



PERSONA

ECOLOGIAS DRAMATÚRGICAS NA CRIAÇÃO EM DANÇA: UMA CONVERSA

*ECOLOGIES OF DRAMATURGY IN DANCE
CREATION: A CONVERSATION*

*ECOLOGÍAS DE LA DRAMATURGIA EN LA
CREACIÓN DE DANZA: UNA CONVERSACIÓN*

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RESUMO

Angelique Willkie é Jamaicana, Preta, dançarina mulher cisgênero e dramaturga. Dois interesses paralelos emergiram gradualmente ao longo de sua carreira – a contribuição do performer ao processo criativo, e a dinâmica da operação necessariamente colaborativa que é a coreografia contemporânea. Esta entrevista com a artista-pesquisadora reporta sua experiência artística e o processo criativo da obra *Confession Publique*, ao qual ela ocupa a posição triádica de dramaturga, dançarina e pesquisadora auto-etnógrafa, compondo uma conversa dialógica entre artistas interdisciplinares e pesquisadores do projeto *Dramaturgical Ecologies* (sediado na Concordia University, CA). Para além de uma entrevista, este projeto polivocal-centrado nos temas de agenciamento, dramaturgia, corporalização e movimento–migrou do físico para o virtual, respondendo a reconfiguração biopolítica causada pela pandemia do COVID-19. Esta transição ativou tensões e ressonâncias no diálogo que se tornaram limitações facilitadoras, onde os corpos envolvidos na pesquisa se tornaram parte da co-composição dramaturgical do processo de escrita deste texto. O resultado está distribuído nas páginas que seguem, tomando forma de uma escrita performativa dialógica-reflexiva, criada a partir de um processo de pensamento coletivo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

dramaturgia; ecologia; corporalização; criação em dança e agenciamento.

ABSTRACT

Angélique Willkie is a Jamaican-born, Black, cisgender woman dancer and dramaturg. Two parallel interests have gradually emerged over the course of her professional career—the performer’s contribution to the creative process, and the dynamics of the necessarily collaborative operation that is contemporary choreography. The interview with this artist-scholar explores her experiences in the creative process of the dance performance, *Confession Publique*, for which she occupies the triadic role of dramaturg, dancer and auto-ethnographic researcher. It is a dialogical conversation amongst interdisciplinary artists and researchers of the *Dramaturgical Ecologies* project (housed at Concordia University, CAN). Beyond an interview, this polyvocal project—centred around themes of agency, dramaturgy, embodiment, and movement—migrated from the physical to the virtual in response to the biopolitical reconfiguration engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic. This transition activated tensions and resonances in the dialogue. The result takes the form of a reflective, performative text crafted through a collective thinking process.

KEYWORDS:

dramaturgy; ecology; embodiment; dance creation; agency.

RESUMEN

Angélique Willkie es jamaicana, Negra, bailarina, cisgénero y dramaturga. A lo largo de su carrera han ido surgiendo gradualmente dos intereses paralelos: la contribución de la intérprete al proceso creativo y la dinámica de la operación necesariamente colaborativa que es la coreografía contemporánea. Esta entrevista con la artista-investigadora informa sobre su experiencia artística y el proceso creativo de la obra *Confession Publique*, en la que ocupa la posición triádica de dramaturga, bailarina y auto-etnógrafa, componiendo una conversación dialógica entre artistas interdisciplinarios e investigadores del proyecto *Dramaturgical Ecologies* (con sede en la Universidad de Concordia, CA). Además de una entrevista, este proyecto multivocal -centrado en los temas de agencia, dramaturgia, corporalización y movimiento- ha migrado de lo físico a lo virtual, respondiendo a la reconfiguración biopolítica causada por la pandemia de COVID-19. Esta transición activó tensiones y resonancias en el diálogo que se convirtieron en limitaciones facilitadoras, donde los organismos involucrados en la investigación pasaron a formar parte de la co-composición dramática del proceso de redacción de este texto. El resultado se distribuye en las páginas siguientes, tomando la forma de una escritura performativa dialógica-reflexiva, creada a partir de un proceso de pensamiento colectivo.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

dramaturgia; ecología; corporalización; creación de danza y agencia.



INTRODUCTION

MY CURIOSITY about my own artistic practice and the contexts in which it has evolved has fueled this research project. I am a Jamaican-born, Black, cisgender woman dancer and dramaturg. Over the course of a 30-year career in European concert-dance, two parallel interests have emerged: first, the performer's contribution to the creative outcome, and second, the dynamics of the necessarily collaborative operation that is contemporary choreography. Those interests are at the root of the questions being asked by the research group Dramaturgical Ecologies,¹ which focuses its inquiry on the dramaturgical potential of the performing body and its impact on collaborative agencies. The choreographic project that is the focus of this interview, *Confession Publique*, provides us the opportunity to engage directly with a creative process, allowing us to deepen our understanding and our thinking *through* the specific explorations and relations inherent to that process. Montreal choreographer Mélanie Demers (MD), with the assistance of rehearsal director Anne-Marie Jourdenais (AJ), is commissioned to create a full-evening solo performance taking my embodied stories as its point of departure. The title *Confession Publique* emerged during initial conversations between MD and myself and the realization that we shared certain autobiographical similarities. Confessions and confessional situations fed by my own intimacies and lived experience became the point of departure for choreographic exploration. It is the very beginnings of this creative process that

1 Dramaturgical Ecologies is a 3-year project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Fonds de Recherche du Québec—Société et Culture. Special acknowledgement goes to Dramaturgical Ecologies members Mariana Marcassa and Carlos Eduardo Mello who participated in the initial stages of the interview that gave rise to this article.

have given rise to this interview. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic imposed a national quarantine that subsequently halted this initial phase of *Confession Publique* after only one week of rehearsal. The investigations and explorations continued virtually between myself and the research team in the form of regular online conversations and the forcibly layered interventions of a “Google Doc interview” so that, ultimately, the interrupted creative process of the performance engendered the creative undertaking that is this collaborative academic article.

