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Directing and Choreography in the Academy and the Profession: a Forum

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DIRECTING AND CHOREOGRAPHY IN THE ACADEMY AND THE PROFESSION: A FORUM

INTRODUCED + EDITED BY ANNE FLIOTSOS + ANN M. SHANAHAN

In this issue of *SDC Journal*, SDC is proud to introduce a new peer-reviewed section, featuring academic articles and book reviews on the crafts of directing and choreography. With editorial support by directors, choreographers, and scholars representing the range of institutions of higher education across the country, *SDC Journal* will publish one academic essay and one book review per issue.

The *SDC Journal Peer-Reviewed Section* is co-edited by Anne Fliotsos, PhD, Professor of Theatre, Purdue University, and **Ann M. Shanahan**, MFA, Associate Professor of Theatre, Loyola University Chicago, with an editorial board comprised of directors, scholars, and choreographers from around the country, several of whom are Members of SDC. Based on Membership surveys in 2013-14, SDC identified that over one third of its Members are working as teachers and/or artists in institutions of higher education. Executive Board Member and professor **Sharon Ott** and Executive Director Laura Penn approached Shanahan and her colleagues in the directing cohort of a national organization for theatre professors, to explore ways of supporting the unique needs of these directors and choreographers working professionally and in academia. Several of Shanahan's colleagues had been interested in creating a directing-focused, peer-reviewed publication in order to provide additional publication opportunities for directors, deepen conversations about the craft, and strengthen the connection between training and the profession. Since SDC was also seeking ways to support its Members working in academia, this synergy seemed like a natural moment for collaboration. This peer-reviewed section of *SDC Journal* was one result, along with specified initiatives to support guest artists and observerships for academically situated directors and choreographers.

In addition to the co-editors, members of the the Peer-Review Board include book review editor **Travis Malone**, PhD, Associate Professor and Chair of Theatre, Virginia Wesleyan College; and associate book review editor **Kathleen M. McGeever**, MFA, Professor of Performance and Chair, Northern Arizona State University. The Senior Advisory Board includes: **Anne Bogart**, MA, Professor and Head of the Directing Concentration, Columbia University; Joan Herrington, PhD, Professor and Chair of Theatre, Western Michigan University; and **James Peck**, MFA, PhD, Professor of Directing, Muhlenberg College. Peer-Reviewers include: **Donald Byrd**, Choreographer; **David Callaghan**, MFA, PhD, Professor and Chair of Theatre, University of Montevallo; Kathryn Ervin, MFA, Professor and Chair of Theatre Arts, California State University San Bernardino; **Liza Gennaro**, MA, Assistant Professor, Musical Theatre, Choreographer, Indiana University; **Ruth Pe Palileo**, PhD, Current Theatrics, Centre for Immigrant Resources and Community Arts (CIRCA), Chicago Pintig Theatre Group; Stephen A. Schrum, PhD, Associate Professor of Theatre Arts, University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg; **Scot Reese**, MFA, Professor of Performance, University of Maryland; and assistant editors **Thomas Costello**, PhD, Instructor of Speech and Theatre, SUNY Dutchess, and **Emily Rollie**, PhD, Assistant Professor of Theatre, Monmouth College.

In order to introduce our new *SDC Journal Peer-Reviewed Section* (SDCJ-PRS), for our first issue we created a forum to provoke thoughtful discussion concerning the relationship between the academy and the profession. We invited members of the SDCJ-PRS Review and Advisory Boards to reflect upon any or all of the issues below in short essays. We hope this forum will extend the lively discussions that initiated this venture to *SDC Journal's* broader readership. We asked:

How does scholarly work inform or inspire professional creative work? What is the most fruitful relationship between our institutions of higher learning (colleges and universities) and the professions of theatre directing and choreography? How does academic training prepare

directors to enter the profession? What professional realities need to be better considered in our academic training in these fields? In addition to training, how can the academy serve the profession? What problems can be addressed to generate a greater flow between the academy and professional work? How can the academy advance the profession—by offering opportunities to experiment with new production models or serving as incubator for creative work? What exchanges have been successful between the two arenas, and where might we go from here?

The responses from six of our members are included below, followed by a call for submissions. We hope this discussion will prompt ideas for future pieces authored by the several directors and choreographers who occupy this space of rich cross-over between training, scholarship, and creative work. Submissions are now being accepted on a rolling basis for the 2016 issues. We invite you to participate.



