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# Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 23, issue 1

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Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell, Vicki Stroich, Martine Kei Greene-Rodgers, Curtis Russell, Will Daddario, Wade Hollingshaus, and Becky Becker

# Review

The Journal of Dramaturgy

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Summer 2013

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PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MORRIS



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PHOTO: KENNY GRAY



LITERARY MANAGERS  
& DRAMATURGS  
OF THE AMERICAS

# EDITOR'S NOTE

I am pleased to share with the readers of *Review* our latest issue, published in concert with the LMDA annual conference in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia. In "Dramaturgy and Risk in Pakistan," LMDA President Vicki Stroich recounts a journey undertaken in service of a new play that had its world premiere at the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays at Alberta Theatre Project in March 2013. The risk to which Stroich alludes in her title is both artistic and physical, something few of us working in stable democracies must face. It is a sobering and inspiring reminder of the personal risks artists must take when working for social justice in repressive societies.

At long last, we have a conversational review of Scott R. Irelan, Anne Fletcher, and Julie Felise Dubiner's *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook* (Focus, 2010). The reviewers, Martine Kei Green-Rogers and Curtis Russell, provide a lively overview of the book from the point of view of those most likely to use it: a theatre professor/dramaturg and an undergraduate student.

We also bring our readers two peer-reviewed articles; each addresses dramaturgy in production but from very different perspectives. "Emancipating Dramaturgy," by Will Daddario and Wade Hollingshaus, deconstructs the theoretical underpinnings of the idea of dramaturg as pedagogue (or "ghost light," in Michael Mark Chemers' book by that title), suggesting that despite claims to the contrary, dramaturgs of this sort are not essential to the production process. Following Jacques Rancière among others, Daddario and Hollingshaus propose emancipating the dramaturg (and the audience) through the practice of what Michele Foucault termed "psychagogy." In "Directing Like a Dramaturg," Becky Becker presents a case study of

her work directing a new play (*Compañeras* by Kathy Coudle-King) about Uruguayan women who were "disappeared" during the dirty wars of the 1970s. Drawing on the idea of "thick description," popularized by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Becker describes her dramaturgical approach to directing at Columbus State University.

In closing, I would like to share a brief reflection on the life of the late Franca Rame, actress, playwright, and life-long collaborator of Dario Fo. She was all that and more: producer, political and social activist, Senator, mother, wife, and... dramaturg. Although she never identified herself as a dramaturg, a brief description of her fifty-seven-year collaboration with Dario Fo makes it clear that "dramaturg" is a fitting title. Each draft of a Fo play was subject to her scrutiny and critique; she kept track of each change made during rehearsal and performance (of which there were many); archived materials from production stills to manuscripts; discussed the plays with audiences sometimes for hours after a performance; and edited each of Fo's plays for publication. Rame created theatre in the service of making a more just world, inspiring both the love and the ire of her fellow citizens. She continued her work even after being kidnapped, tortured, and gang raped by neo-Fascists in 1973.

At times, Rame joked that if she hadn't been born into the theatre profession, she probably would have become a social worker. I don't doubt it. But how lucky we all were that she was *una figlia d'arte*, and a dramaturg to boot.

SCO

## Review

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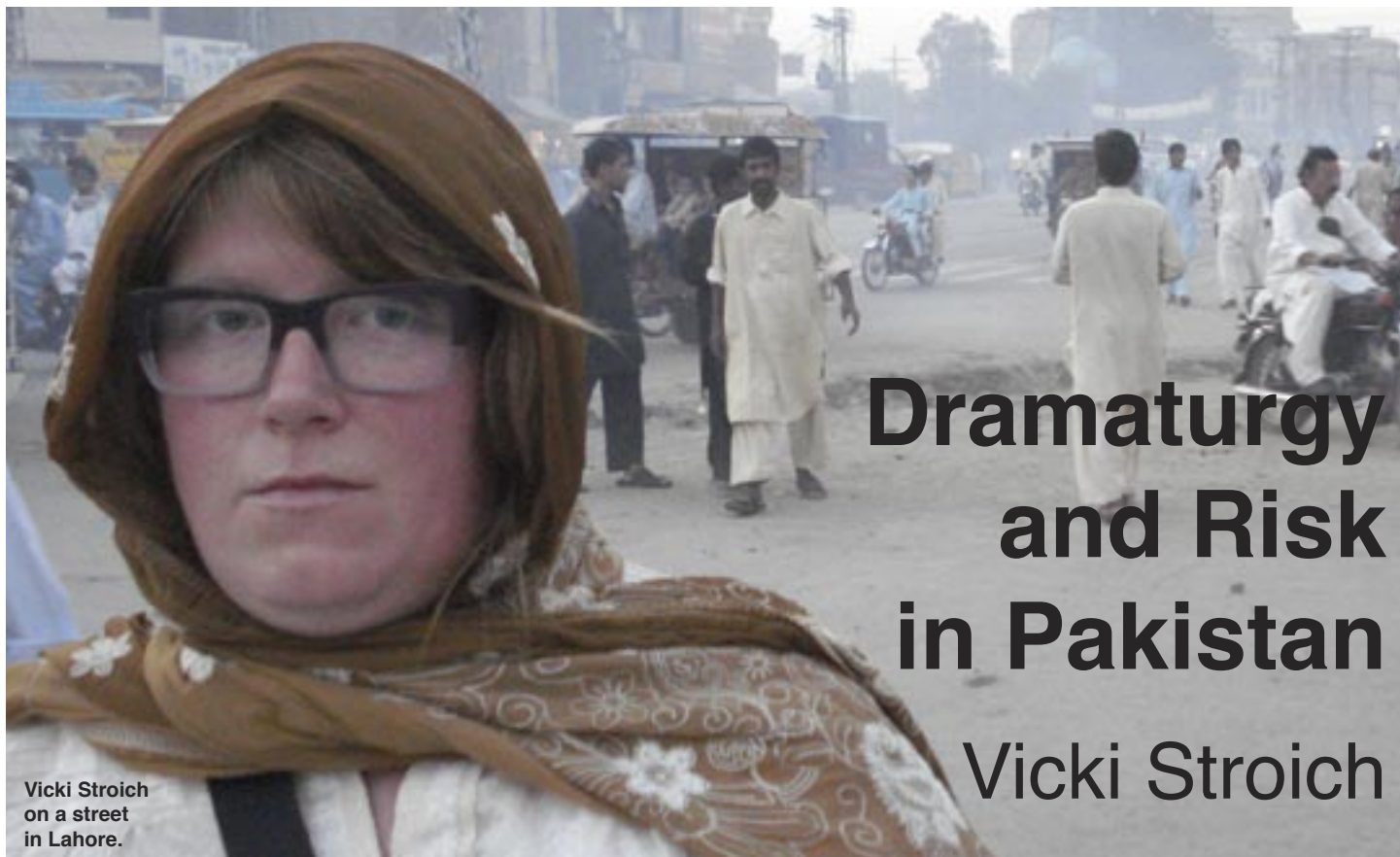
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*Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell: editor@lmda.org. Review Volume 23 number 1, Summer 2013.*

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Vicki Stroich  
on a street  
in Lahore.

# Dramaturgy and Risk in Pakistan

## Vicki Stroich

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MORRIS

I am in the backseat of a non-descript white car with tinted back windows, in the front there is a driver and an armed guard with an assault rifle. We drive down busy city streets congested with colorful motorized rickshaws, motorcycles carrying whole families, carts drawn by bony horses and, of course, other cars like ours. On our way to our destination we pass busy markets, domed mosques and brightly lit signs in Urdu advertising new fashions just in time for Eid.

I let my long dupatta drape over my hands and as we approach the checkpoint, I turn my covered head at an extreme angle to say something to my colleague who is sitting next to me so the guards will not see my ruddy, freckled face.

We are not supposed to be in the cantonment, a restricted area of Lahore, Pakistan, that is off-limits to foreigners. My colleague, Canadian director and playwright Christopher Morris, pulled some strings to get us this transport past the army guards and into this area of the city. He is sitting in the backseat next to me, as is Jonathan Garfinkel, Canadian playwright, poet and creative non-fiction writer. Why are we taking this risky journey into the cantonment? What brought us to Pakistan in the first place? Why, a show, of course.

I never expected to visit Pakistan. It was not on my list of places I needed to see. Indeed, my travels have been surprisingly limited in geography (exclusively within North America) for someone who boards a lot of planes for business and pleasure. It was dramaturgy that brought me to Pakistan.

This September 2012 trip was part of the final development phase of Christopher and Jonathan's play *Dust*, which I was dramaturging

**VICKI STROICH** is Interim Artistic Director this season at Alberta Theatre Projects. She is also Artistic Associate - Festival where she has been a member of the Artistic Team for over 11 years. Vicki's focus at ATP is dramaturgy and programming for the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays. She freelances as a dramaturg, facilitator, and director. Her work has included dramaturgy of dramatic text, devised theatre and performance creation. Vicki is President of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas and was Conference Chair of the international 2010 LMDA Conference in Banff. She is the proud recipient of a Betty Mitchell Award for Outstanding Achievement for her contributions to new work.





**Vicki Stroich in front of Faisal Mosque in Islamabad.**

in its premiere at the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays at Alberta Theatre Projects in March 2013. Both Christopher and Jonathan are seasoned international travelers. They had been to Pakistan and Afghanistan previously to interview families and communities affected by the conflict in Afghanistan in order to build *Dust*. Their research also included interviews with the families of soldiers at the Canadian Forces Base in Petawawa, Ontario.

The show has been in development through Christopher's Toronto-based company Human Cargo since 2008 and now, with the premiere coming up, they wanted to return to this area to place the script that grew out of those interviews back into the cultural context of Pakistan. They invited me along as their dramaturg and as the programmer of the Enbridge playRites Festival, so that we could share a vocabulary about the cultural context of the show and so that I could continue to help them focus their work on the play as they revised the script prior to rehearsals starting in Calgary.

I was in Pakistan for two weeks in total, spending the majority of my time in Pakistan's cultural capitol, Lahore, with a brief visit to the political capitol, Islamabad, and its sister city, Rawalpindi. We were hosted in Lahore by well-known Pakistani theatre and television actress Samiya Mumtaz and her family; Jonathan and Christopher stayed with her family for the month they were there, while I stayed nearby in a hotel after joining them for the final two weeks of their stay.

While the focus was on the development of the play, the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about the culture of Pakistan, its artists and its theatre was one of the major reasons I got on the plane. And it was that dramaturgical curiosity that had me hiding my face as we entered the cantonment in a small car with a large gun in the front seat.

We had been invited to watch a rehearsal at the headquarters of Ajoka Theatre, a theatre company based in Lahore that advocates for social change. The company is run out of the home of its Artistic Director Madeeha Gauhar who started the company in 1983 with some fellow cultural activists during the politically and culturally repressive regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. Ajoka's mandate is "to do socially-meaningful

theatre and thus contribute to the struggle for a secular, humane, just and egalitarian society in Pakistan. To promote theatre in Pakistan by blending traditional theatre forms with modern techniques and to provide entertainment which has a social relevance" ([www.ajoka.org.pk](http://www.ajoka.org.pk)).

Pakistan has been, at best, apathetic to the performing arts. I also discovered that in a country where the security situation can be so unstable, any large gathering of people in a single space feels like a risk. I became used to going past gates and guards on my way through metal detectors and having my bag checked at every public place we went to and many private spaces as well. With socio-political repression and security being a constant concern, a diverse theatre scene is nearly impossible to foster.

The dominant form of live entertainment are lowbrow comedy shows that last several hours and feature a rolling cast of characters in a sort of sitcom-style narrative framework; but the frame is very loose. Christopher and I attended one of these comedy shows at the Alhambra Arts Centre in Lahore. It started at around 10:30 p.m. It was performed entirely in Punjabi and there were a few reoccurring characters that seemed to carry the story. I didn't understand the language, but from what I could discern the story seemed to involve a couple who had some important (and it turns out absurdly slick) visitors from Karachi coming to their home in Lahore. There was a constant stream of walk-on turns by other performers and twice there were fully clothed but very sensual burlesque dances by a young woman. The crowd was mostly men and these dances charged the energy in the audience.

