97 look like a trickle.

PREMIER

I'm not aware of any flooding south of the border.

PUBLIC WORKS

The Red River basin is saturated.

MADAME ROUGE

I see Hudson's Bay feeding the Red.

PUBLIC WORKS

Winnipeg could be under water!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

PREMIER

Excellent news!

MAYOR

Excellent news!

MADAME ROUGE

Calisse! I see water coming from the north!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

The water is flowing from north to south **and** south to north.

PREMIER

Impossible! The Red River flows north!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We are experiencing a flow reversal as well as water coming up from the Dakotas. Something to do with climate change.

MAYOR

What does this mean in plain English?

MADAME ROUGE

Tabarnak! I see the Red River breaching its banks.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

I can't say. One more inch of rain...wind
"galumphing" in...

MADAME ROUGE

I see a wall of water rolling southward down the Red!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

I'm not certain that Duff's ditch has the capacity to prevent flooding of this magnitude. The Red River could "gyre and gimble in the wabe!"

MADAME ROUGE

Ah ben we're fucked!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

PREMIER

How much time do we
have?

MAYOR

How much time do we
have?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

I'd only be speculating, of course...If the river becomes "frumious"...

MADAME ROUGE

Bam! Tout la mer!

LX flashing display.

PREMIER

Best case scenario?

MAYOR

Best case scenario?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Our current technology could conceivably save us. The floodway and the expansion, and again, I'm speculating here, could contain the flood with the net effect that Winnipeg would acquire valuable oceanfront real estate!

Madame Rouge Googles surreptitiously on her cell, then 'consults' her snow globe, fumbling between both. Flustered.

MADAME ROUGE

I see... the online tide chart... high tide...12:33 PM CST today. 1008 km to Hudson's Bay, a wave traveling at 800 km per hour.

PREMIER

[beat.] Worst case scenario?

MAYOR

[beat.] Worst case scenario?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

There's no way to procure the full data set before things become "vorpel". Add to this the complexity of multiple analytical flood models...

LX brown out.

MADAME ROUGE

Alors, where is my maths? That puts us /at

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Again, I'd just be/

MADAME ROUGE

...osti de câlisse de ciboire de tabarnak!! One o'clock!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

speculating...maybe four hours before we have a flood situation?

MAYOR

One o'clock!

PREMIER

One o'clock!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

MADAME ROUGE

I see the Red River flooding Manitoba. Water pouring over the plains! I see swells! Ooh. Did I say that?

PREMIER

How much of the province could flood?

MAYOR

How much of the city could flood?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

With the floodway. Hard to say. Without the floodway. We could all be under water.

MADAME ROUGE

I see a clock in water. [beat.] What is this orange string?? Calisse! I see a sunset at sea! Fuck les doughnuts! J'm'en fou!

LX flashing display.

Madame Rouge makes a dramatic exit. The attendees do not notice.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We should do something!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Send out press releases!

PUBLIC WORKS

We probably should raise the gates! Maybe. Definitely. 'Nip it in the butt!'

MAYOR

How high?

PUBLIC WORKS

To the max! 40 feet!

PREMIER

Raise the gates!

MAYOR

Raise the gates!

Attendees jump up. Test their strength on the High-Striker, jostling with machismo.

Video of actual gates being raised onscreen.

Floodway warning HORN. JARRING, BLARING UH-OO-GA! An assault to the ears. It sounds like war.

Pause. A tableau of panic.

Bran flies across SL to SR.

INTERVAL

ACT II

Scene 1

Projected: "... never once considering how in the world she was to get out again." - Lewis Carroll

Same day. Not a normal day. Pouring rain.

A basement. Institutional lift. A vertical casket-like box 0.95 m x 1.25 m. Scraped walls. Red emergency phone. A metal mop bucket and two string mops.

Large print sign with up/down arrows and universal wheelchair symbol.

Two large crudely handmade signs: "OUT OF ORDER," and "Please Use the Stairs" with a happy face emoji taped to the wall.

Morgan crosses SL to SR, from the 'bus stop' to the lift in the university basement. The different levels prevent easy progress to the lift.

Bran enters flying. Pecks at the "OUT OF ORDER " sign. The sign falls off the wall. Bran shreds the sign.

Morgan enters drenched. Full stop at the "Please Use the Stairs" sign.

MORGAN

"How sweet the mundane when you have no access to it."

Morgan's cell rings. She answers. Sees that it is Giles.

MORGAN

[beat.]

Giles offstage.

GILES

You got there ok.

MORGAN

[beat.]

GILES

Are you still angry?

MORGAN

[beat.] Are you?

GILES

Not at you.

GILES

Want to be nice?

Do you?

Okay.

MORGAN

Want to be nice?

Do you?

Okay.

MORGAN

I forgive you for being an SOB.

GILES

[laughs.]

BRAN

SOB! [laughs.]

GILES

I'll pick you up after class.

MORGAN

No thanks.

GILES

Are you sure?

MORGAN

I can make my own way home.

GILES

You're still angry.

MORGAN

We need to talk.

GILES

We need to talk.

MORGAN

Later.

GILES

Later.

They hang up.

Morgan maneuvers her wheelchair back and forth, backs into the mop bucket, ponders her predicament.

MORGAN

Bran! Will you look at that sign! Please use the stairs!

BRAN

Quork! Quork! Quork!

MORGAN

Do you think it's broken?

BRAN

Broken?

MORGAN

It looks normal.
[laughs.]

BRAN

[laughs.]

Morgan does a doughnut.

MORGAN

It doesn't say out of order anywhere. [beat.]

BRAN

Broken? Quork?

MORGAN

The custodian probably put it there to hold it for their cart. They think this is their private lift.

BRAN

Quork!

Morgan rips up the "Please use the Stairs" sign, throws it on the floor. Bran finishes the job, flies to Morgan's wheelchair.

Morgan holds down the button on the exterior of the lift. The door opens out. An unkindness of ravens - shadow puppets - flies out. Bran flaps their wings but stays with Morgan. Morgan hesitates. The door closes automatically.

Scene 2

Projected: "...Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise

than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise." - Lewis Carroll

Morgan holds down the button again. Tries to enter the lift with Bran. With no warning, the door closes on her wheelchair. Bran flaps about. She holds the button down again. Roomfull of Teeth choral music begins. The door opens again. Music stops. Morgan holds the button down. Bumpy start sounds. The sound of the lift rising. Music starts. The sound of the lift stopping. Music stops.

Morgan repeatedly pushes the lift button. Click! Click! Click!

The sound of the lift dropping back to the basement level with a loud clunk.

MORGAN

Perfect. Isn't that perfect, Bran?

BRAN

Quork?

Morgan uses her cell like a flashlight to find the lift emergency phone. A loud dial tone. She dials.

No answer. Repeats. Repeats.

Lx on lift and conference room.

The attendees are seated.

Conference room clock 9:30 AM

FIRE

Fire here. What is your location?

MORGAN

I'm in the basement lift.

FIRE

(to attendees)

There's a fire in the elevator!

(to Morgan)

[beat.] Hold on. [beat.] You're on speaker phone.

On speaker phone.

FIRE

Leave the elevator at once! You should use the stairs when there is a fire -

MORGAN

No! No! I'm not reporting a fire! I'm not in the elevator, I'm in the lift! It's broken! I'm stuck -

FIRE

You're referring to a special handicapped lift?

MORGAN

[beat.] Yes.

FIRE

There is no special handicapped lift in this building. The legislative building has a normal elevator, of course.

MORGAN

The legislative building? I thought this was direct to the security office at The /University

FIRE

Sorry, security is not my mandate. I'm handing you over to the police.

MORGAN

Wait! This isn't a /security

POLICE

Police Head here. What seems to be the problem?

MORGAN

I'm impaired and I'm stuck in the lift.

POLICE

Are you willing to submit to a breathalyzer?

BRAN

(Mimics glug-glugging)

MORGAN

No! I'm not dr -

BRAN

(Mimics popping cork)

MORGAN

I haven't been drink -

BRAN

(Mimics hiccups)

POLICE

If you won't submit to a breathalyzer -

MORGAN

No! Would you please listen? I'm imp...disabled.

POLICE

Disabled! That's different.

MORGAN

Tell me about it.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Services, here. Language, please. Person first! Person with disability. Everything must be labelled appropriately.

MORGAN

Shouldn't I decide how I want to be labelled?

SOCIAL SERVICES

As long as your terminology is politically correct, dear. Everyone must be properly labelled.

MORGAN

Fine. I'm a person who just happens to be a cripple in a wheelchair.

(sotto voce)

fuck

BRAN

Fuck.

SOCIAL SERVICES

That word makes me feel very uncomfortable.

MORGAN

Which word? Fuck or cripple?

SOCIAL SERVICES

Well, [beat.] cr...[beat.] fu...Those two words you said. [beat.] There's no need for invective and billingsgate.

BRAN

Fuck!

SOCIAL SERVICES

A spoken word is not a sparrow. Once it flies out,

you can't take it back.

MORGAN

I'm a person in a wheelchair!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Good! I mean...I can only help persons in wheelchairs, dear. Luckily, you fall well within my mandate.

BRAN

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

SOCIAL SERVICES

That's terribly rude! [beat.] Let me speak to your caregiver.

BRAN

Fuck! Fuck! [beat.] Fuck!

MORGAN

I'm on my own.

SOCIAL SERVICES

No caregiver?

BRAN

Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!

SOCIAL SERVICES

But I heard. [beat.] Are you okay? You're being very slantindicular.

MORGAN

No! I'm not okay! I'm stuck in a lift!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Of course you aren't okay, dear. That's why you really should have someone with you.

MORGAN

Why? Then we'd both be stuck in a lift! Do you have someone with you?

SOCIAL SERVICES

Of course not, dear. I'm not a person with disability. I just thought I heard someone else. We count on a caregiver squiring you.

MORGAN

We?

SOCIAL SERVICES

You know. The not-others. Persons without disability. Are you certain you're alone, dear? You're not bifurcating?

MORGAN

There is no person with me!

SOCIAL SERVICES

No need to peck at me!

MORGAN

Maybe if you stopped using that annoying disability talk-down, I wouldn't feel the need to clack my beak!

SOCIAL SERVICES

I'm just trying to help, dear. I really haven't the time to dilly-dally!

MORGAN

Good! All I want is to get out of here! I'm late /for

DOGS FIRST

Dogs First here. Do you have a service dog with you?

