

Number 4/2016

ISSN 2324-3635

# OCCASIONAL & DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

**Guide Me Without Touching  
My Hand:  
Reflections on the Dramaturgical  
Development of the Devised-theatre  
Show *One by One***

**Pedro Ilgenfritz**

ePress

 **Unitec**  
Institute of Technology  
UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

# OCCASIONAL AND DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES 4/2016

## Guide Me Without Touching My Hand: Reflections on the Dramaturgical Development of the Devised-theatre Show *One by One*

By Pedro Ilgenfritz

---



Guide Me Without Touching My Hand: Reflections on the Dramaturgical Development of the Devised-Theatre Show *One by One* By Pedro Ilgenfritz, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

### THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE CITED AS:

Ilgenfritz, P. (2016). Guide me without touching my hand: Reflections on the dramaturgical development of the devised-theatre show 'One by One'. Unitec ePress Occasional and Discussion Paper Series (4). Retrieved from <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/>

### ABOUT THIS SERIES:

Unitec ePress periodically publishes occasional and discussion papers that discuss current and ongoing research authored by members of staff and their research associates. All papers are blind reviewed. For more papers in this series please visit: [www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/index.php/category/publications/ePress-series/discussion-and-occasional-papers/](http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/index.php/category/publications/ePress-series/discussion-and-occasional-papers/)

Cover design by Penny Thomson

### CONTACT:

[ePress@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:ePress@unitec.ac.nz)  
[www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/](http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/)  
Unitec Institute of Technology  
Private Bag 92025, Victoria Street West  
Auckland 1142  
New Zealand

ISSN 2324-3635

# Guide Me Without Touching My Hand: Reflections on the Dramaturgical Development of the Devised-theatre Show *One by One*

## Author

Pedro Ilgenfritz  
Senior Lecturer - Acting  
Creative Industries Pathway  
Unitec Institute of Technology

## Abstract

This essay is a reflection on some aspects of dramaturgy observed during the creation and development of *One by One*, a silent tragicomedy designed by the Auckland company, LAB Theatre, in 2011 and restaged in 2013. The emphasis of the essay is on pedagogical aspects at the core of the company's work, as they inform the creative process and lead to the blending of the actor's function into that of the dramaturg. The following discussion makes apparent the fact that this process of hybridisation, made possible by implementing features of devised theatre, emancipates the actor and brings improvisation to a better use. The play was based on the notion that theatrical action must be 'suggestive' rather than 'descriptive'. This idea originated in the works of Konstantin Stanislavski (1988) and Jacques Copeau (2000) and was developed by more recent theorists of dramaturgy into a practical framework for theatrical performance in general. The success of *One by One* depended very much on the implementation of these principles. The achievement was duly noted by reviewer Lexie Matheson (2011), who appreciated that *One by One* "exists on its own, doesn't need explanation, doesn't explain itself; it just unravels with delicacy and tenderness, like a good yarn should."

## INTRODUCTION

In 2011, I worked with LAB Theatre, an Auckland company founded in 2009, to develop *One by One*, a piece of silent theatre which made apparent important aspects related to the bridge between dramaturgy and acting training. The play featured two recent drama graduates as part of a pedagogical initiative to generate awareness about the roles of actor and dramaturg, and, more importantly, about the interchangeability of the two functions. Actors' attention was drawn to the fact that an actor/performer is not just an obedient follower of a director's instructions but also an active element in the construction of a play. As such, the creation and production of the show favoured techniques and principles such as indirectness, improvisation and suggestion, which have the ability of relativising the role of the dramaturg and, at the same time, of investing the actor with agency. Given these general objectives, *One by One* can be interpreted as an exercise in emancipation, one which addressed the very foundations of dramatic art.

The technical base of LAB Theatre was the result of a five-year work relationship (between 2009 and 2013) with actors Andrea Ariel, Genevieve Cohen, Katie Burson, Greg Padoa and Cole Jenkins, and musicians John Ellis, Nigel Gavin and Mark Ingram, at Unitec Institute of Technology's Department of Performing and Screen Arts, in Auckland. The fundamental ideas employed in *One by One* were explored, discussed and implemented during these five years of collaboration. Jacques Lecoq (2002) and his tradition of physical theatre, mask training and playfulness had a major influence on our work, a fact based on my own training as a clown with Grupo de Pesquisa Teatral Atormenta in Florianopolis, Brazil, under the guidance of Geraldo Cunha.