The fourth wall was often broken, sometimes by the performers and sometimes by the audience who would heckle the performers and get a few choice words sent back at them from the stage. One performer chose to make fun of Christopher and me, the only Caucasians in an approximately 400-seat auditorium. The bit of physical comedy suggested we were sitting shell-shocked and slack-jawed in our seats; and we probably were. The joke got a huge laugh. We left, exhausted, at intermission which began at 12:45 a.m., two hours after the show had begun.

Ajoka Theatre performs at the Alhambra Arts Centre alongside these popular comedy shows. They also take their work around South Asia. When we arrived at Madeeha Gauhar's home it was after dark and they were rehearsing a new cast into a popular show of theirs that would tour to a theatre festival in India. The play, *Bulah*, was written by Pakistani playwright and activist Shahid Nadeem. Nadeem has written over 30 plays and teleplays, and after being imprisoned for union activities was adopted as an Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience. He returned to Pakistan after his imprisonment and exile in the mid-1990's and has worked with Gauhar (who is also his wife) creating work with Ajoka. A collection of his plays, including *Bulah*, translated into English is available from Oxford University Press.

*Bulah* tells the story of legendary Sufi mystic Bulleh Shah (1680-1757), a peaceful poet, humanist and philosopher known for his love of music and dance and for exposing hypocrisy. The play brings together epic storytelling with an imaginative and physical staging full of choral music to honour the Sufi tradition of Bulleh Shah.

When we arrived at Ajoka Theatre the sun had set and we could hear them rehearsing in the courtyard outside the house, but we could not see them. There are regular and rolling power outages in Pakistan



**Christopher Morris and Vicki Stroich in front of Badshahi Mosque in Lahore.**

mandated by the government to ration energy. Most businesses and many private homes have some form of generator that kicks in when the power cuts out. Ajoka's generator was giving them trouble, so as our eyes adjusted to the dark we were led into the courtyard and took our seats next to Medeeha as she rehearsed eight or nine young men through intricately choreographed movement sequences, in the dark.

It was strange and peaceful to see the shadows of these young performers working through this very visual form of storytelling, including a stylized battle scene, their powerful voices joining together in choral song. I listened to Madeeha and her assistant discussing the scene, occasionally leaning over to consult with Christopher while cats weaved between our legs. There was no light but the rehearsal needed to go on.

Then suddenly the blue-white fluorescent lights strung above the courtyard flickered to life and we were all illuminated. I was able to see the chorus in their formation and Medeeha sitting in her chair, the script in front of her. We continued to watch rehearsal and see several choral sequences; the chorus was being rehearsed separately from the leads. The movement was expressive and expressionistic with a strong sense of composition, every movement a possible tableau.

At the end of rehearsal we enjoyed chai and biscuits. Christopher and Jonathan visited with the performers. Medeeha showed me around their offices full of awards and colourful puppets and the adjacent music room with its collection of drums laid out along the wall. The connection to traditional forms of storytelling (poetry, music and dance) seems to be important in creating work that speaks to the contemporary life of Pakistan by allowing audiences to encounter difficult material in a traditional form; shaking up the status quo while telling the story in a form that many would recognize.

Outside of original stories that play with traditional forms, Ajoka has also produced adaptations of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. They created a show recently that borrows from the comedies they share theatre space with: *Amerika Chalo* ("Destination USA"). Dubbed "a serious comedy," it is a satirical take on "the love-hate relationship between Pakistan and the US" because, to quote Ajoka's description of the show on their website, "sometimes there are national and international issues so serious and sensitive, that they have to be addressed through satire."

A financially independent theatre company that sometimes works with international NGOs, Ajoka's survival and dedication to its mission in a country where performing arts are not encouraged in the midst of constant threats to those who expose injustice and hypocrisy is no small feat. My admiration for Medeeha and her company, rehearsing in a dark courtyard and continuing to do work they believe in against the odds, is hard to express. What they do is nothing short of heroic.

Visiting Ajoka Theatre and being introduced to their work was one of many experiences in Pakistan that made me very grateful for the freedom and support I am given in my work here in North America. Yes, we could receive more public and private support to keep our theatres thriving and diversify the voices and experiences we offer our audiences. We sometimes struggle to fill the seats and even question our relevance in the face of a quickly changing world of new media. But we have no excuse not to be bold and fight for the vital experience of bringing people together in one place to share a story, some ideas, to feel something; there are places where that sense of community and humanity is overshadowed by fear.

Before we returned to Canada we hosted a small reading of *Dust*, inviting some friends to hear the play in the living room of the Mumtaz home with Samiya, Christopher and I reading. Our guests were the Mumtaz family, Madeeha, a local filmmaker and a man who had been interviewed for the play several years earlier and whose words are a part of the piece. Christopher and Jonathan were, understandably, very nervous about the reading. It felt like a risk.

The play aims to capture something of the experience of living with conflict in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Canada; it is honest and unapologetic. The play is about personal struggles with violence and loss. It was inspired by interviews with people who live with the legacy of these conflicts, and asks questions about the moral contradictions that active and passive participation in these conflicts provoke. How would this small Pakistani audience, people who live with the possibility of violence day to day, react to the way their country was depicted? Would they be disappointed or offended? The subject and forces at work are complex, to understate it wildly. How do you illuminate something with so many shadows constantly shifting around it regardless of context? How do you capture something that is so difficult to pin down? We had come to test what had been created in Canada within the cultural context of Pakistan, and this reading was our chance to share the work and get that feedback.

So we put aside the nerves and read the play to that thoughtful audience. Then we waited to hear what they had to say. They were moved, they had some dramaturgical advice and they quizzed Christopher about how he planned to stage the play to help the audience follow the

shifting characters and locations. We talked about what we needed to work on, but mostly we talked about the ideas and images and emotions that the play provoked.

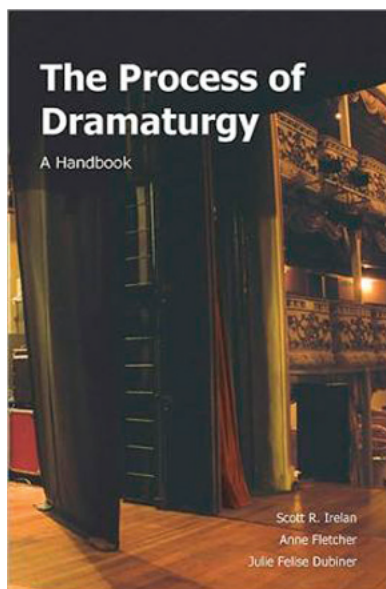
It was one of the most meaningful feedback sessions I have been a part of because there was something at stake, for us and for them. There are a great many stories that are never explored in Pakistan and a great many that don't make it out of that region to an international audience. Having the opportunity to tell a few of those stories through *Dust* and hear from artists in Pakistan about their struggle to create art that has meaning and an impact on their society taught me a lot about the great power of what we do as storytellers.

Meeting these brave artists inspired a new sense of responsibility and joy in my work; it was well worth the risk.



# A conversation about *The Process of Dramaturgy:* *A Handbook*

as discussed by **Curtis Russell** and  
**Martine Kei Green-Rogers**



**Ireland, Scott R., Anne Fletcher, and Julie Felise Dubiner.**  
*The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook.* Newburyport,  
MA: Focus, 2010.

*“The Process of Dramaturgy emerges from the presupposition that dramaturgical acts are committed wherever individuals come together in an environment of support for creative relationships explicitly in the name of crafting a live performance event”* (Ireland, Fletcher, and Dubiner ix).

**Martine Kei Green-Rogers:** Am I allowed to start by saying that there are some great authors for this book? I have had the pleasure of working with Julie Felise Dubiner, who is currently the Associate Director of the American Revolutions project at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. When you add Scott R. Ireland and Anne Fletcher’s educational backgrounds into the co-author mix, I have high hopes for what this book sets out to accomplish.

**Curtis Russell** is a senior in the Theatre Studies BA Program at the University of Utah and a member of LMDA. He was the dramaturg for *All My Sons* (Babcock Theatre), *Stop Kiss*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and *Love Alone* (Studio 115) and was Pioneer Theatre Company’s dramaturgical assistant last season. He was also assistant director to Denny Berry for *Spring Awakening* (Babcock). His playwriting debut, Utah Free Theatre’s *The Zion Curtain*, ran in January 2013 in Studio 115. He is co-writing the University of Utah Musical Theatre Program’s senior show and developing a one-person performance version of *Richard III*. He is spending the summer in Chile studying with Juan Radrigán, the country’s pre-eminent playwright, as well as researching Chilean theatre. Other dramaturgical work includes Frank Wildhorn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (Utah Rep).

**Martine Kei Green-Rogers** is a Raymond C. Morales Post-Doctoral Fellow in Theatre at the University of Utah. Martine earned her PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Prior to studying at UW-Madison, she earned a B.A. in Theatre from Virginia Wesleyan College and an M.A. in Theatre History and Criticism at The Catholic University of America. Her dramaturgical productions include: Stages Repertory Theatre’s staged reading of *A Stubborn Woman* and their production of *Dollhouse*; Classical Theatre Company’s productions of *Miss Julie*, *The Tempest*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Triumph of Love*, *Antigone*, *Candida*, *Ghosts*, *Tartuffe*, and *Shylock*, *The Jew of Venice*; productions of *Home* and *Porgy and Bess* at the Court Theatre (Chicago, IL); *The Clean House* at CATCO (Columbus, OH); *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The African Company Presents Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Fences* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Ashland, OR); *10 Perfect* and *The Curious Walk of the Salamander* as part of the Madison Repertory Theatre’s New Play Festival, and *A Thousand Words* as part of the WI Wrights New Play Festival.

**Curtis Russell:** As an undergrad, I have had the pleasure of working with...well, no one yet, so I'm grateful for the recent influx of guides such as this and Michael Chemers' *Ghost Light* (reviewed last issue). They not only provide legitimacy to a branch still struggling for acceptance in the professional theatre (at least in my 'hood), but they take some steps, however tentative, toward resolving the central paradox of our profession: we have our fingers in every pie of theatrical practice, but are almost never the bakers. This strange, borderline-indefinable liminal (is there a word dramaturgs love more?) space we occupy was a cause of great frustration for me (and undoubtedly other students) as I undertook my studies, but *The Process of Dramaturgy*, *Ghost Light*, and others, especially as used in Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell's Dramaturgy course at the University of Utah, have helped me to see that that very indefinability is the source of our power and insight as dramaturgs. It is the student's perspective that I hope to contribute to this conversation.

**MKG-R:** I find it funny you mention that in our neck of the American woods (and pretty much everywhere in the U.S.), dramaturgs are still struggling for respect in the theatre. I feel books such as this one, and the others you mentioned, are helping with our credibility. This book is especially helpful for new dramaturgs because of its division into three sections: "Pre-Production," "Rehearsals," and "In Production."

**CR:** No question. In the introduction, the authors state their intent for the book. They write, "*The Process of Dramaturgy* fills a gap... by specifically calling particular attention to the myriad ways in which an individual might go about developing a production dramaturg's aesthetic sensibility on the road to committing 'acts of dramaturgy' in the production process" (xiv). The purpose of all this is to "clearly (connect) analysis to the live performance event," as symbolized by the cover image connecting the backstage area to the auditorium. The book's organization certainly lends itself to that synthesis of theory and practice, perhaps even more concretely than *Ghost Light*. Though not the purpose of this review, I think a bit of comparison between the two wouldn't be entirely unwelcome, since they both burst on the scene at about the same time and cover a lot of the same ground. I think *Ghost Light* excels at the analysis and *Process of Dramaturgy* at the production process.

**MKG-R:** I have not read *Ghost Light*. Would you clarify the difference between the two?

**CR:** *Ghost Light* has a great section of theoretical summaries near the beginning that, while far from exhaustive, provide a useful underpinning for the work we do as "aesthetic philosophers," whereas *The Process of Dramaturgy* gets right to the nitty-gritty of practical dramaturgical work. *Ghost Light* covers a lot of the same practical ground, but *The Process of Dramaturgy* does a better job at employing specific examples (including musical theatre!) from the authors' experience. Extremely useful for a beginning practitioner who just wants to figure out what the hell a dramaturg does, but perhaps a bit too concrete. I understand the desire to formalize our work, but *Process of Dramaturgy*'s strict practical chronology doesn't effectively answer the prime conundrum of all introductory texts: teaching the craft without stifling the creative, revolutionary impulse (though they acknowledge that the dramaturgical sensibility lies "at the juncture of relevant research and attentive application" (22), and Chapter Three, "Conceptual Frameworks," takes some interesting steps in

that direction). Together, though, *Ghost Light* and *The Process of Dramaturgy* make up a great introductory text.