MORGAN

No. I don't.

DOGS FIRST

That's good...I mean...I'm glad that a dog's life isn't in danger...I mean...I don't want to see you suffer either! [beat.] We don't want to have to put anyone down.

MORGAN

Put anyone down! Mater Dei! I'm not suffering! What is it with this suffering thing? I'm just stuck in a broken lift!

Emergency Coordinator covers the emergency phone mouthpiece so Morgan cannot hear.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

(sotto voce to attendees)

Must I remind you all that we are in a situation here?! There's no time to lose! We should do something!

The attendees do nothing.

MAYOR

Mayor here. What institution did you say you were in?

MORGAN

I'm not in an institution...not the kind...well, yes, I'm in an institution but...

MAYOR

You don't seem to have a clear fix on reality. You're rather a flibbertigibbet!

MORGAN

I'm an associate professor!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Well, isn't that gelastic!

MORGAN

Save me! I'm drowning in bureaucracy!

Conference room clock moves to 9:45 AM.

BRAN

Cuckoo!

Sound of moving water. The water rises.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Not to worry! We'll get back to you. Eventually. We really can't dawdle.... We should do something!

Dialogue fades out, Lx crossfade, as Emergency Coordinator hangs up.

Scene 3

Projected: "Stuff and nonsense." - Lewis Carroll

Same day.

The lift.

Morgan dials Giles cell.

Bran perches on Morgan's chair.

GILES

(offstage)

[Giles's recording.] Hello? Hello? [Pause.] Who is this? [Pause.] [Pause.] Beep!

BRAN

Hello? Hello?

MORGAN

Giles, where are you?

BRAN

Hello? Hello?

Morgan hangs up. She takes lipstick from her backpack, graffiti's the lift walls. 'I don't need easy. I just need possible.' The graffiti is visible in between multiple brown-outs.

Lx on conference room, while Morgan continues to graffiti. "There is no elevator to success. You have to take the stairs."

At the same time, in the conference room. Attendees are seated. Throughout, when the attendees are not speaking they confer (improvisation) with one another, sotto voce, over brightly coloured charts, diagrams, and photographs. Numerous times, the words 'ramp' 'flood' 'evacuate' and 'The Centre of Things' pop out and are audible to the audience.

The Premier leafs through his travel brochure.

Emergency phone rings in the lift. Morgan picks up. On speaker phone.

MORGAN

Hello?

SOCIAL SERVICES

Hello, dear.

MORGAN

That was quick! I thought eventually meant never!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Don't be a blatherskite. Eventually does come eventually, or it would be called never, wouldn't it, dear?

MORGAN

How long am I going to be stuck in here?!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Patience is a virtue! [beat.] You'll be happy to know

that we're all working to build you a special ramp...maybe two...because you're special.

MORGAN

Oh my God.

BRAN

God-man!

SOCIAL SERVICES

That sounds so ungrateful, dear.

BRAN

Quork!

MORGAN

What good is a ramp? I'm stuck in a lift!

SOCIAL SERVICES

But aren't you the one who got into the lift, dear?

MORGAN

I didn't know it was out of order! The sign said please use the stairs. I thought...the custodian. You think I should have dragged myself up the stairs?

BRAN

Quork!

SOCIAL SERVICES

You don't have to be snarky with me, you know. We're all going through a great deal of bobsy-die just for you even though we're really pressed for time!

PUBLIC WORKS

Public Works here. We really need to get this show on the road! The ramp is in the works!

MAYOR

We're waiting on provincial burden-bearing.

MORGAN

I don't need a ramp!

BRAN

Quork!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Taradiddle! Of course you do. You're in a wheelchair, dear.

MORGAN

[beat.] Ok. I usually need a ramp. We need more ramps in the world. Ramps are a good thing. They just aren't enough. Since I've started using a wheelchair, I've been denied access, isolated, demoralized and destabilized. But right now what I need, is to get out of this lift! [beat.] Can't you PLEASE help me get out of this lift?

SOCIAL SERVICES

No need to get your feathers all ruffled, dear.

MORGAN

You don't understand -

SOCIAL SERVICES

I do understand! I participated in an empathy simulation in grad school. I was confined to a wheelchair for an entire afternoon. I had to act spastic. I was pretty good at it! Academy award material! It was a real eye-popper. You know what they say about walking in someone else's shoes. Not walking exactly. [beat.] I mean, I'm woke.

MORGAN

You're woke because you zipped around in a wheelchair? Maybe you think that a man wearing a bra and heels for a few hours knows what it's like to be a woman?

SOCIAL SERVICES

No use pettifogging. What I'm trying to say is that you are an inspiration, dear. But I really mustn't tarry.

MORGAN

I inspire you?

SOCIAL SERVICES

You're so brave!

MORGAN

For what? Getting out of bed this morning?

SOCIAL SERVICES

You've overcome your disability! Look at you, out and about all by yourself! You must be proud as a peacock! It's remarkable that you don't just give up! I would! I couldn't do it.

MORGAN

Now I'm part of the disability inspiration-porn spectacle!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Oh dear! This has all gone widdershins! You're making me feel all collywobbles.

MORGAN

We wouldn't want that.

SOCIAL SERVICES

We? But...I thought you said. Never mind, I've really no time to waste! This is discombobulating! It would be ever so much nicer if you would make me feel more comfortable when in the presence of your otherness.

MORGAN

I'll try.

FINANCIAL RISK

Financial Risk here. We really can't afford to goof-off! If I can just interject a bit of argle-bargle. We are working to allocate funds to the proper department to build that ramp just for you!

MORGAN

The ramp again!

BRAN

Quork!

FINANCIAL RISK

Yes, I am calculating costs as we speak. Yikes! Look at the time! Haste makes waste! I'm quite good at counting money, but we're in a real time bind!

MAYOR

We can be proactive as soon as we have clarity about provincial funding intentions. [sotto voce.] Bloody snollygosters.

PREMIER

Premier here. We really must turn the page on this bafflegab! The provincial government has made significant contributions to accessibility in this province....including generous cost-sharing with the city of Winnipeg. [beat.] We're not just popinjays, you know!

MORGAN

"I don't know the meaning of half those long words,
and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!"
[beat.] Asinus asinum fricat!

BRAN

Frickin' asinum!

PREMIER

We're not just piddling time with grandiloquence
here...reminds me...Can I ask a personal question how
do you people pee?

MORGAN

Quork.

BRAN

Quork.

PREMIER

And sex?

MORGAN

Quork!

BRAN

Quork!

MORGAN

My gender identity?

PREMIER

No, I mean, do the handicapped? You know.

MORGAN

You expect me to do tricks?

PREMIER

Can you?

BRAN

Quork!

MORGAN

Quork!

PREMIER

Look, I'm not ableist.

MORGAN

You don't get to say what is ableist and what isn't!
Did someone wipe your ass for you today?

BRAN

Quork?

PREMIER

I know what it's like to be wheelchair bound. I used
to live next door to a man who lived next door to a
woman who was confined to a wheelchair. Poor soul.

But really I must not malingering.

MAYOR

Speaking of which, when can we expect clarity on provincial funding intentions?

FINANCIAL RISK

If I can get back to the numbers. We need to watch our twoonies. I regret to inform you that, due to budgetary and time constraints, we may only be able to build one ramp.

PREMIER

You have to understand, this is a long game. One ramp promised now, maybe two promised after the election.

MORGAN

A mop would be more use! I'm dripping all over the floor in here.

FINANCIAL RISK

You want a mop, too! A Royal Commission may be required to append the original requisition! These things take time!

MORGAN

I don't need two ramps!

BRAN

Don't!

PUBLIC WORKS

Then why did you request two? That's rather muddle-headed. So much gobbledygook! Especially when we're in a rush here.

BRAN

Don't!

MORGAN

I didn't request any ramps!

FINANCIAL RISK

What about the mop? We need to hurry this up! Time is money!

MORGAN

No! This is nonsense! I just want to get out of this lift! You're not listening!

BRAN

Quork! Quork! Quork!

MAYOR

Of course we're listening!

PREMIER

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act mandates that we listen. I take umbrage with your unsubstantiated insinuation of tartuffery!

MAYOR

My team has done our drive-through diversity training! We've ticked all the boxes!

Conference room clock moves to 10:00 AM.

BRAN

Cuckoo!

Sound of moving water. The water rises.

MORGAN

What's going on?! Water is seeping in! There must be a water main break or something!

FIRE

None reported.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Oh, I don't think it's that.

MORGAN

You have to get me out of this lift!

MAYOR

As soon as the province comes through with the funds we'll have that ramp for you!

MORGAN

Ad absurdum! [beat.] Absurdity!

Starting at one end of table. Staccato.

DOGS FIRST

Did she say doggie - or puppy?

FINANCIAL RISK

I heard fiduciary - or bankruptcy.

POLICE

For sure she said she's guilty.

FIRE

Flaming incendiary!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

I'll need to send out a communique, an announcement,
reportage - and correspondence.

PUBLIC WORKS

Sorry. I wasn't listening. Is she dangerous?

SOCIAL SERVICES

No. No. Poor dear. I think she said she's harmless.
Or was it armless?

MORGAN

What? No! No! No!

BRAN

No! No! No!

MORGAN

I said nothing of /the

PREMIER

Well if you said nothing, should we even be
listening? This is a real boondoggle.

SOCIAL SERVICES

A perfect hurrah's nest!

BRAN

Quork.

MAYOR

Point of personal privilege.

PREMIER

State your point.

MAYOR

We're losing the point.

PREMIER

Point taken. People, please!

MAYOR

Team, let's fly in formation!

FINANCIAL RISK

We really can't dawdle! Of course, I must first
identify, measure, monitor and mitigate the financial

risk.

MORGAN

To build me a ramp!? We're back to the ramp!

Financial Risk takes a very long densely worded contract from their briefcase.

FINANCIAL RISK

Yes, we can proceed without delay once the contract is signed! It simply states that the disabled, that's you, cannot sue the government, that's us, should the disabled, that's you, fall off the ramp and become, well, I suppose, a person with a plurality of disabilities. And, of course, there's a lot of gobbledygook fine print to ignore. Octothorpes and such. But we must cross our t's and tittle our i's. If we continue to hurry, it shouldn't take long!

BRAN

Quork!

MAYOR

Of course, we still need cost-sharing from the province.

PUBLIC WORKS

No need to create a hullabaloo! We're frittering away valuable time!

MORGAN

How long is this ramp?

