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Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 20, 2009/2010

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Review

The Journal of Dramaturgy
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Dramaturgs of the Americas

Volume 20
2009 / 2010

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by Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt
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ATHE DRAMATURGY DEBUT ARTICLE

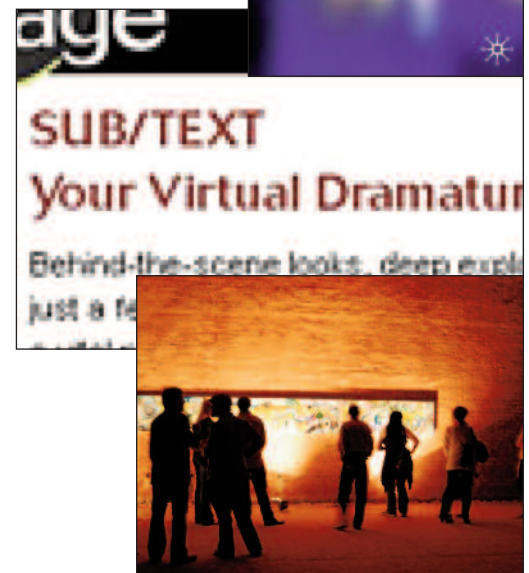
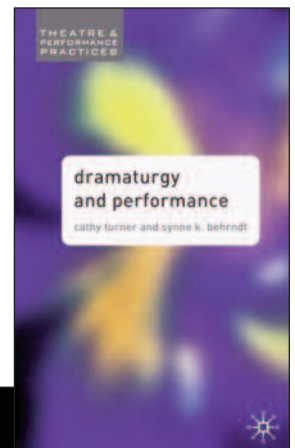
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LITERARY MANAGERS
& DRAMATURGS
OF THE AMERICAS

Photo by Heather Ramey

Recognizing *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility*

Geoff Proehl, recipient of the 2009
ATHE Outstanding Book Award

INTRODUCED BY JONATHAN LEE CHAMBERS

The Outstanding Book Award Committee is pleased to announce that this year's recipient is Geoffrey S. Proehl, for his remarkable study *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey*. Professor Proehl's beautifully written book is smart, useful, and at times out-and-out humorous (how often do you hear that about an academic book?). Drawing on years of experience, in a single volume Professor Proehl offers a wonderful introduction to the tasks of dramaturgy and the job of the dramaturg. The committee was particularly struck by the author's ability to combine the theoretical and the personal. What is more, the authority Professor Proehl brings to the subject of dramaturgy is counterbalanced by a charming humility. In sum, then, the committee is certain that Professor Proehl's observations will prove useful in a number of classroom contexts and,

as such, we believe that it will have a marked and positive impact on theatrical practice and pedagogy. It is my pleasure to introduce to you the 2009 ATHE Outstanding Book Award winner, Geoffrey S. Proehl.

Award ceremony speech delivered by Jonathan Chambers (Bowling Green University) on behalf of the ATHE Book Award Committee, which included Chambers, Stacy Wolf (Princeton University), and James Peck (Muhlenberg College).

Review

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Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to D.J. Hopkins: <dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu>.

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Geoff Proehl's Acceptance Speech, Association for Theatre in Higher Education Awards Ceremony

AUGUST 10, 2009

Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility comes from hours of conversation with many amazing collaborators — mentor, Michael Lupu; director, Mark Lamos; dramaturg, DD Kugler (all on the cover), and many others — students, colleagues, friends, family — present throughout its pages, many here in this room, conversations that would have never occurred were it not for ATHE and LMDA (Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas).

It explores a sensibility found not only among this wonderful group of people we call dramaturgs but also among a larger, equally wonderful group, also including dramaturgs, called theatre artists.

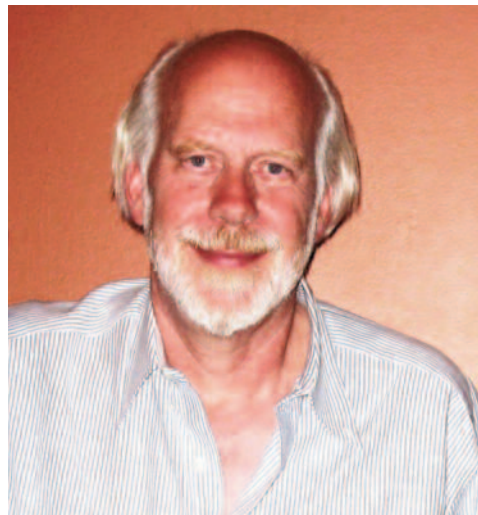
The book begins in rehearsal with a moment in which one actor says to another, “Not know me yet?” It was one of those early stumble throughs that can be agonizing, but that day, Laila Robins, allowed us to hear, not just Cleopatra’s frustration that Antony could doubt her love, but also, by some alchemy of talent and intuition, all these other moments in which — no matter how close we are or have been to another — a gulf forms that our best words and good intentions cannot bridge.

Cleopatra’s question expresses a dilemma of human experience, but it also tells us something about making a play, for always the play will say to us — in different voices, sometimes saucy and impudent, sometimes still and grave — “Not know me yet?” And to this we will always have to answer, yes and no. The sensibility that inhabits us — actors, directors, designers, technicians, playwrights, dramaturgs — in this space of loss (not), abundance (know), subjectivity (me), time (yet), and inquiry (?) is the “toward” of the title.

Thank you Awards Committee, thank you Association for Theatre in Higher Education for this surprising, delightful, and deeply appreciated recognition.

Editor's note: see the conversation about Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility by D.J. Hopkins and Lauren Beck in Review 19.2.

GEOFF PROEHL teaches, dramaturgs, and directs at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. He is the author of a study of American family drama and the figure of the prodigal: *Coming Home Again* (1997). He is a contributor to and co-editor with Susan Jonas and Michael Lupu of *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. He has written articles for *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, the *Encyclopedia of English Studies and the Language Arts*, and *Theater Topics*. He is a past president of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. Professionally, he has worked with the Guthrie Theatre, Arena Stage, the People's Light and Theatre Company, and Tacoma Actors Guild. Most recently, he was the production dramaturg for *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Mark Lamos at the Guthrie. His book *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey* was published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press in 2008.



