

## **Personal Statement for Promotion to Full Professor**

(to accompany CV in CSU Provost format)

**Dr. Megan Lewis**

**Colorado State University**

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### **Introduction**

I joined the faculty at Colorado State University in Fall 2020, after 10 years and earning tenure at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Prior to UMass, I held a Visiting Professorship for five years at the University of Minnesota. My PhD in Theatre History, Literature & Criticism with a focus on Theatre Historiography is from the University of Minnesota (2001); I also hold a Masters in Drama Studies from Johns Hopkins (1994), a BA in English Literature from Kenyon College (1991), and a certificate in Digital Filmmaking from New York Film Academy (2003). I am a multidisciplinary scholar of African theatre, performance, and film with a focus on performance and/of race and gender in South Africa; a passionate undergraduate and graduate teacher and mentor with almost three decades of experience; a video editor, producer, and director and voiceover talent; a dedicated internationalist and advocate for study abroad; and an inspiring, visionary feminist leader committed to principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI). CSU requires 5 years between promotions from Associate to Full. Upon my hire at CSU in 2020, I was granted 3 years of credit towards promotion to Full Professor. I earned tenure in 2017.

### **RESEARCH**

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#### **Research Focus & Specialization**

Trained as a Theatre Historian, I work broadly in Theatre Studies, Performance Studies, and Film Studies with a focus on African theatre and performance, especially my home country of South Africa. Drawing on the complexities of my experience as a transnational citizen—an African-born naturalized American—my research and teaching interests are broadly concerned with imaginings, depictions, and performances of “Africa” both within and outside of the continent. My research focuses specifically on South African theatrical work and other performance(s) ranging across a diverse array of media, including film, dance, and theatre and across multiple performance sites, including monuments, museum installations, public pageants, traditional staged texts, documentary and narrative film. I am interested in how cultures create, and are created by, what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities” to support their political goals, and how the cultural capital (Homi Bhaba) and mythologies (Roland Barthes) of such communities circulate in space and time, in text, on bodies, and on celluloid.

My work explores the stakes of race and performance, particularly the ways in which whiteness and performance intersect. Whiteness is the structural system, or machine, of white supremacy and privilege that is designed to perpetuate and replicate itself in cultural systems at every level. In tracing various scenarios of South African whiteness, I am interested in what they offer to our global understanding of how whiteness is imagined, staged, perpetuated, and resisted, and what options white subjects have to perform their whiteness in what Achille Mbembe calls the “postcolony,” the contemporary stage on which the lasting effects of colonialism and contemporary neoliberalism play out.

As an anti-racist white ally, I believe this work is timely and necessary, as both South Africa and America wrestle with their racial past and present, and as discourse and efforts around understanding and dismantling whiteness are more pressing than ever.

## PUBLICATIONS

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### Books

#### 1. PERFORMING WHITELY IN THE POSTCOLONY: AFRIKANERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE (University of Iowa Press 2016)

My monograph concerns the ways in which Afrikaners—the white settlers of Dutch and Huguenot descent who colonized and then dominated the southern tip of Africa starting in the 17th century, then became the architects of apartheid, and since 1994 have been part of the multicultural, multilingual democracy—have performed themselves into, around, and out of power.

Acknowledging the fraught status of this population and the stakes of focusing on a hegemonic group responsible for a racist regime, my aim is to interrogate these performances and *trouble whiteness*. In other words, I put Afrikaners in the spotlight, not to extol their position, but to better understand how whiteness and hegemony are created, enacted, and contested and to explore how the once-privileged perform once that privilege is deflated. Unpacking the nuances and contradictions of what it means to perform whiteness and to be a white African, my book focuses on the multiple speech acts, political acts, and theatrical acts of the Afrikaner volk in theatrical and public life. As such, this study includes performances that occur within the proscenium arch, as well as those that take place in public pageants, museum sites, political speech, and popular culture. I explore the intersections of whiteness with theatre and public life, which I regard as spaces in which to mark and negotiate racialized and gendered performances.

The book consists of six chapters; the first three concern historical performances prior to 1994; the fourth chapter covers the apartheid era and moves into the new democracy; and the final two chapters are dedicated to contemporary Afrikaner performance post-1994. In Chapter One, I trace how Afrikaners leveraged performance tactics and media to stage themselves into a cohesive nation, or volk, during the period of Afrikaner ascendancy in the first decades of the twentieth century. Chapters Two & Three are dedicated to exploring the complex work of Afrikaans playwright Deon Opperman, who can be read as simultaneously reactionary and culturally relevant. The fourth chapter concerns the gender-bending satire of queer, cross-dressing cultural critic Pieter-Dirk Uys; the fifth, the iconoclastic performance interventions of Peter van Heerden, who interrogates white masculinity in his provocative work; and the sixth, the racially charged stylings of the rave-rap crew, Die Antwoord.