Dramaturgical Ecologies—the collective authors of this article—is a research-creation project based at Concordia University in Montreal, of which I am Principal Investigator, supported by an interdisciplinary team of seven artist-researcher assistants. The fundamental premise anchoring the research is that the body of the performer is not a blank canvas; rather, it is the locus of personal, cultural and political inscriptions that have societal signification and dramaturgical potential that not only contribute to creative and artistic outcomes, but also speak to the hierarchies and power dynamics of the choreographic endeavor. Moving back and forth between the microcosm of the creative process and the macrocosm of its context, Dramaturgical Ecologies seeks to use that process as a thinking mechanism for understanding how different layers of agency reside in bodies, how they are expressed through gesture and re-performed across time and space, how gestural coordination may engender collective bodies and dramaturgies, and what spaces are available for these bodies.

Though Dramaturgical Ecologies is fundamentally rooted in my concerns around embodied histories in dance creation and the place of my/a (black) body in (white) contemporary dance, global events of the first half of 2020 have brought these concerns into sharp focus. Pandemic measures have imposed disembodied virtuality onto both the embodied creative process of *Confession Publique* as well as the embodied thinking practice in which we the authors of this article engage. Further, the murder of African American George Floyd at the hands of a member of an American police force and the cumulative effect of global racial violence around the world have brought racist gesture to the international forefront, exacerbating calls to challenge the white supremacist and colonial hierarchies that continue to govern the agency of (black) bodies and the place of blackness in contemporary Western society.

At a microcosmic level, these events have also impacted the performing arts; with specific reference to contemporary dance, questions abound regarding the origins

of the art form, the bodies that have been its signatories, whose and what stories the art form represents and who enjoys access to its processes, outcomes, and privileges. The field has been thrust into a global existential crisis provoked by the economic inviability resulting from ongoing pandemic measures, and the crisis of content provoked by the call for decolonization of choreographic aesthetics and pedagogical practices in dance.

The interview that follows does not address these issues directly. However, the backdrop has affected our sensibilities, our bodies, our questions. The inability to meet in person has imposed an inhabitual temporality and layers of polyvocal thinking onto the interview process, manifesting in back and forth interventions of our respective voices spread over several months. Anti-black racism has raised the stakes in any discussion of the agency and embodied dramaturgy of a black body in choreographic creation, and even in my role here as both the subject of study and principal researcher amongst a group of white research assistants. The interview cannot therefore be separated from its secondary role as medium for thinking through the current context; it must be read as a first step in understanding the conceptual buttresses of the project and the ways in which they will guide further investigation.

This writing is in itself an ecological circumstance. It is anchored in the slipperiness of my role as subject of study and research leader, and in the modes of thinking imposed and facilitated by Zoom platforms and Google Docs. We make no attempt to resolve or sanitize the discomforts of this blurriness - that dimension is also the content of the article. I have written the introduction; the research assistants Haley Baird, Dana Dugan, Vanessa Montesi, Matthew-Robin Nye, Melina Scialom and Christian Scott (RAs) have written the conclusion. The body of the article holds our collective thinking and, yet, we are all present in all of it. We have explored the rigor of an ecological practice that is by nature slippery, messy, shifting, interdependent. What unfolds is necessarily incomplete, a snapshot of where we sit in a process: methods, terminologies, concepts have been experienced in our bodies but are yet to be fully formulated. Using dramaturgy as both lens and tool (perspective and method), this conversation is a performative glimpse into our shared inquiries and understandings...

Angélique Willkie (AW)

FIRST PHRASE

RA: In the role of dancer, how do you invest in this work?

DD: *How do these investments feed, inform, and influence your agency in this context? How are these materially and immaterially manifested in the dramaturgy?*

For me, I think such investments are about my subjective self. As a dancer they include technique, that is, my training in body (and mind!) and my distillation and synthesis of it. These include my movement impulses, the way my body processes movement and seeks to understand through movement. Forcibly, it also includes my injuries which have generated limitations that have become part of my physical expression and explorations. My “secrets” as shared during the process: personal stories and sensibilities. My ability (and willingness!) to “believe” and integrate other elements that don’t come from my stories or experience and make them my own, fill them in with my own experience. My desire to continue performing and participating in a creative process in that capacity—in spite of feeling confronted with unfamiliar methods and unsuccessful results. My curiosity about what I have to say as a performer at this stage in my career. My experience as a performer and the fact that I know I can rely on those skills and sensibilities to carry the ultimate performance. They allow me to engage even when I’m feeling lost and/or insecure in the material or with the indications.

VM: *Here there seems to be both constrained agency and agency deriving from constraints. Is there a dramaturgy of intimacy and proximity which reveals difficulties, injuries and uneasy places as part of the shared secrets and confessions?*

CS: *I find it interesting to bring forward the idea of injury—how does it relate to agency as well as the traces and gestures it leaves on the body?*

Thinking of agency in the sense of Noland,² there's something about the repetition of gestures over the years and the relationship to injury—either as the cause or as a result of it. The other thing that comes to mind is whether those repeated injury-related gestures are conscious or unconscious and how that aspect relates to agency. When I thought of exploring the performer's embodied dramaturgy, that was one of the things I had in mind: to also explore the difficulties or less evident places of ease. What do they tell about the performer's story? How can they be used in the context of other thematic explorations?