PUBLIC WORKS

[splutters.]

MORGAN

Does it have side railings?

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

BRAN

Quork!

MORGAN

What is the grade?

PUBLIC WORKS

[splutters.] We have made comprehensive adjustments to the ski jump plans made available to us. We can't

just turn on a dime 'in the spurt of the moment!'

BRAN

Quork?!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

PUBLIC WORKS

We better get our skates on!

MORGAN

Quork?!

BRAN

Quork?!

PUBLIC WORKS

Have no fear! A better ramp is as good as built!

MORGAN

I don't want a ramp!

PUBLIC WORKS

[splutters.] You're being a smellfungus!

MORGAN

I've been stuck in here so long I'm moulding! Get me out of here!

PUBLIC WORKS

You're very demanding for someone who's getting more than she asked for! This is 'nerve-wrecking!' We're falling behind here.

DOGS FIRST

Dogs first here again. Checking back. I haven't time to mess around! Are you sure you don't have a service dog in there? A Pekinese or Corgi or a Schnauzer? A rescue dog...eensy, average, or jumbo, any breed at all will do.

BRAN

(Mimics bark)

DOGS FIRST

I heard a dog.

MORGAN

No, I don't have a dog with me.

BRAN

(Mimics bark)

DOGS FIRST

Waaaait a minute. [beat.] I heard a dog.

BRAN

(Mimics bark)

DOGS FIRST

There!

MORGAN

No, I don't have a fucking dog!

BRAN

Quork!

DOGS FIRST

Oh.

MORGAN

It's a fucking bird.

BRAN

(Mimics bark)

DOGS FIRST

A bird dog? An English Pointer, a Labrador Retriever,
or an Irish Setter?

MORGAN

No, I fucking don't have any fucking kind of fucking
dog!

BRAN

(Mimics bark)

DOGS FIRST

I distinctly heard a dog.

BRAN

(Mimics bark)

MORGAN

I don't have a dog! I have Galapagos finches and gold
finches and a mourning dove! I have fucking birds!

FIRE

Are the fucking birds spontaneously combusting? I
could definitely save a spontaneously combusting
bird...fucking or not. A Phoenix, perhaps?

DOGS FIRST

I can only save d...

Erratic reception. Words missing.

MORGAN

Wait! Fuck! What if I have a dog in here? I -

Erratic reception. Words missing.

DOGS FIRST

What? I can't hear you. You have a dog? Why didn't you say so! Time is flying!

Reception again.

MORGAN

Bark! Bark! Bark!

BRAN

I have a dog!

Conference room clock moves to 11:00 AM.

BRAN

Cuckoo!

Sound of moving water. The water rises.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We should do something!

MORGAN

Yes! You should get me out of here!!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Perhaps I should have mentioned...you've caught us on a particularly bad day. We have a province-wide emergency...well, rather a situation we're... monitoring.

MORGAN

Situation?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

A flood.

MORGAN

A flood!

BRAN

Quork!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the public at this time.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

There's no time to waste. We must evacuate the entire city to higher ground. We really should absqualate.

MORGAN

But I'm in the basement! Please, help me! You have to

get me out of here!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We're working round the clock, as expeditiously as possible -

MORGAN

Thank God!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

To get you access to The Far-off Edge of Things.

MORGAN

[beat.] Where?

BRAN

Quork?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

It's rather a peregrination to get there. There's a map here...somewhere [beat.] filed under maps without territories, I believe.

MORGAN

You mean...?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

It's Far-off...at The Edge of Things. That is, way out of The Centre of Things, out of the way, so as not to inconvenience anyone... [beat.]

MORGAN

Is there a sign on my back that says kick me?

PREMIER

Premier here. Let me confabulate and bloviate about all the conveniences we have in place at The Centre of Things. As the old saying goes, "Every bird loves to hear himself sing!" There are libraries, doctors, pharmacies, theatres, cash prizes for just being there, well-paying jobs, and all the infrastructure is ergonomically constructed for the able-bodied! All the beautiful people will be there!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We're doing a sort of triage to see who gets in. Emergency protocol, you know...crisis standards of care. We really must get a move on!

DOGS FIRST

Dogs must be saved!

MORGAN

Triage?

BRAN

Quork?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

I have a powerpoint slide.

*A confusing powerpoint onscreen emulating a
Cagean drawing which shows abled white males at
the top, disabled people after dogs and disabled
old people at the bottom just below cats. It all
looks like organized nonsense.*

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

You see it all makes perfectly good sense
diagrammatically.

MORGAN

I can't see your powerpoint! I'm stuck in a lift!
What are you talking about? I just want to get out of
here!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

[sotto voce.] Sacrifices must be made.

BRAN

Quork?

MORGAN

Did he say sacrifices?

BRAN

Quork.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Can we hurry this along?

MORGAN

I smell "drooz".

PREMIER

I forgot to mention the parades and banners at The
Centre of Things!

MORGAN

"With a clamour of bells that set the swallows
soaring" -

PREMIER

Nothing is too -

BRAN

Far-off!

PREMIER

Exactly!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

To elucidate further, The Far-off Edge of Things is at the periphery, of course. At the margins. For the marginalized marginal. Let's see. I have a powerpoint slide for that, too.

A power-point slide onscreen showing a flat earth and a wheelchair at the precipice as if going over the edge.

MORGAN

I can't see your fucking power points! [beat.] I'm already at the Far-off Edge of Things!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Oh no, this is very very far-off...to the extreme edge. The hinterland. Across the morass...

MORGAN

How am I supposed to get there?!

BRAN

Quork?

PUBLIC WORKS

Well, we're working on that. That's why the ramp, of course. It's a bit of a bugbear. If you weren't holding us up like this -

MORGAN

You're building a ramp to The Far-off Edge of Things?

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Yes, isn't that what we've been saying!?

MORGAN

For persons with disability?

PUBLIC INFORMATION

If they show up. Yes.

MORGAN

How are they going to get to the ramp?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

[Splutters.]

MORGAN

What are your plans for evacuating cri... persons with disability... from their homes? From work places?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

[Splutters.] Normally, not many of you people show up.

MORGAN

Makes you stop and think, doesn't it?

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Think? Oh no, all our information is statistical. No thinking involved at all. No time for that malarkey. We really must push on.

MORGAN

Imagine a world in which you're surprised when disabled people don't show up!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Impossible! I certainly can't imagine if I can't think! What an addle-pated attitude!

MORGAN

We don't go where we can't go!

BRAN

Quork!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Maybe someone can push you to The Far-off Edge of Things...once the ramp is constructed?

SOCIAL SERVICES

As they say, birds of a feather should flock together. We really must fly now!

MORGAN

I want to go to The Centre of Things!

SOCIAL SERVICES

Oh dear. That is uber complicated. It's standing room only at The Centre of Things. There's no room for

people like you, dear.

Morgan loses it. Rest of scene Morgan does a furious 'fuck run.' That is, the actor interjects 'fuck' liberally as she loses it. The inclusions in the dialogue are suggested at minimum.

MORGAN

People like me?! I don't fucking need a lot of room!
I have my own fucking chair! Just get me the fuck out
of here!

BRAN

Get me the fuck out of here!

PUBLIC WORKS

This is a humongous problem. We're not just 'biting
our time,' you know!

SOCIAL SERVICES

You do understand that you aren't the norm. That is,
you aren't the standard norm. That is, the person we
normally expect? That is, we normally plan for the
normally normate.

MORGAN

Fuck yes, I'm beginning to get that!

PUBLIC INFORMATION

No need to create a kerfuffle! My head is spinning!

BRAN

Quork!

SOCIAL SERVICES

We must get back to normalcy here. We can't be
twiddling our thumbs!

PUBLIC WORKS

We have to step on it! What do you want from us?

MORGAN

A fucking new normal!

BRAN

Quork! Quork! Quork!!

MAYOR

I want equity
participation!

MORGAN

I want equity
participation!

PREMIER

Codswollop! You have to understand that you are just

one person and we have to think of the greater good. As they say, The arrow strikes one bird down, but the flock remains. We can't be saving one fish at a time here. We should have high-tailed it already!

MORGAN

But I'm not just one -

SOCIAL SERVICES

Aha! You've been obfuscating all along! You do have someone with you!

MORGAN

No! This isn't about me! There are a billion people on earth with disability! I am not a fucking metaphor!

BRAN

Quork!

FINANCIAL RISK

A billion! I love big numbers!

SOCIAL SERVICES

We have your best interests in mind, dear. But we really must scoot!

PUBLIC WORKS

Believe you me, there are millions and gajillions of barricades, obstacles, obstructions, hurdles, bars, blockades, hazards, detriments, and assorted bigly strictures and quagmires for persons with disability at The Centre of Things. And of course, there are yuge moats.

SOCIAL SERVICES

You wouldn't like it, dear. Now I really really must scoot!

Conference room clock moves to 12:00 PM.

BRAN

Cuckoo!

Sound of moving water. The water rises.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We should do something!

MORGAN

Oh my God! My feet are getting wet!

Bran becomes increasingly agitated as Morgan's fear escalates.

MORGAN

The lift is filling with water! This isn't funny anymore! Get me the fuck out of here!

PREMIER

People! Let's skedaddle!

MORGAN

Don't leave me here!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We should do something!

MORGAN

You can't just abandon me!

PREMIER

Al mal tiempo, buena cara.

MORGAN

FUCK!! FUCK!! Water is pouring in! Water is up to my ankles! You have to get me out of here NOW!

PUBLIC WORK

Right! This is no time to lollygag. We must work with utmost speed! Ramp construction has /begun!

MORGAN

Oh my God! Don't fucking leave me! This isn't funny anymore.

BRAN

God-man! Get back here!

Reception fades, disconnects. Morgan yells into the emergency phone.

MORGAN

Hello? Anybody?!
Hello?

BRAN

Hello? Hello?

Morgan leaves the emergency phone dangling, dead. Bran pecks at it.

Onscreen text/Offstage VOICE:

Wohn! Wohn! Wohn! Wohn! Wohn! Wohn! Wohn! Wohn! Wohn!

Emergency Alert! This is not a test. A flood alert has

been issued for the entire Province of Manitoba. The public is advised to evacuate low lying areas immediately. Evacuate low lying areas immediately!

Scene 4

Projected: "One of the deep secrets of life is that all that is really worth the doing is what we do for others."
- Lewis Carroll

Same day. Flood.