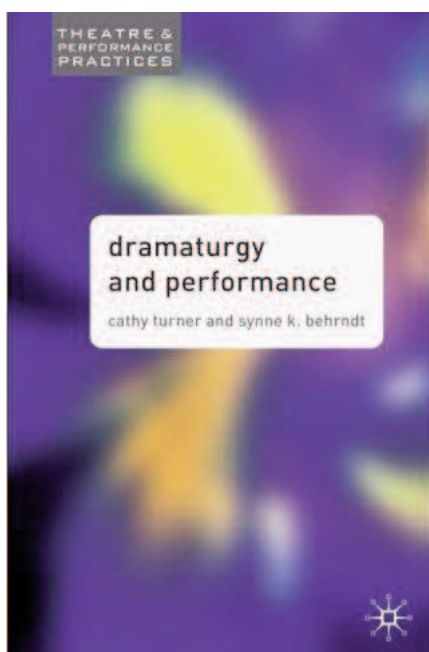
Geoff Proehl.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle.

MILLENNIAL DRAMATURGY

A conversation about the new book *Dramaturgy and Performance*

as discussed by **Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell**
and **Gina Pisasale**



Turner, Cathy and Synne K. Behrndt. *Dramaturgy and Performance*. Theatre and Performance Practices Series. Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt's 2008 Dramaturgy and Performance is a comprehensive study of dramaturgy as currently practiced and theorized in the United Kingdom. Part I defines dramaturgy as a concept and illustrates Bertolt Brecht's influence on dramaturgy as both a concept and a practice. Based largely on interviews with dramaturgs, Part II describes the dramaturg's role in contemporary UK theatre practice, including institutional positions, relationships with playwrights, common production practices, and the dramaturg's function in "devised" theatre. Part III outlines several trends in twenty-first century dramaturgy and reflects on possibilities and problems for the future of dramaturgy.

Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell (SCO): It seems to me that the golden thread running through *Dramaturgy and Performance* is the idea of dramaturgy as a profoundly contextual practice. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt explore this idea most explicitly in Chapter 2, but they also touch on it early in their first chapter, when discussing Adam Versényi's proposal that "'dramaturgy' be defined as 'the architecture of the theatrical event'" (Versényi 2003: 386, qtd. in Turner and Behrndt 18). This definition, they say, "makes it clear that the object of analysis extends beyond the performance itself" to a context that includes the audience as well as the social and political climates in which a work is created and consumed (18). Chapter 2, "Brecht's Productive Dramaturgy," demonstrates how Bertolt Brecht and his many collaborators attempted to change theatre by changing the "whole theatre-going context" (58), including adapting dramatic structures that they saw as too narrowly focused on individual experience.

Gina Pisasale (GP): Yes, and not only do Turner and Behrndt argue that contextual considerations are necessary, but they also suggest that dramaturgy itself is dynamic and diverse as it is shaped by ever shifting cultural contexts and artistic sensibilities. In their introduction, Turner and Behrndt acknowledge that covering such a diverse and vast area comprehensively is a virtually impossible project (1);

SYDNEY CHEEK-O'DONNELL is Head of the BA in Theatre Studies in the Department of Theatre at the University of Utah, where she teaches theatre history, dramaturgy, critical theory, and directing. Current dramaturgical work includes *42nd Street* at the Pioneer Theatre Company and Edgerton Foundation Award-Winner *Charm* at Salt Lake Acting Company. In addition, Sydney is working on a book about actress, playwright, political activist, and dramaturg extraordinaire Franca Rame, life-long collaborator of Dario Fo.

GINA PISASALE is a freelance dramaturg based in Philadelphia, and has worked with companies such as the Arden Theatre Company, 1812 Productions, Hedgerow Theatre, Media Theatre, A&E Biographies, Harrisburg Shakespeare Festival, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She is currently a PhD graduate student in the University of Maryland's Department of Theatre. Her areas of research include Asian-American theater and performance, Korean diasporic performance, and dramaturgy.

yet they constantly remind the reader that attempts to define both “dramaturgy” and “performance” can be dangerously reductive. To me, this is both terrifying and encouraging, as I cling to definitive terms (and always hope to better explain to non-theatre practitioners what a dramaturg “does”) but am inspired by the great variety and potential that dramaturgical work can encompass.

SCO: What excites me here is the notion of dramaturgs and dramaturgies that are deeply engaged not just with theatre but also with local and global communities. This is not to suggest the authors advocate doing the kind of politically engaged Marxist theatre that was created at the Berliner Ensemble. Indeed, they argue in Chapter 3 that a changing context has necessitated changing dramaturgical strategies among the UK’s “political” playwrights and theatre companies. But this idea of theatre in context appeals to me artistically and politically. Last summer at the LMDA conference in DC, dramaturg Allison Horsley asked how the artistic staff at a theatre can become invested in and connected to the community in which the theatre exists. In Chapter 5 (“The Dramaturg and the Playwright”), Turner and Behrndt, offer a number of examples of how dramaturgs and theatre companies in the UK have attempted to do this. For example, Birmingham Repertory Theatre’s mission links audience development with the development of new work by supporting young and established writers and producing work for “culturally and ethnically diverse audiences” (138–140). This seems to me to be something we really must commit to in the United States. When I go to see a play that represents “ethnically diverse” characters I’m always struck by how white and middle-class the typical theatre-going audience in this country is because that is the only time I see an audience that even marginally represents the diversity of the community outside of the theatre building.

GP: I also find the question of audience diversity incredibly vital, but also perplexing in attempts to determine how “diversity” can be achieved and how it is received. Along this line of inquiry, I felt as if Turner and Behrndt didn’t fully address the question of “audience” and how audience response is gauged, assessed, and met. Instead, they rely heavily on dramatic structure and artistic intent to assess audience response. For example, in the final section, Turner and Behrndt observe that the structure of contemporary performance pieces has shifted to a “dramaturgy of process” where a production is no longer focused on “making meaning” but on “how meaning is (and has been) made” among performers and audiences (188–189). Turner and Behrndt then address the structure of various performance pieces that “invite” the audience to participate, but they do not identify the audience, a detail that may suggest how such performances were ultimately interpreted.

SCO: True. Turner and Behrndt don’t really deal with audience response or assessment of that response despite their identification of “millennial dramaturgies” that are interactive. In some ways, they imply that the dramaturg is the audience. I wonder if this is less a question of the authors overlooking what is undoubtedly an extremely important element of dramaturgy, and more an indication of dramaturgical practice today. How much information do theatres gather about their audiences, and how much of that information is put to use beyond season planning? What is the quality of that information? How often does the theatre company share that information

with individual production dramaturgs? Interestingly, the most detailed discussion of audience in *Dramaturgy and Performance* is in the context of trends in British theatre marketing, which is drawing increasingly on the skills of institutional dramaturgs (113–116).

GP: I wonder if this question of assessing audience response will become more and more prominent if “interactive” performances increase as Turner and Behrndt predict in their final chapter.