VM: *Injuries speak to embodied agency. It becomes difficult to disentangle this form of agency from others that AW mentions above. For example, the willingness to participate in the process, the agency regarding which of her own secrets to share or how, etc.*

HB: *Secrets had a thematic purchase in Confession Publique. One of the points of departure for the piece was the idea of AW sharing her secrets (as public confession). Interestingly however, these secrets didn't exclusively belong to AW, because MD and AJ also contributed to them. For example, MD was encouraging AW to use the so-called 'royal we' to share her secrets as a confessional. Instead of 'we are crazy bitches' she wanted AW to say 'we are a crazy bitch', speaking from the point of view of the singular-plural pronoun. For me, this speaks to the complexities of agency, voice, and plurality in the piece.*

RA: **What is your investment as a dramaturg?**

My interest in the theme, in MD's approach, in the nature (form and content) of my performer input. Ultimately, as a dramaturg in this project, there is very little hands-on intervention. Some discussion took place before the studio work started but both the preparation for this phase and the phase itself have essentially excluded any specific contribution from me in my role as "dramaturg". That said, I'm aware that the dramaturgy of the piece is emerging in part from the process itself. Initial

2 Carrie Noland (2009, p. 2) examines the agency inherent to the body and its gestures and the way in which the performance of gestures embodies and/or challenges (an) established culture. Arguing for the centrality of the kinesthetic experience as a source of agency, she questions the cultural inscription of the body and proposes that its conditioning may be transformed by the gestures it embodies: "[...] gestures, learned techniques of the body, are the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to the test [...]".

discussions with MD absolutely included broader dramaturgical considerations—about roles, about her willingness to lend herself and her creation to the exercise, about components of my dramaturgy, about authorship, creative impulses and inspiration material which usually comes from her, etc. We also talked about the potential challenges of me having both roles. As the discussions evolved, what became clear was that, in her words, in order to do the experiment of starting from and creating with “my dramaturgy”, the rest of the context needed to be as close as possible to what MD’s habitual conditions of creation would be, for example AJ’s presence as rehearsal director, and her choosing of collaborators (music, lights, costume).

It was in the context of these conversations that we ended up with *Confession Publique* as the idea for the piece and from there, MD proposed the closed circle of chairs around this very intimate performance space. The chairs are arranged in a closed circle around me so that I have to negotiate always having my back to someone, always being seen, being visible to the public, never able to “hide”—a very public intimacy! The mics also contribute to this contradictory amplification of intimacy (*confession très publique!*). We also talked about the possibility of performing in a museum which came from my own interest in gallery and museum spaces and the questioning that already exists in the dance world about bodies on display, movement arts in those spaces, the relationship to viewers versus spectators, and the colonial origins of the museum. As a child of the colonies, I’m particularly interested in confronting that as well, so it came out in conversation and was pursued accordingly.

RA: How do you experience the performance space during creation?

Where do different agencies assert themselves in the space? How does the use of space in the rehearsal studio affect or reflect the roles of dancer/dramaturg in relation to the other individuals and their roles?

It’s true that in the context of the creation, space takes on a very particular aspect. I almost never go into the space that MD occupies outside. It’s not a question of territory so much as not needing to see the performance space from that point of view in any continuous way. However, she not only needs to see that space from the outside, but her direction of what I do there also travels through her

own body, both in terms of the actual movement material and the eventual relationship to the spectators. So that “turf” of the performer is mine, yes, but early in the creation it’s a space that MD occupies/visits as well. As the performance takes shape, it will be increasingly mine and there will be less and less need for her to experience her own movement through her own body in that space. Rather, she will progressively need to see my body negotiate that space more and more.

DD: For me, this directly speaks to agency through the idea of turf, occupying, visiting and transferring from one body to another.

For my part as performer (not so much as dramaturg), my relationship to the space is as much one of territory (for example, the inside of the circle being my turf so to speak) as of exposure and vulnerability. So that also reflects how I relate to the performance/creation space in general. For me, my capacity to be vulnerable to the audience is also, in fact, my strength as a performer. So, in a way, that’s my place of agency. I’m aware though that during the creative process, when I’m still searching and questioning to find both form and content, that space is also rife with insecurities that I also seek to escape from time to time during rehearsals.

VM: Agency as enacted in and related to spacetime.

CS: Very interesting that you identify vulnerability as your ‘place of agency’.

I decide how much of “me” I tap into, especially in the moment of performance. By that I mean going to my own emotional sources to feed or, better said, anchor the material that I’m performing in my real experience. That way, I “live” whatever I’m experiencing as truly as possible. That’s what I mean by vulnerability—a place of a certain emotional nakedness. I’m aware that I am empowered there; I see the capacity to go to that place as a tool of agency on stage. Of course, it doesn’t only happen there. I also need to cultivate it during the explorations and improvisations.