ANNE BOGART
THE RECIPROCAL LINK
BETWEEN ARTISTIC AND
SCHOLARLY WORK

An acting student at Columbia University once mentioned that her father, a surgeon, had a saying: "Study one, do one, teach one." I instantly recognized that this formula, familiar to surgeons, "study one, do one, teach one," is precisely the right equation for me as well. The ratio that allows me to be the best possible theatre artist is: 1/3 research, 1/3 directing, and 1/3 teaching.

If I do not dedicate enough time to research or if I teach too much or too little, my work as a director, as an artist, is compromised. The correct balance among the three activities is key. This ratio/equation is also crucial to the effectiveness of SITI Company. One third of our engagement is research and cultural exchange, 1/3 is spent making and performing new work, and 1/3 is engaged in teaching. This equilibrium is central to our well-being, productiveness and usefulness.

Research, or study, for me, includes reading, writing, reflection, analysis, and unconscious rumination. A successful process is both active and passive. After a certain amount of committed study, when the unconscious is sufficiently primed, the imagination must be left to do the necessary associative work. The composer, conductor, and polymath Leonard Bernstein suggested that it would be technically possible for him to compose a short sonata within a few hours through sheer willpower, but the sonata would not be good.

In order for the work to have substance, he said, it needs to pass through what he called a trance-like state of unconscious processing. "It cannot come from the made-up, thinking intellectualized, censoring, controlled part of my brain." I did not study directing in graduate school; rather, in 1975 I entered into a then two-year academic Master of Arts program at New York University, now known as Performance Studies. Performance studies continue to impact my work in meaningful ways. Every time I approach a new production I pose the questions that I was encouraged to ask at NYU: What is a play? How does a play function in society? What is acting? What is performance? What does it mean to the world to act or to perform? What is a rehearsal? What is an audience? These questions are anthropological and sociological. Performance studies initiated an appetite for theoretical inquiry that continues to this day to affect all my waking hours.

Teaching is also a key component to my work as a theatre director. If the arts were subsidized in the United States as they are in many European nations, I would probably not need to teach as much as I do. The extended rehearsal periods enjoyed in Russia, Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries afford artists the deep exploration of subject matter that any serious theatrical endeavor demands. In these countries the development of training, the shared research, and the essential experimentation can be carried out within the context of rehearsal. In the United States, most of my work in developing technique and in investigating content occurs, alternatively, within the classroom. I study alongside my students at Columbia University and in the context of classes at SITI. The SITI Company actors also work to advance their personal and shared understanding of technique and form through their teaching at SITI and worldwide at academic and artistic institutions. The standard three to four-week rehearsal schedule that is the norm in the United States demands that everyone must hit the tarmac running at top speed in order to stage the given play with courage and alacrity within the given amount of time. But where and when does the crucial preparation happen? It can happen in the classroom.

The university environment provides an alternative to the lack of arts subsidy in the United States. The collegiality of fellow academics, the enthusiasm of young artists heading into the field, and a quiet campus environment can offer a respite from the relatively cutthroat commercial and not-for-profit world. But there must be a lively and mutually beneficial interchange between the profession and the academy, otherwise the relationship will be perfunctory.

Finally, the give-and-take between artistic and scholarly work extends to the period following the première of any new production. After the many crises of rehearsal, after the obstacles and inherent challenges of bringing a new project to fruition, there is the opportunity to ruminate, analyse and ultimately share new, hard-won insights with others. This sharing can transpire via writing, conversation, practical workshops, or teaching. Thus, now full circle, the reciprocal link between scholarly and artistic work can begin all over again.

Anne Bogart is a prolific and award-winning American theatre and opera director. She is the Co-Artistic Director of SITI Company, which she founded with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki in 1992, and a Professor at Columbia University where she runs the Graduate Directing Program. She is the author of five books: *A Director Prepares*, *The Viewpoints Book*, *And Then, You Act*, *Conversations with Anne*, and, most recently, *What's the Story*.



JOAN HERRINGTON TRAINING THROUGH PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND GUEST ARTISTS

With the hallowed halls of regional theatres becoming fewer in number, the traditional model of conservatory style training—the mainstay of the majority of theatre programs within the academy—is necessarily challenged. Thus, we must ask ourselves if we are teaching to and modeling for students our past, or their future. While we must take care not to jettison the basic training of theatre artists that is crucial regardless of the expanse of the form, we also must acknowledge that exposing our students to a broad array of theatre-making techniques is crucial to both their survival as artists and to the survival of the theatre itself.