Along with a shift in performance forms, Turner and Behrndt also suggest a significant shift, or perhaps expansion, happening in the field of dramaturgy. This shift seems to involve a move from privileging textual analysis to focusing non-textual analysis, which concentrates more on linkages between performance elements or “gaps, evasions, silences, [and] ambiguities” (193). They suggest that negotiating these sort of negative spaces requires a keen dramaturgical awareness, not only from an individual designated as “the dramaturg” but from everyone involved in creating the performance event, including the audience (202–203). Again, this ambiguity both terrifies me, since there is no “right” answer, and excites me, *because* there is no “right” answer!

SCO: Indeed. Some of the “millennial dramaturgies” to which Turner and Behrndt refer are pretty extreme, but one cannot expect or demand of all audiences, as you put it, the “keen dramaturgical awareness” required of texts by writers like Sarah Kane or the “pervasive games” being devised by companies like Blast Theory (201–202). Not that we should pander or talk down to our audiences, but we must know them. Are they prepared to engage with a work in a particular way? Are there new or underserved audiences in our communities who would be more inclined to engage in theatres that employ more interactive, “millennial” dramaturgies?

This point returns us to what I find exciting in Turner and Behrndt’s book: the idea of dramaturgical practice that is fully engaged with context and communities. Although they are not prescriptive or doctrinaire, the authors repeatedly identify context as central to all sorts of dramaturgical practices, techniques, and approaches. And certainly one of the most fundamental contextual questions is, How does this theatre company relate to the community in which it is housed? Without this dramaturgical sensibility, theatre companies (especially the so-called “main stream” ones) will miss out on the possibility of connecting in any meaningful or prolonged way with the diverse groups that inhabit metropolitan areas today.

GP: Yes, and as Turner and Behrndt delve into these questions of contextualization and the dramaturgical sensibility, I especially appreciate their focus on the practical aspects of dramaturgy and literary management. I believe that the strength and significance of their text is that it is shaped by examples and direct accounts from practicing dramaturgs rather than general ideas, theories, or established definitions of dramaturgy and the dramaturg’s tasks. I feel that we, as dramaturgs, are rarely given the opportunity to observe or question the nuances of another dramaturg’s process. Even at the annual LMDA conferences, it seems as though we operate on the assumption that we all know what each other’s dramaturgical work entails. Turner and Behrndt reveal various and even contradictory ideas among practicing dramaturgs about what this work should and could entail. For example, in their chapter “The Dramaturg and the

Playwright,” they include accounts from dramaturgs who encourage writers to develop their work independent of production considerations, as well as dramaturgs who advise writers to “work beyond the writing process” and consider production aesthetics such as space and physicality (137-142). These accounts also include insightful details, such as dramaturgs’ descriptions of the general content and context of their conversations with playwrights.

Turner and Behrndt’s use of accounts from practicing dramaturgs is especially illuminating in Part II, which addresses and compares the work of dramaturgs operating within large regional institutions, working with playwrights on new plays, working on more conventional theatre productions, and collaborating on dance pieces and devised performances. Their introduction offers what I consider to be a useful distinction between the terms dramaturgy and dramaturg, explaining that “the term ‘dramaturgy’ applies to the general composition of a work” and “‘dramaturg’ is a specific professional role” (3). In Part II, they present specific examples of how various dramaturgs identify, research, illuminate, and interpret the “‘composition,’ ‘structure,’ or ‘fabric’” of a performance.

These practical examples lead to what I feel is the utility of this text. As part of Palgrave’s Theatre and Performance Practices publication series, I feel as if this text would prove useful to dramaturgy courses within both undergraduate and graduate theater curricula. Its historical survey of dramaturgy’s development as well as its coverage of the dramaturg’s potential work within a variety of rehearsal and performance settings renders this text useful for an introduction to dramaturgy. Also, its engagement with performance theory and exploration of political and cultural contextualization offers a bridge between theory and practice for more advanced academic analysis.

SCO: Interestingly, I had the opposite response. Not that the text isn’t extremely useful, but that it is, in my opinion, too dense for a typical undergraduate student just beginning an exploration of dramaturgy. While I find the longer theoretical explorations of terminology in the introduction and the first chapter illuminating, I’m fairly certain that my students would find it extremely difficult to extract what is useful or relevant from such discussions without considerable guidance. (I should note that my dramaturgy class focuses in particular on the practice of the production dramaturg, rather than on the breadth of dramaturgical practice and theory.) There are sections of the book that I would enthusiastically assign to undergraduates; I thought the chapter on Brecht was one of the best explanations of the connections between his work (as playwright, dramaturg, and director) and his theories that I’ve ever read. At the same time, I have already found this text incredibly useful as a resource for my teaching of undergraduates, particularly because of Turner and Behrndt’s systematic research into what contemporary dramaturgs and literary managers are actually doing when they “do dramaturgy.” As you say, we rarely get to observe other dramaturgs’ processes. This text provides one with a window into a wide array of approaches. Of course, Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl, and Michael Lupu’s collection *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook*, also presents the reader with a multitude of approaches to dramaturgy as well as quite a few definitions of the term itself. But *Dramaturgy and Performance* offers a more systematic and unified description and analysis of the field in the UK, with some reference to current practices in Europe and the US. So while I would probably only assign individual

chapters of this text to undergraduate students of dramaturgy, I would enthusiastically assign it to graduate students.

GP: I definitely agree that certain sections of this text would be more accessible than others for undergraduate students. Still, I wish that I could have this book in my back pocket every time someone asks, “So what is a dramaturg?”

CREATING *SUB/TEXT*

Dramaturging the ReStaged Festival

By Janine Sobeck

On July 1, 2008, Arena Stage was in a state of flux. Having recently moved out of its permanent home in Southwest Washington, DC in order to complete a major renovation, Arena was about to venture into uncharted waters with the launch of a two-year ReStaged Festival. This ReStaged Festival was to be a two-year long presentation and examination of American Voices specifically designed to allow Arena the opportunity to determine the type of programming that, in fall 2010, would be taken back into the new building, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater.

July 1st was also the day that I transitioned from full-time Dramaturgy Intern to Interim Literary Manager, taking over the Dramaturgy office after the departure of Senior Dramaturg Mark Bly. As I began the task of preparing for Part One of the ReStaged Festival, I became acutely aware that the traditional Arena method of dramaturgy was not going to be enough for the breadth of the Festival. Due to the demands of planning a season in two spaces in which Arena had never before worked, and the need to keep our core audience with us during this transition while taking advantage of the new audiences awaiting us in these new locations, the season planning committee had pulled together a list of ten titles that broadened the traditional Arena method of producing shows. Although Arena typically produced the full season in-house (from casting and designing to rehearsing and building), the ReStaged Festival would supplement these fully-produced shows with presented work (where the show arrives “in a box,” needing only some tech rehearsals before opening) and “half-and-half” work (where the production started elsewhere and Arena is somewhat, but not completely involved in the developmental and artistic process). As I looked at the list of titles, I realized that I had the enormous task of creating an institutional dramaturgical through-line for all ten shows even though my office would only work as the traditional full-time production dramaturg on three (a number that, due to last minute season changes, eventually dwindled to two) shows. I needed to find a way to support the process for every show in the season, no matter how it was created.

