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Review

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LITERARY MANAGERS
& DRAMATURGS
OF THE AMERICAS

EDITOR'S NOTE

Included in this issue of *Review* is the inspiring call to action by long-time LMDA member Ilana M. Brownstein, who was the recipient of the 2014 Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy.

In addition we share with readers two peer-reviewed articles, both of which address the growing field of dance dramaturgy. Jeanmarie Higgins discusses her work as a dramaturg on the 2013 reconstruction of Martha Graham's solo dance *Imperial Gesture*, and argues that a dramaturg's most valuable trait is her/his skill with critical performance theory. In his essay "Towards an Aesthetic Dramaturgy," Adrian Silver reevaluates several of dramaturgy's canonical texts in order to parse out a theoretical understanding of the relationship of aesthetics to politics, and narrative to the role of the dramaturg in the theatre.

SCO

Review

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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 2, Summer 2014.

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2014 LMDA CONFERENCE

ELLIOTT HAYES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN DRAMATURGY

Introduction

by Stephen Colella, VP Programs

This year as the discussions over the Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy went into their second hour, the committee, comprised of Laine Newman, Liz Engelman, Raphael Martin and myself found ourselves debating the nature of achievement. Is achievement defined by a singular success? Must there be a focused individual, seemingly insurmountable, task that is accomplished in order for “achievement” to occur? Should we continue the traditional tendency of the Hayes Award to recognize great projects, such as Robyn Quick’s New Russian Drama Project or Brian Quirt’s work on *City of Wine*, or could we continue to expand the scope of how the award views dramaturgical accomplishment? The committee felt that there has always been space in the guidelines to recognize dramaturgs whose work is wide in breadth and deep in its engagement. As a result, we have decided to recognize someone whose work as an advocate, a mentor, an architect of ideas and a generative dramaturg is a marvel to behold in its own right, and whose ongoing effect on communities, both national and local, is undeniable.

The challenge in these introductions is generating suspense. At the best of times it is difficult to disguise work that reaches the heights that past winners of this award have done. This year is especially challenging because the work of the recipient has had an effect on so many here with us tonight that it is almost impossible to obscure. So, in an effort to demonstrate just how far this work has reached, we’ll play a game. Hands up if you know who has won. [A number of audience members raise their hands.] Ok, a handful of cheaters know, but let’s keep going.

I want to talk first about the recipient’s impact on their local community — a community that has in the past experienced, in the recipient’s words, “artistic heat loss” as year after year young people from the community receive training and then depart for other opportunities. This loss diminishes not only from the local artistic scene, but also feeds back into the opportunities that are

available to future students as the professional performing arts scene dwindles. In an effort to stem that tide, the recipient created a program engineered to bring together emerging designers, writers and dramaturgs. This program was not merely about supporting individual artistic practice, but providing space and offering challenges in order to help find the ways in which these participants could collaborate, create in new ways and forge partnerships that did not exist before. It is these forms of collaborations, these links of creativity and partnership, that bind a person to a community and a place. Of the 26 participants that have taken part in the program thus far, 80% of them have chosen to remain in the community and continue working. In just a few short years, over twenty projects have been created that are a result of relationships forged during this program. One of the participants said that the program gave her

- a total revitalization of the values, interests, knowledge and faith in things previously only possible in the container of college and grad school
- a bridge from thought/belief to real world application/action
- a re-opening to deep artistic trust
- and a “foot in the door” to the larger theatre community after a year of networking and finding no significant theatre friends or collaborators.

These comments were echoed many times over by other participants. And this was just one of the initiatives undertaken to develop theatre artists in the recipients’ community.

Hands up now if you know who I am talking about. [More hands go up.]

Continuing on the on-going topic of care and focus on growing and emerging artists, I’d like to turn our attention to the company the recipient works for — a company that, in the words

of the Artistic Director, has grown under the recipient's leadership into a place where the infusion of dramaturgical minds has become the core of how the company self-defines. In the past three years, this company has created twelve dramaturgical positions for emerging dramaturgs whose work has included season planning, production dramaturgy, audience engagement, literary management, social media content, conversations internally and externally and creating context for the work. To once again borrow the words of the Artistic Director, the dramaturgs became "strong, active problem solvers and collaborators impassioned by the powerful idea that socially provocative performance can change the world." This is because under the guidance of our recipient tonight they are not mentored by being insulated — they are mentored by being put in positions to succeed and given the opportunity to fail and to then learn from that failure. This method of challenging mentorship not only provides a great avenue for learning, but it also instills in them, and the collaborators they work with, a sense that a dramaturg is an artist who needs to be right in the mix of generation and creation for the artistic process to be effective.

This role of mentorship has not been confined to the local arts scene. The recipient has also made use of social media to provide welcome and support to many of the early career dramaturgs (ECDs) who have been entering the field. While the recipient is certainly not alone in this venture of working with ECDs, there has certainly been tireless support. One thing I would like to acknowledge is that this year's recipient donated the travel portion of the Elliott Hayes Award cash prize to this year's ECD travel fund. This decision is emblematic of the thought and care the recipient puts towards the theatre artists of tomorrow.

Hands? [Still more hands go up.] Ok, pretty good, but let's keep going.

Finally, our recipient is not just concerned about the future of the field, but also about advocating for theatre and its practitioners right now, and for opening up the conversation about what we are doing, how we are using best (and worst) practices and how we might both do and think better.

This thoughtfulness and advocacy had lead to an official commendation by City Council to the recipient's company for promoting diversity and cross-cultural understanding as a result of their dramaturgical ethos. The recipient curated and edited a series of articles, blog posts, videos and interviews exploring the character of their home city, which opened debates about the health of the local ecology. The recipient engages in conversations nationally through Facebook, blogs, Storify and Twitter about compelling and innovative expressions of dramaturgical acts, as well as the importance of diversity and inclusion. The recipient has created strong online communities for playwrights, as well as effectively using social media to promote ideas and action steps and spread news both locally and nationally. That the recipient has done this work is no surprise to anyone, but that no one else did is one of the reasons we are grateful for this presence in our community.

In the words of those who spoke passionately about the recipient, I am proud to present this award to:

- a profound connector, a revolutionary thinker, a digital leader, a ferocious advocate, the heart of new American theatre
- a hero for those of us who care deeply about the inclusiveness of theater
- a debater, a theatre fan and a friend from wherever a computer is
- a model for what an engaged and deeply caring dramaturg should be.

For all of these reasons and more, I am proud to be able to present, in a community she has helped to shape, in her home city of Boston, the 2014 Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy to Ilana Brownstein.

LMDA CONFERENCE 2014

On the Impact of Mentorship, Advocacy, and Dramaturgical Innovation in Boston and Beyond: A Keynote Address

By Ilana M. Brownstein

As with all ritually significant moments, it feels proper to begin with an incantation and a glance to the gods:

INCLUSION. INTERSECTIONALITY. EMPATHY. ADVOCACY. ACTION.

I've been a member of LMDA for 15 years, and I can say without a doubt that nearly every radical idea and new direction I've tried in my artistic life has been sparked by ideas born from conferences and conversations with the people in this room. And 15 rooms past.

The last time I stood up here in this capacity was in 2008, and I mentioned that I was hoping to launch a grassroots playwright development organization in Boston. I remember thinking: Jesus, Brownstein, you said it out loud so now you have to do it. Three years after that moment, and after a test run at Liz Engleman's Tofte Lake Center, I formally inaugurated the signature program of Playwrights' Commons: the Freedom Art Retreat. But what is Playwrights' Commons? It's not incorporated. It has no board. It barely has a staff (really it's me, and while she lived in Boston, Corianna Moffatt).

It's an idea.

The idea is this: a dramaturg has the power to be a curator, a facilitator, a teacher, an organizer, a distributor of resources both esoteric and logistical, a node around which a movement can happen, a driver of new forms, and a force for public good.

The Freedom Art Retreat was born in one of the darkest times of my life from my desire, well, my need (hi, Liz) to be in the woods, on a lake, for my own mental health. I thought, well, if I'm going anyway, maybe I can rent a bigger house and let some artists tag along. Then I thought, well, if they're coming anyway, maybe I can organize some programming. And if I'm going to program it anyway, I should probably make sure we all eat really well. (This is one of the many places

ILANA BROWNSTEIN is a dramaturg specializing in new plays and public arts advocacy. She is the Director of New Work at Company One Theatre, Founding Dramaturg at Playwrights' Commons, on faculty at the BU School of Theatre, and is Senior Dramaturg for XX/BCA PlayLab. She created the Playwriting Fellows and Breaking Ground at the Huntington, programs celebrated by a 2013 regional Tony Award. Some of her favorite projects include works by Lydia R. Diamond, Rajiv Joseph, Kirsten Greenidge, Aditi Kapil, Natsu Onoda Power, Lauren Yee, and Kristoffer Diaz. She holds an MFA in Dramaturgy (Yale); is a Kilroys nominator for The List; is on the Advisory Board for HowlRound; serves on the Boston Cultural Change Network; and is a two-time winner of the Elliott Hayes Award for excellence in dramaturgy. You may also know her as @bostonturgy.

where Mara Isaacs and I are totally simpatico – break bread with someone to cultivate trust and humanity.) It seemed worth it. As Cindy SoRelle said yesterday, I’m more of a do-er than a thinker, so I booked a house, and put a call out for participants. Six years later, I can point to the 26 early career playwrights, dramaturgs, and designers who have come to the woods for a week of collective creation and experimentation, building aesthetic and collaborative vocabularies that carry them back into the Boston theatre ecology. I can point to over 30 projects (and I entirely new company) that were made by Retreat participants across all three alumni years, in Boston, with one another. And I can point to the 375 members of the Boston & New England playwrights network, which I run on Facebook as a space dedicated to de-siloing playwrights, and cultivating energy as a sector.



PHOTO: CYNTHIA SORELLE

Ilana Brownstein giving her keynote address.

I do it for about \$2000 a year. And frankly, so could you. So please, steal this idea. Adapt it to your needs. Step up and opt in: what does your community need most? In Boston, most professional theatre artists teach in our training programs, but we have enormous creative brain drain as recent grads look elsewhere for their artistic communities. Freedom Art was designed to address this heat-loss, and give early career folks shared collaborative experiences. That might not be a problem where you live, but surely there’s some tangible challenge in your city that could use your dramaturgical intervention. My soapbox tonight is this: you can make a change.

As I was getting Playwrights’ Commons off the ground, learning to tweet, and teaching my amazing students at BU, I had the incredible good luck to find a home with Company One Theatre and its incredible staff collective. For the first time in my life, I felt like all my artistic and professional endeavors were aligning with my own social mission: to make work that makes a difference. The founders of Company One, two of whom are here tonight, all came out of Clark University, the motto of which is “Challenge Convention, Change our World.” This notion infuses all we do. There is a presumption that as a non-profit theatre, we have a duty to represent our city in the widest sense possible, to be answerable to the people, and to provide civic benefit. Our stated core values are:

- Never be satisfied;
- Diverse, socially conscious thinking;
- Innovation and creative problem solving;
- Artistic Excellence; and
- Development of the individual as part of the greater community.