HB: At times, during the rehearsals, MD was trying to get AW to embody a movement quality which seemed ‘less controlled’. I noticed the notion of the secret came up again as

MD described this ‘less controlled’ quality of movement as if it resembled AW’s embodied discovery of ‘the secret that you are to yourself’. I think this speaks to vulnerability and agency in this piece.

vm: How do you think this difference between insecurities and vulnerability (as strength) relates to gaze and the agency you give to it? I am thinking here of Sartre and the three ontological dimensions of a body as: the body as known by me; the body of others as known by me; and my apprehension of my body as known by others. Do you think there is a prevalence of one of those bodies over the other(s) in the creative process and in the performance? Also, what is the agency of the ‘body of others as known by you’? In your article ‘Authentic as Opposed to What?’ (WILLKIE, 2016), you mention your awareness of different audiences and how this informs you in terms of how they will receive your body and their expectations.

I think I am honestly playing back and forth constantly between those three ontologies of the body. In creation, I’m definitely exploring my body as known by me and the boundaries of that, trying continually to push them in response to my own curiosities (gaze!) as well as the propositions (and gaze) of the choreographer. I’m not always dealing with the body of others during the creative process—that depends on the nature of the work and whether or not I’m trying to know the choreographer’s body/gestures/movement through my own exploration. However, on stage I am constantly engaging with what I “know” of the body (individual and collective) of the audience. It’s that negotiation of “knowings” that is intimate, confronting, vulnerable and powerful. The apprehension of them knowing me is also present of course. In fact, I think it’s precisely because that apprehension is so present in our culture that the ability to open oneself to the gaze (that emotional nakedness) becomes a place of “power” and agency.

I think the insecurities are more related to my own apprehensions about my own body as known mostly by myself! And of course, as a consequence, by the gaze I attribute to others. In this way, I give agency to the gaze of others as seen through

my own. My sensation of vulnerability as strength is related mostly to the apprehensions I might feel about the gaze of others (and my own!) and defying them. Inherent in that strength (not necessarily vulnerability) is also the conviction that my knowing of other bodies will manifest through my own body (for example, I can communicate with a certain universality). Just rereading this I realize there is much to be gleaned from the investigation of the agency of the gaze, but by pulling apart the notion of gaze itself—whose and on what/whom?

DD: *For me, this plays into the performativity of embodied dramaturgy or subjective investments. Performativity in relation to the larger context outside of the performance speaks to a kind of political agency.*

VM: *A negotiation of agency with the public? I believe that this has to do with the agency of gazes and ontologies of bodies as given above. You can't look back when you are giving your back, so in a way that leads to more exposure, the acceptance of a gaze on you that cannot be reciprocated.*

MS: *A negotiation which, because of our presence, happens early in the process, when it would 'normally' happen more during the moment of performance.*

DD: *When thinking of the audience as a consideration in distributed agency, does the audience exist in process or only in performance?*

RAs: **What about your investment as a dancer with an embodied dramaturgy?**

I'm not sure to what extent there is any real separation between me as a dancer and me as a dancer with an embodied dramaturgy. In the context of *Confession Publique*:

My age

My gender

My ethnicity

Technical and performance abilities

My injuries

My authentic movement & interpretation styles

Being English-speaking

Speaking French without having it in my cells

My education, my cultural context

My insecurities

MN: *Does such a distinction exist? Is a dancer without an embodied dramaturgy possible?*

MS: *I would see it as her consciousness of these characteristics. Many dancers go without such consciousness, thus not having access to an embodied dramaturgy.*

DD: *So, in order to have an embodied dramaturgy, there must be a certain awareness? How does this play into embodied agency? Can agency exist without consciousness?*

MS: *My understanding is that when a performer is conscious of their physical characteristics, movement preferences, memory, inheritances, backgrounds, etc., they can address them deliberately in performance-making (both the performer as well as the choreographer or maker). This deliberate activity reveals the body's dramaturgy. This is similar to Eugenio Barba's (1997) concept of the actor's dramaturgy where the composition is strongly based on the actor's subjective investment, which determines their presence on stage. But if the dancer/actor/choreographer/maker/director is unaware or uninterested in the performer's investment and seeks material (movement, actions, sound) that is indepen-*

*dent from the performer's own body dramaturgy, then this dramaturgy is not a factor that influences and/or feeds into the making.*³

I think embodied dramaturgy is also about the consciousness of it—a somatic awareness that contributes to the modes of engagement and awarenesses that are part of the creative process.

DD: *Do we need to make a distinction between embodied dramaturgy and dramaturgy of the body? Can the dramaturgy of the body truly be independent? The body speaks regardless of consciousness and whether there is interest or lack of interest in its consideration.*

I see what you mean and I agree. It may seem obvious, but I'll say it anyway: I want the creative process to be imbued with my embodied dramaturgy but the dramaturgy of the ultimate creation can/might tell a very different story! In a way, my subjective investment is also my awareness of that fact.

ms: *I associate what's going on here with Bojana Kunst's (2009) economy of proximity, in which there is a desire to bring together makers, the experience of dance-making, the dramaturg and spectators. On the one hand, the dramaturg needs to experience the creative process in order to dive into its affordances, on the other, the proximity of the contemporary spectator is a strong influence on the dramaturgy of the work. In Confession Publique, both are in action—the dramaturg is experiencing and embodying the process and the audience is very close to the work, both physically (sitting in chairs around the performer) as well as in the content.*⁴

DD: *Economy of proximity speaks to intimacy. How does intimacy influence agency?*

3 Barba's "actor's dramaturgy" or "dramaturgy of the actor" (1997) is an important contribution to theatre-making and aesthetics. It is part of what the author called "Theatre Anthropology" (BARBA; SAVARESE, 1991), a discipline of practical study in performance making that sets fundamentals for the actor's *metier*.