My first priority was to find a way to get my office (which consists of me, my intern, and a group of volunteers) invested in the shows on which we would not be working as the production dramaturg (i.e. we were not working on the development of the show with the director, playwright, and production team in pre-production and rehearsal), but to which we were still responsible for the “institutional” dramaturgical requirements: actor’s packets, program notes, and post-show talkbacks. My second priority was to tackle a problem

JANINE SOBECK is the Literary Manager at Arena Stage. She is the creator of *Sub/Text: Your Virtual Dramaturg*, the website dedicated to providing behind-the-scenes information about the productions at Arena. Now in her third season at Arena, she has been the dramaturg of multiple productions, including *The Light in the Piazza*, *Stick Fly*, *The Quality of Life*, *Looped*, *A Delicate Balance*, and *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, and is the Producer of Arena’s Downstairs New Play Series. Sobeck has an MA from Brigham Young University, where she worked as the Dramaturgy Supervisor for the undergraduate program, developing new dramaturgy courses as well working as a production dramaturg.

that, as an intern, I felt existed within the dramaturgy efforts of Arena Stage. I feel strongly that one of my main purposes as a dramaturg is to enrich everyone's experience with the show, which includes the director, playwright, production team, actors, theatre staff, and audience. As an intern, I had often felt dissatisfied with the amount of audience enrichment that was happening, believing that we were allowing our audiences to see the show in a void instead of fully supporting their experiences with our productions.

After some discussion with my new supervisor, Associate Artistic Director David Dower, I was given free rein to try and figure out a way that would effectively tackle these two issues, while not straining our already tight budget. As I began to research the possibilities, I thought of my university training (in which part of the dramaturg's responsibility was to create an eight-page study guide for the show). I also stumbled upon an old Arena publication, *Performance Journals* (a study guide-esque book that contained essays and information about each show, which had been discontinued several years earlier as a cost-saving measure). Although the study guides and the *Performance Journals* provided excellent models for a certain type of audience enrichment, I already knew that budget restrictions would not allow for an additional publication. I was also interested in creating a kind of "behind the scenes" experience with our audience (especially the younger, tech-savvy audience that we are always trying to cultivate) that would offer more than a printed publication could provide.

I originally proposed the idea of pulling the research that my office was already doing to complete the actor packets and incorporating it into a special feature on the Arena Stage blog (which I had also been asked to revive). That original idea was exciting enough to my supervisor that I was asked if I could take it a step further, expanding it into a wider project. After several meetings with the communications director and the publications director, the project continued to morph until *Sub/Text: Your Virtual Dramaturg* was born.

The introductory page of *Sub/Text* says: "Following Arena Stage's belief that theatre can and should be a vital participant in the intellectual life of American culture, *Sub/Text* is dedicated to enriching your

experience with the plays presented at Arena Stage and facilitating further discussion and inquiry." Based on the model of the Extra Features sections that are common on DVDs, I wanted to create an interactive experience that provided a wide range of information (from historical background to information on the production team to a glimpse inside the rehearsal room), while providing the tools for any audience member who wanted to delve more deeply into any of these subjects. Working with the publications director and web designer, we created a subsection of the Arena Stage website that, thanks to our existing web contract, allowed me unlimited space at no cost.

Moving from a printed publication to a website opened up a plethora of possibilities. Being online forced me to examine and "update" my method of presentation while creating opportunity to supplement written text with images (and color ones at that), video, audio, and external links. The design of the site allowed me the flexibility to customize each section according to the needs of each show and what I believed would most benefit the audience. The set-up of the page removed restrictions (due to space or cost) on how much information I could provide for each show. Above all, being on the web allowed visitors the freedom to pick and choose what information they wanted to engage with according to their individual interests while allowing me to track the activity of each page in order to better understand what our audience wanted to learn.

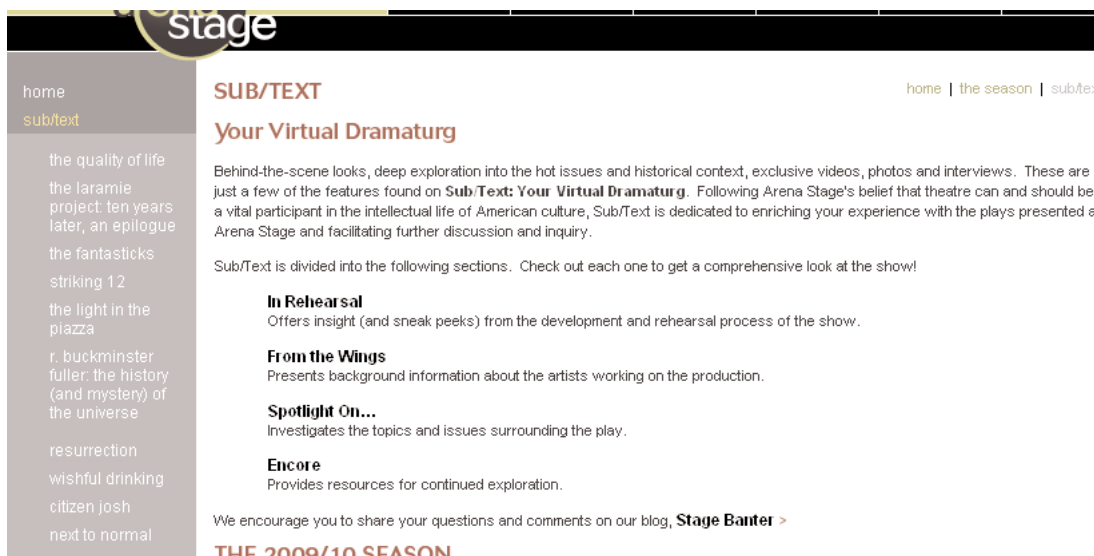
In an effort to aid navigation, the *Sub/Text* page for each show is divided into four main sections:

- In Rehearsal: Offering insight (and sneak peeks) from the development and rehearsal process of the show.
- From the Wings: Presenting background information about the artists working on the production.
- Spotlight On...: Investigating the topics and issues surrounding the play.
- Encore: Providing resources for continued exploration.