Room in Morgan and Giles's house. Giles, drenched, is on his cell.

The lift. Bran sits in Morgan's lap, solicits head scratches. Bran nibbles at Morgan's fingers. Morgan scratches Bran's head.

Morgan's cell rings.

GILES

Morgan, pick up pick up pick up! Answer the fucking phone!

Morgan answers.

MORGAN

Giles!

Bran pecks at the phone, then settles on Morgan's shoulder.

GILES

Morgan! I've been calling and calling! Reception is erratic! I thought you'd be home already. Where are you?!

MORGAN

Where are you? I'm stuck at Uni -

GILES

I just got home! Streets are rivers, sidewalks are buckled! Basements are collapsing! The water was coming up behind me. I turned around... there was more and more water. The entire city has been given an hour to evacuate! The Red Cross and the Forces have set up emergency shelters.

MORGAN

Giles, I'm really scared. I'm trying -

GILES

Stay there! Don't even try to get home now, Mor. I barely made it myself. I swear I heard the water roar! Just get to the top floor!

MORGAN

[beat.] The birds!

GILES

Saint Giles to the rescue. [Beat.] Mor [beat.] I

LX brown-outs.

GILES

(cries.)

What I said this morning. It wasn't me. [beat.] I just -

MORGAN

(cries.)

I already forgave you.

LX brown-outs.

MORGAN

Giles!

Black out SR Giles.

GILES

Fuck! Hydro went out! Mor, hang up...get to the top floor before you lose power!

MORGAN

Giles, get out of there!

GILES

Mor, get out of there!

GILES

How will I find you after? Where will you be?

MORGAN

At The Far-off Edge of Things!

GILES

Where? [beat.] Nevermind! I'll find you. When?

MORGAN

A nameless day when it rains stars! Giles, YOU HAVE

TO GO!

BRAN

GO! GO! GO!

GILES

Have I told you I love you lately?

MORGAN

Not yet.

*Reception lost. Neither can hear the other's
response. Lips move.*

GILES

I love you lately.
[beat.]

MORGAN

I love you lately.
[beat.]

MORGAN

Giles?

GILES

Mor?

MORGAN

Giles?

*Bran pecks at the cell. Morgan fumbles. The cell
falls into the water.*

BRAN

Calamity sum

MORGAN

Oh my God, Bran. [crying.] Yes. We're in deep
trouble.

BRAN

Calamity sum! Quork! Quork!

Morgan pounds on the door.

MORGAN

HELP! Can any one hear
us?! Is anyone out
there?!

BRAN

HELP! HELP! HELP!

Scene 5

Projected: "We're all mad here." - Lewis Carroll

Same day.

The conference room is in a shambles.

"Pop Goes the Weasel" music.

Attendees become more clownesque. Set, costume, props are in brilliant colour. The Premier wears a tropical tourist outfit. They play musical chairs, then sit jammed together at one end of the table. The Premier sits on the Mayor's lap. A tableau.

PREMIER

People, we are in a situation!

PUBLIC WORKS

The-Flood-To-End-All-Floods!

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We should do something!

PUBLIC WORKS

Probably, unfortunately, Duff's ditch is worse than 'the lesser of two equals!' Water is backed up from a gazillion directions! The James Avenue pumps are shot!

Onscreen: James Avenue pumping station not working.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

There is no danger to the pub...There is a MODICUM, a tad, a smidgen of danger to the public at this time.[beat.] Maybe a soupçon.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

Everything is cattywampus! We should do something!

PREMIER

Un momento por favor.

The Premier takes a small inflated tropical pool floaty from his briefcase, starts inflating it.

PREMIER

All hands on deck!! Abandon ship!

Carmina Burana (O fortuna and Fortune Plango Vulnera) choral music

The attendees rush to the THIS WAY TO ELEVATOR door. The Premier creates a log-jam in the doorway with their floaty. They all exit. The door closes. The conference room is empty. Silent pause. Roomful of Teeth choral music begins. Music stops. Starts. Stops. Music winds d..o...w.....n. Multiple brown-outs accompany arcing sounds. The elevator button is heard being repeatedly pushed. Click! Click! Click! A loud clunk.

The attendees re-enter the conference room, grumble about the elevator malfunctioning, rush to the stairwell door. The Premier gets there first, opens the door. Lx on stairway under construction. Large construction crosses of crudely nailed together 2x4s block the exit. DANGER Construction tape criss-crosses all. Two extra-large crudely made signs: "STAIRS UNDER CONSTRUCTION," and "Please use the elevator," with a happy face emoji.

The amplifying sound of the unkindness of ravens.

DOGS FIRST

What is that? [beat.] Listen. [beat.] It sounds like feathers.

The sound of feathers fills the house. Ravens crash through the window into the room. The window explodes as the sky rains ravens. A fall-out. Ravens flop muddled onto the table, onto attendees, across the room. Mud everywhere.

Muddled attendees 'fall out' as one.

PREMIER

*Mierda!! Mierda!!
Mierda!!*

MAYOR

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

Fallout continues.

Conference room clock moves to 1:00 PM. Falls off the wall. The clock dangles from the orange string, hangs in the water that trickles into the room.

PREMIER

All right people! Let's all act normal.

Sound of moving water. The water rises.

EMERGENCY COORDINATOR

We really should do something!

PREMIER

No hay problema.

The Premier gestures to the attendees to wait a moment, makes a cell call, hand covering the cell microphone briefly.

PREMIER

(to attendees)

Time to call in a few favours. [winks.] All we have to do is wait for our ship to come in...

Scene 6

Projected: "She soon made out that she was in the pool of tears. " - Lewis Carroll

Same day.

The lift.

Multiple brown-outs.

Black feathers are woven through Morgan's hair. She has black Celtic warrior's make-up smeared on her face.

The door opens a crack. Water fills the lift. Morgan is waist-deep in water.

MORGAN

"And one is come, from considering the deluge, and Christ crucified, and the day of future doom. [screams.] I am splendid."

Morgan pounds the lift door.

Bran hammers the door and flies about, hitting the walls, screaming.

MORGAN

[screams.] HELP! Can anyone hear me?! We're in the lift! [beat.] This can't be happening. Where is my joyful ending? [beat.] I will emerge rowing in my chair with a crown of feathers. [soft.] "I will roll my feathers and row myself softly home." Birds will flutter around my head composing stories! [beat.] Oh my God! [cries.] Oh Bran, dear Bran. Don't wound yourself! Come.

Bran settles on Morgan's shoulder, fluffs up their head for a scratch. Morgan comforts Bran.

MORGAN

Where is my deus ex machina? Where is my miraculous escape? My winged victory? Where is St. Jude with my boat? Where are my wings?

BRAN

Quork! Quork! Quork!

Bran puts their forehead against Morgan's cheek.

Pause.

Morgan tries to shoulder Bran off. Bran pulls at Morgan's shirt collar, makes soft intimate gurgling sounds, bowing gestures. Morgan ignores Bran's overtures.

Sound of moving water. The water rises.

MORGAN

Shoo! Go!

Morgan shoulders Bran off again.

MORGAN

Bran! GO! Go to the Far-off Edge of Things!

Bran argues, flaps their wings.

BRAN

Quork!

MORGAN

PSHSHSH! PSHSHSH! PSHSHSH!

An unkindness of ravens fills the cyclorama and spills off onto the stage.

On-screen birds-eye view. Bran flies out of the lift, swirls and wheels over the house.

Morgan is up to her shoulders in water. Her arms move like wounded wings underwater (mimes). Morgan leans her head back to keep her mouth and nose above water. The camera zooms in on her face.

MORGAN

"Then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with God's permission." [beat.] Where are my wings?

Morgan gasps. Inhales deeply.

Lx change. A nameless day when it rains stars.

Off the stage entirely, Giles stands. He holds a birdcage with two finches and a mourning dove. Morgan's binoculars hang around his neck. Giles exhales deeply as if it is Morgan's exhale. He reaches out. From the darkness, Bran flies to Giles's shoulder.

The sound of the Bennu's wings whomping, flying into the distance.

CURTAIN

Quotations in order of occurrence:

All scene titles Lewis Carroll.

Page 5 The Quran

Page 6 Wordsworth

Page 18 Ted Hughes.

Page 24 Lewis Carroll(2)

Page 24 Samuel Beckett (2)

Page 27 Shakespeare.

Page 38 Lewis Carroll (3)

Page 39 Lewis Carroll

Page 41 Enda Walsh

Page 53 Lewis Carroll

Page 62 Ursula LeGuin

Page 63 Ursula LeGuin (2)

Page 74 Taliesin

Page 74 Anne Sexton

Page 75 The Quran

“The peculiar drama of my life has placed me in a world that by and large thinks it would be better if people like me did not exist. The fight has been for accommodation, the world to me and me to the world” (228). — Harriet McBryde Johnson, disability-rights activist.

“We will not let you get away with this.” — Greta Thunberg, climate activist, speech to the United Nations, 2019.

Afterward: *The Far-off Edge of Things: A tragi-comedy*

In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, my protagonist, a birder with a cheeky raven ally, shares the narrative with prehistoric archaeopteryges, extinct passenger pigeons, and a mythological Egyptian bennu. As a result of this strong ornithological energy, I've been thinking a lot about birds since last fall. As I watch the first geese collect again for their fall migration, I am reminded of my writerly journey. Like the bird who gathers strength for the leave-taking, I gathered research to write *The Far-off Edge of Things*. While the bird tries to outwit the predator along the way, I tried to outwit the critic within. Like the bird weaving through changing landscapes and crosswinds, I wove through myriad story ideas and themes. Sometimes, like the bird flying into a glass window, I stared stunned at my monitor, tried to gain a different perspective. Akin to the bird's migratory route, my writerly path was circuitous. The research for *The Far-off Edge of Things* was particularly diverse and led me, for example, from life-changing coursework in disability studies to scientific explications of climate change, the intersections of which were to be my focus. I researched elements as seemingly off-course and disparate as the mechanisms of the Manitoba floodway and the 1950's Winnipeg flood, to mythological birds and the world of birders. I continually renewed my understanding of the complexities of disability studies while reading countless articles and blogs. Added to this, I watched videos, listened to radio interviews, and collected newspaper clippings that filled file folders labelled *climate change/disaster*, *disability*, *scribbling/notes/ideas*, *visual/set ideas*, and *birds*. Mornings, I was startled awake by impressions that must be written down, ephemeral as dreams. However, this complex confluence of ideas, this flock if you will, had been gathering for a very long time. My writing migration

began before I was even aware that I was preparing for the journey. As I near my destination, I begin with a very personal explication of my relationship to disability, follow by positioning the play within literary and theatrical genres, continue with an explication of themes and literary influences, and conclude with the representation of disability within the framework of the play. And so, I follow the King's instructions to Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop." Simple, that.