While theatre professors often have the ability to bring to their students a range of theatre experiences, the opportunity to immerse college students in the work of professional companies offers extraordinary opportunity—and often, significant challenges.

Over the past decade, my theatre department has chosen to pursue such engagement, working with, for example, the SITI Company and The Tectonic Theater Project. We are currently working with Universes, re-envisioning their well-known theatre piece, *Ameriville*. In relaying these experiences—which both grew and frustrated students and faculty alike, I advocate for such engagement.

But there are inherent challenges. These partnerships are expensive. Each time we embarked on such a project, the need to raise funds became our first hurdle. Indeed, such partnerships often open up avenues of funding that might not otherwise be available—both through the prestige of the professional partnerships themselves and through the community engagement that such partnerships can create. Additionally, the visibility that accompanies hosting these artists on campus can attract funding from foundations with related missions, who welcome the exposure.

These partnerships require long-term planning. Established professional companies often have full schedules and a theatre department must be able to accommodate a limited window of availability—and be prepared to be “bumped” when the Goodman or the Public Theatre makes a competing offer.

There must also be a fundamental willingness on the part of the faculty to embrace a methodology that may be far from the daily life of the unit. This multi-faceted willingness ranges from the welcoming of super-star artists to campus, to the ability to work in potentially new ways, from casting to technical production. And most importantly, for such partnerships to have lasting benefit, they require a willingness to engage with the work long after the guest artists have departed. Each of the experiences has brought to us a new vocabulary, along with the challenges of using that vocabulary. They have also brought to the visiting artists new perspectives on their own work inspired by the generation that will follow them into the theatre. As Tectonic company member Kelli Simpkins noted:

There are numerous benefits of partnering a professional company with an academic institution. When I came to Western Michigan University to introduce students to Tectonic Theater Project’s technique of “moment work” and to subsequently cast them in a company created project, I had no clear idea what the benefits would be. But finding my voice as a leader changed me. The benefits included not only my own personal evolution, but learning from these students who quickly became my collaborators and teachers. Working with the best that the department has to offer, working with students who are being mentored by faculty, who are living fully in their training and yearning to put their incredible skills to use with an outsider, gave me new insights into this technique that I’d almost taken for granted. And it made me feel alive in the present moment in a way that the best theatre creation can do.

Another fundamental challenge of devising new work with professional partners is the time required to complete the endeavor. Recognizing the extraordinary potential of Viewpoints training as preparation for devising, two faculty members envisioned a project wherein the SITI Company was brought in to teach student actors who would later create an original work. Engagement spread over seven months; training on campus was followed by continued practice and further training off campus by the student company. Then devising began.

The wealth of time had tremendous benefit, as it allowed the work to have real presence in the department for an extended period, such that it began to positively infect many students not directly involved in the work. The production de- and re-constructed the text *Women of Troy* to include firsthand accounts of those who had experienced genocide in the second half of this century. The impact of the SITI training was clear: this new work startled both the campus and local community with its exceptional ensemble work, its unique staging, and its ability to bring to a classic play frightening relevance. While none of my faculty professes an ability to prepare students to work in the methods of the SITI Company, their return visits and the investment of performance faculty over time have enabled this work to live in our classrooms and to change the face of how we think about theatre long term.

Good Death is a devised work created by our students working in collaboration with two artists from Tectonic Theater Project, Simpkins and **Leigh Fondakowski**. It focused on the question of the right to die and was heavily drawn from the lives of people in our community and our state. The primary challenge was, again, the necessary duration of the project—how to accommodate a period of preliminary engagement to launch the work, an expansive period of research, and enough time to create the piece in a collaborative model. This was achieved through three separate residencies—two short and one seven weeks—for the artists on campus, singly and together. Still, director Simpkins clearly felt pressured:

In terms of challenges: time was certainly one of the biggest. Usually these projects can take years to come to fruition. Creating a play from raw material and interviews in six weeks was something I'd never done before and it was a pressure that created much angst. In the end, the deadline focused the play but I wish we'd had more time.

Producing *Good Death* presented for faculty and staff the difficulty of working with professional artists whose process is very different. Chief among the challenges were:

an ever-changing script that threatened our ability to finalize designs in sufficient time for the shops to have comfort in their realization; frictions for technical personnel with unfamiliar methodologies; and a fluidity of "product" right through opening. But these are all challenges worth facing, provided that everyone in the exchange believes in the value of the engagement; with friction comes heat and creativity—a fundamental requirement for such professional partnerships. Simpkins noted:

[A real] challenge was being the new kid on the university block. Yes, I came vetted because of the previous work that I'd done with Tectonic and that reputation is hugely important, but I didn't know these students, nor did I know the faculty. Everyone gave their all to this piece and fought to make it the absolute best it could be. But there were struggles because I was new to them and they were new to me.