These four sections are highlighted in the table of contents of each main show page. The titles and brief "teasers" give the audience

members a brief idea of what is available in each section, while icons let them know what type of information (video, audio, images, text, links) is contained on each page.

Although this consistency was helpful in making the site "user-friendly," it was important to keep the definitions of each section loose in order to keep open the possibilities of what kind of information I could make available. For all shows, such as the world premiere of *Legacy of Light* by Karen Zacarias, the original focus remains on traditional



Part of a page from *Sub/Text*, courtesy Arena Stage.

dramaturgical research (historical background, issues, etc). *Legacy of Light*, which was a fully-produced show, revolves around the true story of Emilie du Chatelet, an 18th century scientist who has received little attention despite the fact that her groundbreaking ideas paved the way for Einstein's discovery of $E=mc^2$. In order to introduce the audience to this very specific world, *Sub/Text* featured Emilie's biography (and her long affair with Voltaire), the conditions of life at court (and what it meant for such an intelligent mind in this era to belong to a woman), and the science that consumed the lives of the characters (ranging from Newtonian gravity to string theory), all while trying to provide a basic understanding of the complex scientific ideas about which the characters bantered.

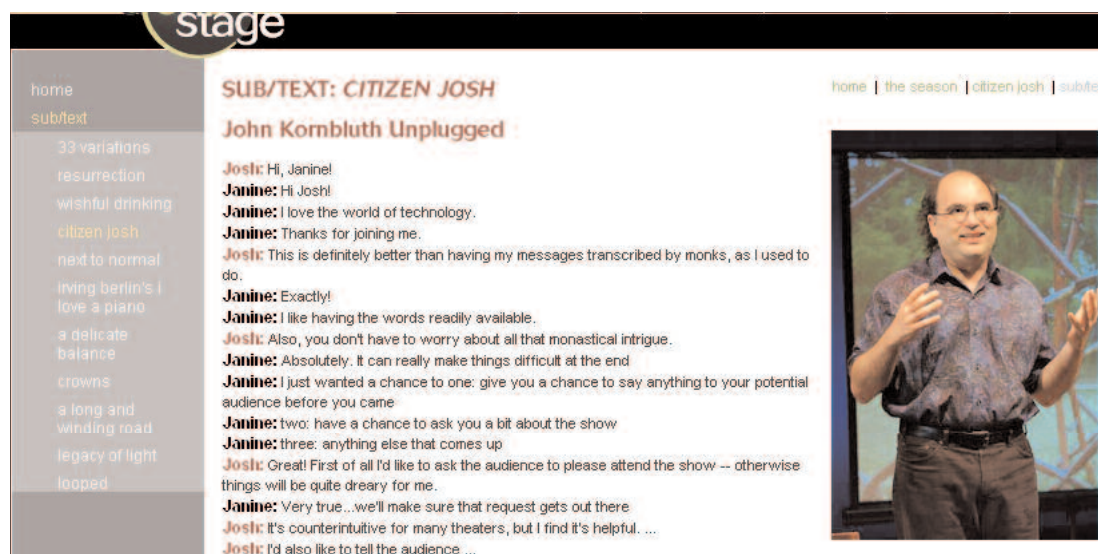
In addition to this type of information, the nature of *Sub/Text* has allowed me to play and explore what information is helpful in the quest of enriching the audience. For example, one of our presented productions was Josh Kornbluth's *Citizen Josh*, a one-man show that wrestles with the idea of democracy and what it means to be a good citizen. Josh was arriving two days before tech to have some final rehearsals and then launching immediately into his two and a half-week run. However, the topics of the show (politics and the creation of a fruitful conversation across the Democrat / Republican divide) were particularly juicy for our audiences because it was running right before the November 2008 presidential election. Because most of the show was pulling from Josh's life experiences, we knew that we wanted to explain his personal "timeline." However, thanks to the nature of a one-man show, and the absolutely delightful personality that is Josh, it became imperative to round out the facts and infuse the website with Josh's personal touch. While giving us access to personal photos and files that supplemented his stories — with permission to use and publish any and all of them — Josh allowed us to play with how we presented him on the site, including a variation of a traditional interview that was done through IM and posted in its entirety (including all tangents and mistakes).

The *Citizen Josh Sub/Text* also allowed us to connect with the community. Every night as audience members came into the theatre, they were given a survey that asked about everything from their age and their political beliefs to their views on certain moral issues. While the show was running, the ASM would madly tabulate the surveys into pie charts that would be projected at the end of the show, allowing the audience to see the demographics of the house. Afterward, the surveys were made available on the *Sub/Text* pages, giving audience members the chance to view the broader picture of who was seeing the show. This clear depiction of how much people agreed and how many points of conflict existed, in combination with the communal experience of watching and responding to

the show together, created a tighter sense of unity among audience members while driving home Josh's point that conversation and connection across the divide is not only possible, but essential.

As we moved through the shows in Part One of the ReStaged Festival, the opportunities to get the artists involved in the creation of material produced some of the most interesting and viable contributions to the *Sub/Text* pages, since such involvement personalized the production to the Arena Stage audiences while connecting my office to the artists in a much more intimate way. A great example is one of our "half and half" productions, *Next to Normal* by Brian Yorkey and Tom Kitt. Knowing that Yorkey and Kitt had finished their world premiere production at Second Stage with the general feeling that there was still work to be done, Arena extended a "second chance" opportunity to Brian and Tom to "get it right." With a shortened rehearsal time (in New York rather than DC) and an intact artistic team, the interaction with my office ordinarily would have been limited, leaving me to write my program note and mediate the talkbacks in a void. But given Arena's particular interest in talking about the "second chance" (especially since it was part of the ReStaged focus to persuade our audiences that productions are still new and worthy of our time and attention even after the world premiere), I contacted Brian and Tom about sharing their journey, which has lasted more than ten years. Both Brian and Tom were enthusiastic about sharing their story and between them created several pages that outlined both the path of the story and the music. These pages were enhanced by Tom's audio files of the different versions of the songs, allowing the audience to hear the journey that the music had taken from its original inception up to the Arena Stage production.

As Part One of the ReStaged Festival continued, an important aspect of *Sub/Text* became the evaluation process. How well was the website actually working to achieve my two goals? The engagement of my office was easy to assess. As previously discussed, the creation of material for the *Sub/Text* pages created a stronger relationship with the artists involved, immersing us in the process of each show. Additionally, the nature of *Sub/Text* also required the dramaturgy office to go beyond the typical "photocopy" or "cut and paste" research for



Part of a page from *Sub/Text*, courtesy Arena Stage.