When I initially gave my advisor, Dr. William Kerr, my 'elevator pitch' for *The Far-off Edge of Things*, he questioned how I would reduce my ideas, so grand in scope, to one effective piece of stage work. He heard the passion, but did not see a play. My passion in this pursuit was unrelenting. From where did this passion derive? In my thesis proposal, I write that the genesis of my idea evolved from Jordan Melograna's documentary, *The Right to be Rescued*. In Melograna's documentary, he exposes the disturbing story of Benilda 'Benny' Caixeta, who was left to drown in her wheelchair during Hurricane Katrina. The details surrounding her death impelled me to write *The Far-off Edge of Things*. In the documentary, Pam Minning describes her friend's last moments. Benny had called a company to pick her up, but the rescue never came. When she called the driver again, he said, "I have my own family to think about," and hung up. Benny gave her cell and address book to her aide and said, "Call Pam and the others and tell them I'm dead. There's no reason for two of us to drown." Benny was up to her neck in water. In a *Huffington Post* article Melograna writes about persons with disabilities during the flood:

There was no plan to rescue them. There was no plan to transport wheelchairs or provide electricity for ventilators. There was no pre-planning for evacuating hospitals and nursing homes. No accommodations were made for people who are Deaf or blind inside emergency shelters. The list goes on, touching on every right that people with disabilities fight to have in everyday life, which went simply unaccounted for in the emergency.

This wasn't a plan that overlooked inconveniences that everyone experiences in these scenarios, this was a plan that overlooked important, life-preserving accommodations that many people with disabilities need in order to live. During Katrina, people with disabilities were denied the right to be rescued.

Although the media often view disasters as mercurial natural events, in Melograna's documentary, disability rights lawyer, Adrien Weibgen makes clear that, "No disasters are natural. When you know in advance who is likely to be the most harmed by a disaster and you don't do anything about it, then that is a choice. It's about whose lives are more valuable and which ones aren't as valuable." This choice is often based on what is termed the Utilitarian Principle, that is, saving the many at the expense of the *supposed* few. However, the *few* during disaster is often a euphemism for persons with disabilities. This is especially surprising because the most recent World Health Organization's *World Report on Disability* states that, "More than a billion people are estimated to live with some form of disability or about 15% of the world's population" (Chan and Zoellick 7). In Canada alone, according to Statistics Canada, "22% of Canadians [have] at least one disability. This represents 6.2 million people" (Morris et al. 1). That's quite a *few*.

Certainly, my approach to writing *The Far-off Edge of Things* began with Melograna's documentary which elicited an alarming visual image of a woman in a wheelchair underwater. However, the more I wrote, the more I understood that the migration take-off point was my childhood — although I was entirely unaware that societal ideas surrounding disability were imprinting themselves upon me. My first contact with disability was at a distance. I was a non-disabled child. My relationship to disability became black & white when a rabbit-eared television set became a fixture in our living room. I watched women sobbing on the “Queen for a Day” television show as they competed for the crown. The big-prize giveaways, determined by an applause-meter, were often either a wheelchair, or surgery, for a disabled child. I watched children with muscular dystrophy exploited on Jerry Lewis telethons for which Lewis was misguidedly awarded the 2009 Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences despite disability advocates' protests (Andrews). Lewis once held up a child with muscular dystrophy and said, “God goofed, and it's up to us to correct His mistakes” (Andrews). Is this so difficult to imagine now? Lewis and his telethons are part of disability studies' history, but the ableist attitude remains.

As a child, literature also coloured my understanding of disability. I was a reader of fairy tales. In *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales*, I read “The Ugly Duckling” about a cygnet who is ostracized by ducks because of his bodily difference and is finally accepted at maturity by a flock of swans, because his now beautiful body mirrors theirs. In *The Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales*, I read “Rumpelstiltskin,” the story of a stereotypically evil little person, pejoratively characterized as a “dwarf,” who tries to trick a young woman into giving him her newborn child. In Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* I read about Colin whose crooked back makes him

wretched until he ‘overcomes’ his impairment. These stories taught me that physical difference is something to overcome at best and evil at worst. They also taught me, as disabilities activist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes in an opinion piece for *The New York Times*, “The one thing most people do know about being disabled is that they don’t want to be that.” As a child, I saw no joy in the disabled body. I had little actual contact with real disabled children but they were significant to my understanding of disability. Decades later, I can recall each one. As I write in a previous paper, “How Does the Constructed Environment Impact Disabled People?” I still wonder, “What happened to these children who were so hindered, so excluded by the environments in which they found themselves, that navigation of barriers was difficult at best, and not even a consideration, at worst.” The memory of these children undergirds my passion in writing *The Far-off Edge of Things*.

But, how could I transmit this passion? How could I be didactic without being pedantic? Why a play script at all? First, I trusted that the acting, playwriting, and directing experiences I had encountered during the course of obtaining my undergraduate honours degree in theatre would inform my writing. Moreover, I chose playwriting because theatre is an experiential and collaborative method of conveying ideas; there is a transactional give-and-take to live performance. The actors and audience must both show up. At its best there is entrainment; the audience’s ethos coheres and materializes in spontaneous applause. No other genre can compete with the immediacy, the aliveness, the edginess of the stage. Further, theatre practitioners are able to create multiple levels of reality through collaborative stagecraft such as the *mise-en-scène*, lighting, sound, projection, puppetry, costume design, and makeup. Theatre’s ability to

synergistically create multiple worlds is essential to my script. And so, I determined to write a play. As Shakespeare's Hamlet succinctly enunciates, "The play's the thing!"

Because I was not interested in writing a drawing-room play, or in more contemporary terms, a living-room play, no matter how re-modelled, I set-off on what I will call a postmodernist course, embracing the hybridity of postmodernism, particularly as the text intermingles genres. The following discussion is not intended as an exhaustive inventory of stylistic conventions, but rather to place *The Far-off Edge of Things* in the context of literary genre. As Hans-Thies Lehmann holds in *Postdramatic Theatre*: "Art in general cannot develop without reference to earlier forms" (27). Thus, *The Far-off Edge of Things* references numerous stylistic conventions of both Magical Realism and The Absurd. It should be noted, that although I did not set out to systematically follow these conventions, the text exhibits both Magical Realism and The Absurd in genre and the magical real and the absurd in a generic sense. This may be the result of being isolated in the middle of a surreal global pandemic — an advantage, perhaps, considering the zeitgeist of *The Far-off Edge of Things*.

Firstly, the overarching style is that of Magical Realism. The term, *Magischer Realismus*, is credited to Franz Roh, a German art critic, who in 1925 coined the term to describe the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, a post-expressionist painting style (Perez and Chevalier 6). Currently, the term encompasses not only the Latin American *lo real maravilloso* literary style, but has also broadened to encompass global "cross-disciplinary" and "cross-cultural" post-colonial art forms (Anderson and Mariboho 562). The definition of Magical Realism is elusive. I agree with Dana Del George who posits that works of Magical Realism are fairy tales with the addition of postmodern context (622). Certainly, Del George's definition reflects the literary tone and fairy-

tale ethos of *The Far-off Edge of Things*. Inarguably, the primary convention of Magical Realism is that the preternatural, unexplained by science and logic, is presented as the ordinary in a realistic framework. To that end, verisimilitude is essential to the genre and it is this contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary which creates an oxymoronic vividness. This aspect is seen early in *The Far-off Edge of Things* when Morgan, birdwatching along the banks of the Red River in Manitoba, sights a mythological bennu. Morgan views the bennu as an extraordinary rare bird sighting rather than as an extraordinary mythological phenomenon. She says, “I’ll text a rare bird alert!” and posts a text describing the bennu as she would any other rare bird sighting in Manitoba (17). Certainly, Magical Realism defies logic. The logical Giles cannot see the bennu:

GILES: What am I looking for again?

MORGAN: A mythological bennu.

GILES: Where's the logic in that? If it's mythological, it doesn't exist.

MORGAN: Don't go all science and logic on me (16).

Effectually, the bennu destabilizes realism. As Christopher Warnes writes in *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*, Magical Realism “naturalizes...the supernatural” (3). However, as I intended, and as Warnes points out, the mode can also accomplish the reverse, that is, super-naturalizing the natural. In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, Morgan’s direct address at opening serves this purpose. She says, “I mean really...isn't the world a wonderland!” and matter-of-factly says of birds, “They told me stories,” as if that is the natural way of things (6). The audience is alerted then to a world that may not be exactly of their world.

More significantly for my play, Magical Realism has often been used historically as a device to give voice to the marginalized of society while disrupting the hegemonic status quo. To illustrate, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* gives voice to the marginalized Indigenous people and their flooded lands, while humorously satirizing Whites and the 'discovery' of Canada, as "A Nissan, a Pinto and a "Karmann-Ghia" sail over a dam as if falling off a flat earth (407). Likewise, *The Far-off Edge of Things* gives voice to marginalized persons with disability and the fragile earth, while humorously satirizing ableism and technological salvation, as a mythological bennu, like a psychopomp carrying souls to the next world, flies over a flooded landscape at curtain. Further to this, Magical Realism often explores the destabilization and the hybridity of post-colonial society (Faris 2). In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, a multiplicity of languages and realities reside onstage, and the rightness and normality of any given reality is questioned. As Morgan enunciates, "What the fuck is normal? It's a stupid dryer setting!" (32). In essence, *The Far-off Edge of Things* questions and challenges what is normal, what is ordinary, what is other. Hence, the play mocks the Attendees in the conference room whose bureaucratic lack of imagination, narrow-mindedness, and entrenchment perpetuates societal injustices. For example, when Morgan says, "Imagine a world in which you're surprised when disabled people don't show up!" the emergency coordinator replies, "I certainly can't imagine if I can't think!" (65). By design, the send-up of bureaucrats and politicians occurs in every conference room scene. Further to this, in *The Far-off Edge of Things*, consistent with Magical Realism, irony is a plot device. Explicit dramatic irony occurs when the Attendees are, comprehensively, left in the same situation in which they have left Morgan; their elevator is

broken, and they cannot use the stairs. Perhaps the ultimate irony in the play is that the Attendees do not comprehend the irony.