Having shared all of the benefits and challenges, I would say that this experience was truly one of the most difficult and the most rewarding of my career. Taking time away from professional theatre to work in this university model made me a much better artist and collaborator. And working with students who yearn to have complex experiences in which they feel ownership and responsibility enlivened my career and my techniques and gave me new skills and inspirations.

Both *Women of Troy* and *Good Death* were not only produced on campus but also went to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Electrified by new levels of engagement for artists and audiences alike, we felt compelled to extend the life of these projects—to both embed them more deeply at home and to share more broadly with the larger artistic world the lasting value from these partnerships.

Several years ago, I approached Steven Sapp of Universes to ask if he would be interested in collaborating with us on a production. It took us four years to find the finances to support the venture, along with a timeframe when Universes was available to be in residence.

We originally spoke of devising a new piece but given the constraints of scheduling, we decided instead to work with an established company piece—*Ameriville*—and to "adapt" the script, adding material that made it relevant to our community. We had learned through our experiences with Tectonic the tremendous rewards that come from such engagement. Bridging the town/gown divide quite obviously changes the relationship between artist and audience in an extraordinary way—and it is also attractive to both foundations and donors.

While Universes will be in residence for eight weeks, the preliminary casting and design work required everyone on the team to limit face-to-face time and to work more remotely—an approach out of our traditional process. And again, the rules of collaboration need to be continually re-examined. *Ameriville* has been successfully produced by Universes many times—and has been done largely the same way. If the project was to have value for our students, we asked that the cast of four expand to at least eight (they chose to expand it to fourteen) and that the production itself be re-envisioned so that our design students could engage with our guests. As we have moved forward on this project, we have the great joy that comes from watching our students stand with our guests on unfamiliar aesthetic ground, and in turn our artists be newly inspired by the ideas of their student collaborators. Universes company member Steven Sapp noted:

I feel like these types of partnerships are beneficial for Universes because they give us an opportunity to look at the work through young and hungry artists who are excited about getting a chance to work on material with a professional company. It is a chance to teach our aesthetic in a rehearsal, performance environment, which is much more in depth than just a brief workshop exchange. It also introduces the students to new contemporary work, that is becoming part of the American theatre canon.

His thoughts are echoed by Simpkins who believes: "There is a benefit to being the only 'expert', but also a benefit in being open to learning the expertness and the openness of amazingly committed theatre students and how much they yearn to absorb and explore."

One additional challenge that sometimes applies is the working model for collaborative ensembles that operate without a singular director. Even in companies such as SITI or Tectonic with an identified "director," the relationship between that person and her actors—or the relationship between that person and his designers—is often very different than those relationships in the academy, where we tend to work in a more traditional pyramidal structure, the director sitting clearly on the upper most point. While we have embraced a more egalitarian structure on many occasions, my tremendously open-minded technical director still felt compelled to ask our guest from Universes—known for its collaborative ensemble building of all work—if one of them would be the "director" on our project together. We found a good compromise in this case: Steve Sapp will lead the work in rehearsal, and when he steps back onto the stage, a faculty member will lead the show through tech.

It is an excellent blending of methodologies and a great learning experience for us all.

These partnerships energize our community. They open to our students and faculty new pathways for creating theatre. In many ways, it would be much simpler to continue to do the work that we know best and with which we are so comfortable. But how then would we all continue to grow?

Joan Herrington is Chair of the Department of Theatre at Western Michigan University. She is a contemporary theatre scholar whose research is focused on the pedagogy and practice of theatre in the last thirty years. She is the author of four books and over a dozen book chapters and journal articles that examine the creative process of playwrights and directors. The subject of her research has ranged from the work of August Wilson to the complex practice of the SITI Company.



JAMES PECK
HOW MIGHT THE
ACADEMY SERVE
THE PROFESSION?
AND VICE VERSA

This new section of *SDC Journal* aims to address productive exchanges, actual or imagined, between professional theatre and theatre in colleges and universities. This inaugural group of essays, the editors suggested, might range across issues of training, the professionalization of young directors, or collaboration on production. Since a significant percentage of the Membership of SDC works in higher education, myself included, these pages are a promising place to explore such questions. One of the prompts offered by the editors asked: "In addition to training, how can the academy serve the profession?" This is an important issue, and one that I'll briefly address. But writing from my particular experience as an SDC Member and a tenured professor recently named an associate dean at a liberal arts college, I feel it most urgent to also reverse the direction of that inquiry. I want to ask, in addition, "How can the profession serve the academy?"