The screenshot shows a website interface for 'Sub/Text: Legacy of Light'. On the left is a vertical navigation menu with a 'Stage' logo at the top. The menu items include 'home', 'sub/text', '33 variations', 'resurrection', 'wished drinking', 'citizen josh', 'next to normal', 'irving berlin's i love a piano', 'a delicate balance', 'crowns', 'a long and winding road', 'legacy of light' (highlighted), and 'looped'. Below the menu is an 'explore more' button. The main content area has the title 'SUB/TEXT: LEGACY OF LIGHT' and a sub-header 'Passionate Minds'. It features a quote from Voltaire about Émilie, a portrait of her, and a biographical paragraph. At the bottom of the main content is an 'explore more' button.

Part of a page from *Sub/Text*, courtesy Arena Stage.

each show and instead forced us to internalize the information in order to funnel it into clear and concise articles. As for the audience, Google Analytics proved — with more than 57,000 hits — that people were going to the site. However, it was my attendance at the shows and moderation of post-show discussions that allowed me go beyond dry statistics. The most gratifying part of the process was overhearing audience members discussing and quoting sections of the *Sub/Text* pages during intermission and fielding their *Sub/Text*-related questions during post-shows.

These developments, along with accolades from the artists (in his opening night speech, Josh Kornbluth observed that *Sub/Text* was the type of support that he had always dreamed about having surround his production), were enough to warrant the continuation of the site. However, as the ReStaged Festival has continued, the potential impact of the *Sub/Text* site has become more intriguing thanks to other, unexpected results.

It quickly became apparent that *Sub/Text* introduced Arena Stage to a much larger community — a community outside of our DC home. With *Next to Normal*'s subsequent move to Broadway, interested audience members searching for information about the show regularly find the *Sub/Text* site. This outside audience was further enlarged when *33 Variations* by Moisés Kaufman went to Broadway. Though *33 Variations* had premiered at Arena Stage in our 2007/08 season (the season before *Sub/Text* was launched), we were asked by the producers to create a *Sub/Text* page that could be linked to the Broadway website. In addition to this national Broadway audience, other regional theatres have asked either to copy the information from or link to the *Sub/Text* site when they have done the same productions.

However, as I was creating exciting possibilities by expanding the audience for *Sub/Text*, a more satisfying reverberation has been felt within the walls of Arena Stage. Although the Dramaturgy office spearheads the creation of *Sub/Text*, with growing support from our Community Engagement department, the communications (media and marketing), development, and sales departments have all started to use the *Sub/Text* materials in their own work. By creating an easy resource for the staff to tap into the artistic life of the play, the use of *Sub/Text* materials by all of these departments has created a unified

voice in the institution, addressing a continuing problem within the organization about how we discuss our productions with the public.

I have been subsequently hired as the full-time Literary Manager, and the scope of *Sub/Text* has only continued to grow. The results from the pioneer season have shown continued interest in the site, both from within and outside the organization. The feedback from audience members, artists, and other theatre practitioners has challenged me to search constantly for new and exciting ways to interact with the show

and everyone involved with it. Concurrently, the process of creating material for the *Sub/Text* pages invests my staff more fully in the show, both in relation to the subject matter and the development process. I have been asked by my supervisor to make the continual presence of *Sub/Text* a priority, allowing me to adjust and re-examine the practices of our office to make sure that the time needed to support this project (which, I confess, is much more time-intensive than we ever imagined) is available. I am sure that as it continues to grow and I understand the full breadth of its possibilities, *Sub/Text* will become an integral part of the Arena Stage experience while broadening the range of what is possible in the “digi-turgy” realm.

Visit *Sub/Text* online at: <http://www.arenastage.org/season/subtext/>.

DRAMATURGY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

A Case Study of Russian Theatre and Politics

By Robyn Quick and Alison McCartney

Editor's Note: This piece is based on Robin Quick's presentation at the Hot Topics Session of the LMDA Conference in Washington, DC, July 2009.

Dramaturgy invites us to investigate many different aspects of the world of a play. Therefore, it both cultivates and requires the kind of interdisciplinary thinking that has long been at the heart of a liberal arts education. Many of us regularly assign advanced theatre students to perform dramaturgical work on departmental productions as a way of helping them to broaden their areas of knowledge and develop integrative thinking. But how might we extend such learning opportunities to larger groups of students and to other departments? How might we even feed our own intellectual curiosity about the world and become partners with our students in an interdisciplinary conversation? The following case study suggests a potential answer to these questions by examining a project developed jointly between a theater professor (Quick) and a political science professor (McCartney). We designed a course offered in the Spring 2009 semester at Towson University to engage students in dramaturgical research and analysis of contemporary Russian drama. By utilizing strategies of representation, integration, and collaboration, we aimed to help students from both departments better understand the political events, policies, and structures that have influenced and been influenced by that culture, and each other's field of study.

The plays themselves provided our initial source of inspiration for the course. Over the last decade, Russians who reached adulthood after the fall of the Soviet Union have started to express their reactions to their world and their unique generational perspectives in a new wave of socially conscious and artistically adventurous playwriting. Quick's initial idea to build one semester of her production dramaturgy course around these plays, soon grew into a much larger project for the Department of Theatre Arts in collaboration with the Center for International Theatre Development. By the end of 2010, we will have translated, studied, or produced over ten new Russian plays. [More information about the project is available at <www.newrussiandrama.org>.] Quick wanted the learning in this

ROBYN QUICK is an associate professor and coordinator of the theatre studies program in the Department of Theatre Arts at Towson University. She has served most recently as a production dramaturg for the Maryland Arts Festival and the Baltimore Shakespeare Festival. Currently, she is the dramaturg and coordinator of the New Russian Drama Project at Towson University in collaboration with the Center for International Theatre Development.

ALISON MILLETT MCCARTNEY is Associate Professor of Political Science at Towson University. Her research and teaching focus on European politics, particularly German, Polish, and Russian politics and foreign policy. Her current projects include a book, *A New Germany in a New Europe? Conflict and Continuity in Post-Cold War German-Polish Relations*, which will be released in December 2010, and another book project, *From Service-Learning to Civic and Political Engagement*, in progress.



Towson University students meeting Russian Ambassador Sergey I. Kislyak at a speech hosted by the Baltimore Council on Foreign Relations.

Photo: Robyn Quick

project to reach across campus in as many ways as possible. In the early planning stages of the project, she contacted Alison McCartney, head of the university's International Studies program and a political science professor with a specialty in Eastern Europe. McCartney saw the value of studying plays to help her students understand the political culture behind Russian policies, and we were both excited to create an opportunity for students and faculty in our disciplines to learn from each other.