My study asks what repertoires are available to white subjects in the postcolony and includes analysis of the various strategies they deploy, including nostalgia, melodrama, queering, abjection, and kitsch. I believe this work makes an important contribution towards understanding how white supremacy and privilege function—and are enacted—in culture.

Reviews of this book are housed on my [website](#).

#### 2. MAKING SPACE: THREE DECADES OF MAGNET THEATRE (Intellect Books & Unisa Press 2016)

Co-edited with my colleague Anton Krueger at Rhodes University, *Making Space* won the 2018 Hiddingh-Currie National Book Award. This collection is focused on Cape Town-based Magnet Theatre, one of South Africa's preeminent multiracial physical-theatre companies. Drawing on the expertise and voices of many key figures involved with Magnet since its inception in 1987, *Making Space* explores the creative, collaborative, and cultural contributions this company continues to offer South Africa. Magnet's

creative and cultural labors span the apartheid era, through the historic transition in 1994, and into the contemporary democracy. While situated in the South African context, this case study examines several pressing issues that are applicable outside of South Africa, including how theatrical practice is involved in the production of knowledge, both in the content of the work as well as the methodologies and processes of the act of theatremaking. It also addresses how theatre intervenes in the process of remembering in the postcolony. And Magnet's work is a productive site in which to examine how physical theatre counters the stillness, erasure, and rupture that bodies experience in totalitarian regimes by focusing on the moving, articulate, individuated body capable of transformation. As a cultural history of theatre practice in a fraught and contested population, this study examines the ways in which devised performance (workshop theatre, in South African terms), the language of the body, and lengthy and deep archival research processes allow these artists to respond to their culture in meaningful, creative ways.

We divide the collection into three sections of scholarly essays: In Part One, *Concepts: Making Space for Ideas*, Mark Fleishman, Miki Flockemann and Anton Krueger investigate how a profound complexity of thought—exercised intellectually as well as physically—permeates all of Magnet's work. In Part Two, *Collaboration: Making Space for Embodied Practice*, Jennie Reznick, Yvette Hutchison and Megan Lewis examine how Magnet's underlying philosophy and spirit of physicality—inspired by Jacques LeCoq's claim that tout bouge [everything moves]—functions in Magnet's staged performances, rehearsal rooms and classrooms, as well as within the larger South African cultural landscape. And in Part Three, *Community: Making Space for Cultural Interventions*, we turn our attention to Magnet's important community-based work, particularly in townships and communities around Cape Town like Khayelitsha and Clanwilliam. Scholars Gay Morris and Elliot Leffler and fieldworker Lavona de Bruyn delve into the potentials and pitfalls of this work.

The collection is illustrated with over a hundred images that document Magnet's important theatrical work and is peppered with first-hand accounts and interviews with the many actors, directors, designers, students and artistic collaborators who have worked with the company over the past three decades. I believe this work offers an in-depth look at a vital South African theatre company, at the importance of physicality and bodily communication in a country with eleven official languages, and at the exciting and productive ways in which research can inform compelling and engaging art.

### 3. THE PLAYS OF DARKNESS AND MYSTERY (book manuscript in development with Brett Bailey)

My third book project is a co-edited project, modelled after my previous chronicle, *Making Space: 25 Years of Magnet Theatre* (Intellect Books, 2016), with South African theatremaker Brett Bailey. Bailey and his company Third World Bunfight, have produced some of world's most provocative contemporary theatre. An artist with a "feisty "maverick" personality—partly mischievous provocateur, part blunt frankness, and driven by a perfectionist's work ethic" (Lewis, 2018, p. 133)—Bailey's work has both garnered praise and provoked protests.

In 2009, Bailey published *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*, which include three playscripts interspersed with his process notes and reflections. The plays were *Ipi Zombi?* (1998), *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), and *The Prophet* (1999). He invited me to collaborate on a second publication, which will document the second half of his career and include three additional playscripts: *Orfeus*, *Samson*, and *Exhibit B*. To echo the previous publication, we are calling it *The Plays of Darkness and Mystery*.