4 Kunst (2009, p. 87) asserts that economy of proximity is characteristic of the production contexts of contemporary art. Inclusion, participation, relationality, engagement, emotional and intellectual involvement, affective temporality, expectation—all of these modes are embraced in contemporary dance dramaturgy. Proximity comes from "the encounter of different ways of working together which only enables (or fails to enable) changes and establishes future forms of being". According to Kunst this is a characteristic of contemporary dance practice.

For sure I feel that this experience is potentially a different kind of “economy of proximity”. Somatically, for example, only inside of myself, it’s an encounter of different ways of working and of being that already shifts my perspective. In terms of both the project and the existential musings that have arisen since the pandemic and now with the antiracist protests, I wonder about ways of “being” through contemporary dance as a practice and how that influences my role/contribution as dancer and/or dramaturg.

As this process spreads itself over time and across my memory, especially with cancelled rehearsals because of the pandemic and the anticolonial racism awarenesses that have brought to the general surface the aesthetics and hierarchies that are part of contemporary dance, I’m aware how much my own dramaturgy is shifting and shaking and I wonder what traces will be left in my memory—both conscious and somatic—of the rehearsals, of current experiences. Some kind of somatic memory exercise would be great.

DD: I am wondering how context might shift agency, mobilizing sedimented memory and experience. How does it relate to the larger socio-political context and its paradigm shifts?

VM: Agency as a dramaturg, as ongoing dramaturgical reflection that is present even when not working and that feeds a sort of agency projected into the future?

DD: Interesting point. I like that there is an implicit critical practice of agency that you identify as projected. I think this is powerful for the critical processes of creation and dramaturgy.

MS: How would your embodiment (or awareness and sensation) inform your dramaturgical thinking, actions and interventions? If you are not seeing from the outside but sensing the experience, how different is this from previous dramaturgical practices you have done ‘from the outside’?

In my attempt to be fully available as a performer inside the creation, I'm not trying to think dramaturgically at all while I'm exploring and improvising. I'm more focused on trying to lend my skills, feelings, and emotions to whatever is being explored/proposed. That said, as we talk through the improvisations before and after, I'm aware that there are dramaturgical elements being considered or emerging from the conversations, but they're not limited to any specific role I might have as dramaturg; they are more generated by the three of us involved in the creation. There was only one moment when we were in conversation towards the end of a rehearsal about the notion of "confession" and I asked clearly if this was a moment where I could intervene as dramaturg, and I did. If I were to simply do so throughout the rehearsal process it would get very difficult for everyone involved, precisely because my role as dramaturg is also to question! As a performer, if I questioned everything nothing would ever happen. However, using my questioning internally to feed my explorations is part of the somatic task.

ms: Your dramaturgical input as a dancer: a dancer who has dramaturgical thinking in her work, without necessarily taking action as a dramaturg. A dancer acting dramaturgically even as she moves.

I agree. For me it's about doing the meaning-making through motion (which isn't necessarily the same thing as movement!) rather than verbal articulation. Motion can also suggest, for me, the buffeting of roles and perspectives. Finding the meaning and the through-line for the piece via movement is more what I associate with the performer's role and experience—making meaning for the piece versus for myself isn't necessarily the same thing! That's perhaps also an aspect of the agency I experience in the process.

ms: So, in order to be present as a performer you need to relinquish your role and responsibility as a dramaturg? Wouldn't a dramaturgical mind still be present while making choices during the improvisation? How does your body think when following the choreographer's instructions?

My body finds its logic and asks its questions in order to do the thinking necessary to resonate with the choreographer's instructions. So there's definitely dramaturgy in the body, in its movement, in its processing of information, in its thinking. But I don't consider that fact to be executing the role and responsibility of the dramaturg. For me the dramaturg has a different kind of thinking to do—that might be through motion as you suggested earlier but that isn't movement, at least not in this creation. Improvisation has its own dramaturgical mind but I don't think that's necessarily the dramaturgical mind of the piece. Though as I write this I realize that even as I dive into my tasks as performer, the dramaturgical mind of the piece influences my improvisational logic as well. What doesn't exist in improvisation is the overview of the whole piece which is part of the dramaturg's role as I see/practice it.

ms: I recall a moment during the rehearsal when AW was focused on following MD's instruction to undulate her body. Despite trying to follow MD's verbal or even embodied demonstrations of the waving gesture, AW's body had its own way of moving and, as a result, composing the scene.

DD: Diverging dramaturgies mediated by different or divergent agencies...

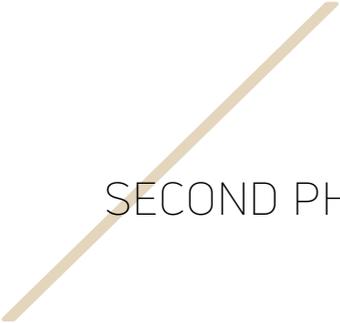
Entr'Acte

<i>Overlaps, frictions, meetings of</i>	<i>Dramaturgical body</i>
<i>Slippery, blurred, not separate</i>	<i>Agency of the performer</i>
<i>Through embodied dramaturgical thinking</i>	<i>with embodied dramaturgy</i>
<i>Distributed agency</i>	<i>Roles</i>
	<i>Dramaturgical agency or</i>
	<i>Agency of the dramaturg.</i>

*Negotiated/shared/collective
agency*

*A negotiation of agencies mediated through
different types of dramaturgical thinking/
relationscapes/events/becomings within the
distributed agencies of the dramaturgical body*