In the 3 years I’ve been on staff, my dramaturgy has been radicalized, thanks to the guiding philosophy of the company. Though I still relish the act of new play development, of being in the rehearsal room, it’s only one part of how I conceive of my practice.

My colleague, managing director, and friend, Sarah Shampnois, never wanted to make theatre. She started as a community organizer. Her

values and practice — and those of the other Company One founders — have been a model for me. Boston has just seen the election and inauguration of the first new mayor in 20 years. Massachusetts is about to go through a Governor’s race. The state-house has been a battleground for budget fights, especially around the arts. And for the first time since I moved here, there’s a rising energy across our entire arts and culture sector that (a) there’s work to be done, and (b) we could actually do it together. As a dramaturg, I realized I was in a perfect position to join that movement and make a difference.

And so could you. The only barriers to civic participation are apathy and inertia.

Following Sarah’s lead, I’ve been able to testify at city council hearings and town hall meetings, meet with state legislators, intersect with MassCreative and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Democracy is amazing when you opt in. And as dramaturgs, we have the exact skills for this task. I often tell my students that the dramaturg is the person in a process whose job it is to identify and open up pathways into the world of the play — or, if you prefer, into the big idea, the question, the issue — to open those pathways to every individual constituency and stakeholder. It’s context, it’s framing, it’s speaking the language of the person you’re trying to reach. But now I’m not just doing it for plays, I’m doing it for the health of the sector, for the future of emerging artists, and for the quality of life for all residents of this city in which I make my life and my art.

I think about Hrotswitha a lot. Did you know she named herself? Her name means “the strong voice of Gandersheim.” It was a radical act that was meant to convey that she “stood firmly within the community of which she was a part” (McMillin 319). The community of people who allow me to do my best work is extraordinarily large, and if I named them all we’d be here all night. But I want to call out a few specific people. I feel sometimes that Shawn LaCount, Sarah Shampnois, Summer Williams, and Mark VanDerzee saved my life when they welcomed me into the heart of Company One. I am exceptionally, eternally grateful for their friendship. Corianna Moffatt made Freedom Art with me, and any of its success belongs at least 50% to her. Jim Petosa, my colleagues, and my students at BU not only allow me to cultivate my art and advocacy outside the university setting, they celebrate the ways it makes my teaching better. The staff of Company One is like a family to me, especially the dramaturgs who have been on my team, most recently Jessie Baxter, Ramona Ostrowski, and Ciera Sade Wade. Julie Hennrikus, Executive Director of StageSource, is a frequent co-conspirator and between the two of us I am sure we’ve made a pot of trouble. Speaking of trouble, I deeply appreciate the cadre of amazing women who are like my professional braintrust – you know who you are. And of course my husband Chandran, who not only tolerates but encourages all the barnstorming I’ve ever endeavored to do.

I’ll close here: the common thread that runs through all of this work is a soul-deep dedication to the dramaturg as an artist of impact. If we



The dramaturg as “a driver of new forms, and a force for public good.” Brownstein poses with the Award plaque.

are to accept that dramaturgy, in its efforts to contextualize and present traversable pathways, has merit as a creative act, then I believe social justice, mentorship, and advocacy have to be at the core of all I do. The thing that sustains me is that theatre is not just an art form, it’s a vehicle for empathy and humane connection. It comes to us through a history of ritual and spiritual practice, and though we’ve largely moved on from those structures, the roots remain. The human condition is one that seeks connection—something we’re sorely in need of these days. If any communal activity holds the promise of bridging the gaps, it’s the theatre.

And so: I advocate, I mentor, I seek to make my small corner of the world better for us having been here. So can you.

INCLUSION. INTERSECTIONALITY. EMPATHY. ADVOCACY. ACTION.

Thank you.

Work Cited

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Iconicity and the Archive: Martha Graham's *Imperial Gesture* 1935/2013

By Jeanmarie Higgins

Jeanmarie Higgins is Assistant Professor of Dramaturgy at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Before joining the UNC faculty, Jeanmarie taught critical theory at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle where she also served as resident dramaturg for new works. Recent dramaturgy projects include *placed* and *and how to be in two places at once* for AGA Collaborative, and *Mamá Goose*, a new Spanish/English musical for children by Beth Murray and Irania Patterson. Her essays on performance space have been published in *Theatre Topics*, *Theatre Symposium*, and the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*.

Ask most theatre artists what dramaturgs do, and they will respond, "Research." Granted, a dramaturg's research skills are valuable. Directors, actors, and designers need answers to practical questions, such as these that I have been asked in my capacity as a theatre dramaturg over the years: What religious rituals did women in fifth century BCE Greece perform in public? How would a prostitute in medieval China have conducted business? What methods were there for taking opium in nineteenth-century England? Most dramaturgs enjoy hunts for evidence about how people lived in particular historical moments, especially if these hunts yield information that translates into truthful staging, empathy-driven characterizations, or designs that reflect or else thoughtfully depart from the historical record. As is true of many dramaturgy projects, my recent work on choreographer Kim Jones's reconstruction of American modern choreographer Martha Graham's "lost" 1935 dance, *Imperial Gesture*, drew on my historical research skills, from locating and working with archives, to assessing the value of evidence, to documenting the project through scholarship (such as this essay).

Less apparent, but as I argue, even more valuable, are a dramaturg's skills in critical performance theory.¹ Critical theory can frame performances in terms of identity and politics. Toward this end, the dramaturg can distill and communicate current theoretical thinking for the artistic team when a director chooses, for example, to approach a text through an expressly feminist, Marxist, or other theoretical lens. Shaping the production's purpose for embracing theory, the dramaturg becomes an informed rehearsal audience, reflecting back how the production supports a desired reading of the text. No matter the specific ideas directors or choreographers want to coax from performance texts, all theatre and

¹ For a useful list of the potential production roles a dramaturg plays, see "The Shakespearean Dramaturg: a Job Description" in Hartley, A.J. *The Shakespearean Dramaturg: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. For the uses of theory in dramaturgy practice, see "Power Plays" in Chemers, Michael M. *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010: 39-65.



PHOTO: PIAVINSON

At rehearsal at The Westbeth, NYC, Fall 2012. L-R: Karen Young, Kim Jones, Pat Daugherty, Blakeley White-McGuire, Janet Eilber (Artistic Director, Martha Graham Dance Company), Judith Daitsman.

dance artists are in the business of making meaning. As a theory that addresses how meaning is made, this essay engages semiotics—the study of how meaning is constructed and interpreted in various written, verbal, and performance languages—beyond its use as an interpretive tool, and considers it as a research practice. This essay details how semiotics, in concert with various theories of mimesis (representation), informed my work as dramaturg for *Imperial Gesture* and how, in turn, semiotics might be useful to choreographers undertaking dance reconstructions.

The dramaturgical process for *Imperial Gesture* illustrates how powerful collaborations result when choreographer/dramaturg teams pursue separate, complementary research questions that frame studio work. For *Imperial Gesture*, Jones’s research question proceeded from her work as a Graham Company regisseur (a choreographer who remounts pieces from a repertory) and a choreographer who reconstructs Graham dances: “How can this 1935 Graham dance be reconstructed in a way that honors the original but that also resonates with audiences in 2013?”² Unlike Jones, my primary research area is not dance reconstruction, or even the work of Martha Graham. Proceeding from my own scholarly and studio practices of theatre semiotics and new works dramaturgy, I developed a parallel research question in concert with but fundamentally different from

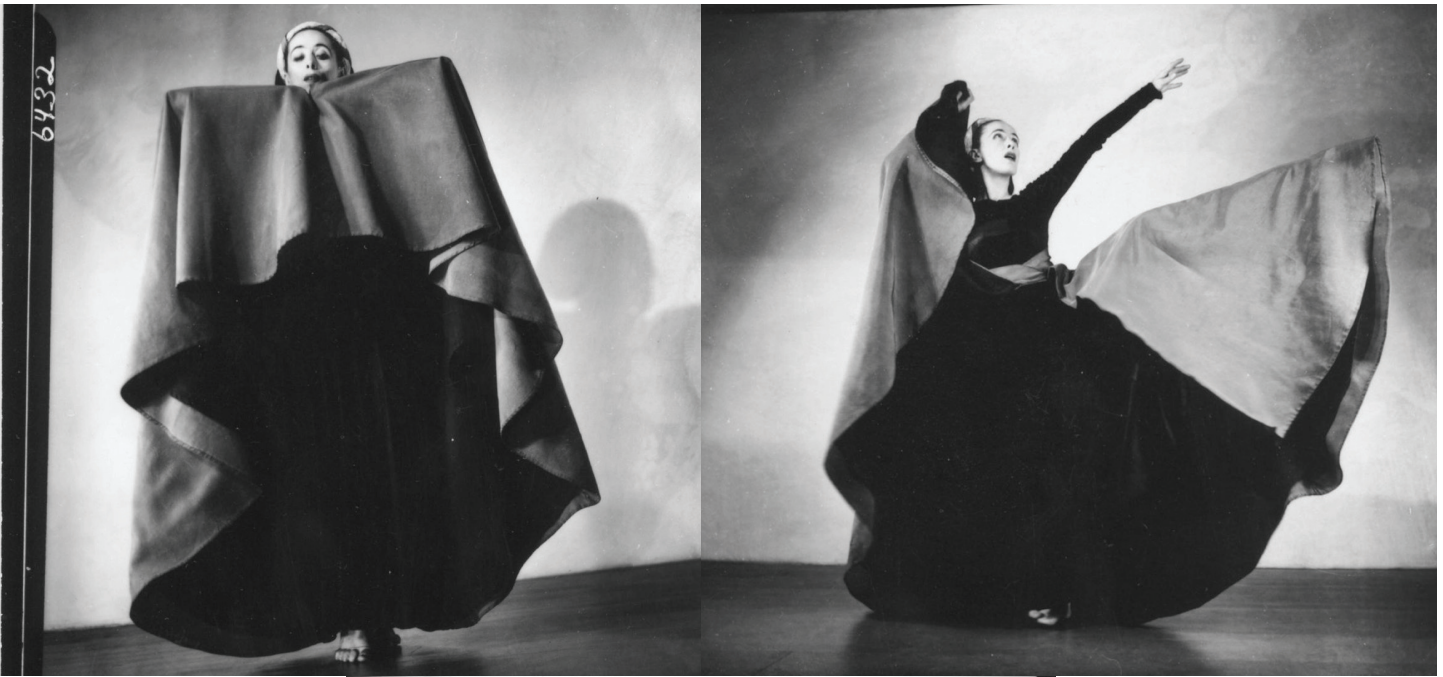
² Throughout this essay, I refer to *Imperial Gesture* 2013 as a “reconstruction” while also acknowledging the breadth of ways to describe such a project. In *Reworking the Ballet*, Vida L. Midgelow offers an inclusive term, “reworkings,” which she describes as “‘palimpsestuous’ texts that evoke a particularly bidirectional gaze, as they exist within a double frame, simultaneously evoking and questioning their sources” (10). Jones refers to *Imperial Gesture* 2013 as a “reimagining.” Whatever the term, as in all reworkings, *Imperial Gesture* 2013 occupies a space somewhere along the continuum of authenticity and interpretivity that Midgelow identifies as characteristic of all reworkings.