Moreover, although Magical Realism can be said to dominate the style of *The Far-off Edge of Things*, The Absurdist style insinuates. The Absurdist genre can be traced back to the Roman Plautus's tragi-comedy, a term which Beckett used as the sub-title for *Waiting for Godot*, and which I also reference in the sub-title of *The Far-off Edge of Things*. In his landmark book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin holds that Absurdist playwrights are "not concerned with whether the world is absurd or not, and that they certainly do not try to define it; they just present it as such" (45-46). To that end, Absurdist form uses an atypical fusion of antecedents such as Lewis Carroll's nonsense literature, the Theatre of Cruelty, the Grotesque, clowns, mimes and puppetry (327-398). Examples of Absurdist conventions within *The Far-off Edge of Things* are easily discerned. For example, typical of Absurdist sets, the set is minimalist. In Absurdism, often very little action is employed to build dramatic tension and this is also true of *The Far-off Edge of Things*. Most of the *action* in the play is limited to sitting, whether in lawn chairs, a wheelchair, or interior chairs, although, later in the play, the Attendees break out in a game of musical chairs, and scramble into the elevator (72). Adding to the idea of limited action, there is a great deal of antiphrasis in dialogue. My study and admiration of Beckett's writing has been an undeniable influence. Similar to Beckett's Didi and Gogo who say they must go, yet do not, the Attendees continually say they must hurry, but do not. In addition, as in *The Absurd*, repetition is used both in language and in action. Public Information repeats ad nauseum "There is no danger to the public at this time," and the Attendees continually ignore warnings from Dr. Lou Crane-

Mercier and Madame Rouge. The dialogic rhythms of Absurdist language, sometimes clipped or telegraphic, are especially heard in the ‘telephone game’ in the conference room:

DOGS FIRST: Did she say doggie — or puppy?

FINANCIAL RISK: I heard fiduciary — or bankruptcy.

POLICE: For sure she said she's guilty.

FIRE: Flaming incendiary! (56).

As well, characterizations in *The Absurd* are often stereotypes. Likewise, in *The Far-off Edge of Things*, the Attendees exemplify both political and social tropes. Short-sighted politicians are more concerned with Madame Rouge’s election forecasts than her forecast of impending disaster (37-40), and misguided Social Services is more concerned with political correctness than with rescuing Morgan (46). Moreover, the mood of Absurdist work often swings from comedic to tragic. Similarly, in *The Far-off Edge of Things* comedic routines in the conference room precede a somber curtain. Most importantly, the essential convention in Absurdism is existential angst or crisis, which in *The Far-off Edge of Things* — although there are numerous references to religious faith — is most noticeable by its absence. Despite the given circumstances, the Attendees show a dogmatic lack of self-awareness; they never navel-gaze or experience crises of meaning. Underneath this lack of awareness, two intense moments of existentialism literally transpire in the final scene, just before curtain. The first moment occurs when Morgan asks, “Where is my joyful ending? (74) and the second follows when Morgan inhales and Giles immediately exhales while he waits under a rain of stars at *The Far-off Edge of Things* (75-76).

Further, the through-line of survival situates *The Far-off Edge of Things* well within the existing Canadian literary ethos. As Margaret Atwood observes in her seminal piece, “From

Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature,” “The central symbol for Canada — and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English and French-Canadian Literature — is undoubtably survival, *la Survivance*” (447). The primary themes of *The Far-off Edge of Things* — disability, extinction, diversity, interconnectivity, and sacrifice — repeatedly intersect the through-line of survival. The tension between survival and extinction is set in the establishing scene when Professor Lou Crane-Mercier pushes a consumerist shopping cart downstage. Their dialogue, as they pick up consumer waste, implies that humans are moving in the wrong direction, and like the dinosaurs, are at risk of being “mudded in a fossilized plaster for all time” (4). Further concretizing this theme of survival and extinction, Lou, despite being interrupted and ignored, later exhorts the Attendees: “Both Indigenous and Western science have demonstrated we are all connected. We live in a fragile and increasingly interdependent world” (9). Lou warns that “7.7 billion humans are at the edge of extinction” (13). Later, drawing a parallel, an eco-anxious Morgan wonders, “How did five billion passenger pigeons, five billion of anything, become extinct?” (17). Most importantly, in *The Far-off Edge of Things*, the threat to survival is shown to be experienced unequally. Dinosaurs are extinct. Passenger pigeons are extinct. Bird species are dying. Are humans next? Which humans?

In addition to being a convergence of the earlier noted literary styles and influences, *The Far-off Edge of Things* is a convergence of ideas, particularly, from four literary references: Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and “Jabberwocky,” Eimar O’Duffy’s *The Phoenix on the Roof: A Satire in One Act*, and Ursula LeGuin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas.” These texts informed the language, structure, and themes of *The Far-off Edge of Things*. I employ Carroll’s “curiouser and curiouser” language from the poem “Jabberwocky”

such as “galumphing,” “frumious,” “gyre and gimble in the wabe,” and “vorpal” as the conference banter becomes increasingly improbable (38-39). And, although I agree, as Carroll maintains in 1897 *Symbolic Logic*, “that any writer of a book is fully authorized in attaching any meaning he likes to any word or phrase he intends to use” (Carroll 166), it should be noted that all the other delightful seldom heard words I use in *The Far-off Edge of Things* are in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary. I use them because they accentuate the sheer incommunicability and pomposity of the conference room dialogue, are humorous to the ear, and perhaps, more importantly, they confuse audience expectations. Here I must admit that I do not necessarily expect, or need, the audience to fully comprehend the obscure language; I accept that there are multiple layers to understanding in every work. Language, whether English, French, Michif, Latin, or abstruse is important to my writing. Especially, as is apparent from the scene titles, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was always close at hand. And, similar to Alice who sees the White Rabbit and falls down the rabbit hole into Wonderland, Morgan sees the Egyptian bennu and falls down the embankment into the world of disability. Alice, by turns, is disabled by being either too large or too small and by the logical nonsense in Wonderland. Morgan is disabled by all the micro-geographies and by the logical nonsense in the world of the play. In both narratives, their senses of self are shaken. As Alice says, and Morgan quotes, “At least I know who I was when I got up this morning although I may have changed several times since then” (23). As well, from the moment that Morgan’s emergency call connects to the conference room, like Alice’s conversation at the Mad Hatter’s tea party, the language of the committee exposes the nonsense of ableism and political jargon. Both Alice and Morgan fall from a world that is comprehensible into a world that is not entirely comprehensible. Carroll’s

“nonsense system,” is described by Elizabeth Sewell in “The Nonsense System in Lewis Carroll’s Work and in Today’s World.” She writes, “What emerged was a vision of an autonomous enclosed field (think of a football field if the word seems too abstract) governed by absolute rules, insulated in time and space” (61). In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, Morgan is confronted head-on by just such a nonsense system. *Pun intended*. The Fire Head remonstrates her for not taking the stairs, the Police Head assumes she is drunk when she says she is impaired, Social Services admonishes her for not using politically correct disability terminology, Public Works is in the process of building a ramp she does not need, The Mayor intends to offload the cost of the ramp to the province, Public Information sees her as a statistic, Dogs First is only interested in saving dogs, Financial Risk is concerned only with numbers, The Premier is distracted by his upcoming holiday, and the Emergency Coordinator perpetually repeats “We should do something,” yet, does nothing. Adding to the nonsense language is my use of the earlier mentioned telephone game, a game which invariably culminates in humorous communication failure. I later discovered that this was also one of Carroll’s linguistic games. There is an example in *Letters to Child-Friends* in which he describes a tutor sitting outside a classroom with a closed door who shouts questions to student “scouts” and “sub-scouts” and “sub-sub scouts” placed at various distant positions, who then shout ludicrous answers to each other (Sutherland 27). “It is the most important point,” Carroll instructs, that “the tutor should be *dignified* and at a distance from the pupil, and that the pupil should be as much as possible *degraded* (27). The inflexibility of the Attendees, coupled with their ableist attitudes, “hostile incivility,” and “downright heartlessness” in this closed world (Sewell 61), while humorous in its

absurdity, is nonetheless very real for the degraded Morgan in the world of the play and for persons with disabilities in the real world.

Additionally, I owe a literary debt to Eimar O'Duffy whose play, *The Phoenix on the Roof: A Satire in One Act* pointed me in the direction for which I had no map. His writing taught me how to combine the real world with myth. In addition, O'Duffy plays with language to toy with and satirize established mores and parochial views. To that end he employs caricatures to lampoon, such as the pompous professor whose one absorbing question is how to correctly pronounce the Greek *phi* and who is exceedingly annoyed that the mythical Phoenix, or the dialectical, "phaynix," on the roof bursts into flames before he can get his answer (15-29). Like Carroll, O'Duffy made me laugh. From this idea came Morgan's sighting of the Egyptian bennu "the mythological bird associated with the flooding of the Nile — the bennu that flies across the chaos of the earth before it rebirths!" (15). In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, similar to O'Duffy's phoenix, the bennu, both myth and metaphor, serves to disrupt the predictable and familiar at the outset.

Most importantly, thematically, *The Far-off Edge of Things* looks to Ursula LeGuin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," her thematic homage to philosopher William James, which she expressed as the parenthesized sub-title, "Variations on a Theme by William James." The entire quotation she references is from an 1897 piece by James titled, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life":

Or if the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier's and Bellamy's and Morris's Utopias should all be outdone and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life

of lonely torture, what except a specific and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain (333)?

This is where I found the title for my play. Le Guin's psycho-myth is the story of the utopian city of Omelas during the joyous *drooz*-scented Festival of Summer, and of the residents' simultaneous complicity in a social contract to allow the torture and suffering of one imprisoned child so that the city can continue to function as a utopia. With bells pealing, Le Guin creates Omelas, a magnificent city with boats in the harbour, a great water-meadow, and moss-grown gardens. She inhabits the city with the old and the young — "old people in mauve and grey robes," "merry women carrying their babies," children playing, "their high calls rising like the swallows' crossing flights," and Green Fields boys and girls naked in the bright air" (466). But, Le Guin asks us to be complicit in this chimera. She writes, "Perhaps it would be better if you imagine it as your own fancy bids" (467). Later, readers may come to regret this complicity, as I did. The narrator prods the reader, "Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No?" (469). It is only then, after our complacency is rattled, that the narrator reveals the cellar and the abused child who is kept there so that Omelas can be kept perpetually in its idyllic state. LeGuin describes the child in pejorative ableist terms which make me shudder:

It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition and neglect. It picks its nose and occasionally fumbles vaguely with its toes or genitals, as it sits hunched in the corner farthest from the bucket and the two mops. It is afraid of the mops (469).