The creation of LAB Theatre, its training and its shows have been part of ongoing research with regards to the study of a type of acting training that includes and emphasises the understanding of dramaturgy. Alison Hodge (2000) states that acting training in Europe and North America is a twentieth-century phenomenon, which has come to inform not only the concept and construction of the actor's role but also the entire dramatic process. As applied to LAB Theatre, Hodge's statement is evidence of our preoccupation with compositional principles of dramatic narrative construction. These principles are understood, with Eugenio Barba (2006), as the study of the behaviour of human beings, when they use their physical and mental presence in an organised performance situation that is different from daily-life situations.

LAB Theatre's agenda of creating shows where the development of the acting craft is closely tied to that of the learning of the narrative composition was advocated in the late twentieth century by Dario Fo (1987). Fo challenged the type of acting training where the material conditions and socio-historical development are disconnected from the dramatic act. In other words, he was critical of any method of teaching that places more emphasis on technique than on other aspects of the art:

It is dangerous to learn techniques unthinkingly when no prior care has been given to the moral context in which they are to be employed and it is a grave mistake to separate technique from its ideological, moral and dramatic context (pp. 148-149).

As in the case of Dario Fo, LAB Theatre considers acting training an extension of the study of dramaturgy, and employs it in conjunction with the ideological background of the dramatic act. At the same time, the company regards the technical development of the performer as a process that is not just formal research in the aesthetics of theatre-making but also a practical and involved enterprise.

## NEW DRAMATURGY

The term 'dramaturgy' has been defined and redefined from a wide range of perspectives, often in contradictory terms, with serious consequences on how stage arts are currently perceived by both practitioners and critical experts of theatre studies and performing arts. The collection *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, edited by Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane (2014), brings forth the notion of 'new dramaturgy,' a concept meant to encapsulate not necessarily a new methodology but rather



Actor Katie Burson in action during *One by One*; Image by Peter Jennings CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

a new approach to the various methodologies subsequent to the era of postmodernism. To warn against expectations of consistency and regularity, the editors propose, in an introductory essay, that "the term new dramaturgy lacks exactness." They continue:

a demarcation between and a differentiation from an old (traditional) dramaturgy, the term suggests change but does not identify the nature of change. In fact, new dramaturgy could be open, expanded, contemporary, slow, and porous or even post dramatic (xi).

Trencsényi and Cochrane recognise that new dramaturgies are defined by three major aspects: they are post-mimetic, embrace interculturalism, and are process-conscious. In other words, one is invited to recognise in these paradigms the decline of mimesis as the dominant dramatic model, and to acknowledge the fact that one no

longer lives in a monolithic culture, but is surrounded by multiple value systems and intertwined cultures. Finally, the 'process-conscious' aspect called for by these new models indicates that, when a theatre work is created, all elements and factors are aligned to construct the dramaturgy of the piece. Differentiation by role or authority is no longer relevant. The actor and the director share responsibilities in relation to production and performance, while decision is dependent not on the significance of their professional responsibilities but rather on the extent to which they internalise the creative processes involved in the staging of a play.

In a keynote presentation at the Alternative Dramaturgies conference in Tangier, theatre scholar Patrice Pavis (2015) pointed out the current triumph and explosion of dramaturgy and, in a way similar to that of Trencsényi and Cochrane, interpreted the many different types of dramaturgical methods as a rich and varied, but also confused and tormented, landscape. Pavis discussed the idea of 'visual dramaturgy,' a phrase coined in the early nineties by Knut Ove Arntzen (1994) to describe a type of performance without text and based on a series of images. According to Pavis and Arntzen, the main characteristic of visual dramaturgy does not reside entirely in the absence of text in performance, but also in a dramatic situation where visibility takes central stage, to such an extent that it becomes the main feature of the aesthetic experience. This particular form of dramaturgy does not depend on a story or narrative and, very significantly, it succeeds in avoiding commentary on stage.

The visual element, with its own rhetorical potential, becomes the most prominent factor in post-dramatic theatre styles, which aim towards the exclusion of traditional elements, such as mimesis, conflict and narrative. As pointed out by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006), visual dramaturgy places emphasis on the static effects of the stage by rejecting the cacophony of motions traditionally associated with dramatic movement. Lehmann draws attention to the so-called 'image-time,' a hybrid characteristic to *drame statique* (static drama), in which aspects such as dramatic tension, story, or imitation are made redundant and, consequently, replaced by their opposites: contemplation, visibility, improvisation.