**MKG-R:** You bring up a good point about how to understand the usefulness of *The Process of Dramaturgy*. It is an introductory text and the authors identify the specific audience for this book—people interested in the "process inherent in completing tasks that usually fall under the purview of a designated production dramaturg" (xi). For that reason, the "handbook-ness" of it did not bother me. As with all art forms, there is only so much a book can teach you. I prefer it when a book gives me the basics and then allows me to figure out the rest.

On another note, I think the organization and theoretical base for this book warrants some continued discussion. The majority of the text is based on what the authors have experienced as dramaturgs. For example, the basic breakdown of "research dramaturgical" information they suggest in Chapter One is helpful, but I am really intrigued by the suggestions they give for opening the door to a conversation with the director in Chapter Two. I do the things they suggest putting in the letter regularly with directors, but usually over the phone. So, the idea of sitting down and crafting a letter is both odd and familiar to me.

**CR:** Mark Bly casts a long shadow over practical dramaturgy. This section of *The Process of Dramaturgy* is almost identical to the same part in *Ghost Light*; I believe both draw on his 1994 LMDA Conference remarks. Irelan, Fletcher, and Dubiner acknowledge as well that the initial conversations with the director take place over email or phone rather than a formal letter, but that "collecting [their] thoughts in [those] categories remains a part of [their] professional practice and often shapes the contact [they] make with a director" (26). They move from there to talking points.

**MKG-R:** On another note, I did appreciate the exercises that may be used in a classroom setting to help emerging dramaturgs with the conversations that must occur between dramaturg and director. I also love the caution the authors place on how these initial moments of contact with the director are crucial in determining the role the dramaturg will have as part of the artistic process.

**CR:** In Chapter Three, I was initially dubious of the authors' assertion that "some of the most interesting moments in our own work are when we realize that a theoretical framework is a proverbial dead end for the live production and that we must embrace another way of seeing" (48). Then I assisted on a production in which the director had absolutely no interest in theory-based readings of the text, and realized how useful the short "Ways of Seeing without Theory" section is. The authors' affirmation that one must learn to "articulate both what is known and what is seen" helped me modify my approach to the production in ways that I hope were beneficial to both the play and my relationship with the director. Which brings us to Part 2: Rehearsals! How well did this section jive with your experience?

**MKG-R:** I am living Part 2 as we converse about this book, preparing several texts for production right now and a couple of things they said resonated with me: "[T]here is absolutely nothing sacred about a given classical text" (60), and "The production dramaturg must read the text with three things in mind: time, tension, and tone" (61). The formula they provide to help gauge the time of the script you have cut is very helpful. In addition, they stress the importance of

having conversations with the director to assess the tone, which ultimately prevent dramaturgs from wasting time with work that they have to re-do or didn't have to do in the first place!

The best advice they give is to LISTEN, constantly and consistently! The guidelines listed in the "tablework" section of this section of the book will save any new (or old) dramaturg from making mistakes that will negatively impact a rehearsal experience. My personal favorite? "Be able to respond in human terms that performers can play in a scene" (70). I also find their sections on Production Meetings, Read-Throughs, and Runs helpful for new dramaturgs.

Do you have any new play experience? What do you think about Chapter Five?

**CR:** Chapter Five characteristically cuts right to the heart of the matter: commissioning, soliciting, and evaluating scripts, workshoping, readings, etc. But it seems to skim right over what I would assume to be the most important part of new play dramaturgy: avoiding prescriptive tendencies. That such a vital idea receives only a page-and-a-half speaks, I think, to what we've already discussed above, namely the authors' desire to provide a basic handbook about the fundamentals of dramaturgy. I don't know, I guess I'm just asking too much; while the book is undoubtedly useful and clear, it didn't light any fires in me the way the best introductory texts can. To be honest, it makes dramaturgy seem kinda boring, which I know to not be the case. Maybe I need to get my Fuchs-colored glasses on and stop pining away for what the book isn't.

**MKG-R:** Your "Fuchs-colored glasses"? I feel as though we have become the "Siskel and Ebert" or the "Statler and Waldorf" of book reviews.

I think you are right. Textbooks do have to take that type of tone. Some of that tone derives from the fact that there are not many books that deal with laying out what we do as dramaturgs. Someone has to, with a tone of authority, in order for the conversation to evolve and grow. I feel that this book is the dramaturgy equivalent of texts such as *A Sense of Direction* and *An Actor Prepares*, in that it will eventually be looked upon as a seminal text for its simplicity and clarity.

Chapter Six is of great interest to me, especially since there has been a huge drive at the University of Utah to work on "Outreach and Education." I appreciate how the book walks through several ways in which budding dramaturgs may accomplish this task.

The sample table of contents for a study guide is a great way of illustrating the types of materials schools might need to prepare their students to see a show. I also enjoyed the way this chapter addressed several types of dramaturgical writing such as the program note, the interview, and the newsletter article. This section allows dramaturgs to find a format that feels the most comfortable to them, if they have a choice in the type of program material they must write, or, at least, understand the basics of what they need to do, format and style-wise, if they do not have a choice. The authors also address lobby displays and, my personal favorite, pre- and post-show discussions. However, the one thing I feel is missing from this section is an example (or two) of questions a dramaturg might use during post-show discussions. Post-show talks tend to instill fear into the hearts of

new dramaturgs and providing solid and time-tested advice might be helpful. That being said, I do realize that some of the questions they posed in Chapter Five, for new play development, could be altered for use in post-show discussions.

**CR:** I hadn't thought about that. I also like how they emphasize the importance that the dramaturg avoid "coming off as a stuffy, professorial know-it-all" (116). They go on to say that "[t]he materials generated ought to be full of high ideas presented in accessible ways to theatre patrons of all ages and levels of theatrical understanding," (116) having earlier in the chapter said that "the contents of the [program note] can confuse the logic of a live performance if it is too cerebral, disjointed, or otherwise jammed with jargon" (100). This is good for me as my writing tends to the disjointed and jargon-stuffed. I do have a question, though: how the hell am I supposed to know what an eighth grade reading level is? It's been (indecipherable) years since eighth grade!

**MKG-R:** Same here!! The last chapter in this book is a rather lengthy case study of a production of *Biloxi Blues* performed in an educational setting. I liked that they provided a case study, although a small part of me wishes that they had included two—one in an educational setting and another one in a professional setting. I find that dramaturgy in these situations can be extremely divergent. I enjoyed that their case study is (mostly) the ideal experience, but then what happens to a young dramaturg when faced with a less-than-ideal experience?

**CR:** One of the things I've really appreciated about *The Process of Dramaturgy* is the inclusion of academic dramaturgy in the discussion, something that was all but missing in *Ghost Light*. Their nods throughout to musical and classical dramaturgy have also been helpful, so I agree: more case studies would be welcome. But you've highlighted a real conundrum: Should future dramaturgs be shown an ideal situation or a more realistic one? I can envision green dramaturgs getting frustrated and giving up when a situation isn't ideal, but on the other hand, how to inspire the rising generation to strive to create the type of situation in which practical dramaturgy can really flex its muscles and foment a meaningful, dynamic theatre? What I'm left with at the end is the feeling that the profession, though time-honored and the result of decades of hard work by its pioneers, is really just in its infancy; there is much left to define. Maybe this book is more revolutionary than I had realized.

**MKG-R:** Come to the dark side, Curtis! We have cookies! Just kidding, not about the cookies though, we do have those.

Last, but not least, I thought their nod, in Chapter Eight, to the age-old question "So...what is next?" was great. I am sure many budding dramaturgs have wondered how to get started. Whether you want to learn more about dramaturgy, become involved in dramaturgy at a school, or find an internship, I believe this book provides some simple ideas to begin that process.

**CR:** Hear, hear! And now that we've got some good texts that outline the beginning of the journey, we're ready for the Big One to come along and blow the doors wide open and light the theatrical world on fire. I can't wait to read it! But in the meantime, cookies.

**MKG-R:** I have a stash in my office. I can share!

# *Emancipating Dramaturgy: From Pedagogy to Psychagogy*

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## Introduction

In one of the multiple dramaturgy handbooks published recently, Michael Mark Chemers presents a vivid metaphor for understanding the identity of the dramaturg today:

*A ghost light* is in reality nothing more than a lighting instrument left illuminated in the middle of the stage when no one is working in the theater ... So indispensable are ghost lights that it is now almost impossible to find a theater anywhere in the world without one. [...] The ghost light's lonesome existence is dedicated to protecting us, just in case we wish to venture into the dangerous space. The ghost light is a beacon in a world of darkness, where a single step (say, off the stage into the pit or off a catwalk) could be the last mistake one ever makes. (9)

For Chemers, the dramaturg is this indispensable ghost light, dedicated to protecting audiences and illuminating the darkness of dangerous (conceptual, experiential, aesthetic) territories. It is as if, without the figure of the dramaturg, theatre simply could not function.

The weight placed on the necessity of the dramaturg is perhaps not surprising, given the historical relationship between dramaturgs and the institution of theatre. Since Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, the dramaturg has been able to carve out a niche for himself within a certain type of theatre. Even now, when regional theatres have dissolved the monopoly of state-sponsored theatrical fare, such as those in Gotha, Vienna, and Mannheim during Lessing's day, the dramaturg has been able to establish a position alongside the literary manager as part of the artistic team dedicated to mounting productions. Training for these positions begins within the halls of the academy where, more and more, theatre departments have adopted professional structures for their mainstage seasons, which, in turn, has required adopting the dramaturg as an integral part of the production team. Indeed, once the dramaturg moves from the training ground to



the professional theatre, she frequently acquires a pedagogical position as the one supposed to know (the dates of composition, the biography of the playwright, the history of production, the best method of communicating literary theory to a live audience, etc.). Thus, over time, the dramaturg in Western theatre has played the role of critical voice, of pedagogue, and even, if we are to believe Chemers, of indispensable beacon in a world of darkness.

Despite the body of literature and repertoire of pedagogical practice that continues to advocate for the necessity of the dramaturg, we would like to pursue a perhaps counterintuitive argument.<sup>1</sup> As we continue to discuss dramaturgy with other theatre scholars and practitioners and explore the dramaturgy training literature that works hardest toward calcifying the position of the dramaturg, we become increasingly convinced that the argument for the necessity of a dramaturg in a traditional theatre environment has not become stronger but has in fact become weaker. The impetus for this argument comes from a philosophical inquiry into the practice of dramaturgy and a historiographical awareness that intelligibility always belies a latent uncertainty: the more luminous the ghost light, the deeper the darkness. A dialectical attunement to the dramaturg's necessity within the practice of theatre requires that we allow for the possibility that the dramaturg, as it has been imagined by Chemers, may be completely unnecessary. Between the poles of necessity and superfluity there unfolds an entire spectrum of possibility that inspires us to reimagine the role of the dramaturg and the praxis of dramaturgy.

We draw inspiration for our rethinking of dramaturgy from the recent work on this subject in the fields of dance, theatre, and performance studies. It is clear from these interventions that the dramaturg now does much more than creating information packets for audiences, designing lobby displays, coaching the directors and actors during rehearsal, and participating in play selection. Bojana Kunst, for example, has dissected the trope of the dramaturg as “coach” and challenged us to understand the dramaturg's profession not as something constructed around aesthetic elusiveness, deduced from the dramaturg's perpetual shifting between theoretical and practical concerns, but as a facilitator who “embodies a kind of affective proximity” (86). Christian Biet, for another, does not even necessarily connect dramaturgy to the practice of an individual dramaturg. Instead, dramaturgy functions as a frame that binds the theatrical event within a specific time and place thereby making possible a theatrical “appearance,” an “aesthetic-political operation” that “represents for all present a social event akin to a gathering and necessarily pertaining to the political” (108).<sup>ii</sup>

Creative, philosophical theories such as Kunst's and Biet's are not necessarily in short supply. On the other hand, there is, as indicated, an equal if not greater amount of labor expended on the activity of conserving the image of the dramaturg as an indispensable protector of theatrical activity. This presumed necessity, one that tends to merge the figures of the dramaturg and the master of theatrical knowledge, often functions as a kind of armor that restricts the flexibility of the dramaturg and protects the profession from challengers seeking to change the shape of dramaturgical practice. As two the-

atre scholars/practitioners committed to dramaturgy, we are disconcerted by this assertion of the dramaturg's necessity and the frequent assumption that dramaturgs conserve and disseminate a certain type of knowledge. If dramaturgs want to be a viable productive force in contemporary and future theatre environments, we argue that theatre artists and theoreticians must, together, re-imagine the dramaturg in ways similar to Kunst and Biet; we must reconsider the traditional tropes touting the necessity of the dramaturg-pedagogue as he without whom theatre becomes a dangerous and uninhabitable space.