Although the Russian plays that our theatre department is producing in the 2009 – 2010 season served as a major source of inspiration for the course, we agreed that we would work carefully to represent both disciplines equally in the experience. In fact, for administrative reasons, our single course experience was officially registered with the university as two courses: POSC 470: Russian Politics and Theatre and THEA 380: Russian Theatre and Politics. We designed enrollment so that half the students working with us would be political science majors and half would be theatre majors. The structure of the semester was similarly divided between lectures in Russian politics and culture given by McCartney and discussions that Quick led on specific Russian plays. Each week began with political science lectures in subjects such as economics and ethnicity and ended with discussions of plays related to the lecture topics. At the same time that we worked to represent both disciplines in the course, we made sure that all class members equally engaged in both areas of study. All students read the same material and completed the same assignments, which included written exams and journals. Both professors participated equally in grading students in both disciplines.

In order to help students understand the relationship between the culture expressed in the plays and the political system that both informed and responded to that culture, we designed the course so that students would be compelled to integrate knowledge from both

fields. We modeled this integrative learning in part through our own active participation in each other's lectures, as we asked questions and contributed thoughts to relate the material of the day to other learning in the course. The students received independent practice in integrative learning through weekly journal essays in which they related their analysis of each play to some aspect of political culture, events, or policies that we studied. Those journal entries, assigned in advance of each week's discussion of a play, were designed to help prepare them for class discussions in which we collectively explored the relationships between the plays and the world in which and for which they were created.

Despite the fact that each professor took major responsibility for instruction in her field, it required a good deal of collaboration to involve the two groups in a single course experience. Navigating the cultures of the two departments provided some fascinating insights — from the different ways students address professors to technical matters like documentation style. In each case, we worked together to create unified expectations for the students. But we also shared our discoveries with the students so that they could learn about differences between disciplinary cultures. For example, one distinction between disciplines that required resolution was the question of group work. Political science students as a rule dislike group work, and they express particular concern about how such work will be graded. In theatre departments, by contrast, many classes require some degree of collaboration, as does production work. We compromised by creating a group presentation assignment with a detailed grade structure that allowed for individual paper grades within the larger group grade.

This group project required our students to engage in the same kind of collaboration that we employed while creating and conducting the class. A team of students from both disciplines created a mini-dra-

maturgical casebook on each contemporary play we studied. They collaborated on a written analysis of the play and the assignment of specific research topics to each team member. They also worked together to give an oral presentation of the results of their research and analysis that was supplemented by visual and written materials. Dramaturgy provided an excellent focus for this collaboration. Their assigned play gave them a common frame of reference to establish a conversation, and their diverse backgrounds allowed each student to make a contribution to the project that complemented the work of others. Some of their chosen topics mirrored their major fields of study as political science students chose to write about economics or the military and a theatre student provided information about contemporary theatre practice for a play that prominently features characters who perform a scene from Othello. But others found ways to explore new territory, such as the political science student who chose to examine symbolism in a play and the theatre student who conducted a detailed analysis of how police corruption in Russia is reflected in his group's play. In every case, the range of topics for each play allowed the group to present a multifaceted view of Russian culture as expressed in the play. The casebook and oral presentation also required another kind of integrative thinking because students were asked to present information to the translators, directors and actors in the department who would work to produce the plays in our Russia season the following year. This exercise required all students not only to draw from their play in developing their research projects, but also to direct their thinking back to the theatre and the contemporary political circumstances in the material that they chose to present.

In a course driven by dramaturgy and structured around the principles of equal representation, integration, and collaboration, we created a dialogue that helped us understand each other and another part of the world in new ways. One interesting set of responses to the course was that the students all privately felt it had focused more on the discipline other than their own. When they shared these observations on the last day of class, we all concluded that those perceptions must relate to the tremendous challenges and rewards of moving outside our comfort zones. Students certainly confirmed they had gained new insights about how to understand another society in all its complexity. They also helped us understand how we might accelerate the process of entering each other's disciplines with clearer guidelines about expectations in each field and activities to help students from both majors collaborate earlier in the semester. Given the excitement that students expressed at the new territory they had encountered and the promise of an even more fulfilling experience that we gained with their advice about how to refine our instruction, we look forward to a similar collaboration in a future semester.

*For further information, please see the course syllabus at:
<http://pages.towson.edu/quick/RussiasyllabusFINAL.htm>*

THINKING ABOUT THEATRE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Lauren Beck



Photo: Lauren Beck

In the spring of 2009, I took Prof. Jim Carmody's PhD seminar, "Theatre and Photography," at the University of California – San Diego. The class, a blend of scholarly reading and practical photography assignments, challenged students' notions of the role of the photographer in the creation of a photograph, and examined the relationship between photography and theatre.

Many of our photography assignments were portraits: of non-actors, actors, and other theatre artists. In our portraits, we made conscious decisions about how best to represent the personalities and professions of our subjects. Laura Brueckner's portrait of theatre collaborators – a playwright and a costume designer – indirectly and symbolically references the roles of the artists. Unusually, her portrait does not show the faces of her subjects. Although disconcerting, her decision seems apt given the behind-the-scenes work that these artists do. The serendipity of the playwright's pregnancy (is there a better way to bodily symbolize the creation of a play?) and the display of the costume designer's hands (she is after all, a creator of physical objects that appear on stage) were captured by Laura's selective, photographic eye.

Through lengthy discussion of Laura's portrait, we identified three important skills necessary to produce a successful image. The most obvious of these skills, one most people would recognize in a skilled photographer, is the ability to capture a moment before it slips away — being in the right place and the right time, pointing the camera in the right direction, pressing the shutter release at the right moment. But after the photographs are taken, the photographer edits each shot, making decisions about cropping, tilt, contrast, or whether the image will be in color or black and white, for example. Even choosing to present an image without change is a conscious editorial decision. Finally, and arguably most importantly, the photographer selects which photographs to present. Of the many (sometimes hundreds) of photographs we took each week for our assignments, we were asked to present only one or two images. It was in the selection of these final photographs that each of us most clearly demonstrated our photographic sensibilities.

In our class discussions, we also discovered just how much our individual theatrical aesthetics crept into our shots. In one discussion, Jim accurately described each of our theatrical interests using nothing more than our photographs of “theatrical spaces.” For example, I was stunned when Jim correctly discerned that I was primarily interested in aggressive theatre that invades the audience’s personal space. Each of us, through framing and selection, created a document of our own perceptions. Our discussions revealed that each of our photographs was a product of a series of personal choices, whether made consciously or unconsciously.