Roles, agency



SECOND PHRASE

...AJ's presence as rehearsal director actually contributes significantly to the dramaturgical reflection/evolution of the piece. In a way, that limits my scope as dramaturg in the process, and MD's need for me as dramaturg—at least for now. Perhaps the dramaturgical role-switching is not something that is happening explicitly, but rather there's a movement through dramaturgical reflection that is happening in and through the process itself.

ms: Distributed agency impacting the (preconceived) role of the dramaturg, thus forcing a revision of the role.

vm: Also brings me to the word 'negotiation', spoken (as when MD states her need to work as usual) and unspoken, i.e. the movement through that dramaturgical reflection.

ms: Indeed AJ's presence is curious, as different references mention how the rehearsal director is also seen as doing dramaturgy. Dramaturgy as this slippery practice, that slips through the roles of the people in the rehearsal room—dramaturgy as a function, as in Switzky (2015).

In fact, her presence speaks more to the culture of choreographic creation here in Canada than anything else. Dramaturgy as I practice it—being present from the very beginning of the process, from the germ of an idea and then intervening in various ways all the way through to the première—is not part of the modus here; the practice is still very young and has only just begun to be considered as a regular (not even integral) component of the creative process/team.

ms: Layers and practices of agency depend on the choreographic culture established in each place.

DD: Here AW clearly speaks to the cultural situatedness mediated through codes, conventions, traditions, habits alongside the singularity of the dramaturgical body (as a process).

The end result is that rehearsal directors assume the role of confidante to the choreographer in the creative process and fully participate in the dramaturgical reflection taking place in the creation. For sure in this piece, without AJ, my role as dramaturg would have been more present but that would have meant destabilizing MD's work habits completely! Back to Switzky's reference on dramaturgy as a slippery practice that touches everyone in the room: I do think it takes us back to the idea we've been sharing regarding dramaturgy as an ecological practice.

ms: This statement suggests that there is a particular agency that belongs to the creative process of a work.

vm: I also wonder about the agency belonging, or maybe more accurately said, given to the piece itself. When the structure and organicity of the piece rule out a conceptual proposition that one may have as a dramaturg or as the creator. This negotiation between what I as creator might want to say and what the structure of the piece itself allows me to do without bending the beauty of its composition. I find this negotiation even in academic writing.

DD: *Speaking to distributed agency, here AW speaks to negotiated complexity, but also to its singularity. And to how embodied dramaturgy exists regardless of its consideration by the choreographer (consciously or not) to inform the work.*

VM: *What degree of agency would you attribute to the academic provenance of the piece and how does this affect your subjective investment in the creation, if it does, in comparison to other works which were realized outside academia?*

I think the academic origins are key! They have imposed a different kind of questioning: of the process itself, of relationships within it, of method, of content, of representation. Without the academic provenance, there would have been questions, as is endemic to any creation, but the nature of the questions, the ways we ask them, the existential reflections on our roles as artists, this would all have been different in another context. My subjective investment is necessarily different this time. I try to invest myself in the explorations without question but being the dramaturg at the same time sometimes interferes, and certainly being the researcher makes me wonder at times if the experiment is going well! Also an interference...

In a way, perhaps we're not only looking at me switching between specific roles (and responsibilities), but rather how responsibilities are switching between different roles. In that way, dramaturgy actually becomes a medium (beyond a function). I think the dramaturg is primarily a facilitator. To what extent they're "solely" responsible for the dramaturgical reflection (which I think is virtually impossible) depends on each creator/context/collaboration. As I've worked previously, my role and task have been to facilitate reflection by virtue of my proximal distance to the creation.

MS: *DRAMATURGY AS A MEDIUM FOR DISTRIBUTED AGENCY!?*

VM: *I like this! And how does the role of dramaturg relate to dramaturgy as a medium for distributed agency? If you eliminate the dramaturg, there is still a dramaturgy and there is still*

distributed agency. But maybe they aren't highlighted in the same way as when the dramaturg is present? Does this role carry an increased focus on process (versus product)?

MN: *IS dramaturgy the medium for distributed agency? Dramaturgy facilitates the distribution of roles and their responsibilities. Are roles and responsibilities agencies? Is this a definition of agency? Just rolling this around on the tongue/in the mind...*

DD: *I also agree this deserves further teasing out. DRAMATURGY (including embodied dramaturgy informing the work or not) AS A MEDIUM FOR DISTRIBUTED AGENCY and distributed dramaturgy?*

ms: *Also, this phrase 'To what extent they're 'solely' responsible for the dramaturgical reflection (which I think is virtually impossible) depends on each creator/context/collaboration', suggests the distributed agency of dramaturgical reflection, which in AW's response we understand is different from the agency of the dramaturg.*

vm: *How is the agency of the individual dramaturg negotiated with the dramaturgical body? What emerges in Lynn and Sides (2003), Ditsa (2010), and slightly in Cools (2005) is an idea of a dramaturgy as the locus of the subjective investments made by all the participants (and by the spectators) in the creation. In a way, the dramaturg witnesses the production of a dramaturgical body that comes into being out of a specific 'relationscape' (MANNING, 2009) and facilitates its coming into being (in this metaphor of birth it would be the midwife). How do these reflections apply to or contradict the concrete instance of Confession Publique?*

cs: *Definitely, the idea of a (collectively formed [negotiated?] and fluid) dramaturgical body resonates too! Dramaturgical body: the creative process itself?*