A deep analysis and visual and verbal archive of past productions, *Plays of Darkness and Mystery* will reflect the impact of Bailey and Third World Bunfight's work during a shifting and contested time in South African history and as the world wrestles with the lasting legacies of colonialism. My goal is to provide an archive of performance easily accessible to the lay reader, as well as critical theory which would be of interest to theatre and cultural scholars. This collection will be a sourcebook that engages its subject through both the personal

and the political, from perspectives both inside and outside the company, through visual and verbal viewpoints. The book will feature full colour images from the Third World Bunfight archive. Between the more critical discourse and the more personal interviews, I envision pages peppered with artefacts from performance archives, such as reproductions of Bailey's design notebooks and images and photographs that document key performances and controversies. This book offers a portrait of an evolving artist not afraid to tackle sticky, tricky subjects. It also provides an inside view of an artist's process. And it documents the work of one of South Africa's best theatremakers.

### Articles

In addition to my books, I have 4 refereed articles in print and an additional 4 manuscripts in the publication pipeline (see below). I have also published 2 textbooks (audiobooks), 1 book chapter, 2 invited guest editor curations, 14 reviews, and 5 non-refereed works. I am also expanding into creative writing, with a memoir, poetry collection, and play in the works.

Two of my earlier publications—"Abject Afrikaners and Iconoclast Trekkers" (JDTC) and "Uprooting & Re-routing the Afrikaner male" (Positions)—concern performance artist Peter van Heerden. Analyzing his abject bodywork and iconoclastic performances, many of which are framed by religious references, I argue that Van Heerden deploys strategic blasphemy and actively engages in a form of race betrayal (*volksveraad*) in order to disrupt comforting, reiterative understandings of his white male body. Through physical abjection, and by wrenching familiar language and symbols away from their usual associations, his work lays bare the ethno- and gender-mythologies of Afrikaners and makes space for the frank discussion and re-imagining of white identity in democratic South Africa.

In addition to my work on South African performance, I published on pedagogical issues with my colleague Will Daddario on hyperlinking and hyperthinking in the theatre history classroom for *Theatre Topics*.

My review work is part of my ongoing scholarly commitment to South African theatre and performance. I reviewed several important new books about South African theatre by renowned colleagues: Catherine Cole, Anton Krueger, Yvette Hutchison, Jay Pather, and Adrienne Sichel. I reviewed two new anthologies of South African plays, the 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2015 National Arts Festival, the largest theatre festival on the African continent, William Kentridge's *The Head and the Load* at The Armory in New York, Ryan Claycomb's book on verbatim documentary theatre, and two feminist films on art and activism.

My current scholarly output is described below:

Lewis, Megan, 2023, "H(a)unting Africa: Safari as Performance," solicited book chapter, Bryan Schmidt and Weston Twardowski, eds. *Staging Visitation: Theatre and Tourism* (U Michigan P, forthcoming 2024)

Based on research I conducted in Southern Africa in 2017-2019, this chapter explores the ways performance haunts the tourist practice of safari. From the fictions of Hollywood films and amusement parks to the historic and contemporary tourism practices, safari *performs Africa* in myriad ways. Promotional brochures offer tourists fantasies of romantic nostalgia, thrilling adventure, or benevolent ways to "give back." Safaris and game drives are carefully stage managed to give visitors a once-in-lifetime, memorable experience. Tourists are invited to capture animal souvenirs via camera or rifle and these trophies then stage and perform memory and the haunt after the hunt. Estimated at USD \$1.3 billion in 2022 and forecast by *Market Watch* to grow to USD 2.3 billion by 2028, the global adventure and safari market is a major source of revenue and cultural or national pride for many countries across Africa.

As part of my larger concern with how Africa is portrayed and perceived, I am interested in how safari deploys choreographies, dramaturgies, setting, and embodiment to tell its repeated story about Africa's

wildness. And how it *figuratively casts* animals as performers to play out fantasies of wildness and *literally casts* animals as trophies, captured through a rifle or a camera lens. Safari practice trades in competing discourses of thanatourism (trophy hunting), ecotourism (green hunts), and conservation (preservation intertwined with hunting). Both trophy hunting advocates *and* conservationists leverage notions of life (eco) and death (thanatos) in their attempts to convince tourist audiences of the best path for Africa's future...and to stage and wage a battle for hearts, minds, and dollars.

Status: Draft submitted to editors (August 2023); publication in 2024-25.