Jones’s: “How do issues of iconicity affect the archive?” Pursuing iconicity as a material force in dance reconstruction required me to see semiotics as a creative endeavor, to understand how the cultural weight of Graham’s life and work affected this endeavor, and to explore the ramifications of such for the practices of both dance reconstruction and of dramaturgy.

Imperial Gesture

Imperial Gesture is a dance solo that premiered at the Guild Theatre in New York City on November 10, 1935. Jones’s reconstruction—performed by Graham Company principal dancer Blakeley White-McGuire, with original music composition by Pat Daugherty, costume design by Karen Young, and lighting design by Judith Daitsman—premiered at the Knight Theater in Charlotte, North Carolina in January 2013, and has since been integrated into the Graham Company repertory. As reimagined by Jones and her collaborators [Fig. 1], the five-and-a-half-minute solo has a narrative shape that I characterize as follows: an unnamed despot (performed by White-McGuire/The Dancer) enters a courtyard, arrogantly flaunting her royal authority. Perhaps sensing that her audience of royal subjects no longer adore her, she tangles herself in her own haughty movements, collapsing to the ground as if under the weight of her impending irrelevance. The accompaniment of a spare solo piano composition, performed live by Composer Daugherty himself, and the crisp sounds issuing from White-McGuire’s manipulation of Young’s voluminous burnt-orange taffeta-circle skirt lend critical counterpoints to the dance’s now halting, now fluid movements.

As *Imperial Gesture* dramaturg, I fulfilled many of the position’s standard roles: I wrote abstracts and program notes; presented and co-presented the project at academic conferences, in university classrooms,



and for arts organizations; and conducted archival research. When Jones began research in 2010, she worked with the following: two photographs that American photographer Barbara Morgan included in her book, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*; a space diagram by American scenic designer, Arch Lauterer (Armitage); several dance reviews archived by the Library of Congress; and a poem by John Malcolm Brinnin called “Imperial Gesture: for Martha Graham.” As I detail later in this essay, my hunt for evidence expanded the archive, from reviews from alternative presses, to images that captured the dance’s historical moment. Rounding out the body of evidence were: Jones’s recorded interviews with Graham dancers; Jones’s and White-McGuire’s experience embodying Graham’s 1930s movement vocabularies; and the artistic team’s fluency with Graham’s design aesthetic. The later discovery of thirty-two Morgan studio negatives anchored Jones’s reconstruction [Fig. 2] [Fig. 3] [Fig. 4] (“Barbara”), but no notation score, no musical score, and no film exist for the solo. At first, the absence of a complete photographic record was discouraging. Later, though, this same absence became a productive force, as the scant iconic evidence for this solo joined with the prodigious iconicity of the original choreographer, Martha Graham, to position myth against fact, requiring the artistic team to research creatively, yielding rigorously theorized production choices.³



Figs. 2 - 4: Photos of Martha Graham courtesy of the Barbara Morgan Archive.

Semiotics and Performance

Dance semiotician Henrietta Lilian Bannerman has noted that although “dance scholars have utilized aspects of semiotic theory to create models for the interpretation of dance,” the “conjoining of dance and semiotics is under-researched territory” (19). Into the inquiry Bannerman has begun, I introduce two interrelated questions: how can semiotics provide a new way to understand not only “the interpretation of dance” but its creation, and especially the task of dance reconstruction; and how can this (new, semiotic) understanding of reconstruction inform dramaturgy practice? Further, when the task is to recover not only the form of a past dance but the way this form signified within a particular cultural moment, can semiotic analysis aid in the process? And can dance reconstruction “speak back” to semiotic theory, offering ways to rethink its terms?

Since all performance involves the intentional making and reading of meaning by artists and audiences, the practice of semiotics will always be useful in theatre and performance studies; as theatre semiotician Tadeusz Kowzan noted as early as 1968, “Everything is sign in a theatrical presentation... They are artificial signs par excellence. They are the result of a voluntary process and most often created with premeditation; they tend to communicate on the spot” (57). Revisions of early semiotic theories, including poststructuralist interventions on semiotics’ limitations, do not weaken the case for semiotics’ usefulness. On the contrary, such critiques are useful for dance reconstructors, as these critiques are chiefly concerned with the way time affects the signification process. As culture theorist Roland Barthes has thoroughly argued, structuralist notions of signification that are derived from linguistics do not sufficiently explain the way signs function within and substantively form discourses of culture and society. Barthes’s famous example

³ For example, Pat Daugherty composed the original score for the piece using his knowledge of mid-century avant-garde composition, knowledge of the Graham repertory, experience as a composer and rehearsal pianist for the Company, and an autobiography of the original composer: Lehmann Engel, *This Bright Day: an Autobiography*. New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1974.

of the saluting Algerian soldier on the cover of the periodical *Paris Match* illustrates the way that signs are transformed over time. Just as the sign is made of a signifier (a gesture, e.g., a salute) and signified (a concept, e.g., “patriotism”), so that sign becomes a signifier for yet another sign. In other words, what was once an image constructed to communicate a particular idea (think of the several components of any national flag, e.g., stars, stripes, red, white, blue...) now becomes a signifier (the American flag) for some other idea (The United States). In this way, the very construction of a sign—and thus the process of signification—is erased as it processes forward (116).

Bannerman applies this idea to the chain of signification that is dance history. In her 2010 essay, “Movement and Meaning: An Enquiry into the Signifying Properties of Martha Graham’s *Diversion of Angels* and Merce Cunningham’s *Points in Space*,” Bannerman points out that as is true of any sign, the meaning of any given dance changes over time, especially as revolutionary movement vocabularies gradually become codes known to all dancers, choreographers and audiences. Bannerman’s analyses of *Angels* and *Points* are particularly apt, as she traces a lineage of innovation-to-acceptance from (classical) ballet to (modern) Graham to (postmodern) Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer. All dances signify in their own times as well as across time, and, as Bannerman argues, semiotic analysis—a tenet of which is that the chain of signification is never complete without someone to interpret the sign—can assist the dance scholar in decoding a dance’s meaning over time. Bannerman’s analyses uncover the possibilities for classical semiotic theory to inform interpretive strategies for dance, particularly how the passage of time, with its attendant ongoing process of overturning the known with the new, affects the interpretive process.

The Semiotics of Reconstruction

The tendency of the sign to leave a trail that effects its own disappearance has implications for the choreographer undertaking a reconstruction project. Within semiotic theory, I focus on the icon as the mode of the sign that is the most concerned with imitation, and thus the mode most useful for a discussion of dance reconstruction projects such as Graham’s *Imperial Gesture*. Icons—types of signs related to their referents by resemblance (like portraits)—promise both proximity and authenticity; an icon directly resembles the entity it represents. Few contemporary dance reconstruction choreographers would argue that pursuing a faithful, photographic copy of a dance is either possible or desirable, and few would argue that the meaning of a dance can remain stable over time.⁴ Barthes’s explanation of the erasure of the process of signification shows that “stable” sets of evidence cannot exist, as it also shows the interpreter (audience) to be essential to the process of meaning-making. And so despite their “directness,” icons are unstable, transitory signs; even if the icon remains the same over time, the composition and nature of those who view it do change. And if audiences always change, then dances cannot remain the same over time.

This exploration of the dramaturgy of *Imperial Gesture* owes a debt to those who have framed productive conversations about dance reconstruction, dance artists and scholars who have wrestled with the effects of time on dances and their histories. Work such as Ann Cooper Albright’s embodied research reconstructing Loïe Fuller works; scholarly

⁴ I am grateful to Dr. Ann Dils for her thoughts on the impossibility of iconicity in response to early versions of Kim Jones’s and my research presented in a lecture/dance format.

studies such as Vida L. Midgelow’s collection, *Reworking the Ballet: Counter Narratives and Alternative Bodies*; Millicent Hodson’s writing on such Hodson-Archer reconstructions as Ballets Russes legend Vaslav Nijinsky’s *Jeux* and *Sacre du Printemps*; and case study essays such as those Lesley Main includes in *Directing the Dance Legacy of Doris Humphrey* provide a range of ways to think about and practice reconstruction. Continuing to interrogate dance reconstruction as praxis is important at this time for two reasons. First, as dance companies continue to reconstruct early twentieth-century pieces that are termed “lost” to history, the resulting reconstructions of these pieces tend to be presented *as history*—that is, as reenactments rather than reimaginings—with all of the authority “history” connotes. It is then worth questioning the uses of this authority, including how such authorized recreations of dances influence the way that dance histories are written. Second, the reconstruction of lost pieces requires research that relies not only on iconic evidence (photographs and films of the dances) but also on embodied knowledge, oral histories, and an interdisciplinary knowledge of dance’s milieu (the music, art, and political performances that surrounded a particular dance). As recent attention to dance dramaturgy as both a scholarly and an embodied practice shows, dramaturgs who are trained to identify and evaluate these kinds of evidence are needed in the field (*Dance*).

Symbol/Index/Icon: a primer

Main offers: “As a director, I aim to create a compelling theatrical experience by exploring what a work was in the past in order to discover what it could become in the present” (6). The dramaturgy for *Imperial Gesture* is a study in understanding how a dance can translate to a contemporary audience because of, but also despite, its relationship to its past. This relationship of past to present in the creation of theatrical meaning is reflected in the symbol/index/icon triad of the classical linguistic theory Bannerman embraces. Bannerman lays out the tenets of traditional semiotic theories derived from linguistics, especially those of late nineteenth-century American linguist Charles Peirce, as well as post-structuralist re-stylings of semiotics such as those of Barthes. “Movement and Meaning” provides a primer on semiotics that is useful to a broad range of performance scholars and practitioners, from semioticians of dance and theatre, to students and choreographers unfamiliar with this transformative interpretive tool (19-21).

Bannerman quotes Peirce: “A symbol is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law” (23), or as theatre semiotician Erika Fischer-Lichte notes, symbols are “signs which bear an arbitrary relation to what they signify in the sense that the relation is neither causal nor motivated by the wish to depict the signified” (15). In other words, a symbol does not resemble the thing it represents; the Stars and Stripes is not the United States of America, nor is an octagonal, red, white-piped sign the concept “stop.” The next member of the triad, the *index*, both decreases and increases the distance between the sign and its referent; as Bannerman states, in an indexical sign, the signifier and signified are linked by association, for example, smelling smoke (signifier) implies that a fire (signified) might be nearby. An index is something that points to something else: a rash to an illness; some handwriting to a specific individual (23-4). Using Bannerman’s breakdown, we see that whereas the symbol signifies in the moment, an index is a mode of the sign that signifies over (usually a short period) of time.

But although *symbol* and *index* are certainly relevant to the discussion of dance reconstruction—a type of movement can symbolize or resist

symbolizing a certain event or mood; indexical signs such as movements can gesture to their own histories, such as hip hop to James Brown—it is the third modality of the sign, the icon, that provides the most fruitful opportunity for interrogating the use of semiotics in dance reconstruction: “If the constraints of successful signification require that the sign reflect qualitative features of the object, then the sign is an *icon*” (“Peirce’s”). Whereas a symbol is defined by the fact that it definitely *is not* what it represents (as in the American flag example above), and an index asks the interpreter to focus attention *elsewhere* (smoke → fire) or to recognize the sign as condition (a rash → a disease), an icon promises proximity and authenticity (as with a “live feed” of an unfolding news story). Relevant to performance scholars and practitioners, icons promise faithful representation.