This essay serves as our first step toward that reimagining. In taking this step, we will first present the current popular configuration of the purpose and function of a dramaturg. Second, we will visit the recent educational theory of Jacques Rancière to demonstrate how the current configuration of a dramaturg actually stultifies rather than emancipates production companies and their audiences. And, third, we will traverse the philosophical terrain of psychagogy as charted by Michel Foucault and offer an alternative vision of dramaturgy in the twenty-first century, traceable through the work of Bojana Kunst, Cornerstone Theater, the Rude Mechanicals, Anne Bogart, and Matthew Goulish.

### The Dramaturg and the Schoolmaster

The claim that a dramaturg is a necessary member of a production team implies that the success of the production is somehow dependent upon the work the dramaturg performs. This is not, at this point, a question of the quality of the techniques used in the execution of a performance but rather a question of the misalignment that often occurs between two different dramaturgical sensibilities: the dramaturgy employed by a production company in its creation of a piece and the dramaturgy interpreted by an audience in its reception of a piece. Unsatisfactory theatre experiences are often reduced to the gap produced by this misalignment, but as is also commonly the case, the two different sides of the production—company and audience—fault each other for the presence of the gap. Audiences blame companies for presenting a conceptually incomplete piece, and companies blame audiences for a lack of theatre literacy. The dramaturg has been given the responsibility of closing this gap.<sup>iii</sup>

In their best efforts to do this, dramaturgs work on both sides of the equation. The dramaturg performs a series of tasks for the production company to help them present the most complete piece possible, and then performs another series of tasks in order to provide the audience with the hermeneutical frameworks it needs in order to receive the piece properly. As a member of the production company, the dramaturg (potentially) acts as a conceptual consultant to the director, prepares a glossary of any unfamiliar terms or references that occur in the play script, and collects articles, chapters, encyclopedia entries, maps, images, and any other artifacts that might provide the company with context for both the world of the play and the world of the playwright. On the other side of the proscenium arch, the dramaturg re-organizes much of this same research and information into materials and events that are utilized to

<sup>i</sup> In addition to Chemers' book, two other “handbooks” for dramaturgy have been published in the U.S. in 2010: See Brown and Irelan, Fletcher, and Dubiner.

<sup>ii</sup> For other creative theories on the shape of dramaturgy in today's world of devised theatre and site specific performance, see: Boenisch; Eckersall, Shintaro, Akira, and Tatsuki; and Smith.

<sup>iii</sup> This image of the gap even appears in the work of dramaturgs who seemingly intend to move beyond a traditional narrative. See, for example, Radosavljević: “Being on the margins, both literally and metaphorically, my practice as a dramaturg has by and large consisted of bridge-building, on the one hand and on the other, a negotiation of frontiers between theory and practice, between writers and directors, between the show and the audience, between theatre and academia and sometimes between different cultures, too” (48).

help the audience more suitably experience the show: lobby displays, study guides, a dramaturg's note, pre- and post-show discussions.

Thus, the dramaturg exists either to complete the production or to create a literate audience. In either instance, or in the combination of both instances, as is more commonly the case, there is a presupposition of a gap between the two parties and, more important to our discussion here, that the dramaturg is the individual who is the master of that gap. The dramaturg is the one who knows what that gap is on either side of the equation and also knows what each side must do to bridge that gap.

In positioning the dramaturg this way, as “the master,” we are making a move to connect the figure of the dramaturg with the figure of the pedagogue. That dramaturgy has often been imagined in terms of pedagogy is not surprising, since most dramaturgical training occurs in institutions of higher education. That said, however, we are more specifically attempting to connect the dramaturg with a certain kind of pedagogue, what Jacques Rancière, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, refers to as “the schoolmaster,” a pedagogue that functions upon and continually reproduces inegalitarianism between himself and his students. In a later essay, “The Emancipated Spectator,” Rancière himself connects his educational theory to dramaturgy, when he contends that the current performer/spectator relationship is configured analogously to the current teacher/student relationship; performers and teachers are positioned as those that know, whereas spectators and students are those that do not know. What Rancière does not do in his essay, however, is tease out the implications of his theory relative to the purpose and function of dramaturgs in contemporary theatre. Such a teasing-out becomes possible by revisiting the particularities of Rancière's concerns in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

Rancière argues that the current educational model in the West does not foster intellectual emancipation but rather results in intellectual stultification. This is the case because, he explains, the current model is premised on and continually perpetuates an inequality between students and their teacher. It is perfectly understandable, equitable, and even egalitarian to recognize that a teacher has certain knowledge that a student does not have and that there is, thus, a gap between the two. On the other hand, it is not egalitarian for the teacher or his students to believe that the teacher is the master over that gap. In the current model, teachers are the ones that know what students do not know, know what students need to know, and know what students must do in order to know it. The schoolmaster is the master of the gap. As such, teachers will always know more than the students know and will always, therefore, be on an inegalitarian footing with them. The result of this, Rancière continues, is that teachers and students incorrectly believe that learning requires and is the direct result of teaching. This is the bedrock of stultification in education.

Nearly twenty years after Rancière published *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he was invited to present a lecture at a performance school in Germany. The organizer of the event had read Rancière's book and thought that Rancière might be able to make some connections between his educational theory and contemporary discussions of spectatorship in the performing arts. Rancière accepted the invitation and the challenge and presented an essay titled, “The Emancipated Spectator.”

He begins by reiterating Plato's argument that spectatorship in the theatre is dangerous because 1) the spectators have no knowledge of

the origins of the representations on the stage and 2) their encounter with those representations is a passive rather than active encounter. Rancière then explains how, nearly two thousand years later, that critique led to two of the most influential theatre theories of the twentieth century: Brecht's theory of “distanced investigation” and Artaud's theory of “vital participation” (“Emancipated Spectator” 5). Both of these theorists struggled with how theatre must overcome the gap that exists as a result of spectatorship. Brecht's solution was to widen the gap to a point at which the spectators were forced out of passivity and into activity. Artaud's solution was to eliminate the space in the gap by forcing the energies of the production and the energies of the spectators to become one and the same energy.

The problem with both of these solutions, however, is that they are remedies to a problem that does not really exist. Rancière adamantly insists that Plato's two critiques of spectatorship, the critiques that underwrite Brecht's and Artaud's entire theories—that the spectator is both ignorant and passive—are faulty to begin with. He argues that the fact that spectators do not know the origins of the representations they encounter is not any different from their everyday lived experience. Everyday, we move through the world and are ignorant of the origins of things. Moreover, anything that we do believe we learn about the world comes from a never-ending process of observation and verification, which is precisely the same process we exercise as we sit in the theatre audience. As we watch a performance, we observe and then verify those observations relative to other things we have observed in the performance, things we have observed in other performances, and things we have observed in everyday life in general. Then, after we leave the performance, we will continue to observe and at times verify our new observations with observations we made while spectator to the performance in question.

As for Plato's claim that spectatorship is dangerous because it is passive—a claim that we see reflected quite directly in Brecht's theories—Rancière again replies, False. The claim of passivity on behalf of the spectator is in juxtaposition to the perceived activity of the actors on the stage. Actors are considered active because they are actively composing a theatrical event. Spectators, on the other hand, are considered passive because they are not actively composing a theatrical event. Rancière responds by disagreeing that simply because spectators are not on the stage, this does not mean that they are not still actively involved. Inasmuch as the spectators actively participate in the endless process of observation and verification, they are creative participants in the interpretation of an event and therefore not passive recipients of an event: “Spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as, in their way, do actors or playwrights, directors, dancers or performers” (“Emancipated Spectator” 13).

For Rancière, contemporary spectatorship is neither a position of dangerous ignorance nor a state of dangerous passivity. The reason that the bias against spectatorship persists, Rancière argues, is that Brecht's and Artaud's theories actually perpetuate it. Because their theories assume the problem, and because they position themselves as the schoolmasters relative to this problem, our belief in the problem continues. We believe that audiences need help in arriving at knowledge of the origins of the representations because we are told that their ignorance of those origins is necessarily dangerous and cannot be overcome any other way than with calculated assistance.

Similarly, we believe that a part of the calculated assistance that audiences need to arrive at this knowledge is an incitation to know and that without this incitation they would not on their own accord pursue it. In their attempt to eliminate the gap, Brecht and Artaud unwittingly produce the gap.

At this point, Rancière's theories on spectatorship begin to align with his theories on education, and the implications for dramaturgy begin to become identifiable. Spectators and learners are in a similar position. Both are told that they need to know; both are told what they need to know; and both are told that they need someone else to help them know it. In a majority of today's theatres, especially in the U.S., that "someone else" is the dramaturg. The contemporary dramaturg is Rancière's traditional schoolmaster, who will always know more than the audience and, inasmuch as the dramaturg performs a similar pedagogical function relative to the company, will also know more than the production company. This dramaturg—the schoolmaster of the boards—is the figure that both represents and best facilitates the procedures of stultification that threaten contemporary theatre and its audiences.

But is stultification the inexorable fate of dramaturgs in professional and educational theatre environments? Is the dramaturg necessarily a threat to the emancipation of spectators? Absolutely not. Dramaturgs can and should be a vibrant feature on the landscape of contemporary theatre. But this is only possible if we allow ourselves to re-imagine the purpose and function of dramaturgs.

Although a completed picture of what this dramaturg might look like does not yet exist, indications toward it emerge in the overlapping thought of a number of contemporary philosophers. Rancière's own contribution is "the ignorant schoolmaster," whom he juxtaposes to the traditional model of the schoolmaster. In his educational theory, Rancière argues that a teacher does not need to be master of a subject in order to teach it. The ignorant schoolmaster is herself the perpetual learner who does not say, "Do what I say," nor, "Do what I do": rather, she invites students to—as Deleuze has phrased it—"Do with me"<sup>iv</sup> So says the ignorant dramaturg, the emancipating and emancipated dramaturg.

With its focus on emancipation, Rancière's theory is fundamentally an inquiry into subjectivation, how subjects are produced, and it is here, within the realm of the subject, that Rancière's perfectly lucid albeit negative lesson on the dramaturg-as-schoolmaster ends—for a moment. When searching for a productive alternative philosophical vision for dramaturgy, one that acknowledges the insights of Rancière while also constructing a theory of a potential dramaturgical practice for the twenty-first century, we should turn to Foucault and his discussion of psychagogy. Through that discussion it is possible to enter fully into the dialectical complexity of the question of subjectivation and its dramaturgical implications.

## Psychagogy

To be clear, Rancière's thinking on education does not dismiss pedagogy per se, but rather calls into question a certain form of pedagogy that has taken as its remit the transmission of certain

<sup>iv</sup>"We learn nothing from those who say: 'Do as I do.' Our only teachers are those who tell us to 'do with me,' and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce." (Deleuze 23)

facts and ideas in the name of tradition. While scholars in the field of critical pedagogy and the pedagogy of the oppressed, most notably Paolo Freire, have scrutinized the efficacy and theorized the harm of such transmissions of accepted tradition, fewer people have turned to Foucault and the lectures he gave in the last three years of his life.<sup>v</sup> It is there, we argue, that a compelling alternative to the banking method of education (Freire) and the Schoolmaster (Rancière) appears, but also, and more importantly for this discussion, a provocative model of dramaturg reveals itself. More specifically, in the last three series of lectures given by Foucault, the philosopher unearths the practice of psychagogy and offers that practice as an alternative to pedagogy.