"How can the academy serve the profession?" Both theatre companies and the Arts and Humanities divisions of college campuses are in the midst of rapid, undesired retrenchment. Budgets are being slashed and positions eliminated. In such a moment of financial precarity, figuring out ways to link the resources of the academy to the professional theatre is a good idea. It may mean creating conditions in which established theatre artists can make work and make a living, whether as long-term faculty or guest artists. It may mean

teaming with under-resourced companies to develop new projects. It may mean finding ways to share space, personnel, and budget in mutually beneficial ways. Many such collaborations already exist, and though it's often tricky and occasionally uncomfortable to work out the details, they can be worked out. I hope this section of *SDC Journal* will in part provide a space to share examples of how such arrangements can and do work.

However, in answering the question "How can the academy serve the profession?" it's vital to recognize that "the academy" is not monolithic, nor is "the profession." Every academic theatre program needs to think hard and always about how its work, including the guests it employs and the partnerships it forges, aligns with the mission of the college or university to which it contributes. I have taught for the last fifteen years at an undergraduate liberal arts college with a large and thriving theatre program. I teach directing, among other things, and for eight years chaired my department. And though I value the accomplishment and sustained commitment the word "professional" connotes, I do not think it my principal task to prepare young artists to enter the "the profession." I do try to equip students who hope for a life in the theatre with a sophisticated repertoire of knowledge and practices to draw upon when they walk into a rehearsal hall or production meeting. But teaching in the context of the liberal arts, I have a prior commitment to provide them with opportunities and tools to mature into thoughtful, empathetic adults with a complex sense of the world, their place in it, and their responsibilities to it. For me, doing this is much more important than training people for jobs that barely exist. It's also much more interesting. In some twenty-three years of college teaching, I have found that directing classes, happily, provide a capacious space for people to develop aptitudes, sensibilities, and skills that enable them to shape themselves and their world in serious, effective, and big-hearted ways.

And here I want to ask the inverse question: "How can the profession serve the academy?" The narrowest answers might emphasize the networks that emerge when artists primarily located in the professional arena work on college campuses. I'm of course grateful to the many artists who have circulated through our program and subsequently opened doors for my students. (If that's you, and it might be, thank you.) But that's a constrained and utilitarian notion of what accomplished artists bring to an academic context. I'd prefer instead to trumpet the kinds of knowledge that artists make uniquely possible. What can students know through study of the arts that they can't know in other ways? I would argue that by

and large, the academy as a site of knowledge production is nervous about the body and overtly hostile to feeling. Binary oppositions such as Mind vs. Body, Thought vs. Emotion, Objective vs. Subjective, and Analysis vs. Creativity abound in the academy, with the latter terms always subordinate to the former. These arrangements of knowledge are at best limiting, at worst harmful, and whatever their ultimate effects, false. As an embodied, affecting, intellectually and socially complex art form, theatre is not well served by such attitudes. Neither, in my view, are people. I want good artists to work at my institution not only for the professional savvy to which they expose my students. I value their experience and am delighted when they share it. But in the end I'm much more compelled by the ways they expand what counts as complex, persuasive knowledge. Artists make sense of forms speak. Theatre artists demonstrate that profound social, psychological, and ethical insight arises in the concreteness of human doing. Directorial intelligence asserts itself in the rhythm of a downstage cross, the cut of a hemline, the timbre of a voice, the angle of a gesture, the count of a light cue, and on and on. The arts trust in the specific eloquence of the material world in ways that rub against the tendency of most academic disciplines toward disembodied abstraction and generalization. I'm happy to be working at a liberal arts college that insists its arts majors grapple with science, social science, and the interpretive humanities. Artists need to take seriously the rigor, skepticism, and fierce intelligence of those disciplines. But the world of knowledge also needs the fierce intelligence of artistic assertion. And providing more of that is how I hope the profession can serve the academy.