DD: *Dramaturgical body, as a process, lends itself to a unified co-composing of ontologies within the process. Does re-framing the perspective from roles to one of co-composing shift negotiated/distributed agency?*

This would be exactly how I envision my practice and role as dramaturg. I wonder if we can look at the dramaturgy of the performer in the same way, for example something that comes into being facilitated by a specific relationscape, by a network of relations. In that case, the metaphorical midwife would be as much the ecology of embodied origins and experiences that form the relationscape of the performer as individual, as it would be the ecology of moving, fluid, negotiated tensions and forces that are present in the creative process itself. This reflection could of course apply as much to the performer's dramaturgy as to the ultimate dramaturgy of the piece itself. In *Confession Publique*, I do think the dramaturgical role is absolutely this negotiated (unspoken!) network of relations. Perhaps so is then the overall dramaturgy of the piece which includes my individual dramaturgy and extended relationscapes. My curiosity is leaning towards the notion of a "dramaturgical body", which comes from my thinking about the performer—but that could perhaps also refer to the process as well?

HB: *Thinking affectively about how moments come together to constitute a sense of what happened, I am curious about AW's recollection of specific moments during the creative process. I am interested in how we account for the 'accidental agencies' that might emerge in this process. Is there an attempt being made to keep 'separate things separate' where we might otherwise lapse into a more eco-logical mode of thinking? What might this tell us about the fabulatory elements, or unspoken negotiations of roles in any process?*

VM: *Can we talk of the dramaturgy of the process as a collective dramaturgical body? Can we think of it as redrawing the limits of bodies, of the creative process as inhabiting a collective body?*

MS: *A proposed definition of this becoming: the dramaturgical body.*

DD: *This speaks to relations as an event, a becoming.*

MN: *Yes! An articulation of a 'dramaturgical body' that is outside of an individual embodiment.*

I absolutely agree! And I think there is a dialogue to explore between that collective body and the notion of a dramaturgical ecology. Through the various forms of my input, my own vision of the piece will emerge. But all those choices will be influenced by the views of the other people intimately involved in the process as well. The collaboration develops its own nature and priorities, sensibilities, etc. and these end up creating a vision that reflects its contributors even if the mastermind facilitator is the choreographer.

MS: *I recall the scene where AW was center stage speaking different confessions into the microphone phrased in the first person plural (we) instead of the first person singular (I).*

MN: *I'm interested in an articulation of limits here.*

DD: *Does the articulation of limits/boundaries surrounding responsibilities work towards exposing the porous nature of roles and their function more as a co-composing than a negotiating?*

VM: *I don't see co-composing as opposite to an understanding of negotiation. In fact, I think that spoken and unspoken negotiations are at the basis of co-composing and in a way do the work of co-composing (exactly as in the co-composing we are doing in this interview).*

Part of this personal dramaturgy idea was for my input (both explicit and implicit) to be the subject matter. But I realize that that “angle” quickly gets taken over in a way by the process itself! I consider part of MD’s role as choreographer to be “finding the ways in” to the potentials of my embodied content and capacities. AJ’s role as rehearsal director covers many fronts—organizational, sounding board, facilitator, first spectator.

DD: Agency and responsibility... What is the relationship between the two? How does responsibility (who defines this) impact the distribution of agency and more specifically the embodied dramaturgy?

Increasingly, I see the capacities, limitations and visions of the three roles—choreographer, rehearsal director, performer (four if I count the dramaturg as separate)—as mutually dependent and constantly shifting in their boundaries. In spite of reasonably clear roles and tasks, their realization seems to require a certain porousness both in terms of limits and content. It’s this porousness that I’m increasingly seeing as dramaturgical and inherent to the specific dynamic of the creative process itself.

cs: Yes, this is something that I note throughout the answers. Interesting to think in terms of boundaries, porousness, interdependence, and constant shifts (osmosis?)... In brief: ecologies. I keep going back to what I witnessed during the rehearsal: the trust/friendship/play/open-experimentation throughout the process—a similar process to the one utilized by Keith Hennessy (2014).

ms: Yet we started from the idea of roles and boundaries. What sets them?

What sets those boundaries... good question. Beyond traditions and habits—which I profoundly think need to be questioned, there’s a common desire to work/create/think together.

ms: *Roles and dance culture.*

DD: *What is at stake here? What/how does the dramaturgical body challenge traditions and habits? This also speaks to the dramaturgical body's desire to create in a 'witness'...*

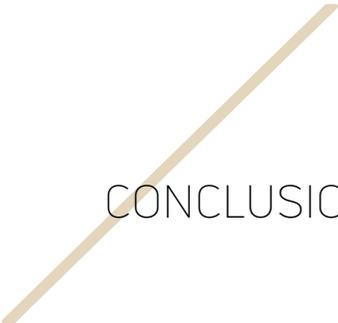
Each individual does that work/creation/thinking thing differently, according to their interests, propensities, sensibilities. For example, I don't consider myself a creator at all, yet I see myself as essential to the creative process as dramaturg and/or performer, and I also see the creative process as essential to the realization of my own sensibilities! Having had conversations with AJ, I know she feels the same way in terms of her role as rehearsal director. MD has developed a creative register from her own impulses that has become her "voice". In a way, that dictates the roles we take on. The porosity of the boundaries between them is harder to tackle... ultimately I think that is also due to the nature of the art form and the fact that those responsibilities all intersect to different extents which means that we're all always weaving back and forth between and through the zones of intersection. I feel that in bodies, that intersection then becomes porousness.