LeGuin adds that one of the Omelas residents “may come in and kick the child to make it stand up. The others never come close, but peer in at it with tightened disgusted eyes” (469). The reader is displaced from their complacency. I include an echo of LeGuin in the play. In the set directions, I indicate “A metal mop bucket and two string mops” by the lift (41), and when ‘The Far-off Edge of Things’ is explained to Morgan, she says, “Is there a sign on my back that says kick me,” “I can smell drooz,” and “With a clamour of bells that set the swallows soaring” (63).¹

LeGuin’s story draws the reader into themes of moral ambiguity, apathy, and finally — guilt. Only a few show compassion. Some walk away. In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, I replace LeGuin’s disabled child in the cellar room with Morgan in the lift. In this context, it is interesting, that in innumerable critical articles, despite blatant characterization of impairment, Leguin’s child has been discussed only as a metaphor. So, too, in the many plays in which Beckett writes disabled characters, such as *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the critics are quick to, as Ato Quayson writes in *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, “render the body as a marker of something else,” thus erasing the impairment (56). Adding to this idea, theorist Michael Davidson suggests “while critics have seen their impairment as metaphors for alienation and solitude in the modern world, we might see that alienation as the condition of disability in a world of compulsory able-bodiness” (qtd. in Johnston 102). For this reason, in *The Far-off Edge of Things*, Morgan shouts, “I am not a fucking metaphor!” (66). I did not want Morgan’s bodily difference rendered as a marker of something else. Furthermore, when Morgan enters the lift, it creates a peripeteia, that is, a major reversal in her circumstances for the worse. Like the child who is sacrificed by reason of Utility, that is, the one for the many, the

¹ As discussed regarding language, this esoteric reference is for those who have read LeGuin and I do not expect everyone to be aware of the meaning.

Attendees are willing to sacrifice Morgan. Because the non-disabled in the audience can easily dismiss the callousness of the intransigent and absurdly bureaucratic attendees, it is unlikely that they will see themselves reflected in these characters. However, it is my intention, that like the citizenry of Omelas, some of the audience will recognize their non-disabled privilege. Perhaps, after hearing Morgan's dialogue, they will realize that they, too, are silently complicit in a social contract which sacrifices the perceived few, that is, persons with disability, by reason of Utility.

Disability is ubiquitous, a part of the human condition. Attempts to the contrary, it cannot be disappeared from the human experience. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes in "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept," "Our experience of living eventually contradicts our collective fantasy that the body is stable, predictable, or controllable, creating misfits for all of us. What we call disability is unavoidable, insistent in its misfitting" (603). Yet, persons with disabilities are excluded from community by the constructed environment, both physical and attitudinal, as if disability is an anomaly.² Until a decade ago, access is not something I thought about. When my husband was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a degenerative disease with plateaus and unrelenting tipping points, I became his primary caregiver. I soon learned that barriers to accessibility not only limit the person with disability, but also those who care for them. Adding to this, I experienced impairment more directly in 2018 when I was permanently injured and found myself progressing from wheelchair to cane. As I earlier write of this experience: "The university became a place of a different kind of learning. I was forced to see the campus through the lens of disability," and "I saw the university campus as a problematic maze with dead ends." Yet, these are minor inconveniences compared to the constant exclusion

² Arguments and quotations on pages 94-95 were also earlier presented in "How Does the Constructed Environment Impact Disabled People?" (Disability and the Environment, 2019)

my husband and other persons with disabilities encounter at The Centre of Things. As wheelchair traveler Walt Balenovich remarks in *Travels in a Blue Chair: Alaska to Zambia Ushuaia to Uluru*, “The world isn’t built with a ramp” (7). This is clearly laid out in *The Far-off Edge of Things* when Morgan rants: “I resent stairs! [beat.] I resent stares! I resent being diminished because this world was constructed without a ramp” (31). As I earlier write, “It is essential to understand, that impairment itself is not a barrier to inclusion, rather exclusion is the result of the constructed physical and social environments that disable.” In *The Far-off Edge of Things*, Morgan’s dialogue draws our attention to this difference when she says, “I’m impaired,” and is assumed to be drunk by the Police Head (45). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains, “The terms impairment and disability distinguish between bodily states or conditions taken to be impaired, and the social process of disablement that gives meaning and consequences to those impairments” (591). Again, as I earlier write, and as Morgan echoes in the play, those with atypical function or structure are “denied access, isolated, demoralized and destabilized.”

Attributing this exclusion to ableist constructions, I conclude that “most impediments, whether concrete barriers, curbs, stairs and the like, or the stigma, attitudes and repugnant stares of the abled population, are constructed.” Reflecting this idea in *The Far-off Edge of Things*, Public Works says, “Believe me, there are millions and billions of barricades, obstacles, obstructions, hurdles, bars, blockades, hazards, detriments, and assorted bigly strictures and quagmires for persons with disabilities at The Centre of Things. And of course, there are yuge moats” (67). Even where there is no animus, learned prejudices perpetuate this exclusion. For this reason, Morgan relates the story of the “do-gooder” in the mall who tells her, “I’d rather be dead than be you” (25). Added to this, I argue, “when accommodations are constructed for inclusivity, they are

often the minimum required, or afterthought solutions that can unnecessarily complicate a disabled person's ability to navigate the environment. Most egregious, the accommodations are often constructed without the input of persons with disabilities." In the play, the misguided ministrations of the Attendees and the ramp construction illustrate this lack. Morgan questions Public Works about the ramp specifications. She asks, "Does it have side-railings?" and "What is the grade?" (58). It is then revealed that Public Works has been using ski-jump plans. The ramp in *The Far-off Edge of Things* may be metaphorical, but the lack of communication is real. "As a result of this lack of communication, persons with disabilities are assumed all the same, in one box" — the disabled box. This is the story I tell in *The Far-off Edge of Things*. As disability activist Harriet McBryde Johnson writes, "Stories are the closest we come to shared experience. Like all stories, they are most fundamentally a chance to ride around inside another head and be reminded that being who we are and where we are, and doing what we're doing, is not the only possibility." The experience of disability is multifarious and cannot be defined as one thing. It is then understandable that Morgan shouts, "I'm not just one thing!" (31). Persons with disabilities experience the world in a multiplicity of ways.

The Far-off Edge of Things draws attention to this multiplicity, particularly as it relates to the internalization of impairment. I reasoned that I should write a non-disabled character who becomes disabled because this is my experience. I certainly understood Giles saying, "I can't fix this" (20), yet I soon realized that this ableist perspective was based on the incorrect assumption that all persons with disability would choose to be fixed. As can be said about most discussions pertaining to disability, the actual picture is not a simple binary. Some people born with impairment go through multiple operations to *fix* their bodies, that is, to more closely embody the

non-disabled template of an able-centric world, but others not only accept their impairment but consider the impairment intrinsic to who they are. In my forthcoming paper, “From the Comfort of Your Own Couch: Is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s *You Can’t Ask That* an Educational Documentary, or a 21st century Freak Show?” I write that the disabled participants “quash stereotype while creating a real sense of pride and joy in various states of being. Over and over, participants declare that their disability is part of their identity, and especially, that they like who they are” (15). As Kirsty Johnston writes in *Stage turns: Canadian Disability Theatre*, “people with disability insist on the pertinence of disability to the human condition, on the value of disability as a form of diversity and on the power of disability as a critical concept for thinking about human identity in general” (9-10). Disability is a lived experience, not just about bodies of difference. It soon became clear that assailing disability stereotype is not as easy as falling into it.

With this in mind, I was determined to avoid two other pernicious disability tropes — the super-hero and the victim. To illustrate, my initial idea with the character of Morgan was that she would be abandoned and drown, similar to the earlier noted true story of Benny Caixeta during Hurricane Katrina. However, this created a conundrum. If Morgan drowned, she would become the victim. Perhaps she should shape-shift, fly out of the lift with Bran, and save herself? I wanted a fairy-tale ending. After all, her first singing words are “Neither have I wings to fly... Where are my wings?” (5) and her final gasps are “Then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with God's permission. Where are my wings?” (74). But, if Morgan could shape-shift into an anthropomorphic raven she would become the super-hero. I wanted neither hero nor victim. As Eli Clare writes in *Exile & Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, “I have a vision. Someday, after the revolution, disabled people will live ordinary lives, neither heroic nor

tragic” (44). Therefore, Morgan is an activist and an agonistic and bold voice; her VOX tattoo signifies that hers is the principle voice of the play. As well, her name derives from the Mórrígan, or the Morrígu, the therianthropic war goddess of Irish mythology. And so, at curtain, I leave Morgan’s survival indeterminate. I conceive that, for as long as her fate remains in suspension, balancing in the audience’s imagination, I subvert stereotype. In abeyance, she is neither superhero, nor victim.

Following this decision, the characterization of Giles also became problematic. In initial drafts, Giles leaves Morgan, because as Adrienne Asch, past president of the International Society of Disability Studies explains, when one spouse becomes disabled, “men leave wives more often than wives leave husbands (qtd. in Kilborn).” Curious to talk to men who were caregivers, I joined a Parkinson’s caregiver support group, however, the group was comprised entirely of women. The misery in the room was palpable. Every woman was worn out. Most were taking medication for depression. They commiserated about lack of external supports. One woman said that she sometimes stared out the window and wished she could escape to somewhere, as she put it, “where I don’t have to smell shit anymore.” The reality of caregiving can be darker than is often on display and I wanted to expose this truth. Yet, there was a danger that Giles would upstage Morgan, or worse, that he might appear to be an abusive spouse, a subject for another play perhaps, but not a direction I wanted to pursue. Adding to this, when I spoke to a fellow graduate student who uses a wheelchair, she said, “Morgan needs an ally.” Out of this came Bran, a staunch ally who defends Morgan by pecking Giles and shredding his shirt when he argues with Morgan, and who generally serves as a supportive and humorous Greek chorus, exhorting Morgan, mimicking sounds, and commenting with variations of “Quork”

throughout. A later conversation with Dr. Kerr also resulted in an entirely new direction for Giles whose namesake is St. Giles, Catholic patron saint of persons with disabilities. Giles, too, became Morgan's ally. I thus undertook to write a balanced relationship in which Giles and Morgan are in love and stay together despite their often conflicted and conflicting feelings. Consequently, while Giles is grieving for what their relationship was and wants to fix her, Morgan's response is an emphatic "Maybe I don't need fixing" (20). Morgan is on a different timeline as she adjusts to her own perception of self in contrast to that of the external world, which sees her, not as a person, but as a disability stereotype. To heighten this duality, I exploit a form of visual shorthand by writing the character of Morgan with a mobility impairment which puts her in a wheelchair — an iconic signifier of disability. Further, I use this signifier to theatrical effect when Giles uncovers Morgan's wheelchair onstage. Would the effect be the same if Giles simply brought a chair onto the stage? Certainly not. My expectation is that the audience's perception of Morgan will alter when the wheelchair is uncovered and both Morgan and chair are 'recast.' As Richard Foreman writes in *Reverberation Machines: The Later Plays and Essays*:

Let the chair that is for sitting have a string run from it to an orange because if chair was just 'chair for sitting,' we would not 'confront' as we not-confront in kitsch because we are too close to the chair, its meaning is too much OUR meaning; but now chair-connected-to-orange is an 'alien' chair that we must confront " (227).