I imagine it's clear that I think an undergraduate theatre degree shouldn't be valued solely (or even primarily) for preparing students to succeed in the profession. The terms "succeed" and "profession" are so malleable and contingent anyway that ultimately everyone needs to define and redefine them for him or herself over the course of a lifetime. That said, many of my students do go on to get paid for their work as artists, a few of them as directors. I think that's great. Many find or create positions as arts administrators or arts educators, and I also think that's great. And many more build professional lives outside the arts but become devoted audience members. And that's great too. A few graduates leave the theatre entirely behind. That saddens me, but to my surprise I'm okay with it. I have to believe that people equipped with the habits of mind, feeling, and action fostered by seriously studying the theatre for four years, whether or not they choose it for their profession or even keep it firmly in their lives, are apt to make

the world more humane. And I am ultimately less concerned that the theatre retain patrons than I am that humanity awaken.

James Peck is Professor of Theatre and Associate Dean for Diversity Initiatives at Muhlenberg College. He has directed over sixty productions of plays, musicals, and operas in professional and university settings. He has published numerous scholarly articles and book chapters and is a former editor of the journal *Theatre Topics*. In addition to Muhlenberg, he has taught at New York University, the Playwrights Horizons Theatre School, and the Yale School of Drama. He is a Member of SDC.



LIZA GENNARO
SCHOLARLY WORK
AS INSPIRATION
FOR PROFESSIONAL
CREATIVE WORK

One of the many advantages of being raised in a family of theatre artists is having access to an extensive library of art-related books. Some of my strongest childhood memories are of countless hours spent in my father's study reading volumes of dance, theatre, art, and fashion. These books were tools of my father's, choreographer **Peter Gennaro's**, trade. Passages were underlined and sometimes I would find drawings that he had made to illustrate a text. My favorite, I still have it, is a sketch of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson's dancing shoe – a very specific design with a wooden sole, particular to Robinson. Being surrounded by those books and now books of my own was then, and continues to be, a constant source of intellectual fascination, visual stimulation, and inspiration.

Jerome Robbins and **Agnes de Mille**, the ostensible parents of contemporary musical theatre choreography were both avid researchers. De Mille not only employed her extensive knowledge of dance to her musical theatre choreography, she also wrote several dance history books and a biography of Martha Graham. Robbins' archives at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts contain extensive files of research material for each of his shows, including books and essays on Cambodian Dance (*The King and I*, 1951), articles and "How To" manuals for preparing to learn the Tango (*High Button Shoes*, 1947), and articles, essays, handbooks, and photographs demonstrating the Charleston (*Billion Dollar Baby*, 1945).

Discovering how and why people dance is an essential element of the musical theatre choreographer's task and each proceeds

to find answers in her own individual manner by examining a variety of sources, including historical accounts (biography, autobiography, newspapers, magazines, literature, oral history), art (paintings, architecture, fashion), film (documentary, biographical, entertainment), and music (recordings, scores). Scholarly writing offers additional perspectives to the creative process by employing insights developed through rigorous academic standards.

In my own experience I have found Jean and Marshall Stearns' book, *Jazz Dance* and Lynne Fauley Emery's *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today* invaluable sources for understanding and examining African American vernacular dance; Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter's *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* is essential to understanding movement vocabularies associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Barbara Stratyner's, *Ned Wayburn and the Dance Routine: From Vaudeville to the Ziegfeld Follies*, is important to understanding the Revue Era and precision line dance and *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, edited by Julie Malnig, offers a thorough understanding of social dance trends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These examples relate directly to projects I have choreographed; however my research and inquiry, like those of my theatre colleagues, is not limited to specific projects. Keeping up with the prolific output of scholars is an exciting endeavor. Liz Wollman's, *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970's New York* and Carol Oja's *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War* are both inspiring and fascinating additions to my ever growing library. No creative artist that I have ever met lives in an isolated bubble. We are influenced and inspired by the world around us and scholarly work stimulates and enhances our creative ideas.

Liza Gennaro has choreographed extensively on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in Regional theatres. She is a Member of the SDC Executive Board and in 2015 completed a three-year term on the Tony Award Nominating Committee. Her chapter, "Evolution of Dance in the Golden Era of the American 'Book Musical,'" appears in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical* and a new chapter, co-written with Stacy Wolf, "Dance in Musical Theatre" appears in the upcoming *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*. She is currently on faculty at Indiana University in the Department of Theatre, Drama and Contemporary Dance.