ms: *When to act rather than how... When can you openly offer your perspective? How do you work with the information of the dramaturg in yourself? Or do you try not to awaken this thinking?*

It seems important to recognize that the dramaturgy I embody is not the dramaturgy of the piece. The former contributes to/informs the latter but they're not the same. As a result, when I'm exploring as a performer, I'm doing so in response to the indications from the choreographer (who is PERHAPS thinking about the whole piece?) but I'm exploring in terms of my own embodied dramaturgy. For sure as I accumulate information about the piece (dramaturgical information that doesn't necessarily come from me embodying the role of dramaturg—rather, in a way, my own personal dramaturgy includes dramaturgical "thinking"!), that knowledge increasingly informs my explorations in regards to context, aesthetics, relationship to audience, etc. But I'm aware that my (dramaturgical) perspective from the inside of the piece is not the same as one that I might have in the role of

dramaturg outside of the piece (but from inside the creative process nevertheless). I think the vision of the piece will emerge out of the overlaps and frictions that are part of the internal borders of the process.

So the when of my different interventions is also dependent on when the different roles might be brought more or less into focus. I do think they're not fixed entities that intersect, but rather again fluid, in the sense of mobile and unstable, with porous borders and constantly negotiated—like embodiment.



CONCLUSION

We, as RAs, are a plurality of bodies through whom these dialogues pass differentially. A group of interdisciplinary artists and scholars, we arrive at and depart from this process with varied subjective, disciplinary, and embodied investments and attachments. We have been, at times, nine researchers weaving in and out of the thinking process.

The singular conditions which have underpinned the form of thinking and writing from which this text was produced sit in productive, if uneasy relation to the micro-political activations which populate the (sub)text. Due to the imposition of pandemic-related social-distancing measures, a creative process which began in the studio has been unable to continue in that form. In turn, our research process, which began around a table in a university, was compelled to move online. This ecology of conditions and their respective constraints activate tensions and resonances in our dialogue. There is a certain vulnerability which is proper to this process. A form of distributed agency characterizes the unfolding of our working process over these past few months, where our energies and investments have been dispersed across screens, continents, and resonant bodies. Our attempts to produce summarizing reflections or comprehensive conclusions remind us of the divergence that is particular to working through process, particularly in this moment.

Further, this process has been outfitted in the content with which it concerns itself. Within the creative process of *Confession Publique*, we encountered the challenge of trying to account for the complex relationships of agency and dramaturgy distributed across the bodies, roles, and hierarchies of the choreographer (MD), rehearsal director (AJ), and dancer-dramaturg (AW). Agency presents as a slippery concept that operates within a (dramaturgical) ecology affected by other human and more-than-human forces: the space, the audience, the cultural context, the politics and economics of performing arts; a “conceptual neighbourhood”, in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) words. In our interview process, we were mesmerized by AW’s discussion of memory, injury and vulnerability as her “places of agency”. These, we liken to forms of constrained agencies, or agencies which derive from constraints, co-authors in a creative process. Our own writing process has been visited by a host of enabling constraints: as its dramaturgy moves across bodies both physical and virtual, each of our bodies has been party to the dramaturgical co-composition of this process.

Where injuries and affordances delimit the movements of the rehearsing dancer, the biopolitical reconfigurations installed during the COVID-19 pandemic have reorganized and restricted movement worldwide. These embodied encounters with movement-thresholds have been reflected in the ways our bodies write, make meaning, and hold conversations amongst one another. Of course, we cannot disentangle these conceptions of movement from the Black Lives Matter movement. As the events of the past months have come to dwell within us, they also reside within the text. The process of its writing bears the traces of dramaturgical movement: gathering the inheritances of past events, building bodies, playing with the limits of embodiment. The writing becomes what AW refers to as a “dramaturgical body” composed of the stuff of lived experience. Experience itself is a shifting ground informed by movement which passes through and does not leave our bodies. Emerging from the rehearsal studio, this movement has become both the fuel and the vehicle of our research as well as a predominant line of enquiry. It necessitates a recomposition of dramaturgical bodies and an account of their becoming.

An important distinction appears for us in the dialogue with AW between motion and movement. Motion, she says, is the site of “dramaturgical thinking”, most often conflated with the “role” of dramaturg, whose “task” it is to maintain a bird’s

eye view. Motion is a sort of “bumping up-together” of perspectives and roles: a collision which characterizes the processual dramaturgical body. This bumping allows the dramaturgical mind of the piece to emerge, in excess of any predefined role. Movement, embodied in the improvisational immediacy of a dancer, carries a dramaturgy that knows itself somatically, in itself. This understanding has a direct and foundational impact, somatically and conceptually, on how we imagine the function of dramaturgy in the context of a dance ecology.

At the end of this collective thinking process, we are articulating an account of dramaturgy situated, at least in part, in the body of the dancer. The creative process has affordances and the role of discrete “dramaturg” has many differences from that of the “dancer”. However, the dancer, in particular, can never wholly give up the role of the dramaturg in the way that others might. Their body begins and ends before and after the event itself. What traverses and resonates across what we might consider the “dramaturgical body” includes the singular conditions in which a body is and has been implicated. This forcibly includes the social movement which will come to characterize this moment (necessary, in part, because certain bodies cannot move or can move no longer). The phenomena and forces with which we have concerned ourselves—dramaturgical bodies, roles, and processes—(in)-form and respond to the event of this text and are compelled to resonate in a new ecological milieu; they are called to a different form of presence, to perform different work.

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