This inescapably interpretive aspect of photography was illustrated further by our most difficult assignment: to photograph the play *Clementine and the Cyber Ducks* by UCSD playwright Krista Knight, and then select a five-image sequence that we felt represented the production. Although we each sat in on the same dress rehearsal, pointing our cameras toward the same stage, the photographs we brought to class were startlingly diverse in focus and composition. Due to my (somewhat embarrassing) inability to listen to the dialogue in the play while actively looking at the production through the lens of the camera, my photographs were not necessarily representative of the play’s plot, but of my interpretation of the visual world of the play, heavily influenced by my own interests. (Once again Jim and my fellow classmates could detect my love of aggressive intimacy in the theatre.) Despite my initial assumptions that I was going to somewhat objectively document the production, I could not simply record the play. My classmates and I, in our photographs, created unique and separate artistic works from the play.

In a way, our photographs allow others to look at the world through our eyes. Each of our final photographic portfolios represents our distinct skills and interests. Although every student in the class worked from the same photographic prompts, the drastically differing results and our subsequent class discussions led us to dispel any preconceived or naive ideas that we might have been carrying about photography — in particular, the belief that a photograph is a truthful and unbiased document of a subject. Our photographs revealed insights into our aesthetic sensibilities and helped us to further define our identities as theatre artists.

LAUREN BECK is a graduate of the MA in Theatre Arts at San Diego State University and an Associate Editor for *Review*. She earned a BA in Theatre from UC San Diego and returned in the Spring of 2009 (via that department’s “pipeline” program with SDSU Theatre) to take Jim Carmody’s Theatre and Photography seminar. Lauren is currently serving as literary manager and head dramaturg for San Diego Asian American Repertory Theatre. She will begin her doctoral studies in Interdisciplinary Theatre and Drama at Northwestern University in the Fall of 2010.

LAURA BRUECKNER is a dramaturg specializing in new play development and digital production dramaturgy. She interned at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and has since ‘tured for many Bay Area theatre companies and festivals, including Last Planet Theatre, Crowded Fire Theater, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and the National Queer Arts Festival. Favorite recent projects include *Forever Never Comes* by Enrique Urueta, directed by Mary Guzmán, and *Danton’s Death*, directed by Dominique Serrand. She is currently studying for a doctorate in theatre at UC San Diego, with a focus on the dramaturgy of popular entertainments, including cabaret, burlesque, and vaudeville.

HEATHER RAMEY is a second year PhD student at UC San Diego. She holds an MA in Theater from Cal State, Northridge and a BFA in Acting from NYU. She trained in Meisner technique for four years at Playhouse West. Her academic interests include the intersections between ecology and theater, spatial theory, festivals, interactive installation art, East/West comparative studies, and spirituality in performance. Taking the seminar discussed in this essay gave her new insight into the ways of seeing and documenting performance.

THEATRE / PHOTOGRAPHY

Photos and text by Lauren Beck, Laura Brueckner, and Heather Ramey

Each of the photos below is drawn from an assignment in Jim Carmody's "Theatre and Photography" grad seminar. Each photo is introduced by the photographer, and the photos are grouped based on the assignment for which they were created.

DRAMATIC PORTRAIT OF A NON-ACTOR



Photo: Lauren Beck

For our first photography assignment, Professor Carmody asked each of us to take two portraits of non-actors. A dramaturgical inclination pressed me to create an image that had clear elements of a theatrical production in my portrait of Emily and Minnie: a conflicted protagonist facing (as yet unknown) obstacles, repetition of motifs (two cats, contrasting areas of light and dark, multiple visual obstructions), strong relationships between characters, careful framing and focusing of attention, and an uncertainty that spurs the audience to ask the dramatic questions that can be resolved in narrative.



Photo: Heather Ramey

This is a portrait of a domestic-violence counselor who runs his own business called Sunrise Counseling. I wanted to capture his seriousness and a sense of hope.

PORTRAIT OF AN ACTOR



Photo: Lauren Beck

My portrait of Joan Hurwit is an homage to the many portraits of actors taken in dressing rooms. I love the tiny details that indicate she is in a space where no one is supposed to be watching – the wisps of her hair coming out of the bun, the unbuttoned sleeve, the mouth half open as she adjusts her makeup.

PORTRAIT OF A DIRECTOR, PLAYWRIGHT OR DESIGNER



Photo: Laura Brueckner

Stephanie Timm is incredibly sweet. She also writes fiercely intelligent plays that take fairy-tale paths down into dark places where monsters of all kinds await the unwary. How to take a portrait that managed to capture something of her complex nature? I took a number of photos before discovering that a high angle, extreme close-up did the right tricks.

PORTRAIT OF A DIRECTOR, PLAYWRIGHT OR DESIGNER



Peter Cirino is a creative and collaborative director who always has a strong vision. This portrait captures some of Peter's free spirited and energetic nature.

Photo: Lauren Beck

PORTRAIT OF COLLABORATORS



Playwright and costume designer. I just thought the body language was gorgeous. Fun to play the matching game with this one. Why do we feel we know which figure is which?

Photo: Laura Brueckner



I asked Stephanie if she considered her unborn son, Hayes, a collaborator on her play *Picked*. She said, “Sure, of course! He influences what I think about, all the time. Everything I do is for him, and with him.” Click.

Photo: Laura Brueckner

THEATRICAL SPACE



This is a vacant warehouse that was rented out for an art exhibit. I loved how they used the lights to create the feel for the exhibit.

Photo: Heather Ramey

STAGED IMAGE



This image was taken at Burning Man. I climbed a tall structure to get the angle and had my subject meditate and wait for interaction. It was taken just after dawn, which helped have only the two people in the picture. What I particularly like about the picture are the many paths made in the desert floor, but only a few inhabitants of “the city” are seen using them. This image brings out a sense of the location’s quiet side.

Photo: Heather Ramey



Naysan Mojgani agreed to perform in a Weimar Berlin cabaret clown piece I was directing; this shot was taken after a rehearsal. I found lots of visual potential in the combination of mask and mirror — and the grin. Something about this photo confuses / disorients us just a little, even though we intellectually know exactly what's going on...

Photo: Laura Brueckner



Ryan is a mathematician who is more than ready to be done with his dissertation. I papered a small corner of our home with pages of Ryan's hand-written mathematical notes and made him huddle there behind a pile of his math books. I wanted to show how much work he has put into being a brilliant mathematician, but also how overwhelming the process of earning a PhD can seem.

Photo: Lauren Beck

IMAGES FROM *CLEMENTINE AND THE CYBER DUCKS* (UCSD 2009)



Photo: Lauren Beck



Photo: Lauren Beck



Photo: Heather Ramey



Photo: Heather Ramey

IMAGES FROM CLEMENTINE AND THE CYBER DUCKS (UCSD 2009)



Photo: Laura Brueckner



Photo: Laura Brueckner