KATHLEEN M. MCGEEVER
FUNDING AND
PARTNERSHIPS IN
PUBLIC
INSTITUTIONS

Universities are historically institutions of innovation and discovery. The environment has been one in which theatre artists can experiment without exclusive focus on profit or bottom line, and this experimentation can spark interesting new directions—both for the present, and the future through training the next generation. While, sadly, financial support for higher education is fading with trends to cut funding regionally and nationally, from my vantage point as chair of Theatre in a large public institution, I still believe the academy can be fertile ground for directorial innovation.

The academy is a place to dream, explore, and stretch in ways one might not be able beyond its walls. Universities are a place to risk; production aesthetics can be explored fully. While those of us who work in higher education might complain that a "short" 6 to 8 week process is not enough to explore and reflect as we would desire, still it is significantly more time than the typical professional rehearsal process in this country. Doubling rehearsal time means more exploration, which can foster increased discovery and innovation. Working in the academy can foster development of new directing methods, and the opportunity to identify and grow new talent. My personal directing style, developed by combining and adapting various techniques to meet the ever-changing needs of the young actors in my undergraduate institution, has served me well, both in the academic context and professionally. Many major directors and choreographers have found a home in both worlds, including Anne Bogart, Sharon Ott, **Mark Lamos**, and **Susan H. Schulman**, to name a few. One of the most important things we do as teachers is light a spark in a student who had not considered directing or choreography, but has aptitude there. If it hadn't been for Dr. Kjell Amble (who in the stereotype of the directing professor came to class everyday in his rumbled tweed jacket with patches on the elbows, smoking a pipe) I am not sure I would have taken the director's path. Dr. Amble encouraged and inspired me to explore directing because he saw something in me I did not know was there, and that he helped nurture. Later, as a directing student, I remember learning from choreographer **Donald McKayle**, who was an advocate of Laban work. The opportunity was provided by The California Arts Project (TCAP), funded through the Board of Education. I immediately found the work valuable to the development

of my directing style; the cross-pollination of dancer and director, professional and student, and the environment of trial and error coupled with adequate time, created a vibrant and creative working relationship.

Professional/educational partnerships such as TCAP have a long history within the academy, and are an excellent way in which directors and choreographers can work together to inspire one another, and develop new ways of creating. In the changing economic landscape we must find new ways to create these partnerships. In the past these have been more common for private institutions, which have more abundant donor dollars at their disposal. One possible model for both public and private institutions is a brand of "public/private partnership," or PPPs (as they are called in a business context). PPPs have been featured in press surrounding the state of public institutions of higher education since the 2008 recession. Rising stresses in the university, including higher demands for student success and career readiness, along with shrinking funding, have prompted increased consideration of PPPs. I am not arguing for using these partnerships as a quick fix, cure-all for higher education's budget woes, but rather as opportunity to foster deeper artistic collaborations that forge a path, not only for a new generation of artists, but for new audiences as well. This change in funding can be looked at as a rich opportunity, through which the educational and professional worlds of theatre might find new, meaningful, and lasting opportunities to collaborate. When considered in this light, the possibilities for continued innovation are many.

In her 30-year career, **Kathleen M. McGeever** has worked professionally as director, actor, educator, arts administrator, dramaturge, and playwright. She has directed over 50 plays in a variety of genres, from new plays, to Commedia dell'Arte, absurdist, classical, and puppetry. McGeever is an Associate Member of SDC, and has served as Chair of the Northern Arizona University Department of Theatre since 2007.



RUTH PE PALILEO
THE SCHOLARLY
DIRECTOR/
CHOREOGRAPHER:
VISITING THE ARCHIVE
TO REVITALIZE THE
REPERTOIRE

In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor asks, "If...we were to reorient the ways social memory and cultural identity in the Americas have traditionally been studied...and look through the lens

of performed, embodied behaviours, what would we know that we do not know now? Whose stories, memories and struggles might become visible?" (xviii). To use a scholarly lens on professional directing and choreography projects is to illuminate the stories, memories and struggles involved in these projects. Too often, the hard-won lessons a professional director/choreographer gleans from a given project are as ephemeral as the project itself; the show closes, and the stories unique to the project are gone. And though there may be records—or as Taylor defines it, the "archive" of the work—such as an occasional recording, review, or blog, these records do not constitute what Taylor calls the "repertoire" of the work, that "vital act" of dialogue between the work and its audience in which "social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity" are transmitted (2). When a scholar revisits the work, however, the project can be reoriented and revitalized because the scholar again engages the work in dialogue—placing the work in discussion with a different social knowledge, memory, or sense of identity. The "archive" of the closed project is thus reinvigorated as "repertoire"—engaging in a second vital incarnation with a second audience, those who read the scholarly work.

