

A manifesto written for the Playwrights' Center (Minneapolis, MN) on their 45th birthday.

Theater in 2060

by Aditi Brennan Kapil

What theater will look like in 2060 depends largely on whether there's a zombie apocalypse. I mean most likely there will be, so say the storytellers of our time, and it would be impossibly naïve for me to stand up here talking about 2060 without addressing it. The stories we tell speak volumes about our present moment, about our past, but also about our fears for the future, and let's face it we're pretty scared. Of zombies. Fast zombies, slow zombies, zombies in suits, zombies in floral print dresses, zombies eating our brains, zombies making us zombies, zombies don't care about friendship, morals, family, the fabric of society, and they probably don't give 2 shits about theater.

So it's a rough time for theaters, 2060. Best we can tell, I mean we haven't actually interacted with another human in a while, and news travels slow in this new world with precious few people left uninfected, nowhere to congregate, and really no desire to congregate anyway because survival is every human for themselves, I mean the moment you start to like someone they inevitably turn zombie and try to eat your brains, so why bother. But the years pass and right around 2059 let's say, the zombies start dying off, or they're fewer at least. And the remnants of the human race stagger out of their caves and sub-basements, start forming packs, not based on trust or anything, just strength in numbers. It's not a society. Whatever collective memory remains of a pre-apocalyptic time when we lived in actual societies is buried deep in the inarticulate psyche of that one old blind woman muttering to herself over there, we call her Teresa-ias.

Then this one day you hear about this building in former Minneapolis, if you follow the river and take old Franklin Avenue you'll see it, most of the streets are gone but the path is marked with the names of long dead playwrights, and if you successfully navigate this maze of obscure guideposts, I mean even in 2016 they were obscure, you'll come to a church. No denomination other than a steady stream of stories, nothing but stories- fiction, truth, past, present, future, hopes and fears, all mashed together, uncurated other than to make space for absolutely everyone, but even that doesn't require curating because there's a hunger for new stories, for new imaginings, new voices, this place is our only way to imagine ourselves forward, out of this post-apocalyptic morass into some sort of future. When one story ends another begins, because more than anything we need the air to be filled with imagined worlds, jokes that bind us, communal weeping, access to the minds of those around us, to their brains, we need our minds in discourse with their minds, we need to stitch together the torn fabric of society. And when it's happening, when the chemistry is really right, it's mind blowing, epic, intellectually, viscerally, it's like falling in love. I mean how else do you explain humans co-existing and forming societies for centuries other than that at some point we fell in love. All of us. And we decided to live together and have sex and procreate. And communicate, be in constant conversation, because people grow apart and we're not going to be those people, we'll keep talking, we'll have theaters, the fabric of our society won't fray because we'll gather regularly for the communal act of storytelling. Or family dinner, if you want to be all nuclear about

it. So in fact theater in 2060 is alive and healthful and beautiful and everything that it should be, at least in this broken down old church in New Minneapolis, I can't speak for anywhere else, the internet's been down for years.

Ok so if there's no zombie apocalypse between now and 2060, and let's face it no one wants to live through a zombie apocalypse, I'm 99% certain I wouldn't make it, I'm 99% certain none of you would make it either. Then this is harder. The way sustaining a marriage is harder than falling in love. Falling in love is fun, it's new, every day is a discovery that feels important, it is important, you're important. Maintaining love on the other hand is a pain in the ass, constantly paying attention, being in conversation, and you're busy, you're not actually that interested, besides haven't you already heard that story like 12,000 times? We've got a lot of history here and I'm sorry but I already know that all you want is to take my guns, my reproductive rights, kill and mock everything I believe in, cover your tracks with deleted emails, screw you, for real, screw you, and I'm sure as hell not going to be the one moving out and leaving you to mess up our kids, I paid for half this country. We're eating each other alive out there, hell this is the zombie apocalypse. We band together in packs for protection, we hoard resources, some have successfully isolated themselves in these high towers with enough resources that they need never come out, let's call them the 1%. With every city on fire, every poisoned water supply, distrust grows, and all we want is some personal damn agency, it doesn't even have to be positive agency, let it all burn, I just can't be at the mercy of forces beyond my control anymore, I need some way to deal, to wrap my head around it, to give it meaning, a political movement, an amplified voice for my rage, anything. Sometimes the stories we tell about the future speak volumes about our present.

But then, in 2017 let's say, the call goes out from this former church in Minneapolis. And not just from here, there are theaters everywhere, we know this because the internet still works. And the theaters offer us a steady stream of stories, an alternative to eating each other alive. They offer everyone's stories, a space in which we all coexist, a balanced social ecology, a mainstream that belongs to everyone, humanity in constant dialogue, stitching together the frayed, ripped, and ribboned fabric of our society. We devour the contents of others minds, we allow others to devour ours, we construct future worlds together. Metaphoric devouring instead of literal, it's like there's a zombie-vaccine and the storytellers have got it, the problem is distribution, because isn't it always. And the problem is that immunization only works if everyone has access to it, herd immunity, that's how you stop infectious diseases, and zombies.

So in 2017 no one gets left out of the stories and no one gets left out of the audience, because our survival depends on it. And hey, if we can manage that, if we get all of humanity in conversation, then we've pre-empted the zombie apocalypse, so that's kind of amazing. I mean it's a tall order, I know it's a tall order, getting all of humanity in conversation, but I think that's our job as theater makers. And I think that's how we move forward. To 2060.