Iconicity

Dance reconstructions can be fueled and (productively) thwarted by encounters with icons. To discuss *Imperial Gesture* in light of this, it is necessary to explore what the term icon means and to work toward defining iconicity. First, iconicity is the quality of being an icon. As noted above, in discourses of linguistics, an icon is a sign that resembles its referent, the most common example being a portrait. In discourses of art history, iconicity is the quality of being an object used in worship, as one might pray to the likeness of a god.⁵ *Imperial Gesture* provokes the dramaturg to explore both of these meanings, and to understand how these two senses of the term influence each other. One can argue that the practice of reconstruction always engages both of these definitions; reconstructions are likenesses, and choreographers like Graham and the aforementioned Fuller and Humphrey are revered artists who define a school of thought. Illustrating the conjoining of these two senses of iconicity, some choreographers who undertake reconstructions directly advocate for preserving these choreographers’ legacies. For instance, connecting Humphrey’s work to Humphrey herself, Main states the importance of preserving the legibility of a choreographer’s style: “[S]tylistically literate dancing is fundamental to a successful staging because the style of the dancing is a marker of the identity of the choreographer, not simply the work” (6). For many who reconstruct dances, then, these dual senses of iconicity shape the methods and goals of reconstruction.

A third sense of iconicity comes from discourses of celebrity. Iconicity can be the quality of a person or product that represents an idea, movement, or event. Examples abound across the fine and performing arts: Charles and Ray Eames’s Molded Plastic chair (mid-Century modern furniture), choreographer Bob Fosse’s rolled shoulders and “jazz hands” (Broadway dance), Alfred Eisenstaedt’s *Life Magazine* photograph of a couple kissing in Times Square (V-J Day). Of course, in a strict semiotic sense, the relationship between these signifiers and their signifieds is symbolic rather than iconic, but in popular usage, the definition of iconicity has grown to encompass this type of symbolic relationship as effected by celebrity or renown. Each of these several definitions of iconicity tends to reinforce the others; consider how a single image stands in for the renown of a specific artist, how the pro-

⁵ The first two definitions of “iconic” from the *Oxford English Dictionary* are: “pertaining to an icon, image, figure, or representation; of the nature of a portrait; spec. in Art, applied to the ancient portrait statues of victorious athletes commonly dedicated to divinities, and hence to memorial statues and busts executed according to a fixed or conventional type,” and “Of or pertaining to an image used in worship”. *Merriam Webster* offers a broad definition of the word “iconicity” as “correspondence between form and meaning [as in] the iconicity of the Roman numeral III.”

liferation of that image solidifies this person’s fame, and how fame itself acts as an agent in the arenas of art and culture. Researching the 1935 performance of *Imperial Gesture* illustrated that the interrelation of these separate senses of iconicity creates a new space for the evaluation of evidence. Surprisingly, the most iconic (photographically mimetic) pieces of evidence for *Imperial Gesture* were not always useful in expected ways. To be sure, photographs of Graham performing the dance depicted movement, but these led to more questions than they answered. As dramaturg, iconicity (in its constellation of meanings) became a multifaceted quality against which to evaluate evidence.

Graham as Icon

It is safe to say that Martha Graham is the most iconic of American choreographers. If, as theatre theorist Joseph Roach says, “It” is a “certain quality, easy to perceive but hard to define, possessed by abnormally interesting people” (1), then Graham is undoubtedly modern dance’s It Girl. When approaching Graham’s work—whether as a dancer, a choreographer who is reconstructing a dance, or as a dance scholar—one must wrestle with Graham’s iconicity in the layperson’s sense of the term. It is easy to see Graham as a singular genius who transformed the field through a combination of sheer will, exceptional creativity, and a great deal of “It.” If, as Barthes has said, that “myth is a type of speech chosen by history” (110), then Graham’s iconicity is in some part the result of a genius myth. Recent scholarship on Graham focuses less on her ineffable qualities of genius, and more on the ways her work was shaped by her life and world events. In his 2012 study, *Martha Graham in Love and War*, dance historian Mark Franko offers that politics shaped Graham’s early work as much as her genius did. This is certainly true, but Graham’s iconicity—if not the uncomplicated “genius” it might point to—also had material effects on her work. The choreographer’s iconicity, her fame, exerted significant agency over the reconstruction process for *Imperial Gesture*, not least of all because it is a solo first danced by Graham herself. This iconicity sometimes interfered with the reconstruction process. Rather than a hindrance, though, this interference was productive in that it asked the artists—all of whom were intimately familiar with Graham’s oeuvre, movement vocabulary, and design aesthetics—to evaluate each piece of evidence they encountered in terms of iconicity, that is, its likeness to the 1935 dance, its adherence to the iconic 1930s Graham style, and/or its power to commemorate Graham as an historically important figure.

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of Graham’s wide fame among the non-dance world audience is Apple Inc.’s 1997 “Think Different” advertising campaign, which included a one-minute television commercial that featured Graham alongside fifteen other preeminent twentieth-century figures including Albert Einstein, Bob Dylan, Mohammed Ali, and Amelia Earhart. The commercial features a procession of slow-motion black and white archival film clips, most of which show their standout subjects in context—Ali boxes toward the camera, Earhart stands in front of an airplane—in a sequence narrated in the soulful voice of American actor Richard Dreyfuss, with a text that is a toast to American iconoclasm:

Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in square holes, the ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them. Because they changed things. They pushed the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. (Apple)



Fig. 5: Photo used for Apple's 1997 "Think Different" campaign. Martha Graham (*Frontier*, 1935).

In Graham's cameo of archival footage, (falling between an Alfred Hitchcock interview clip, and Jim Henson talking exuberantly with Kermit the Frog) she performs one second of a solo from her 1935 dance, *Frontier* (Shields). Even if viewers are not familiar with Graham's oeuvre, many would recognize *Frontier* from the pinafore costume, Isamu Noguchi's modernist *mise-en-scène* of intersecting ropes, and of course Martha's signature headband (Morgan 18-29). Only the stretched purple fabric costume of Graham's *Lamentation* is more iconic an image of her early work (31-37). Taken together, these details signify "Martha Graham," and it is easy to assert that any recognizable image of Graham signifies "modern dance." That an artist's life's work can be conjured through one second of archival footage points not only to the power of the artist but to the power of iconicity.

Iconic Evidences

In addition to Graham's inclusion in the pantheon of exceptional people that appears in the one-minute "Think Different" television commercial, her image was used in a related print series. In each of these full-page magazine ads, a single photo of an American "genius" was branded with the rainbow colored bitten-apple company logo, and no text was provided to contextualize the relationship between the two. [Fig. 5] [Fig. 6] In the Apple ad, Graham is pictured in a press photo taken by Morgan from *Chronicle*, Graham's long 1936 anti-war ballet—or so it was commonly thought. As *New Masses* dance critic Owen Burke noted in 1937, *Chronicle* had much in common with *Imperial Gesture*:

Martha Graham's *Chronicle* follows the tradition of *Imperial Gesture*... The simple dipping into the red cascade of the skirt that the dancer wears is enough to recall all the brutalization of imperial conquest. It is a less satirical, more savage *Imperial Gesture* that moves slowly but ravishes well and gluttonously.

Here Burke provides good evidence of what *Imperial Gesture* was



Fig 6: Blakeley White-McGuire (*Imperial Gesture*, 2013).

not: it was not "savage"; it was more "satirical" than the much better known and better-documented *Chronicle*.

This Apple Inc. Graham print ad would take on new meaning in 2010 as Jones began to work on *Imperial Gesture*. One piece of iconic evidence led to more pieces of iconic evidence, specifically more Morgan photographs. When the Graham Company began reconstructing *American Document* (1938) with Anne Bogart and The SITI Company in 2010 (a project inspired by its own lost-and-found archive of evidence), the Barbara Morgan Archive informed the Graham Company that they held sets of photographs for other pieces. Among these were thirty-two photo negatives depicting *Imperial Gesture*. It was a surprise to all that the Apple photo, commonly believed to depict *Chronicle*, was actually a photo of *Imperial Gesture*. This likeness of *Imperial Gesture* turns out not to have been lost at all, its ubiquitous image hiding in plain sight, an icon of Graham put in service of the idea of her iconicity.

Although it would not have been possible to begin the reconstruction without these previously unpublished archival photos—raw material for Morgan's forthcoming book documenting sixteen Graham works—still, these were studio photos, not production images. Relying on these images as a map of the dance was not prudent. And even if these icons could provide a crude storyboard, how would the soloist travel within the stage space? Another icon framed the solution to this puzzle. A stage diagram for *Imperial Gesture* is one of five illustrations by American scenic and lighting designer Arch Lauterer that appear in the 1937 Merle Armitage book, *Martha Graham*. This diagram looks like a floor pattern, with an arrow indicating a starting point stage right, followed by a zigzag pattern that ends in a spiral shape. But Lauterer's diagram also looks like a modernist drawing. In this respect, it is hard to say whether this drawing is a symbol of the floor pattern, or whether it has the faithfulness of an icon. But at the very least, the drawing describes Lauterer's interpretation of the spatial scene Graham choreo-



Fig 7: "The Rhodes Colossus" by Edward Linley Sambourne (1892).



Fig 8: Blakeley White-McGuire (*Imperial Gesture*, 2013).

PHOTO: JEFF ORAVOTTA

graphed for *Imperial Gesture*. Over the course of several weeks, Jones and student assistant Lindsey Herring broke the line drawing into separate sets of spatial paths, transcribing each line of movement onto its own transparency, and then overlaid them onto one opaque sheet, the simultaneity of time-spaces living together in one iconic document.

Armed with the Morgan photos and the multi-layered space diagram, one might think that staging each Morgan photograph as a tableau, then deciding the path from one icon to the next as transitions between the photographs (using the Lauterer drawing as a map) might seem too simple. But as Franko notes, Graham's early work had the feeling of photographs. As Franko began to point out as early as 1990, critics and audiences often read Graham's early works as uncannily icon-like. Although 1930s dance critic Edwin Denby criticizes this property in Graham's early works, his following observation sheds light: "[Graham] allows her dance to unfold only on a dictatorially determined level. I have the impression that [she] would like to keep a dance constantly at the tension of a picture." He attributes this icon-like quality especially to her solos, which he describes as "clinging to visual definition" (qtd. in Franko, "Emotivist" 113). If one adds to these observations Franko's reasoning that "[w]eight, tension, and angularity were the hallmarks of Graham's early work . . . to the exclusion of flow and time" ("Emotivist" 113), we are left with a dance that moves from photographic image to photographic image. Uncovering Denby's audience response to Graham suggested that the task at hand was not to smooth or hasten the transitions between poses, but to preserve them as tableaux. This discovery was effected by the interplay of all three senses of iconicity: the dance that left few icons behind joined with the iconicity of the choreographer to signify the feeling of icon-like movement that contemporary scholars note as constituting Graham's solos of this time period.