Thus, directors/choreographers who have academic training are given the skills to 1) record or document their own "archive" and 2) engage their own work and the work of others as "repertoire." Academic training for "scholarly directors" allows them to inform their creativity with research and to re-engage professional work with an academic lens. Such scholarly directors also learn how to complete their work within strict deadlines and how to review and refine the work so that it is better viewed within well-defined parameters. These skills serve the professions of directing/choreography and, in return, academia provides scholarly directors a wider network to inform their work and a wider audience to engage in dialogue with their work.

Take for example, scholarly directors studying the works of Shakespeare as used in prisons. A director in such an environment must keep the archival work confidential to some extent because it is potentially dangerous. Because of this, directors working in this field feel an inherent isolation. The scholarly response for alleviating such isolation includes Michel Balfour's work *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice* and a conference at University of Notre Dame in 2013. Of course, academic research into "Shakespeare behind bars"¹ would not be possible without the archive of *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, the title of Jean Trounstein's writings about her directing project at a women's correctional facility in Massachusetts and of a documentary about the work of director Curt Tofield at

the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in Kentucky. In turn, Baz Kershaw, an academic at the University of Lancaster who also directed at Lancaster Farms for young offenders, cites the influence of scholars Michel Foucault and Slavoj Žižek on his directing work. Thus William Shakespeare's archive informs the repertoire of Trounstein and Tofield, whose work then becomes the archive that informs the repertoire of scholars Balfour and Kershaw, which relies on the archive of scholars Foucault and Žižek, and so on around the world, transforming the isolation of directing in prison to a lively dialogue.

This circular exchange between scholarly work and creative work can also often be found in the relationship between dramaturg and director/choreographer—such as the relationship of Heidi Gilpin and choreographer William Forsythe. Gilpin worked as an editor for *Copyright and Parallax*, a journal of cultural criticism, which Forsythe read. He initiated "endless conversations" with Gilpin that eventually resulted in her working as a dramaturg with Forsythe from 1989 to 1996. This in turn, led to further essays by Gilpin about Forsythe's work. Again, "archive" initiates dialogue with "repertoire" which leads to "endless conversation" between the two. Examples such as these illustrate the types of successful exchanges between academia and creative work.

"Endless conversations" do take time to build, however; this is one of the difficulties in moving from archive to repertoire and back again for the scholarly director/choreographer. Often, the professional timeline of preparing a show within a month or two leaves little time for the studied, measured research and reflection which make the strongest academic work; the two types of work happen at different speeds. Moreover, the professional reality is that when one is working to complete a project for the "archive," it is difficult to keep open the idea of a future "repertoire" engagement; most director/choreographers are more focused on their audience, the "repertoire" of the present. The "archive" priority is to create and complete the work while the "repertoire" priority is to receive and analyse the work; the two types of work happen with different priorities. Therefore, resources which support a scholarly director/choreographer in moving between the two stages would create a greater flow between the academic and professional work. What if there were retreats made available to a director/choreographer upon completion of an interesting project so that she would have time to record and reflect upon her process? What if there were assistant directors/choreographers whose particular purpose was to annotate the production in a scholarly manner? What if a scholar were able to fund a directing or

choreography project by researching and preparing an academic “proposal” first? This model from the sciences, in which a grant proposal lays out the hypothesis and describes the methodology for testing it has much to offer the scholarly director/choreographer. Such early academic research and preparation into the hypothesis of a professional project, into discovering the critical artistic question that a given project asks² will certainly clarify her vision of the professional work.

Ruth Pe Palileo is a director/producer for Current Theatrics in Las Vegas and a director/playwright for Pintig Cultural Group in Chicago. In 2014, Ruth adapted and directed the award-winning time travel novel *The Anubis Gates* for an audience of 1,300 in London. A documentary about Ruth’s site-specific production of *The Passion of Christ for the Church of Ireland* airs yearly on Irish television RTE. Ruth received her doctorate in Theatre and Performance from Trinity College Dublin, Ireland in 2010. Her current production, **David Mamet’s A Life in the Theatre**, is on tour in Phoenix.

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NOTES

1. “Shakespeare behind bars” appears to be used as a nickname for this particular practice of prison drama. It is also the name of the oldest US program currently practicing such theatre and of a documentary about that program.
2. In his book *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, Lajos Egri argues that each dramatic work asks at least a single question of its audience and that all further engagement with a given work depends from an understanding of that critical question.

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