This Brechtian theatrical device, *verfremdungseffekt*, is intended to facilitate a distancing effect wherein things onstage are made strange. It is my expectation that the audience will be made aware of, confront, and interrogate this altered perception of Morgan in her wheelchair.

Although my play owes much to Magical Realism and The Absurd in form, *The Far-off Edge of Things* is, unfortunately, not very far from reality. And, there is a danger here. As Lewis Carroll warns in a letter, “We must be careful, while the laughter of joy is in full harmony with our deeper life, the laughter of amusement should be kept apart from it. The danger is too great of thus learning to look at solemn things in a spirit of mockery, and to seek in them opportunities for exercising wit (Collingwood 331).” I hope that the solemn things I have written are not lost in the sometimes circus-like entertainment of the play. Unanticipated, although *The Far-off Edge of Things* is not optimistic, I became more positive as I wrote. As noted earlier, I wrote *The Far-off Edge of Things* during a pandemic. Before the pandemic, I believed that the disparities and systemic injustices affecting persons with disabilities in Canada, and the Anthropogenic effects accelerating global warming, were too entrenched to change, except perhaps at a glacial pace. I believed that these “wicked problems” were so entangled with history, intersectionality, governmental layers, invested opinions, and an ever-changing environment, that they were unsolvable and irreversible (Rittel & Webber 160). Yet, within weeks of the first cases of the virus in Canada, I watched the government assure access and financial assistance to the non-disabled in isolation, thus demonstrating a flexible political will that I thought impossible.

³Attitudes changed, seemingly, overnight. Consequently, I no longer believe that wicked problems, whether during crises or in the best of times, are unsolvable and irreversible. In *Resources of Hope* Welsh philosopher Raymond Williams writes, “It is then in making hope practical, rather than despair convincing, that we must resume and change and extend our

³ It should be noted that, as of this writing, late fall 2020, persons with disability have still not received promised cheques from the Federal Government to off-set extra costs incurred during the pandemic. The cheques to all other eligible constituents were distributed in early spring 2020.

campaigns (118)” Change requires activism; activism requires hope. I began with comparing the migratory journey of a bird with my writerly journey. Like the bird who builds her nest after the long flight, I build on hope — because I have seen the world change on the wing.

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Thesis Presentation: *The Far-off Edge of Things*

Thank you, Dr. Tromly, Dr. Kerr, Dr. Hansen, and Dr. Cariou for sharing this moment in time with me.¹ In 1968, after my first year at the University of Massachusetts, I dropped out of school for financial reasons. Not finishing my undergraduate degree was always a deep regret. So it's a real and unexpected privilege to be defending my master's thesis on Zoom over half a century later.

The future seems more indeterminate than usual. With climate change and its adverse effects on the ecosystem, the real possibility of a sixth extinction, and a global pandemic, I struggled to write this presentation. Why talk about a play? Why write one, when so many theatres are dark except for ghost lights? Yet, I remain, shakily and incorrigibly, hopeful. Which is good. Because as Gloria Steinem says, "Hope is a form of planning," and I want to see *The Far-off Edge of Things* on a stage. And so, this morning I'm going to use my production notes as a framework to talk to you about disability and access in theatre and production of *The Far-off Edge of Things*.

Despite the fact that disability intersects every cross-section of humanity, access and inclusion for disabled people is one of the last frontiers of human rights. Disability, whether visible, or invisible, is a lived experience, not just about bodies of difference. This isn't about them. This is about you. Disability is part of the human condition. Disability is not *other*. We all exist in a vulnerable space. At one time or another, we all need accommodation for access. During the pandemic, we are finding out how true this is.

¹ This presentation was given during thesis defence, 30 October 2020.

Yet, we are only beginning to move past the question of why there should be universal access and inclusion, to the question of how these human rights can be achieved. There is still a pernicious idea that disability is disruptive to the non-disabled, but there is little acknowledgement that it's not the person's impairment but the lack of access that causes the disruption. Although, innumerable stories we tell explore, and have a preoccupation with physical, and or, psychological impairment, the theatre community, like the rest of the world in which it exists, has only begun to include real persons with disability.

The first sentence of my production notes is my mission statement. I write: "Accessibility is the default. Accessibility onstage and backstage is as essential as accessibility front of house."

A sidebar here. Although my mission statement may suggest that front of house is entirely accessible, it isn't. Just getting to the theatre can be a production for persons with disability. In my play, as Public Works says about 'The Centre of Things': "There are millions and gajillions of barricades, obstacles, obstructions, hurdles, bars, blockades, hazards, detriments, and assorted bigly strictures and quagmires for persons with disability, and, of course, yuge moats." Similarly, in many theatres, ableist infrastructure perpetuates exclusion, from inaccessible dressing rooms and washrooms, to lighting and sound booths and production areas — even to the stage itself. Inclusive physical and attitudinal constructions are not always embedded in the creative process. Backstage theatre is fraught with ableist ideology such as "the show must go on" mentality and exhaustingly long hours.

Because Morgan, my protagonist, is wheelchair enabled, I also insist that:

"A wheelchair-enabled person, or person with mobility impairment, must be cast as Morgan."

Am I stating the obvious? Lack of real and accurate representation is an ongoing issue in the

disability community. Artifice and illusion should not take precedence over human rights.

“Crippling up,” is akin to ‘blacking up.’ Theatre scripts, from Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* to Shakespeare’s *Richard III* to Beckett’s *Endgame* to Schwartz’s *Wicked* are full of disabled characters. Yet, theatre has a long history of casting non-disabled actors in these roles, who then immerse themselves in the physical impairment and mine disabled mannerisms so they can fake their ‘crip.’ One argument for hiring non-disabled actors in these roles is that disabled actors are inexperienced. Due to hiring practices, this is often true. But, auditioning, training, and professional practice can be organized to invite disabled people to participate fully. And, casting a person who lives a disability, in a disabled character role, has the potential to better honour the text and move attention from an acted reality to an authentic one, in a way that would be impossible to achieve otherwise. For example, director Christopher Brauer and actor Debbie Patterson (the first disabled person to perform the role of Richard III in a professional production in Canada), shifted the perspective from a non-disabled to a disabled point of view and created a play — not about a stereotypically evil and twisted disabled person — but about, as Patterson describes it, “an excluded, underestimated, and disrespected person who seizes power from the family that has held him down all his life.” This strongly suggests, that if theatre practitioners take what is now considered a creative risk and cast persons with disability, an entirely new world of story and experience can be tapped. I see this disruption as additive.

My production notes also address assistive devices such as smart-caption glasses, and live-described audio during performance. I conclude that these “should be intrinsic to the aesthetics of the production rather than an appendage,” and “should be viewed as a creative opportunity.” Challenging, yes. But doable. For example, in *The Far-off Edge of Things*, the

speed of dialogue may need to be slowed so that the creators of these live-action aids can keep up. But, can you picture the fun of combining these multi-media aids as part of the frenzy when the attendees talk over one another, play musical chairs and scramble for the elevator? Definitely additive potential.

I also want at least one production to be 'relaxed' theatre, a concept I've only just discovered. In these productions, house lights may be at 40% throughout, cellphones may be allowed on silent, food may be allowed, comments spoken out loud are just fine, and quiet rooms are available. It reminds me of watching TV with my family. Historically, of course, theatre was relaxed. Relaxed theatre is also often sensory friendly with low stimuli for the neuro-diverse. Strobe lighting is absent. Loud sound effects are muted. Relaxed production also opens questions of lived experience. As a playwright, I wonder. If the loud blast of the floodway-gate horn in *The Far-off Edge of Things* is muted, is the experience the same for the audience? If the lighting does not flash brown-outs during the flood, what is the effect on the production aesthetic? What is the effect on the acting? Do some moments, maybe unnoticed in the more sensory laden production, acquire a different, or a deeper meaning? Can subtracting create an additive experience? According to a recent SHERC funded British Council of Canada study, attendees of relaxed performance said it enhanced, and allowed a more honest engagement with, the theatre-going experience. Again, additive.

Like any play script, mine is a blueprint. I have a long way to go to get the play produced. But, as the second part of Steinem's earlier noted quote posits, "If our hopes weren't already real within us we couldn't even hope them." I can see *The Far-off Edge of Things* on the stage. The director of The Manitoba Association of Playwrights has offered the organization's support and

I'm looking forward to collaborative workshops and readings as further steps to production. I also want to talk more to others who are already working to create a more inclusive, accessible theatre. Theatre is at a pause. But, what an opportunity to rethink and revamp ableist structures before the stage lights are on again!

I hope that the eventual production of *The Far-off Edge of Things* communicates the essential value of diversity in a world that excludes, otherizes, and triages according to ableist misperceptions. I hope that the audience questions the mistaken understanding of a hierarchy of life that denies the essential value of bio-diversity and puts humans at the top of an anthropocentric inverted triangle.

The Far-off Edge of Things leaves the audience in a liminal space. There is no definitive happy ending, no *deus ex machina*. If there were, the audience might believe that the work is done. It isn't. I imagine a world in which, as Morgan says, "we're surprised when people with disability don't show up." A world in which Morgan, Giles and Bran have a happy ending. Yes, I guess, I am still hoping for a happy ending.