Still more icons helped to bring out the dance's potential politics, as they also reinforced an aesthetic of stillness. Since "the tension of a photograph" was a feeling to aim for, icons of "imperialist gestures" from the dance's interwar period fueled the reconstruction with knowledge of its own history as they contributed to the emerging gestural vocabulary of the dance. In looking for pictures that signified "imperial," Jones offered "The Rhodes Colossus," the 1892 Edward Linley Sambourne political cartoon from *Punch* magazine that spatializes colonial aggressions between Europe and Africa [Fig. 7] [Fig. 8]; to this, I added images from the 1930s: Adolph Hitler from Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*; and most usefully, documentation of Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini's visit to Libya in 1937 in the photo essay *Il Duce in Libia*. Not all of the images from these sources are contemporaneous with the dance, most notably a picture of Mussolini that inspired a key pose in the dance; just as the Italian dictator stands with hands high on his hips, surveying his Libyan subjects, so White-McGuire stands with her skirt pulled onto her hips, but with her back to the audience, her head turned to face downstage [Fig. 9][Fig. 10] [Fig. 11].

Iconic signs of imperialism such as these—images that would communicate quickly to audiences in 2013—were useful in a different way than the Morgan studio photographs. While the Morgan photos record moments from the dance, they do not capture the dancer in performance. In contrast, the photos of *Il Duce in Libia* record a planned performance of imperialism, that is, the visit Mussolini made to Libya to strengthen his connection to his colonial subjects. The staged images of Mussolini's "royal progress" through Libya include: the dictator riding into the desert on horseback wielding "the sword of Islam"; attending a production of Sophocles' *Antigone* at the reconstructed Roman Theatre at Sabratha; and leading a 2000-strong nighttime cavalcade through Tripoli (McLaren). These research images closed the gap between signifier/signified (hands on hips/despotism)



Fig 9, 10, 11 (left to right): Martha Graham; Benito Mussolini in Libya, 1937; Blakeley White-McGuire (*Imperial Gesture*, 2013).

by using an image that history has ratified as a symbol for imperialism. The use of these images, among others, served to close the distance between the immediate political climate of *Imperial Gesture*'s 1935 moment and 2013, decisions informed by the power of iconicity in its several forms.

Reviews: Harnessing the Power of “Left-Wing Wishful Thinking”

The Library of Congress holds twenty-six items related to *Imperial Gesture* in its online “Selections from the Martha Graham Collection” archive, including the original performance program, two copies of the iconic photo later used in the 1997 Apple Inc. ad, and twenty-three national and local mainstream newspaper reviews and performance announcements. More notable than the information these reviews provide is the political debate they host. The *New York Times* offered: “[*Imperial Gesture*] is not altogether successful in spite of some excellent passages and copious cheering from the house. It is something of a study in arrogance whose ending in collapse and defeat lacks conviction except from the standpoint of left-wing wishful thinking” (Martin). The mainstream press ultimately had little to say about the dance, many merely dismissing *Imperial Gesture* as less successful than the lauded *Chronicle*. Informed by previous experiences researching plays and playwrights of this time period, I suspected that whereas mainstream reviewers were quiet about the solo, workers’ newspapers such as *New Masses* would have much to say. In fact, a set of reviews and notices from the leftist presses broke the research process wide open.⁶ These pieces not only positioned the dance as a political statement, but also provided vivid movement description for the dance, making the iconic Library of Congress archive appear as so much low-hanging evidentiary fruit.⁷

⁶ In this essay that argues the value of the dramaturg’s practice of critical theory, I nonetheless cannot neglect the importance of the dramaturg’s specialized skill in archival research. As dance scholars Mark Franko and Ellen Graff have illustrated, leftist press dance reviews had been an untapped resource until very recently. Perhaps this is because they are not indexed in databases along with mainstream periodicals. I submit that the best way to find twentieth-century American dance and theatre reviews is through the hard copy *Guide to Periodical Literature* books found at any library. Some of the best theatre and dance reviews are found in smaller publications. These are not all leftist publications, either. In fact, in addition to *New Masses*, researchers will find thoughtful and useful reviews in *Catholic World* and *Commonweal*, among others. I am grateful to Dr. Barry Witham for introducing me to this archive’s potential for the writing of new histories of twentieth-century performance.

⁷ Luckily, *New Masses* is now archived at <<http://www.unz.org/Pub/NewMasses>>. Unz.org contains a wide variety of publications from alternative presses.

Stanley Burnshaw’s *New Masses* review suggests that *Imperial Gesture* was not as celebrated as it should have been, and that its politics are the reason it deserved more acclaim: “For if any dance deserves a tremendous audience it is [*Imperial Gesture*] this stunning picture of imperialist greed.” Indeed, further exploration of leftist press dance reviews showed that over the next few years, *Imperial Gesture* became shorthand for “protest dance”; later reviewers commenting on new dances that critiqued fascism said that they were, essentially, no *Imperial Gesture*. Owen Burke even attributes the critical success of *Chronicle* to “follow[ing] the tradition of *Imperial Gesture*,” calling it a “brilliantly ambitious choreographic development that has for its subject matter the imperialist World War.”⁸ The passion in Burke’s interpretation here is notable and in line with the communist mission of his publication. Burnshaw’s review also offered invaluable evidence of the solo’s movement trajectory, usefully describing its arc: “In its avidity for seizure, the figure spreads wide like a giant bird [Fig. 3], stamps upon its prey and gathers more and more, until finally bulging with deformity, it collapses under the burden of gluttony” [Fig. 4]. Indeed, descriptions that steeped the dance in an anti-fascist politics provided the best visual evidence. Perhaps it is the emotional connection to the dance that brought out such tactile and visual descriptions, the recollection of detail evidence of a desire to communicate the stakes of the dance’s politics. The “giant bird” is not only a useful way to describe the demise of the character in Graham’s dance, it is a useful symbol for the possibility of the decline of fascism before it takes hold.

Given its inspiration as an anti-imperialist performance, it is no surprise that many saw the dance as intensely political. As Franko points out: “the historical context of Graham’s choreographic flowering was the global crisis of Fascism, the conflict of WWII, and the postwar years that ushered in the Cold War” (*Love and War* 5). A letter from Graham to Rudolph von Laban in response to his invitation to partici-

⁸ In his review of John Martin’s 1936 book, *America Dancing*, Burke, writing for *New Masses*, applauds Martin’s “warmth, vigor, and exciting conviction” that dance in America has become a revolutionary tradition. But his major criticism of *America Dancing* is that it excludes any discussion of *Imperial Gesture*: “The failure of Mr. Martin to carry through [a] social thesis is unfortunate, and his book is unbalanced by it. Indicative, in a volume flooded with names of compositions of later date and less significance, is the failure to mention Martha Graham’s acclaimed and artistically important *Imperial Gesture*.”

pate in the 1936 Olympic Games, tells us much about Graham's feelings about what reviewer Burnshaw called this impending "imperialist World War":

I would find it impossible to dance in Germany at the present time. So many artists whom I respect and admire have been persecuted, have been deprived of their right to work, and for such unsatisfactory and ridiculous reasons, that I should consider it impossible to identify myself, by accepting this invitation, with the regime that has made such things possible. In addition, some of my concert group would not be either welcome in Germany or willing to go. (qtd. in Franko *Love and War*, 14)

This letter is certainly carefully phrased—calling Hitler's anti-Semitic economic policies "unsatisfactory" and "ridiculous" rather than something more to the point like "unacceptable" and "outrageous"—but nonetheless was further evidence of Graham as a political being. Imagining that an emerging anti-fascist politics fueled *Imperial Gesture* made sense, then, and documents like Graham's letter showed that the dance's political brio was more than mere wishful thinking from the leftist press.

Iconic Departures

As Graham herself has said, "The pattern of the dance is as formal as the music. One remembers such movements with one's body muscularity" (qtd. in Armitage, 108). Indeed, the greater part of the archive was personal, embodied, and anecdotal: Jones's and White-McGuire's years of experience as Graham dancers; interviews Jones conducted with 1940s and 1950s Graham Company dancers Ethel Winter and Linda Hodes; and individual stories heard and retold by costume designer Young, lighting designer Daitsman, and composer Daugherty. Knowledge and stories that passed from Graham artist to Graham artist over the decades provided the most important archive outside of the set of Morgan photos, even if this knowledge was farthest from the dance's November 1935 moment. In an interview with Hodes, Jones wonders aloud about how the dance should begin, pointing out that the Lauterer diagram indicated that the dance begins stage right. Hodes disagrees. "Martha would start onstage." She explains: "Wherever Martha was was center stage" (qtd. in Jones). And so *Imperial Gesture* 2013 begins center stage, honoring the iconic "center-stage-ness" of Graham's openings instead of attempting the (perhaps faithful, perhaps not) stage right entrance indicated in the Lauterer diagram.

In a key costume design decision, Young and Daitsman discussed the possibility of replicating Graham's *Imperial Gesture* headband.⁹ To merely replicate the headband would be to place it firmly in 1935. More important was to emphasize the royal nature of the imperialist character Graham had played in the solo. Daitsman showed the team some images at the conceptual intersection of "royal" and "headband" (coming up with, among other images, Juan de Flandes's c. 1498 portrait of Catherine of Aragon). Dealing with how a headband would read to a 2013 audience, one last contemporary condition influenced the final decision to make a headband that read "royal" in a transhistorical way; that is, White-McGuire's hair, which is much longer, redder, and fuller than Graham's. Graham's 1935 costume piece would quite simply not have held White-McGuire's hair in the neat style warranted, thus work-

⁹ Karen Young's design of the *Imperial Gesture* skirt could form the subject of its own essay, as could the original music composed by Pat Daugherty. Young's *Imperial Gesture* costume was recently featured in the 2014-15 "Dance and Fashion" exhibit at the Museum at F.I.T in New York City.

ing against the image of the sober, heartless despot. The beaded, less period-specific hair piece was more appropriate than the simple 1930s headband, just as starting the dance center stage felt like Graham, even if Graham did not begin this particular dance center stage. Throughout this process, the team made similar choices, believing that what feels truthful is more important than what is correct. Many times, these truthful choices flew in the face of the available iconic evidence. In many ways, this reconstruction process acknowledged and celebrated the productive impossibility of iconicity in dance, an art form that nonetheless relies on icons for its transmission and meaning-making.

Semiotics and Dramaturgy Practice

Iconicity is more than a sign modality, and the word "icon" itself signifies in ways that are uncannily relevant to the study of modern dance pioneer, Martha Graham. I would argue that knowledge of what semiotic analysis can and cannot do is crucial to the use of alternative types and uses of evidence. As more early twentieth-century modern dance pieces are reconstructed (many with modest to little direct photographic evidence), choreographers, dancers, and dramaturgs will need to reason from indirect evidence. Not only can indirect evidence fill in gaps in the historical record, it can shape reconstructions in ways that a photographic record cannot. Images like the Mussolini in Libya photos, a reviewer's report of "copious cheering from the house" (Martin), and the memories of those who have danced the choreographer's pieces in the near past provided keys to *Imperial Gesture*'s historical milieu, and to the emotional effects of the dance on its audiences and performers. A semiotic practice not only provides ways for an artistic team to discuss whether and how a reconstructed dance's distance from its original matters, semiotics allows artists to doubt the possibility of authenticity, while at the same time finding authenticity in unexpected places. In turn, dramaturgy practice "gives back" to semiotic practice through its on-the-ground tests of its own principles within rigorously theorized studio experiences.