Foucault resuscitates the term "psychagogy" from classical philosophy where it denoted a practice of guiding and caring for the soul. The term appears in Foucault's lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where he speaks the following:

Let us call "pedagogical," if you like, the transmission of a truth whose function is to endow any subject whatever with aptitudes, capabilities, knowledges, and so on, that he did not possess before and that he should possess at the end of the pedagogical relationship. If, then, we call "pedagogical" this relationship consisting in endowing any subject whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance, we can, I think, call "psychagogical" the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves. (407)

We can surmise from this definition and the two years of lectures that follow it that psychagogy is not a passing on of skills or specific knowledge but, rather, the cultivation of a life practice. In particular, this life practice is the art of caring for the self, epitomized by Socrates in fifth-century Athens. It is useful, for a moment, to cast Socrates in the role of Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster since Socrates' one certainty in life was that he didn't know anything, and, thus, all of his lessons were aimed not at endowing his students with certain knowledges or capabilities but rather at helping his students understand how much they did not know. Or, as Foucault says:

Where the teacher says: I know, listen to me, Socrates will say: I know nothing, and if I care for you, this is not so as to pass on to you the knowledge you lack, it is so that through under-

<sup>v</sup>The mention of Freire in an article that approaches questions of pedagogy relative to theatrical practice might lead readers to wonder about the position of Augusto Boal in this context. In his work, Rancière directly references Brecht and Artaud because the revisions they promulgate are revisions to the theatre. They each see something that needs to be done differently in theatre and attempt, through their theory and practice, to reform the theatre. Boal, on the other hand, while deeply committed to theatricality, does not direct his project toward reforming the theatre. If he did, then, we suspect, Rancière would take issue with it. When Rancière articulates the argument of those that want to reform theatre, he writes: "What is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become participants as opposed to passive voyeurs" ("Emancipated Spectator" 4). This description sounds strikingly similar to what Boal wants to achieve through his notion of "spectactors." However, Boal does not propose spectactors as a means to reform the theatre. In this sense, Boal belongs more clearly to the discipline of Applied Theater than he does to Theater Studies—which is the discipline with which we are concerned here.



standing that you know nothing you will learn to take care of yourselves. (*Courage of Truth* 89)

Foucault's interpretation of Socrates moves away from the emphasis on recollection and remembrance—the *aletheia*, which we might creatively read as “unforgetting,” that constitutes the act of understanding—frequently associated with Socratic pedagogy in order to emphasize the practice of caring for the self that has remained obscured beneath the luminosity of the phrase “know thyself.”

In the following series of lectures, to which Foucault gave the name *The Government of Self and Others*, the term psychagogy returns and takes up a much more prominent position in the analysis of classical philosophy. Foucault continues to build on the negative definition of psychagogy by pairing the term with that touchstone of philosophical discourse, the dialectic. “Dialectic and psychagogy,” he says,

are two sides of one and the same process, of one and the same art, of one and the same *tekhne*,<sup>vi</sup> which is the *tekhne* of *logos*. Like the philosophical *logos* the philosophical *tekhne* of *logos* is a *tekhne* which makes possible at the same time both knowledge of the truth and the practice or *ascesis* of the soul on itself. (335)

As Foucault goes on to clarify, psychagogy is the mode of philosophical praxis bound up with the *effects* of the truth on the soul and on the practice of everyday life that one leads, i.e., that which Foucault calls *ascesis*, or the exercise of life.

Ultimately, Foucault's notion of psychagogy helps to provide a new perspective on the art of teaching that resonates with the perspectives opened by thinkers like Rancière and Freire. This new perspective moves away from the instrumental use of knowledge that holds sway in academia today. The psychagogue is not interested in maintaining the tradition of knowledge handed down through specific disciplines. Rather, the psychagogue finds his or her primary end in the practice of an ethical existence through which one constantly acts in accordance with the truth one knows to be true. The key question to which the psychagogue attends is: Am I the ethical subject of the truths I know? Answering this question requires entering the ethical domain and leaving aside the traditional role of the teacher as that person who endows students with knowledges and capabilities that he or she did not have before, and engaging in the labor of changing the mode of being of the subject.

### Psychagogical Dramaturgy

As with our analysis of Rancière's educational theory above, it is not immediately clear how Foucault's thoughts on psychagogy, which certainly open a new line of sight onto the domain of teaching, translate into a dramaturgical program. Yet, despite the unfamiliar word itself, psychagogy and dramaturgy have a long history together. Foucault himself touches on this connection when he analyzes the Cynic practice of philosophy and attempts to illustrate how

precisely the psychagogue worked to transform the mode of being of the subject to which the psychagogue addressed himself.

The Cynics, most notably Diogenes, practiced their philosophy through a complete commitment to what Foucault named the unconcealed life. By exposing their bodies, their thoughts, and their daily activities, from bathing and going to the bathroom to having sex in public, the Cynics harmonized their words with their actions. “The life of the Cynic is unconcealed in the sense that it is really, materially, physically public,” Foucault suggested while pointing to the visible poverty of the Cynics as the clearest sign of their commitment to a life unfettered by personal wealth or the strictures of socially accepted behavior (*Courage of Truth* 253).

Foucault chooses his words carefully when discussing this Cynic practice of the unconcealed life and eventually he begins to cast this life in terms of a performance:

The Cynic dramatization of the unconcealed life therefore turns out to be the strict, simple, and, in a sense, crudest possible application of the principle that one should live without having to blush at what one does, living consequently in full view of others and guaranteed by their presence. (255)

From “dramatization,” Foucault takes one more step and identifies the Cynic performance of everyday life as a veritable dramaturgy. “The dramaturgy of Cynic poverty,” he says, “is far from that indifference which is unconcerned about wealth, whether this be the wealth of others or one's own; it is an elaboration of oneself in the form of visible poverty. It is not an acceptance of poverty; it is a real conduct of poverty” (258).

How should we understand this deployment of the term dramaturgy? When viewed through the lens of psychagogy, Foucault utilizes this term to accentuate the practical aspect of the Cynic life practice. More than simply a life choice, the Cynic practice of philosophy is a performance of specific ideals and beliefs. To practice Cynic philosophy, one must become the ethical subject of certain truths; for example, one must pledge allegiance to the unconcealed life and make manifest that allegiance through a visible display of one's poverty. By practicing such an allegiance and by dedicating oneself to this performance, the Cynic not only harmonizes with the truths he or she believes to be true but also communicates the value of these truths to all who witness the Cynic mode of life. This transmission of certain truths through one's daily aesthetics of existence for the benefit of others exists as a dramaturgical action, and this dramaturgical action is a “real conduct” intended to convert others to the Cynic way of life.

One need not look as far back as Classical Athens or Imperial Rome for an example of psychagogical dramaturgy, however; other examples exist, examples that straddle the realm of everyday life and the more traditional theatre venue. Look, for instance, at the final lines of Act One in Vladimir Mayakovsky's *The Championship of the Universal Class Struggle*, offered by the character of the Referee:

Intermission for ten minutes.  
All you who want  
the Reds

<sup>vi</sup> A term closely related in Ancient Greek to the word episteme (knowledge), *tekhne* is usually translated as craft or art. In this passage, then, Foucault is concerned with the art of *logos*, which makes up the arts of dialectical thinking and psychagogical exchange. Not to be confused with a knowledge that one can possess, the art or *tekhne* of psychagogy must be practiced.



to win after the ten-minute break,  
 should go home  
 and tomorrow go to the front as volunteers—  
 ...  
 I am  
 ready  
 to go there today  
 To get there faster  
 I'll even take a carriage. (55-63)

But then, that's it. The play is over. There is no Act 2. Why? Because the argument constructed by Mayakovsky and enunciated by the Referee stimulates everyone in the audience to join (or to re-up with) the Revolution. The mode of subjectivity of the audience transforms from peasant to Revolutionary in the blink of an eye. No knowledge is transferred. Rather, a truth is transmitted and then received by those gathered together in the space of theatre. Even if we take this play away from its historical specificity, Mayakovsky's dramaturgy asks us: where is the front to which I am supposed to race off in a carriage? What is the front where I wage my battle for truth today? What is the truth to which I *must* align myself? How might I distinguish between *the* truth and the rhetoric of empty discourse? Am I the ethical subject of the truths I know? If, as in Mayakovsky's case, we are faithful to the 1917 Revolution, then we must harmonize our actions and our thoughts by leaving the theatre and going to the front.

Mayakovsky's agitational propaganda and the Cynics' unconcealed life present two models of a psychagogical dramaturgy. Both performances, though comprising vastly different scopes and erupting in different times and places, drag us miles away from the contemporary understanding of the dramaturg as the master of the gap between audience and performer and reconfigure the practice of dramaturgy as, in Foucault's words, "the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 407). Theorizing the practice of just such a dramaturgy in the present brings us back to the important task of naming the relationship between dramaturgy, philosophy, and the formation of the subject.

### Psychagogical Dramaturgy's Two Paths

Not a master of the gap between audience and performers but a practice of conducting participants to the true life: this is the new configuration of dramaturgy we arrive at by viewing theatre and performance through the lens of continental philosophy. While many philosophers, most notably Giorgio Agamben (*Homo Sacer* and *What Is an Apparatus?*) and Alain Badiou (*Being and Event* and *Theory of the Subject*), work diligently to untangle the means by which a subject is constructed, deconstructed, obstructed, and manipulated, Foucault's work stands apart as the most applicable to our discussion here, and this is the case for one simple reason. Foucault's theories on the subject undergird many contemporary writings on the subject because they lead to an irresolvable paradox, which, far from frustrating any search for truth, reveals the dialectic of subjectivation and allows thinkers to explore the irreducible complexity of subjectivity in the present. Revisiting the dialectic of subjectivation in Foucault's work will lead us to what we call the two paths of psychagogical dramaturgy and allow us to map both the

productive and frightening potentialities of such a practice. Moreover, working through this aspect of Foucault's thought will lead back to Rancière's critique of stultifying pedagogy and help bring this re-thinking of dramaturgy to a provisional conclusion.

In "The Subject and Power," Foucault frames his research as a body of work concerned not chiefly with power, but with the subject, and not with the subject *per se* but with techniques through which subjects are produced or what he calls "the government of individualization" (330). This governmentality works neither exclusively from the top down, nor from the bottom up; neither solely from the execution of power upon an unwitting individual, nor from an individual's resistance to some specific power, such as law or medicine. Rather, the government of individualization concerns the flow of power relations and is thus comprised simultaneously by techniques of authority and the resistance to those techniques. Foucault summarizes this complex act of subjectivation with the following declaration: "There are two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to" ("Subject and Power" 331).

To rephrase this well-known formulation of Foucault's, subjectivation, or the process through which subjects come to be, comes about through the dual process of aligning oneself with a specific truth and becoming subjugated to a specific ideology, perhaps without much awareness of this subjugation. Plugging this dual notion back into the framework of psychagogical dramaturgy that we have constructed thus far makes visible a major problem of which Mayakovsky's play and its historical function serves well as an indicator. Before we champion Mayakovsky's psychagogical dramaturgy as a powerful force to reckon with, we must analyze the dialectic of subjectivation at the heart of it. On the one hand, the play's affective dramaturgy may have worked to stimulate the self-awareness of each audience member, thereby leading to an act of identity formation through which the audience member acted in fidelity to the October Revolution by joining the Referee at the front of the Red Army. On the other hand, the same affective dramaturgy may indicate Foucault's formulation of "subject to someone else by control and dependence." Perhaps we should read Mayakovsky's play as a symptom of the rising Stalinist ideological apparatus and the top-down governmentalization of the post-Lenin Communist regime.

Even if we refuse to adopt one reading of Mayakovsky's play over the other, which we should do in order to stay faithful to Foucault's work, the two paths of psychagogical dramaturgy becomes visible here. If we follow one path, we arrive eventually at a dramaturgy dedicated to representing and reinforcing a specific ideology. The psychagogical force of Mayakovsky's poems and plays were, for example, utilized by Stalin to enforce his brand of communism and to inculcate Russians into a particular ideological apparatus. If we follow the other path, we arrive somewhere different; in fact, we arrive at a place where dramaturgy functions as the mediator of difference and truth in order to *create* a theatrical experience capable pledging allegiance to a political or ideological position without legislating a specific point of view. To conclude this initial elaboration of psychagogical dramaturgy, which we forward as an emancipating dramaturgy, we would like

to work through the ideas presented by Bojana Cvejic's article "The Ignorant Dramaturg."