Other recent scholarship concerns artists of color (Nora Chipaumire, Judyie Al-Bilali & Priscilla Page) as well as white artists (Brett Bailey, Ewok Robinson, Will MacAdams) who are wrestling with the power dynamics of their culture, imagining new paradigms, and using theatre practice towards transforming culture:

Lewis, Megan, 2023, "Decolonising the Proscenium: Nora Shumba Chipaumire's *Nehanda* and *nhaka* practice," manuscript submitted, *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, refereed.

Zimbabwean feminist performance artist Nora Chipaumire's work is focused on decolonizing the tyranny of the proscenium arch. Wrestling with the question—what might decolonized theatre look like—Chipaumire advocates for African noise and the politics of volume, turning up the volume on the historical erasure and silencing of Africans, and she works to decolonize the entire ecology of theatremaking through the creative practice of *nhaka* (the chiShona word for inheritance), a cartography of “animist technology, practice and process” celebrating “radical black african presences.” Both visually and aurally, *Nehanda* asks: Who gets to hear? Who gets to see? Who understands? Whose (hi)story is this? Whose opera is operating here?

Status: Workshopped at MATC to multiple journals; solicited by *JDTIC Journal of Dramatic Theory & Criticism* to submit September 2023.

Lewis, Megan, 2024, "Coming white at you: Flipping the script on whiteness through performance," manuscript in preparation, *Theatre Survey*, refereed.

The critique of whiteness is often initiated by black folk, who are on the receiving end of this system of oppression. But white folk must also do our own work. I write about three artists who are flipping the script on whiteness: South African rapper Ewok Robinson, and Americans Matt Crawford and Will MacAdams, as they offer platforms for engaged dialogue about race and racism and models for social justice activism through theatre.

Status: Submit to *Theatre Survey*, Fall 2023.

Lewis, Megan, with Judyie Al-Bilali and Priscilla Page, 2024, "Theatre for Social Change: A Decade-long Case Study of Transforming a Department," manuscript in preparation, *Theatre Topics*, refereed.

The events of 2020—the global pandemic, the death of George Floyd and the #Black Lives Matter protests that followed, and the formation of #WeSeeYouWAT [White American Theater] initiative, put the spotlight on academic Theater departments, which are being called to shift and transform, to decolonize and diversify. In collaboration with my colleagues at UMass Amherst, Judyie Al-Bilali and Priscilla Page, we offer a road map towards transforming a predominantly white theatre department into a multicultural one, and the potentials and pitfalls of that process.

Status: Final drafting and submit to *Theatre Topics*, Fall 2023.

## **Conferences**

I have presented my work at over 50 conferences and professional associations in the US, UK, and South Africa. I have delivered papers and lectures at the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), Performance Studies International (PSi), Mid-America Theatre Conference (MATC), African Theatre Association (AFTA), and International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR), and the Whitewash Conference at the University of Johannesburg. I also have almost 50 guest lectures under my belt.

## **Guest Curations & Artist Residencies**

I am a committed advocate for South African artists in America. As guest curator for FringeArts in Philadelphia, I created a program of dramaturgical and scholarly events for the September 2016 US premiere of Brett Bailey's *Macbeth*. I did similar labor for Iain "Ewok" Robinson's residency at The Quick Center in 2017. In 2013, I hosted Magnet Theatre for a residency & performance of *Every Year, Every Day, I Am Walking* in Amherst, MA (see <https://profmeganlewis.weebly.com/magnet-residency.html>) and in 2010, I hosted Peter Van Heerden for a residency and performance of *Ubuntu*, Minneapolis, MN (see <https://profmeganlewis.weebly.com/ubuntu-residency.html>)

## **Grants & Funding**

I have a solid track record of securing research funding: from the American Society for Theatre Research Targeted Research Areas Grant to internal grants to support my research and creative activities, including a Book Subvention Grant, and numerous Faculty Presentation Travel Funds grants to present my work at conferences. I was awarded an Ann Gill Faculty Development Award from CSU in Spring 2023. At UMass, I secured three years of scholarship funding (totaling \$23,000) to support student travel on my study abroad course each summer. I raised \$30,000 to bring five artists from Magnet Theatre to UMass for a week-long residency in Winter 2013. I have also received several grants to support my pedagogical and creative work including an Internationalizing the Curriculum Grant, which allowed me to research and establish a summer study abroad program around the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown and grants to help me finish and screen my documentary film about devised theatremaking, *Devising Gilgamesh: Collage theatre-making with Theatre Novi Most* (2015).