As notions of embodied research becomes less opaque to scholars and practitioners, the idea of the practice of dramaturgy becomes less tied to a particular place (like the library, for example). As dramaturgs continue to become integral parts of American dance practice, explaining and expanding the dramaturg's role beyond that of "staff researcher" accomplishes many things, among them: it allows dance artists to apprehend their creative work as research, as it also allows scholars and researchers to understand their roles as creative artists on production teams. It is indisputable that those who practice dramaturgy need to be able researchers and historians. But it is equally true that dramaturgs must be agile theatre theorists, deft with the theories of mimesis that frame both the creation and the interpretation of performance. Luckily, the traditional role of "audience-of-one" (Hartley, 22-3) makes the dramaturg uniquely ready to engage this signification/interpretation process, as dramaturgs are trained to see performance from the perspectives of both artist and audience member.

Traditional rehearsal and production practices in my home field of the theatre reinforce notions of the dramaturg as research expert. In turn, dramaturgs—whose traditional production role is that of reliable seeker and arbiter of information—tend to view themselves as conducting research outside the studio, and then bringing what is useful to rehearsal. Working in dance has expanded my idea of where research happens. Since choreographers rely on embodied forms of knowledge in order to transmit and create dances, they tend to frame their time in the studio as research. My work on *Imperial Gesture* inspires me to advocate for choreographers and

dramaturgs alike to conduct research outside and inside the studio, and, moreover, to view both types of research as theory-driven practices that not only yield practical solutions to performance questions, but that contribute to conversations about process from which other artists can benefit. While dramaturgs can and do provide research support to choreographers, we also do well to conduct parallel research processes that influence the project at hand, while contributing to a broader field of inquiry.

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Towards an Aesthetic Dramaturgy

By Adrian Silver

“ . . . he himself walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.”

Nietzsche – *The Birth of Tragedy*, 37

I would like to propose that dramaturgy can be generally understood as the unification of artistic production and consumption and is an inherently political practice and process. Moreover, I contend in a related vein that by examining the historical character of aesthetics, narrative-based dramaturgy becomes but a particular mode of artistic creation and perception. I use Jacques Rancière’s understanding of a common base for both politics and aesthetics, as well as his key concepts of *le partage du sensible* and artistic regimes for viewing and identifying art. With these renovated links between our political and aesthetic experiences, and between the practice of art to the identification of art, I reevaluate the canonical texts of dramaturgy. Examples drawn from the performance practices of Martha Clarke and William Forsythe illustrate this shift. While many scholars, among them Peter Eckersall and Christel Stalpaert, have already been working in this direction, I hope to clarify the vocabulary and lines of thinking that are already being employed. It is not uncommon, despite developments in alternative dramaturgical practices, for certain orthodoxies to remain enmeshed even in the most experimental works. I hope to parse out these lines of thought, allowing for greater freedom of exploration and clarity of discussion and pedagogy.

As dramaturgy has expanded into more varied literary and performance practices, a primary contradiction that demands demystification is the role of narrative in the production and consumption of art. Now that we rely upon narrative neither as the basis for art’s identification nor for the inspiration of its creation, how do we revise its place in practices of reflection and interpretation? The arts have proclaimed their separate autonomies through technical investigation of their own

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means and constitutions, and are in the process of discovering their renewed relationality. This reintegration has prompted new forms of art perception. The shift from Rancière's poetic regime is not limited to reappraisals of the role of narrative: the very function of mimesis is now varied, as is the hierarchy of discursive meaning over conceptions of "presence" and "image." Dramaturgy, traditionally used to describe the structuring of a story, or a storied event, has renewed vigor and seeks new purpose; narrative, in its myriad multiple contexts, frames, and applications, is not alone in cohering or defining a dramaturgy. Accordingly, the terms of coherence must be reevaluated to allow for these new creation and viewing practices. Said differently, what has the coherence of art production and dissemination been, of which narrative is a particular derivation?

To unearth the precise terms of this cohesion, let's examine the multiple resonances of art production and consumption, and explore the theoretical foundations of aesthetics and politics. Deriving both political and aesthetic experience from sensory perception relocates the radical potential of art. Rather than being limited to the didactic or expository, a critical art is also an intercession and reformulation of our everyday aestheto-political experience. Analyzing Aristotle, Lessing, and Brecht through this lens develops a new conception of "dramaturgy," one that does not rely upon narrative structure, but that more precisely unites artistic production and consumption. In this sense, dramaturgy relates to how we create art as practitioners and identify it as spectators. It is the web of relationships connecting the aesthetic and political manifestations of sensory experience through the artist and to the spectator. More fundamentally, the artistic impulses and relationships that Aristotle and Lessing discuss through narrative are evident in other machinations. Brecht's foundational concepts of epic theater and distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) already indicated a reevaluation of underlying relationships between production and spectatorship.

To begin, it is important to note the historical quality of human perception. Our experiences, being of a historical nature, are dialogic with other contemporaneous events and regimes of thought. Our conceptions of all facets of society and categories of knowledge, be they of education, rehabilitation, art, or science, are inextricable from the politicities of their moment of realization.¹ This is fundamental to my discussion for two reasons. First, because human perception, the formulation of a sensible world and how it is conceived by a body politic, becomes the framework for social identity and social reality. Second, the historical quality of perception implies that the ideas yielded by it are equally historical. The term "art," for example, does not denote the same concept now as in earlier periods, and our ideas and recognition of art have changed as well. As will be discussed further, art, as it arises from our unconscious and finds material expression, is a depiction and recognition of identity and reality; dramaturgy, as it connects the production and consumption of art, is therefore the artistic conjoiner of conscious to unconscious, and identity to reality. These relationships must therefore be researched and discussed in relation to the historical and political grounding of perception.

¹ I am attempting to invoke a roughly Foucauldian conception of how categories of knowledge, and knowledge itself, interact with power and specific social structures of power (5). Rather than viewing these various discourses as an unfolding expression, they are systems of positioning subjects and objects, an example is in "The Formation of Enunciative Modalities" (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*).

The centrality of perception and historical relations is developed by Rancière into a theory of *le partage du sensible*, or "the distribution of the sensible." He argues that acts of perception rely upon a configuration of phenomena and circumstance, based on temporalities and spacings, and a worthiness of object. These conditions are either the possibility of sharing (of a collective perception) or the possibility of exclusion. As such, the distribution of the sensible, which includes both of these possibilities, is at once a political and aesthetic matter. The aesthetic conditions of society come to bear directly on political participation. The distribution of the sensible "is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 8). By viewing politics in this way, Rancière relies on the sensible to gain access to the political. The material world, including its institutional constructs and state apparatuses, form part of the distribution of the sensible, limiting the range of perception, eligibility of perceptibility, and even the construction of space and time.

On an individual or personal level, the question of "who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" is especially operative. Each member of a community has a relational experience of being visible or invisible, heard or unheard that is at once aesthetic and political. The inequality suggested here is the formation of non-democratic politics, but also of common experience where certain voices are granted varying degrees of importance. The duality of Rancière's *partage*, the dialectic between formation and division, is thereby reflected on the level of consciousness and knowledge. Our common, aesthetic experience of an agreed-upon world must be recognized within this dialectic. Without it, our common experience of a non-democratic politics is taken as natural. In other words, it is accepted as a form of false consciousness²; both our participation and perception, aesthetically and politically, are implicated by this system of formation and division.

This aesthetic reality of politics almost immediately raises the political reality of aesthetics. If politics "operates upon the transcendental conditions that structure the distribution of the sensible and thus the subjects that inhabit it," what relation, then, does art have to it? (Tanke 12) According to Rancière, artistic practices are ways of doing and making that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making, as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 8). In other words, just as politics intervenes in the aesthetic, so do aesthetics in the political; a work of art, a reconstruction of a sensible world based on aesthetic experience, is also a reconstruction of a political world.

It is in just this sense that the narrative crisis in Martha Clarke's *Chéri* is truly an aesthetic crisis: the title character, cast as a ballet dancer, and his love for Lea, also a ballet dancer, are simply incompatible with the discursive world into which they are supposed to integrate. The lyrical classicism of the two dancers rushing about the waning Belle Époque-inspired set to the lush Impressionist-era piano music of Debussy,

² Despite the unpopularity of the term, I use it here for two reasons: 1) as aesthetics and politics derive significance from the same realm of perception, so art reifies ideology. 2) "Consciousness" must be addressed both as an artistic and political reality, with agency in the production and identification of art and politics.

Ravel, and Mompou, masterfully blended with the commonplace situations and attitudes of lovers, directs the audience's eye not to the dancing or the dramatic situation, but rather to the details of experience; this is not a dance of spectacle, but an aestheticized life. At various points throughout the piece, Chéri's mother, the only verbal character, intrudes upon the stage bearing with her the tidings of narrative, time, and the hierarchies of a transactional world that made the existence of their love, their very way of being, impossible. While the mother's words tear the lovers asunder in a narrative sense, her sheer presence is anathema to their aestheticized world. The two worlds simply cannot coexist. We see physical manifestations of how political reality upsets other modes of creation, thereby suggesting how the tendency towards new modes of creation and perception within artistic practice reflexively inveighs against the formative, established political reality.

Just as art and politics arise from the same conditions of perception, so they are both subject to perception in their identification. While differentiations can be made concerning artistic practices, it is also necessary to discuss how and on what terms a spectator of a given society identifies art. Rancière lays the groundwork for three regimes of the arts: the ethical, poetic, and aesthetic, which are particularly useful in drawing new conclusions. While I do not have space here to elaborate on the various relevances of the ethical and poetic regimes, I would like to explicate my use of "poetic regime" instead of the more common "representative regime." First, I do so because it immediately suggests Aristotle's *Poetics*. Second, because beyond referring to mimetic action (representation), the poetic regime fundamentally privileges the meaning of words and the articulation of meaning attained by the written word. I argue that poetic dramaturgy has this same effect and contrasts with aesthetic dramaturgy. Especially for the purposes here, in which the processes of artistic creation and consumption of performance events are never fully divided, Rancière's logic and terminology are helpful. It is also imperative that both production and consumption be viewed historically; a regime may materialize in a particular moment, and in that sense is historically based, but does not nullify the prior regime which would still exist as a method of aesthetic intelligibility and discourse. Each regime is produced by contradictions within the prior regime.