### **Falsity, Truth, and Dramaturgy of Problem**

As the title of her article suggests, Cvejic attempts to rethink the practice of dramaturgy, particularly the practice of dance dramaturgy, by harnessing the momentum produced by Rancière's critique of the pedagogical. Harmonizing with the analysis we have offered in the first part of this essay, Cvejic critiques the identity of the dramaturg as master of the gap. "If there should be a dramaturg," Cvejic argues, "she isn't a staff member of a company or a repertoire theater—someone who occupies a position of know-how, craft, or *métier dramaturg*" (41). In such an institutional position, and within the subject position of pedagogue, the "dramaturg puts herself into the priestly or masterly position of the one who knows better, who can predict what the audience members see, think, feel, like or dislike" (43). Instead of this identity, Cvejic proposes imagining the dramaturg through her function as "the constitutive supplement in a method of experimental creation—a co-creator of a problem" (41). In this case, "a problem" becomes the generative matrix from which a truly creative act, as opposed to a representational act, blossoms.

Cvejic's concern in this particular article is twofold. On the one hand, she wants to imagine the role of the dramaturg within the creative process. To do this, she imagines the dramaturg as "friend of the problem" and "practitioner of the methodology of problem," by which she means the person who advocates for experimentation, rejects complacency, and devises the terms in which a working problem may be stated and the conditions in which that problem may be solved (45). On the other hand, Cvejic wonders how we might embrace dramaturgy as a speculative practice emerging from a fidelity to a certain position while simultaneously embracing the multiplicity of truths generated through performance. To help her thinking, she calls upon Deleuze and his notion of the creative mediator.

Our concerns in this article compel us to elaborate on the second strand of Cvejic's line of inquiry, though by working through the speculative practice of dramaturgy we can begin to arrive at a practical model. Deleuze derives the idea of a creative mediator from his own working relationship with Felix Guattari. The point of such a mediator is to goad, reflect, and refract thought. In any creative partnership, each collaborator brings his truth to the table and attempts to manifest that truth through a material practice. Deleuze produces concepts, for example, while Cvejic and other dancer practitioners produce artistic affects. In turn, however, each collaborator acts as the "falsifier" of his partners' truths, insofar as he will perceive any given problem from a different perspective and bring a different vocabulary to bear on the act of stating the problem. Deleuze has Guattari in this respect, though he also relies on artists such as Proust or Bacon, and mathematicians such as Leibniz; Cvejic has other dancers such as Eszter Salamon, though she also relies on philosophers like Deleuze, Rancière, and Agamben. "There's no truth that doesn't 'falsify' established ideas," argues Deleuze. "To say that 'truth is created' implies that the production of truth involves a series of operations that amount to working on a material—strictly speaking, a series of falsifications" (quoted in Cvejic 53). Each falsification reveals the minimal difference within any one point of view and allows each individual to perceive his or her own truths from a different perspective.

For Cvejic, imagining the dramaturg and, in her case, the choreographer as creative mediators, in the sense given to the term by Deleuze, helps remove the dramaturg from the stultifying position of the analyst who is expected to make sense of the performance. Only through this act of mediation can a performance express its truth, a truth that is at once singular and multiple, a truth that comes from the integration of multiple creative partners and produces a multivalent aesthetic-intellectual experience for a viewing public. To transition from this language back into the key of psychagogical dramaturgy, we suggest that changing one's mode of being a subject requires entering into a similar creative-mediator relationship, the goal of which is not to transmit knowledge or skill but to transmit truths that will lead both parties into a life practice that harmonizes with overarching concepts.

The relationship in our case has two axes. The first exists within the production itself, between the creators of the work. Instead of instituting a fixed position for the dramaturg, we encourage theatre makers to treat all members of the production team as dramaturgs, that is, as friends of the problem of the piece under construction. Each dramaturg must bring his or her apparatus of concepts and affects to the creation process and, in turn, must act as the creative mediator of the other concepts and affects attempting to formulate the terms and conditions of the project. The second axis extends between the production and the audience. This relationship must function in the same way, insofar as the audience must act as the creative mediator of the performance and attempt to falsify the ideas/concepts/affects of the performance, which is to say that each audience member will necessarily understand in its own way the ideas/concepts/affects produced by the performers. So as not to dissolve into an empty relativity, the performance and the audience's creative relationship must exist beyond the duration of the performance into the daily lives of each individual. In this scenario, the performers, collectively and with their multiple-one truth made material in the performance, functions as the psychagogue for the audience. This would require theatres to abandon a production model based on the consumption of discrete performance pieces in favor of a curricular mode of thinking.

### **Active Friends of the Problem and a Provocation for the Future**

While our purpose here is to redirect dramaturgical thinking away from pedagogy and toward psychagogy, we readily recognize that there are a number of theatre practitioners in the U.S. that already function, to one extent or another, along the lines that we are advocating, the first and second axes noted above. Their experimentations with consensus models of theatre creation, align both Cornerstone Theater and the Rude Mechanicals (often called the "Rude Mechs") with the spirit of the first axis: envisioning all company members as dramaturgs. Although the respective members of both of these companies have specific production roles to administrate, each member is also empowered equally in making central dramaturgical decisions for a production. In Cornerstone's early community-based productions, for example, this meant that not only are official company members positioned as creative mediators but so too are local community members that have temporarily joined the Cornerstone collective for a given production (Kuftinec 43, 101). The Rude Mechs, though not a community-based theatre, engage in a similar practice of mediation insofar as the group's core comprises a group of artists that are all co-producing artistic directors ("co-pads") who engage in a practice that the Rude Mechs refer to as "collective dramaturgy." As copad Kirk Lynn explains, "The creative team as a whole is the dramaturg



**Figure 1: Every House Has a Door, *They're Mending the Great Forest Highway* (2011). Pictured (from left to right): John Rich, Charissa Tolentino, Jeff Harms, and Matthew Goulish.**

in our work” (Lynn and Sides 114). Both the Rude Mechs and Cornerstone have attempted to decentralize dramaturgical practice by making all company members “friends of the problem.”

In consideration of the second axis, which envisions the audience members too as creative mediators, the Rude Mechs again provide an example. Their cowboy-themed musical *I've Never Been so Happy*, officially premiered in April 2011, at Austin's The Off Center. The press surrounding the premiere drew attention not only to the production's zany *mise en scène* and animated projections, but also to the production's unconventional development process. In 2008, they performed work-in-progress selections from the musical at The Off Center. When audience members arrived for the performance, what they met first was an interactive cowboy carnival: “Theatre-goers could learn to make rope, sing country songs karaoke-style, dress up in Western wear or have their picture taken in a cutout of an infamous moment in Texas history (like the Kennedy assassination)” (Van Ryzin). For half an hour, audience members played and socialized with members of the company and with each other. The communal atmosphere was so immersive that, as Lynn reports, when the performance proper began, it seemed as though audience members had forgotten that the Rude Mechs were supposed to perform (Coakley and Heard). The carnival blended into the performance so seamlessly that there was essentially no division between the two and a blurry division between the company and the audience. One year later, they repeated this activity. The seamless blending of the carnival with the performance implicated the audience into the performance in a way that made them players and not just observers: “both consumers and creators” (“Inviting the Audience to the Rodeo”). More significantly, however, the Rude Mechs observed carefully what transpired during the carnival portions of the events and drew ideas and inspiration that they folded back into what became the official version of *I've Never Been so Happy*. When

this official version finally premiered, before audience members (at The Off Center) who quite possibly participated in developing the production years earlier, that audience had a more intrinsic relationship with the piece. They had been invited to be creative mediators in the development of the theatrical work.

The Rude Mechs have cited a professional interest in the work of Anne Bogart and the SITI Company, and not surprisingly, Bogart and SITI too engaged, ten years earlier, in a development process that attempted to position audience members as creative mediators.<sup>vii</sup> In 1998, SITI was rehearsing a production of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* in Louisville. In an effort to study the relationship between actors and audience, Bogart decided to invite civilians to be audience to the rehearsal process. Those who chose to attend were asked to write notes and participate in interviews with Bogart. When the show went into performance, Bogart also invited the civilians to participate in at least one post-show discussion. Bogart and her company collected all these materials as well as hundreds of pages of research on theories of the actor-audience relationship that the company members had gathered. Bogart and the company selected numerous excerpts from all their documents and used it as source material that they, using Bogart's adapted Viewpoints technique,<sup>viii</sup> developed into a performance piece, *Cabin Pressure*. The show premiered in Louisville, at the 1999 Humana Festival. It began with a portion of *Private Lives*, which was played three times before the performers went into other material. The company felt it was im-

<sup>vii</sup> The Rude Mechs mention their interest in Bogart and SITI during a podcast discussion of the Mechs' piece, *The Method Gun* (Kramer).

<sup>viii</sup> As Bogart and Tina Landau state in the preface to *The Viewpoints Book*, “Each of us was introduced to Viewpoints by another person: Anne from Mary Overlie at New York University, Tina from Anne at the American Repertory Theatre” (xi). In a way, we might consider Bogart and Landau as creative mediators of Overlie's original practice.





**Figure 2: Every House Has a Door, They're Mending the Great Forest Highway (2011). Pictured: Matthew Goulish.**

portant to begin the show this way in this place because it was with Louisville civilians encountering *Private Lives* that the entire process began one year earlier. The audience of *Cabin Pressure* were effectively dramaturgs of the performance they were audience to. One year earlier, they had been invited to be “friends of the problem.”<sup>ix</sup>

Cornerstone, the Rude Mechs and SITI are all commendably making efforts to open up the dramaturgical thinking in ways that emancipate company members and audiences both. Yet, in none of these examples have we seen the figure of a psychagogical dramaturg. For an example of a dramaturg actively engaged in a philosophical dramaturgical practice, we turn to Matthew Goulish. Goulish's work with the company *Every house has a door* emphasizes a crucial dimension of psychagogical dramaturgy, the dimension of invitation.

While invitation is an aspect of the dramaturgies of the companies discussed above, Goulish digs deeper in his philosophical investment in it. Created with Lin Hixson, the mission of *Every house has a door* is to “create project-specific collaborative performances with invited guests” (qtd. in Picard). As dramaturg, Goulish helps to craft the gesture of invitation through writing and performing in order to offer multiple points of entry into each performance. Discussing the 2011 performance entitled *They're Mending the Great Forest High-*

<sup>ix</sup> For a detailed discussion and analysis of the *Cabin Pressure* development process, see Herrington.

way, Goulish reminds us that each point of entry “offers a different door, standing open for a different audience member as an invitation into the house of the performance” (“Returning to...”).

Once audience members enter into the house, they enter into a philosophical relationship with the performers and company members, and the initial gesture of invitation positions the audience as collaborators or creative mediators who will help to process the work. Envisioning each performance as a house with as many doors as there are audience members allows for the emancipating potential that each member of the audience will enter the performance in his or her own way, on his or her own time. Simultaneously, by continually playing with the notion of theatrical temporality, the company members remind the audience that the performance itself may challenge understanding and force an unexpected encounter. As his writings in *39 Microlectures* and his contribution to the anthology *Deleuze and Performance* make clear, this unexpected provocation by the performance object challenges audience members first to learn how to understand a performance, which again enhances the relational aspect between audience and theatrical work. When Goulish signs his writings, “Matthew Goulish, dramaturg,” he folds into the practice of dramaturgy all of his interests in the works of Stanley Cavell, Gilles Deleuze, and Henri Bergson, the gesture of invitation that instigates the philosophical relationship, and the hope that audience members will transform the performance through the practice of their daily lives after they leave the theatre. The dramaturgical practice envisioned through his work combines essay writing, performance, choreography, and the labor of thinking to create a psychagogical apparatus capable of altering one's subjectivity over time.

To emancipate philosophically, or to emancipate through philosophy: this is the task we would like to set for contemporary dramaturgy. Pedagogical dramaturgy does of course function in accordance with certain philosophical underpinnings, but for pedagogical dramaturgy those underpinnings are done, dead, decided long ago. These underpinnings continue to inform the dramaturgical practice, but they are no longer dynamically re-forming dramaturgy. They have ceased to “think” dramaturgy. Positioned as such, pedagogical dramaturgy is a procedure that subjectivates its participants, but inasmuch as it does not allow itself to become other than it is, its subjectivating process is ever tethered to homogeneity. Such a dramaturgy is philosophical, but is in no way emancipatory.