## **SERVICE/ADMINISTRATION**

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After serving as Graduate Program Director at UMass, I left Massachusetts to take on a leadership position at Colorado State University in the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. I see leadership as an extension of my life as an educator and scholar; as an elder, I now leverage my wisdom and position in service to others. Too often in academia, faculty are placed into roles they neither want, nor are suited for. I expressly *chose* leadership, based on my skills, desire, and commitment to making our discipline, and the institutions in which we work, better.

As Director of Theatre, I have made it a top priority to transform our division into a multicultural organization, building off my experience doing the same at UMass. The curricular revisions I am spearheading at CSU include a Theatre for Social Change focus as well as a concentration in Musical Theatre, both of which have drawn a more diverse student body of BIPOC, queer, and marginalized students to CSU. Our faculty have updated their syllabi to include more diverse perspectives, content, and examples. We have revised our Season Selection process towards a far more inclusive, expansive, and diverse array of playwrights and plays—that represent 21st century America and not just the standard Eurocentric classical canon. In our recruitment efforts, we have focused on recruiting students from marginalized backgrounds and identities. After three years of this labor, I am proud to report that we have a cohort of diverse students and are showcasing them in our 2023-24 season focused on Democracy.

I am very proud of my accomplishments in the last three years at CSU:

- Leading the accreditation process for National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)
- Revised our Vision and Mission based on SWOT analysis
- Strategized goals as part of CSU's Courageous Strategic Transformation and Academic Master Planning
- Spearheaded a full curricular revision and implementation of new concentrations in the major
- Developed Tenure & Promotion Mentoring plan and mentoring three junior faculty through T&P process
- Instituted effective systems in our division: annual master calendar, Community Standards and culture of mutual respect and accountability, revised Season Selection process, regular meetings with all stakeholders (TT faculty, CCA faculty, staff, SMTD leadership), Callboard for clear and effective communication to students and colleagues
- Created and chair the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance's Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee
- Revised and updated Theatre Code
- Established *On the Brink* reading series with Saffron Henke, around "new works addressing the hot topic themes of our times—issues that have pushed our culture to the brink...and that reveal whole new worlds of possibilities. A collaboration of professional theatre artists, faculty members, current students and CSU alumni, *On the Brink* explores works representing a variety of underrepresented voices and perspectives."
- Summer study abroad course: Arts & Culture in South Africa approved at CSU (Launch: Summer 2025)

## TEACHING

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When I was honored with the Distinguished Teaching Award and the First Year Residential Student Choice Award in 2015, my passionate efforts and pedagogical skills, my commitment to anti-racist, feminist teaching practice, internationalizing the curriculum, and study abroad were affirmed and recognized at UMass. I was also awarded one of the 12 inaugural TIDE Teaching for Inclusiveness, Diversity & Equity Ambassadorships for 2016-17 and a Student-Centered Teaching & Learning Fellowship in 2015-16.

As an avid advocate for international education and study abroad, I have been honored to teach for Semester at Sea in Spring 2018 and the upcoming Spring 2024 semester. I was awarded a Loren W. Crabtree Global Teaching Scholarship from CSU and the Institute for Shipboard Education for the Spring 2024 voyage. I am also thrilled to be launching my summer study abroad course, Arts and Culture in South Africa, in summer 2025 (while the course was approved at CSU in 2021, as Director of Theatre, I opted to delay running my course to allow two colleagues to run their study abroad courses first).

My Teaching Philosophy is available with my Teaching Portfolio on my [website](#). Lists of my classes and descriptions are included there as well as in my CV.

Throughout my career at three R1 institutions—the University of Minnesota, University of Massachusetts, and Colorado State University—I have continually engaged in professional development around the latest pedagogies and technologies and applied Instructional Strategies and Learning Technologies in my classrooms. Details can be found in my CV, under Educational Professional Development (p. 26).

## Conclusion

The decision to move to Colorado State University has been a very fruitful one. I am thrilled to be a part of the thriving School of Music, Theatre, and Dance at CSU. I enjoy my leadership position and serving

alongside my colleagues on the SMTD leadership team. I continue to advocate for the arts across campus and to champion the faculty, staff, and students in the Division of Theatre. I believe my life's work in research, teaching, and service positions me very well for promotion to Full Professor at this stage in my career. Thank you for your time and consideration of my dossier.