Of particular importance here, is that within the aesthetic regime the rules concerning what makes art and what art makes are democratized. Art becomes art because it is viewed as such, and so is more a mode of being than a mode of doing. A sculpture, for example,

does not draw its property of being an artwork from the conformity of the sculptor's work to an adequate idea or to the canons of representation... This is what "aesthetics" means: in the aesthetic regime of art, the property of being art is no longer given by the criteria of technical perfection but is ascribed to a specific form of sensory apprehension. (Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* 29)

The techniques of imposing specific forms on specific matter, the equation of form to content, the distillation of binary oppositions (active/passive being perhaps the most menacing) are no longer necessary. This should not suggest, however, that art in the aesthetic regime is further separated from social experience; to the contrary, there is a far more democratic appeal that allows for the image, the non-narrative, even the commodity to give the specific experience which suspends the ordinary connections of appearance and reality. Privileging the ex-

perience over the forces of doing, art in the aesthetic regime has a quite different relation to everyday life. Rancière locates in this new-found equality of subject matter a disruption of the prior regime's distribution of the sensible. It is neither the "death of art" implied by the Romantic notion of subsuming all of life into art, nor the opposite, the effacement of boundaries between art and life. Rather, in continuation of the dialectic between life and art that Schiller explored in Letter XV of *On The Aesthetic Education of Man*, Rancière claims that aesthetic experience is effective inasmuch as it is the experience of "the art of the beautiful and the art of living" (*Aesthetics and Its Discontents* 116). It is precisely the co-presence of art and non-art that guides our aesthetic view and suspends the opposition of the activity of reason and the passivity of sensibility.

Consider the conflicting versions of reality and of art suggested by choreographer William Forsythe in his piece *Three Atmospheric Studies* (2005). The narrative of the piece concerns an Iraqi woman attempting to find out what happened to her son after a bomb explosion. A grieving mother and the destruction after a bombing are also referenced by the reproductions of a painting and a photograph found in the lobby of the auditorium and included in the program notes. The painting is Lukas Cranache's *Lamentation Beneath the Cross* (1503) and the photograph is a Reuter's Press photograph of an exploding building in Iraq, and a dead body being hauled away by police. Both of these images are source material for the dance piece to come, but what is their relationship to each other? One is more clearly a work of art, the other a photo-journalistic depiction of a recent event. One is of a Christian death, the other a Muslim. Can they both be perceived as art? The political reality of each piece is present, and then developed in Forsythe's dance. To which composition does the grieving Iraqi mother belong? The juxtaposition of images establishes a series of questions and relationships between art and non-art, the fictive and the real, that persist through her quest for answers about her son. Further, the spectator is positioned as their mediator. Contemporary aesthetics require a spectator to negotiate where the reality lies, where and how it dialogues with artistic expression. Accordingly, the rupture of everyday experience provides the opportunity to discover new ways of being.

We should not underestimate the power of upsetting the binary of activity and passivity, or of breaking the normative ways of being and making. Artistic practice can be an expression of both the conscious and unconscious inclinations towards such a break. What such an expression demands, however, is a correspondent dramaturgy. Without one, we are not adequately developing the tools of reflection and discourse to understand this shifting terrain, or the practical methods to support the endeavor. As creative practice and spectatorship moves beyond traditional forms, discourses, and vocabularies, so too must we understand the dramaturgy of these practices. This does not mean, however, to reject the practical or theoretical history of performance and dramaturgy. Instead, let us reexamine these practices and find the discontinuities within them. Despite its traditional reliance on the literature of representation, dramaturgy as a functional presence and process must not be limited to the web of hierarchical structures based on representation that we are working to demystify and cast off. As the analysis and understanding of performance practices has developed, particularly in relation to theoretical advancements, so has the need for aesthetic and critical dramaturgy emerged.

While the aesthetic regime reigns in ways of recognizing art that are independent from the practices that create art, we should not ignore the

role of spectatorship established in prior regimes. Let us not forget that the effect of performance and dramatic art on the community at large is definitional in the poetic regime. Theoretically, the groundwork is laid by Aristotle, who not only details how a narrative be best constructed, but also incorporates a spectator's reactions to the work into his very definition of the form. In other words, form is neither separate from art's inception nor from its reception. But how does art, as a theoretical concept, gain pertinence within the poetic regime? Through corresponding forms of production and intelligibility.

As an example of the conflicting relations of production and intelligibility that mark art's dissemination in the poetic regime, let's examine Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. By so doing I hope to simultaneously unpack these relations and also begin a discussion about "dramaturgy," a term frequently used when only certain aspects of it are intended.

One can discern from the preface that *Hamburg Dramaturgy* does not concern itself directly with tragedy or dramatic theory, but with theater management, and that the role of "dramaturg" was founded practically, not solely theoretically. Upon the founding of the Hamburg National Theatre in 1767, Lessing was contracted by "the enterprising director of what was to have been the first permanent German theatre devoted to the performance of serious European plays and supported by a group of Hamburg business men" (vii). Lessing was very aware of the opportunity this presented, though not clear on what role he would, or was able, to play. In his preface he remarks that "the best managers have degraded a free art to the level of a trade which permits its master to carry on the business as negligently and selfishly as he likes if only necessity or luxury bring him customers." In response, "an association of friends of the stage have laid their hands to the work and have combined to work according to a common plan for the public good...out of this first change, even with only meagre encouragement from the public, all other improvements needed by our theatre could quickly and easily spring" (2). While the founding of a theater by a wealthy director and a group of businessmen would not mark a shift in today's theater—and, indeed, Lessing's theories are also in want of historical perspective—it is imperative that what follows is properly framed by a managerial and financial architecture of the theater. And so, as neither actor nor poet, but armed with a vision for dramatic art and emboldened by a modernized relations of financial and managerial production, Lessing becomes the first named dramaturg.

In contradiction to the view that an orthodox dramaturgy is solely the imposition of structure or an external influence, and that it is one and the same with the oblique unity of narrative, throughout *Hamburg Dramaturgy* Lessing articulates what he hopes theater to become. It is at once the position that mediates production, rife with managerial and financial implications, and the directive towards a new theater. Prescient of the current application of dramaturgy, Lessing wrote widely on the valuation of process over product, the search for truth over "possession" of it. It has not been insignificant for the subsequent history of dramaturgy that Lessing's criticism found in Aristotle a "plumb-line" (263). The consolidation of Aristotelian doctrine and the role of dramaturgy in relations of production in a theater was thus sealed.

As Aristotle claims, the plot, or "the structure of the incidents" is most important. The poetic regime is primarily concerned with the imitation of actions, not of people. What, then, is the relationship between the artist and the material chosen as fodder for art? "In constructing the

plot and working it out with the proper diction, the poet should place the scene, as far as possible, before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the utmost vividness, as if he were a spectator of the action" (*Poetics* XVII). Re-imagining the artist as a spectator of the action has a few implications. First, it is the artist's senses (it should occur before his eyes) that ensure the plausibility of the plot. Second, for a brief moment the artist stands in an analogous position to the material as the audience to the presented work.

To the first point, the structure of incidents must be plausible. An audience must find the presented imitation to be a possible eventuality according to their sensible experience (*Poetics* IX). Embedded within the mimetic act is the presentation of an agreed upon "real world" defined by a common sensible experience. The artistic work is, however, still an imitation, and need not (should not, according to Aristotle) have actually occurred. The witnessing of an event that has not occurred, and the subsequent structuring of that event specific to the work of art are elements of non reality that may be termed "fictive," as they are acts of imagination and crucial to identifying what we are seeing as a work of art and not real. The imitation of action consists then in an interplay between a real world based on sensory experience, and a fictive world based on imagination.

The spectator is also named as a substantive player in the definition of tragedy. Rather than parsing form into an autonomous entity, the form itself requires a specific intended reaction in the fulfillment of its definitional grounds. According to Aristotle, a tragedy must inspire fear and pity. Fear is instilled "by the misfortune of a man like ourselves" (*Poetics* XIII). By locating a character who is similar to how we view ourselves, a character with whom we can identify, we are locating an element of the real, which is an aspect of ourselves, within the fictive. Some aspect of ourselves has been translated into the fictive realm of art. This identification is now based on both an adequation of reality as we know it and of who we are. Identifying "the real" is critical, without which there is no tension between the real and the fictive and the response is not generated.

Pity is best produced by "unmerited misfortune," which is to say that the actions and qualities of a character should not have caused the events that then befall him. The character is the passive agent, not that she does not perform actions, but that the action of the story was not in her control. Here we see that Aristotle's structure of tragedy is reliant on the spectator's identification with the passive.

Now to the second point in the construction of a plot, that the artist stands for a brief moment as a spectator to the raw material that will be shaped into a work of art. Following from the reversal of active/passive already discussed, here the spectator becomes an active participant, actively watching and identifying, locating himself, his community, and the happenings of this community within a fictional world. The artist, then, is not the sole speaking voice. It is just such an argument that Bakhtin makes for Dostoyevsky's work. A novel in its entirety may be seen as an utterance of the author, but what "the characters say constitutes an arena of never-ending struggle with others' words, in all realms of life and creative ideological activity" (349). The characters respond to the various discourses that populate the world of the novel. This includes what characters say about each other, their ethical judgments, and the unresolved/unresolvable ideological world views. From the vantage point of the artist-as-spectator, the material then ren-

dered as “art” is variously a statement of holy or ethical resonance, of reality/social narrative, and even the aesthetic constitution of reality and ourselves. Each of these, by virtue of the distance between artist and subject, suggests a connection to the material that is not limited to the intellectual and sensual modalities only.³ Each involves an imagining, an ethereal link to what is already “known.” Art, then, through the presence of an unconscious mind, establishes a new connection to the same reality, a reality whose unity was created by perception; this new connection, or re-perception of reality, may disturb or reinforce the original.

Nietzsche explores just this proposition in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Through the paradox of creation, he finds unity through contradiction. The duplicity of reality and dreams, or reality and intoxication, parallels the subject/object dialectic; through the renegotiation of subject/object, identity of artist in relation to the material of his work, his inspiration, the conscious and unconscious discussed here begin to correspond to the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. In the fifth section he discusses how the Dionysian artist—alternately the unconscious, the self-speaking subject—does not use images, but enacts primordial pain itself and its primordial reechoing. The dreamer, however, lives in images and is protected from the reality of his characters and scenes. In contrast, the images of the Dionysian artist are nothing but himself. The enactment of self, or the invocation of “I” does not refer to the sober, waking version of himself, but rather the portion of self that is embedded in and is constituted by reality. This leads to the subject of the artist’s efforts to emerge as a fully realized artistic expression. “For it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified.” (52) In the act of creation the artist becomes subject and object, poet, actor, and spectator.

Thus we have the translation of an inspiration that may constitute an unconscious thought, some hint of the artistic mind, to a communicable idea that is recognizable to an audience; this translation, derived from a common sensible reality, exerts a normalizing influence on the idea itself. In such a way was every art form considered mimetic, an imitation of an idea or an action. Even this division, however, should not be left unscrutinized. The unconscious mind may well itself be structured by the same distribution of the sensible that structures experience. In a parallel fashion, structure may not be immediately perceived and interpreted by a spectator, but apprehended subliminally.