We offer the challenge of thinking dramaturgy dialectically, thinking of dramaturgy as itself a philosophical practice. Such a dramaturgy also subjectivates—what practice doesn't?—but it does so with a clear awareness of that subjectivation and a forthright resistance to the fact of it. Such a dramaturgy recognizes that the transparency of process, while beneficial, is also always undermined by its own inexorable opacity. Such a dramaturgy embraces itself as emancipatory, but it also always interrogates every recess of the comfort and stability provided by that embrace. Such a dramaturgy is psychagogical dramaturgy.

In short, the theatre does not need more ghost lights named “dramaturgs.” Instead, it needs to recognize the illuminating capacity that already exists with everyone connected to the theatrical event and to think more inclusively about that capacity.

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# Directing Like a Dramaturg: The Art of Being a Whale

by Becky Becker, Columbus State University

The cast of *Compañeras* by Kathy Coudle-King engages in a “dance of surveillance” using bed sheets.

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While I am not formally trained as a dramaturg, my approach to directing actively involves dramaturgical strategies. I see these strategies as a way to engage actors in the process of understanding the story they are about to tell—to get inside the story rather than merely to speak through it—and to understand how best to go about shaping the story. It goes without saying, of course, that all good directors and dramaturgs engage in dramaturgy that is active; however, not all rehearsal processes implement dramaturgy as an effective strategy. Like most directors, when I approach a new text, I analyze to understand not just how to tell the story, but also how to approach the rehearsal process. Typically, for me, this means finding unique ways of bringing research related to the context and themes of the play into rehearsals to engage the actors’ imaginations for the purpose of character development. It also means finding ways to shape the story through the lived, kinesthetic experiences we share in our process. If the work is particularly effective, it involves a bit of consciousness-raising on the side.

From my perspective, being a dramaturg is to always be in process. To quote Romare Bearden, “I think the artist has to be something like a whale, swimming with his mouth wide open, absorbing everything until he has what he really needs. When he finds that, he can start to make limitations. And then he really begins to grow” (“Bearden at a Glance”). Here, Bearden is referring to the visual artist, yet his words resonate as a kind of mantra for the dramaturg. Bearden’s understanding of what it means to be an artist is akin to anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s conception of “thick description,” which I understand to be a layering of perspectives and knowledge (Geertz 9-10). In a rehearsal process, the script is just one thin layer of information. Within that layer are clues to other layers that, with exploration, experimentation, and expansion, inform the first layer. It is when these various layers converge in a thick description that audience members can find a space to truly enter into the story. In the case of the dramaturg, everything we do—from the news stories we listen to on our way to work, to the images we see in the community that surrounds us, to researching our latest obsession—the way we open ourselves to the world becomes part of our process. As we continually take in the world around us,





**Figure 1: Ana casts *The House of Bernarda Alba* for the prison's Three King's Day Celebration.**

holding onto just what we need for each new endeavor, we are like whales: continually in the process of seeking what feeds us. In joining Bearden's concept of the artist as whale with Geertz's concept of "thick description," I am advocating for "thick dramaturgy"—a process by which director and dramaturg create a layering of experience for the actors, who, in turn bring this "thickness" to their work onstage.

A year ago I had the privilege of directing the winner of the Larry Corse Playwriting Competition, housed for a time at my university. *Compañeras*, by Kathy Coudle-King, is an unpublished play based on the "testimonios" of a group of Uruguayan women who were "disappeared" during the dirty wars of the 1970s in South America. Coudle-King was inspired to write the play after hearing interviewer Dr. Elizabeth Hampsten speak about her experiences collecting the testimonios. The characters represented in the play are composites of several interviewees and their stories, lending to the play's overall complexity. The play focuses on a women's prison and the seven "disappeared," as well as a female guard and male captain overseeing the prison, while the women rehearse to present a play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, by Federico Garcia Lorca, for their cell block's Three King's Day celebration. *Compañeras* theatrically weaves the women's background stories together while revealing the brutality and hidden blessings of prison life.

In preparing to direct *Compañeras*, I knew that I would need to engage in a more intensively dramaturgical approach than is typical, even for me, as a director. While the production did employ a student dramaturg, who worked diligently to supplement our research and create a lobby display, this play required "thick dramaturgy," which meant that we would need to work in tandem. A bit of background might be helpful in understanding the role of the dramaturg in my department. Within our program, student dramaturgy has not had a significant role until very recently. When I came to CSU seven years ago, I am fairly certain that I was among the first professors to use the term, let alone assign work to foster its understanding as a discipline and role within theatre. When it has been possible to involve students, who have both the preparation and desire, in dramaturgical work I have acted to make it happen. Since our program is about to offer its first course in dramaturgy only now in the coming

year, it has been somewhat difficult to meaningfully employ students in the dramaturgical process, though it is an exciting new prospect. What I have tried to do as a director is to model this approach for members of the cast and production team, in lieu of a fully integrated dramaturgy program, involving students when it is reasonable to do so. In light of this background, in the process for *Compañeras*, the student wanted to be more involved, but given her already busy schedule, was unable to attend many rehearsals. Knowing her strong work as a student researcher and thinker, I welcomed the opportunity to have whatever level of involvement she was able to offer. When she was able to attend, our student dramaturg presented historical information to the cast regarding the dirty wars in Uruguay and other countries in South America, as well as other contextual material from Uruguayan culture. She collected questions from the cast in order to illuminate obscure textual references, and when she was unable to attend rehearsals, the Facebook group became a valuable repository for her posts. Through her work online, as well as posts by members of the cast and crew, the process continued even outside the rehearsal room in a way that served to strengthen our collaboration.

Our multi-faceted approach to dramaturgy was important to the process on many levels. Because the actors ranged from just eighteen to twenty-two, it meant that most of the relationships and experiences depicted in the script were well outside their emotional knowledge base. Of course, this is a typical challenge in educational theatre, and one that we readily embrace with almost every script. Still, *Compañeras* posed the unique challenge of being outside our collective cultural experience, as well as depicting prison life—something about which most college students (and theatre professors) have very little awareness. Added to all of this was the fact that this would be the play's first full production. The play's complexity and newness made for a process rich with opportunity for concentrated dramaturgical interplay.

Since this was to be the first production of *Compañeras*, I was painfully aware of supporting the play's dramaturgical integrity. New plays really are like babies—each is unique and must be cared for with a deep understanding of its essence. While some playwriting competitions support a workshop process leading up to full production, one of the unique aspects of the Larry Corse Playwriting Competition has been its commitment to a full production of the winning play without workshops or staged readings to inform a final production. For a play like *Compañeras* this is both exciting and a bit daunting, particularly given the stage of the script when I received it. Full productions are incredibly valuable to playwrights, who can learn so much more about their work seeing it in full form. Full productions are also difficult to procure, and are often the route to subsequent productions. However, if a play is not at the right stage for full production, or if the production is not true to the essence of the playwright's work, it can do potential damage to a play, its reputation, or the playwright's career.

In the case of *Compañeras*, the play read quite beautifully and theatrically, conjuring strong imagery and relationships upon my first read and subsequent readings. Yet, in delving more deeply into the play's structure one aspect of the script stood out as presenting the greatest challenge—and perhaps not surprisingly, also one of its greatest triumphs in terms of action. Coudle-King's play moves very quickly through a series of action-filled scenes—the women being reprimanded and physically searched for a stolen kitchen knife, the women dividing up speaking parts for the play, the women watching helplessly as one of their compañeras is dragged away to solitary confinement, and so on (Figure 1). The rapid-



**Figure 2: Prisoners Susana and Maria share their abduction stories, intermixing dialogue with dance, their best coping mechanism.**

fire action and quick movement from scene to scene makes it somewhat difficult to fully realize the relationships among the women—something so vital to the script and in developing a connection with the audience. However, early in the script one of Coudle-King’s stage directions suggested a way to communicate those relationships in performance, ultimately enriching to our entire process. Immediately following the first scene, in which we learn how the characters of Susana, a reporter, and Maria, a nurse, were disappeared, Coudle-King writes:

The women in the bunks begin to hum the notes of a classic tango. Susana reaches out her hand and Maria takes it.

NOTE: These brief dance interludes are done with all seriousness. At times they may be performed with a passion bordering on violence, at other times with sexual longing. They do not last long, 30 seconds or so, and act as bridges between the realism of the scenes and the confrontational style of the monologues. However, more than a device, they are a piece of what gets the women through much of their days at Punta de Rieles prison. They are as much a part of their survival as the gallows humor they use and the small kindnesses they show one another. (Coudle-King 5)(Figure 2)

While the script does not contain many specific references to moments of transitional dance, this single stage direction became a vital springboard to the use of dance in our production—one that helped to solve the issue of fleeting character development and, at times, nominally supported connections between characters.

Understanding the dance as a vibrant aspect of the play’s structure was an important first step in visualizing how the play might work best in our studio space, but there were still many other challenges posed within the script that pointed to “thick dramaturgy” as an approach to bringing it to life on stage. After casting the play late during Spring 2011, in preparation for our fall season, for which *Compañeras* would be the first production,

I planned a three-phase process that would provide all of us with the necessary tools to give the play a strong full production. Phase One, or “Boot Camp,” as I began referring to it that spring, would consist of a three-day intensive rehearsal period before classes began in Fall 2011. Phase Two, I have latently chosen to call “Dance Camp,” since dance became the connective tissue of the play and involved multiple choreography sessions to weave the action together. Phase Three, I will refer to as “Reality Camp,” since the latter portion of our rehearsal process involved interacting on a more personal level with the reality of the “disappeared.”

In preparation for Phase One: Boot Camp, the cast, stage manager and I met for a read-through of *Compañeras* just as spring semester 2011 was ending. At that time, I gave them a small summer reading packet, consisting of Lorca’s play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, an article by Francesca Lessa, entitled, “The Many Faces of Impunity: a Brief History of Uruguay’s Expiry Law,” as well as a short history of Uruguay, and a blog entry reflecting on how beauty survives even in the midst of oppression and degradation. In talking with the cast, I explained that these few pieces of writing were intended to be a catalyst for their own research and reflection, as well as our collaborative research and experiences as a group—even before the rehearsal period began. In order to provide a platform for discussions that could develop, as well as materials that could be shared during the summer, I created the Facebook group in early July, entitled “Compañeras,” that would serve as an important connector before, during, and even long after the production closed.

By the time Boot Camp arrived in early August, a healthy conversation had developed on Facebook, we had a modified thrust ground plan allowing for great intimacy with the audience, and I had planned an intensive three days of activities for the cast. We began Boot Camp with another read through of the play, as well as brief discussion of materials assigned over the summer. These early discussions helped to establish a solid base of knowledge regarding Uruguay and the dirty wars, as well as a mood of give-and-take that became an important value for the rehearsal process. Often after these brief discussions we would follow up with a physical ac-





**Figure 3:** Lidia (foreground) prepares for bed, along with the other inmates, as the prison guards watch over them.

tivity or improvisational exercise based on the ideas circulated. For example, following a discussion of prison conditions, the cast used blocks and other items in the room to create their own prison and engage in an improvisation of daily prison life. After discussing Lorca's *House of Bernarda Alba* and the ways in which it parallels characters and themes in *Compañeras*, we walked through scenes of the play-within-a-play. Unlike some rehearsal processes in which collaborators can get bogged down in too much talk—something I have been guilty of myself, at times—the Boot Camp helped us to strike a good balance. Dramaturgy in action. This give and take between research and kinesthetic experience became a strategy through which “thick dramaturgy” flourished, allowing us to develop layers of mutual understanding, both intellectual and physical.