The duality of the unconscious, from the unconscious artist and its persistence in the unconscious spectator, is not without precedent; the depoliticized view of art, that of art’s autonomy from real life processes and structures of power and oppression, frequently relies on the occurrence of this duality. Here, however, I suggest quite the opposite. The structured unconscious is reflective of the same reality, and so it is through dreams, art, and unconscious actions that we can glean the potential of future perception and action. The contradiction between the unconscious and conscious, not as oppositional forces in themselves, but as an expression of how an intangible, such as a thought, impulse, imagining, etc., is substantiated in a communal reality. Through this

passage from unconscious to conscious, the intangible is thereby reordered, or restructured, multiple times, and becomes embedded within the work of art itself.

Lessing makes a similar claim himself in discussing how the “rules” or structures of dramatic composition are internal to the artist. Not being limited by rules, a genius also has the proof of rules within himself (*Hamburg Dramaturgy* Essay 96). The structures are not an externally imposed apparatus, but an unconscious development. At the same time, however, he contends that “[t]o act with a purpose is what raises man above the brutes, to invent with a purpose, to imitate with a purpose, is what distinguishes genius from the petty artists who only invent in order to invent, imitate in order to imitate” (*Hamburg Dramaturgy* Essay 34). To act with a purpose, or restated in the vocabulary employed here, an action of the conscious mind, serves to separate the genius artist from the petty as well. Again we fall upon the same dialectic. Rather than viewing art as singularly an act of conscious will and craft, or the opposite, as the pure fancy of an unconscious creativity, it is both. While it is more convenient to associate structure and rules (and dramaturgy itself) with externally-imposed conscious thought, and “genius” with the unconscious, Lessing rightly allows for a more complex understanding.

These instabilities between narrative structure, a common sensible world, the unconscious, and larger forms of control are the contradictions of the poetic regime that lead to its rupture. Brecht’s writing is illustrative of just this point: while still concerned with narrative and narrative structure, he notes its limitations and begins to reformulate its basic elements. “Even to dramatize a simple newspaper report one needs something much more than the dramatic technique of a Hebbel or an Ibsen . . . It is impossible to explain a present-day character by features or a present-day action by motives that would have been adequate in our father’s time” (Brecht 30).⁴ Brecht’s dramaturgy marked a deviation from Aristotle, but the precise nature of this deviation comes alongside points of accordance. Seen through the vocabulary developed here, Brecht’s advances are twofold: a new conflation of the ethical and poetic regimes, and a recognition of “the real” beyond mimetic action which reflects a passage into the aesthetic.⁵ Further, the distantiation effect can be most easily understood within the same relationships that we have already discussed: those within the work’s production, and those within its recognition.

As per the first point, how the ethical and the poetic are revisited, the shift of regimes implies a shift from the conception of Idea to material in shared reality. Similar to Marx’s view that both the genus (universal) and the species are contained within each individual, Brecht saw the contemplative/rational within the mind of each spectator. Rather than aspiring towards an Idea essentially unattainable, Brecht proposed (oddly prescient of Rancière) that the Idea is contained within each individual, and not separate, and is therefore subject to the critical faculty

³ “It is a labour in vain to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die” (Proust 47-48).

⁴ It is interesting that here Brecht points out the incompatibility of dramatic technique with his contemporary reality, character, and discourse. It is not simply subject matter that cannot be commensurated with the poetic regime, but larger ways of being and making.

⁵ Richard Schechner has noted that the transition from text-based to production dramaturgy began with Brecht. While I am not actually convinced of this, I think the concordance of my proposition of locating a “real” outside of the poetic paradigm with his non-textual dramaturgy is interesting, both being based on a previously unaccounted for sensual experience.

of the spectator. The fact that the Idea does not exist at that historical moment is ultimately his purpose: the impetus towards change is derived from a cognition of the world that does not align with a common understanding of its present state. Rather than this new Idea being a reflection of an ontologically prior Idea, it is the opposite, one that creates its own ethos.⁶

Aristotelian structure is only effectively operative in so far as the spectator can recognize the interconnections between the work of art and the broader socio-historical reality. The struggle of the individual is understood in relation to larger states of society, represented on stage either literally or by structural presence. The narrative must drive the story to a certain conclusion, as already discussed, but the story of the individual is not privileged over the larger narrative. It is a reappraisal of both the genus/species dichotomy and the subscriptive genres of each. As Aristotle replaced the order of the Idea with the order of society, which then becomes transparent when held before the order of poetic art, Brecht exposes the machinery of both. The duality of thinking and sensing in the spectator prompts us to scrutinize both the processes of the poetic regime and the social order. It is to this contradiction between the narrative of the individual and the larger narrative and circumstance of society that his term “epic theater” refers, which, revealingly, is not rooted in the verbiage of politics, but poetics.

Rather than being led along unconscious to the unfolding of narrative and ideology, the Brechtian spectator is made more aware and more critical of both art and the world around her. The reversals indicated here, thought in the place of emotion, judgment in place of stultification, are executed in the distancing effect.

Distancing, or alienation, refers both to the actor from the part being acted, as well as the audience from the performance being experienced. Through this technique, the actor may illustrate his or her own opinions of the subject matter, and not attempt to lose individual identity to mimetic action. The audience, too, is not fully emotional, but pensive. There is self-awareness of spectator as spectator, actor as actor; both are individuals with shared experience outside the theater, and neither are subsumed in the performance by their reciprocal roles.⁷ What this duplicity also engenders is a radically new point of identification. The actor, apart from and regardless of mimetic action is now a touchstone for the audience. The person from everyday life is now suddenly subject to the lens of art’s identification, and the spectator identifies with an aspect of “the real” not based on mimetic action. The intrusion of non-mimetic action does not disturb the lens, but rather is assimilated into it. By virtue of the *distanciation* effect both actors and spectators are granted a degree of volition denied under strict dramatic theater. Brecht’s dramaturgy, then, is one that repositions the performer’s and the spectator’s points of identification.

This has various implications for the current state of dramaturgy. Our

⁶ Rancière makes an interesting observation that “the encounter Brecht proposed, of politics and its supposed audience (workers conscious of the capitalist system) never took place, which means that its suitability to its militant referent was never really tested” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 58).

⁷ Early Marx noted self-consciousness as a basic human characteristic. The simultaneous instancing of the individual and the community, man and Man both existing in each individual, is present in Brechtian theater both on stage in the actor’s relation to the narrative and implied larger social mechanisms, and off the stage in the spectator’s contemplation.

original conception of dramaturgy is now complicated: narrative and form are more rightly understood as one expression of the artistic process based on a reframing of “the real” and how this framing finds identification by a spectator. Negotiating this relationship, between the unfolding form surrounding and supporting the points of identification is more precisely the definition of dramaturgy. Rather than narrative, which is but one form and development of this relationship, and rather than structure, which is itself historical and at times unconscious, dramaturgy is a more central and complex site. As regards the unconscious, one possibility is that dramaturgy, as it appeals to structure, must evenly address the unconscious in its exertions, and a second is that it does not actually bridge the gap between unstructured and structured, but actually between conscious and unconscious minds, leaving structure to play upon both. It also suggests that Brecht’s distancing effect is not only applicable to the spectator but to the artist as well, a conversation already in motion surrounding the role of “a dramaturg.”

Artistic practice since Brecht has meant further elaborations of these ideas. The concept of “presence,” allowing the performer to exist on stage without mimetic action, and an integration of the “discontinuous” clearly stem from this base. As has been noted, rather than the point of identification resting in the fictive, in the character or events portrayed, it is with the performer and the performer’s presence. Peter Eckersall makes a similar comment in his article on “Slow Dramaturgy,” in which he notes that the performers shift between authentic reality and theatrical elements, and that the spectator’s attention is drawn to these shifting, often multiple presences. (Eckersall 7) Even earlier, this sentiment was suggested by Lehmann⁸ in his seminal work on postdramatic theater. According to him, the break from traditional, illusion-based mimetic theater gives “preference to presence over representation” (109). And further, dramatic theater

... wanted to construct a fictive cosmos... the principle that what we perceive in the theatre can be referred to as a “world,” i.e., to a totality. Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model “drama”. . . Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art. (22)

Embedded within these examples expounding upon the “real,” or an aspect of reality located within the scope of art identification, and the discontinuity of negating the regulating principle of consistent narrative and multiple presences of each performer, there is a contradiction. Juxtaposing aesthetic experience and real life promotes a further contradiction: the impossibility of attaining a singular conception of theatrical art.

Aesthetic dramaturgy is how work organizes and coheres based on other forms of experience and contemplation (theory, source material, specific artistic processes and practices, reflection, etc.). The shift from poetic to aesthetic dramaturgy is not based on an exclusion of narrative, but rather the engagement of additional principles of production and recognition. The imitation of action, narrative structure, and even the

⁸ Lehmann disagrees with my contention that this work follows from Brecht: “What Brecht achieved can no longer be understood one-sidedly as a revolutionary counter-design to tradition...it becomes increasingly apparent that [...] the theory of epic theatre constituted a renewal and completion of classical dramaturgy” (33).

domination of the meaning of words over images are reevaluated in the aesthetic regime. Images and multiple presences constitute a new form of dramaturgy based on aesthetic experience.

Where we locate artists, dramaturgs, and spectators in relation to art is a fundamental contemporary question—it moves the aestheticization of process itself, and the relation between process and product, to the fore. I would argue that this is also a danger, however, because overly aestheticizing process, as we have seen with other treatments of labor and character, de-historicizes and removes it from its actual relations.⁹ That concern aside, it is clear that the current functions of “dramaturgs,” despite being insecure about how to define “dramaturgy,” are multiple and far-reaching. From guiding reflection sessions to sharing source material, from finding overlap with theoretical and critical discourses to discussing compositional and narrative presences, dramaturgs are revitalizing the relationships previously confined to narrative. As in the work of Martha Clarke, source material, particularly from artistic genres outside of her own, does not exert a simplistic influence but becomes the basis for aesthetic structure. *Garden of Earthly Delights* may be the best known and most explicit in this regard, but it has also been part of her practice on other recent pieces such as *Chéri* and *Threepenny Opera* (The Atlantic Theater, 2014). The relevance of theoretical investigation in embodied movement practices shifts the points of identification from the fictive (the character), to the real (the performer), then even to the abstract (the theoretical). Each of these functions asks the same questions: where do we locate ourselves in the work, and of what are we conscious?

What we learn from this excursion into the theoretical history of dramaturgy is that while narrative/imitation itself may appear to have been the focal point, it is in fact a particular machination of more fundamental relationships. This connection lends perspective to the diversity of roles currently played by dramaturgs, and gives further agency to the dramaturgy of critical art. The present tension between a spectator’s ability to locate art beyond narrative and an adherence to narrative as the primary structuring force of art compromises the scope and depth of dramaturgy as an artistic and reflective process. Similarly, the engagement of a pure aesthetics as separate from real world experience, which is highly structured, is equally unproductive. What is productive is an aesthetic dramaturgy that follows and develops the presences and images of our common sensible world and potentially kindles the perception of a spectator inured to inequality.

⁹ Interestingly, in a manner rather happily inconsistent with his writings, in an interview André Lepecki mentioned receiving the title of “dramaturge” once “it became part of the institution of production,” once “one is getting a fee, etc., you have to have a name for what you do” (*Dance Dramaturgy: Speculations and Reflections*).

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