In addition to striking a balance between discussion and improvisation, we spent a good portion of the Boot Camp engaged in exercises inspired by Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Some of these exercises were intended to promote team building, such as “The Glass Cobra” (*Games for Actors...* 118) and “The Machine of Rhythms” (94). However, others were selected and sequenced in order to ease the cast into exploring power relationships of the prison environment depicted in *Compañeras*. “Complete the Image” became an important tool for developing physical relationships between various character pairings (139). Depending upon which two characters were paired in this silent, image-oriented exercise, the power dynamics were egalitarian or very clearly “master-servant.” Another more intense exercise that I used with great caution is a variation on one I had learned in a workshop with Boal years ago that I have come to refer to as “Oppressor-Oppressed.” The exercise begins silently and moves, over a sequence of prompts, to words. Partners are asked to decide which person will enact their perception of oppression first, following a series of prompts provided by the side-coach or “joker,” in this case, me. The other partner's role is to “receive” their partner's “oppressive” physical gestures, responding only with the same level of physicality prompted by the “joker.” Through the exercise, participants are asked to empathize with the oppressor, even as they understand the impact his/her behavior has on the oppressed. Given that the cast of

characters for *Compañeras* includes several prison guards, an authoritarian Captain, and a traitor amongst the women, empathy for both “sides” of the conflict was particularly important. Preparing for the rehearsal process, I had written down a quote from Boal: “the essence of theatricality is the conflict of wills” (*Games for Actors...* 54). Nothing could be truer of the characters depicted in *Compañeras* or the events that inspired the play.

Perhaps the most impactful experience of the entire Boot Camp was our visit to a local jail. Sometime in June I had contacted the Muscogee County Jail to see if I could arrange a tour for the cast. Having made this initial contact, I had received a positive response and instructions that the students should wear modest clothing (particularly the women), that we could not bring any personal items into the jail with us, and that the students should be very controlled in their responses to any inmates encountered during the tour. Upon arriving at the jail, I expected a rather cursory tour that might take an hour or so, tops. Instead, our tour guides, comprised of a longtime supervisor and a “rookie,” took us through every part of the prison where we were allowed access.

We began in an older part of the building that was currently being used primarily for storage, though it had once been a very active part of the jail. Due to the age of this section of the building, the lack of windows and the dankness of the air, this was one of the best opportunities for the students to gather sense-oriented experience for our rehearsal process. Amongst the rooms used for storage was a prison cell that was once part of a larger prison block. Here, the cast was able to feel the clammy humidity that is so much a part of the text of *Compañeras*, as well as the dim, languid quality of light. A bit further along on the tour we could also choose to be placed in “solitary” just for a few moments to feel the darkness and silence. While the tour continued to more updated, state-of-the-art areas of the jail, our experiences in the old part of the building helped to inform our collective understanding of what some of the prisons of the “disappeared” may have been like, with its 1970s architecture and cement blocks.

All told, we spent three hours touring the jail, observing procedures, being ogled by inmates, learning the history of the jail, and asking our officer tour-guides questions. Two other formative moments occurred late in the tour, the first being a visit to the women's section of the jail. Interestingly, we were required to split off from the two men in our small group—a scenario that would be repeated in rehearsals later to build solidarity among the inmates versus the guards in the play. There we encountered a young woman who talked briefly with a couple of cast members, mostly to tell them never to end up where she was. Another formative moment near the very end of the tour was our visit to a central room in the jail filled with monitors and protected with double-paned glass. While gathered in this room, we were prominently on display and the male inmates on the other sides of the glass wandered nearer to look at us. Later, back in rehearsal, we discussed the “exposed” feeling that this situation created, as well as the power dynamic of the “watchers” and the “watched” (Figure 3). Our visit to the jail made a profound impact on our rehearsal process. As a group—cast, stage managers, and director, alike—we had a common experience to refer back to in moments when we found the characters' experiences particularly difficult to connect to, and one that had been foreign to us

prior to the tour. While none of us can profess to understand what it means to be an inmate—and particularly one who is unlawfully imprisoned, as the “disappeared” were—we glimpsed for just a few hours the power dynamics and sensations of isolation enacted in prison life. “Thick dramaturgy” in action, this experience offered a layer of experience that, I suspect, allowed for more immediacy in the actors’ ability to communicate mood to an audience.

Our journey through the jail informed the eventual framing of the play, in our choice to treat audience members as if they were in prison with the actors. Ten minutes before the show began each night, the women were marched into the intimate space—ostensibly after having worked all day. They interacted quietly for a while—their bunks mere inches from the front row—then prepared themselves for sleep; when the female guard came back in, she performed the curtain speech in character. While her severe demeanor served as a particularly effective way to “warn” the audience to put away their cell phones, it also invited them to embrace the theatricality and viscerality of the world of the play, which would include them as witness-participants throughout. The actors often looked directly at audience members in specific moments of storytelling, particularly in describing their disappearances. When the prisoner-informant met with her lover, the Captain, the audience became voyeurs—but also knowledgeable as they learned the pair’s secrets. Near the end of the play when *The House of Bernarda Alba* was finally performed, the audience became the other cellblock members as the women served them cookies prepared for the occasion. Ultimately, the intimate thrust setting meant that audience members could experience the *compañeras*’ struggles while remaining cognizant of audience members across from them or to house left or right. In retrospect, it paralleled our moment in the central room of the jail when we had been surrounded by inmates peering at us through thick glass. Whether audience members felt like inmates in the prison of *Compañeras* is, of course, difficult to determine. Still, it was through “thick dramaturgy” that this layer of experience became a strategy for engagement in the performances.

Phase Two: Dance Camp began after Boot Camp was over and we had blocked the entire play. In collaboration with Krystal Kennel, sound designer and a theatre professor at CSU, I had selected songs for the transitions between scenes, many of which would become brief interludes of dance, as well. Astor Piazzolla’s emotionally charged works became the basis of Kennel’s design, in addition to folk songs suggested in the script, such as “La Cumparsita” and “Yira, Yira.” Our choreographer, Brenda May Ito, also a professor in the theatre department, began with simple folk dances and moved rather quickly to a moderately intricate tango, giving the cast members an opportunity to integrate the dance into their characters’ physical lives. When the cast had learned several basic dances, I staged the transitions, as much as possible allowing the rhythmic movement to begin naturally with a song sung by the women, or a gesture made to a *compañera* who needed support. In another instance the song and dance served as a coping mechanism for the women who were left in the cell when their *compañera* was taken away to solitary confinement. The dance became another layer of thick dramaturgy, providing context through its cultural significance for the Uruguayan characters, and in allowing the movement to communicate relationship and emotion in a way that words cannot.

Among the most difficult scenes to stage were those involving dance, but the dance also functioned as a suspense-building mechanism that supported the play’s action. In an early scene following the search for the kitchen knife, two of the “disappeared,” Susana and Maria, shared their stories of being stolen from daily life—the latter even separated from her baby. With this initial use of dance in scene one, Coudle-King had included the previously referenced stage direction, which indicated that dance should be woven into Susana and Maria’s scene. The challenge of this scene, in part, was the emotional context of the characters sharing the harrowing experience of being “disappeared” with the audience. Coupled with this, the simple, but carefully timed partner dance we chose to weave into their stories added to the scene’s depth and complexity, establishing a strong relationship between the characters—and ultimately, the actors.

Much later in the play’s action, a sexual relationship is revealed between the Captain and Lidia, an inmate who is also an informant. In the script, Coudle-King calls for the Captain to begin to undress Lidia, revealing her breasts, as they engage in “pillow talk.” Despite the stage directions indicating nudity, from the first time I read the play, this scene conjured up images of prison bed sheets utilized to obscure the nudity, and silhouetted love-making until Lidia reveals a secret to the Captain—she is carrying his child. To achieve this effect, Kennel and I chose a rather strictly syncopated song with a tone of intrigue. After describing the concept of the scene to Ito—that Lidia and the Captain would be both “watched” and “hidden” by the other inmates carrying bed sheets and guards carrying flash lights—she choreographed movement to match the music and the needs of the action (Figure 4). The resulting scene was simultaneously theatrical, sensual, and chilling, also purposefully reminiscent of our visit to the jail’s central room during Boot Camp. In both dances—one expository, and the other climactic—the movement remained contextualized within the prison, reminding viewers that there is no escape.



PHOTO: KENNY GRAY.

Figure 4: Lidia’s tryst with the Captain is seen in shadow through prison bed sheets.



While Dance Camp was quite different from Boot Camp, it served an equally important dramaturgical function. *Compañeras* involves a kind of brutal realism, which Coudle-King balances with theatricality—the play within the play, the quickly developing action, and the suggestion of dance. The interludes involving dance served to point up the theatricality of the piece, becoming their own “stories,” however brief; in turn, the dance allowed moments of harsh realism to unfold more sharply, given the contrast. Perhaps most refreshingly, the dance served the actors by offering them more “stories” on which to build the characters’ relationships. In *Compañeras*, for me at least, a dramaturgy of dance was born. While I have always appreciated dance and often use it within productions because of its beauty and ability to communicate emotion, this layer of description also allowed the play’s tight structure to breathe more fully.

Phase Three: Reality Camp occurred during the last third of our rehearsal process. The play was fully staged, the dances were in place, and although nowhere near “performance ready,” we invited CSU Spanish professor Dr. Alyce Cook to visit a rehearsal with her student, whose own mother had been “disappeared” in Argentina. Dr. Cook shared her research on literature that emerged after the dirty wars, explaining that many of the “disappeared” were literary figures who had not directly challenged the government, but when someone was taken the community often felt that “they must have done something” to deserve it. Dr. Cook also gave us further insight into aspects of the play that even our research hadn’t quite uncovered. One such gem was her reference to Ford Falcons as a symbol of the captors, bringing important subtext to a line of dialogue Maria has near the beginning of the play as she explains her own disappearance: “Two men, dark suits, skinny ties, slicked back hair. A white Falcon at the curb...” (Coudle-King 6). The cast soaked up Dr. Cook’s thoughts about the dirty wars, asking many questions until she turned the discussion over to her student.

The cast grew very silent as the young man, whose wife and two young children had accompanied him, explained his mother’s disappearance. Like many, she had been a student at the time, taken while visiting her cousins. Students who asked too many questions were perceived to be trouble and “disappeared” quite often. In his mother’s case, the disappearance seems to have been a warning: she was released a week or so later. But her disappearance was enough to convince her to leave her country, never to return. Similar to our Boot Camp experience at the jail, hearing about this woman gave the events of the play a new meaning for the cast, all of whom were close to her age when she was “disappeared.” Before leaving the rehearsal, the young man thanked us earnestly for “letting people know” that these horrors had really happened. The authenticity of his mother’s experience brought a new level of understanding to the cast members, whose desire to know about the events surrounding the dirty wars only grew. For several of them, this was the beginning of their own journeys toward a dramaturgical approach to their work and the world. In discovering layer upon layer of context and connection to their characters and the actions of the play, the actors found new strategies for approaching both life and work. While some dramaturgical layers were thinner or more elusive than others, it was the combined impact of the layering that brought about the desired result: empathy and engagement with the work that went beyond the shimmering surface. They had—and have—an entire ocean to explore.

Which brings me back to Bearden’s notion of the artist as whale. The experience of working on *Compañeras* was like and unlike any other directorial process I have guided. Like other processes, it involved many stages of research, analysis, and interpretation from a variety of perspectives, culminating in a rich practice. In collaboration with the student dramaturg, a variety of perspectives were offered on the dirty wars and the social and historical facts connected to the play’s time period. For most of the cast and production team this was the first time delving into the topic—and it became a significant focus for many months to follow, as we continued to post in our online group about current dealings in Uruguay and South America. In that sense, the work impacted us in ways that are difficult to measure—our view of the world became a bit “thicker” as a result.

Unlike most other processes in which I have engaged, the dramaturgical work for *Compañeras* was as kinesthetic as it was intellectual. While the experiences described above only represent a small percentage of our entire process, they do encompass the physical nature of the piece, its scope and connections found within the play throughout the process. Without Coudle-King’s brief stage direction on dance, I cannot be certain that I would have had the insight or the courage to find in it the connective tissue it provided the story. My research and experiences with the play led me there. Similarly, the work we did using Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed exercises, our visit to the jail, our discussion with the son of a woman who was “disappeared”—all of it challenged our physical boundaries in ways that are not typical to every process. We not only caught a glimpse of the visceral layers within the play, but it made us more aware of our own. With *Compañeras*, I began to understand *physically* what it means to be a whale. To take in all that I am able, embracing even bits and pieces that may not look like nourishment. I have always marveled at the ability of whales to subsist, at times, on organisms as minuscule as plankton and krill, but I also now realize that it is often the tiniest morsel that makes the difference. Call it “thick dramaturgy,” “active dramaturgy,” or just plain “dramaturgy,” the call of the artist is to be in the world of the ocean, to take it all in and then let go—so that she has what she needs to create.

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