Under the banner of visual dramaturgy, the perception of theatre no longer simply prepares for the 'bombardment' of the sensory apparatus with moving images but, just as in front of a painting, activates the dynamic capacity of the gaze to produce processes, combinations and rhythms on the basis of the data provided by the stage (p. 157).

This important shift makes it possible for dramaturgy

to be regarded as an "organization of an event", or an "incitement of incidents" (Bleeker, 2003). In other words, a dramatic work becomes a series of possibilities, none of them prescribed, none of them leading to a unitary pattern, as in jigsaw puzzles. Instead, making a piece of theatre is like managing a network of unpredictable outcomes. This is where the role of the actor becomes important, as he or she fills in the place left empty by the departure of narrative and tension.

## THE VISUAL DRAMATURGY OF *ONE BY ONE*

In order to discuss *One by One* through references to new or visual dramaturgy, it is necessary to move the focus to the concept of 'devised theatre.' This concept is relevant because it offers precisely the type of perspective on theatre pedagogy that informed the production of our silent piece.

Devised theatre has been regarded as an amalgam of "processes of experimentation and sets of creative strategies – rather than a single methodology" (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, p. 6).

According to Pavis (2015), devising is characterised by collaboration. All dramatic and performative functions, and in particular the dramaturgical activity, are strategically open to everybody. As opposed to text-based performances, dramaturgs in devised theatre have to constantly adapt themselves to the inventions of other collaborators, as new material is immediately tested, adapted and adopted. Mia Perry (2011) agrees with Pavis's insistence on collaboration as the main feature of devised theatre, but also draws attention to a number of other characteristics:

the commitment to multiple perspectives (specifically those perspectives of the creators involved), to multimodalities (specifically lending equal weight to movement, sound, and visual technologies as that traditionally given to text), and by extension to performances that are not led by a 'singular vision,' or an 'authoritative line' (p. 65).

In the spirit of the definitions mentioned above, *One By One* was created using a collective and collaborative method, in which the actors improvised scenarios and developed materials by directly engaging with situations based around a central theme. However, there is a basic difference between our process and Pavis's definition, and that difference lies in the understanding of how independent the dramaturg and the actors can be from each other. The model proposed by Pavis is a radical one, and with very good artistic potential.

However, he disregards the paradox at the centre of

theatre-making. The director needs the actors to build his/her vision, while the actors need somebody to guide them into the process and to enable them to generate the material in which the director will structure his vision. At the same time, the actors need to be independent, but their creative freedom can only be achieved within the limitations imposed by the director. As such, collaboration emerges not from a denial of the director's position but as the result of a mutual agreement about the sharing of roles and responsibilities.

The starting point, for us, is no longer the existing text but indications, provocations, scenarios, situations that need to be engaged with, resolved, evaluated, researched, tested and discovered by the actors via improvisation. All of the above contribute to the development of the text's dramaturgical structure. A method of this type, which appoints the actor as dramaturg, is fundamentally pedagogical in nature, since it enables the actors to learn by experimenting with the given material, through repeated processes of trial and error. This turns the director/dramaturg into a guide, a provocateur and a devil's advocate: someone who has not written the text prior to the beginning of the process, in solitude, but who will construct the dramaturgy along with the actors. The collective dramaturgy thus generated is piloted by an expert who depends on the other members to convey their dramatic experiments. As such, the director assumes a role distinct from the rest of the creative team, while the cast, as Pavis (2015) agrees, shares the dramaturgical function. What results from this situation is a type of authorship equally attributed to the director and the actors.

In working on the production of *One by One* and sharing the dramaturgical function, the actors and I followed the good tradition of devised theatre, where,

[t]hrough collaboration in performance and performance creation, participants are at once learning through doing, comparing, and contemplating each other's input (critique) and at the same time troubling and unravelling knowledge, experience, and subjectivity (Perry, p. 68).

In our case, the actors responded to certain provocations and constraints by improvising scenarios. They tested possibilities 'on the spot,' in order to resolve scenic problems. Gradually, through repeated adaptations and improvisations, they developed the play's themes and discovered the details of each section. My role in this context was to "weave together," as Barba (2006, p. 66) would put it, all the elements of the performance. I did that by provoking, questioning and instigating actors' choices.

It is important to point out here that, at LAB Theatre, the role of the dramaturg is not limited to the play as such.

It is also backed by responsibilities related to the training of actors and to the discovery, through work, of the elements present in the structure of a play, scene or situation. The dramaturg is intrinsically connected to the development of the narrative aspects of a play by means of improvisation. It could be said that the dramaturgy of a new play is "earned in the moment," under the guidance and authority traditionally given to one figure (Barton, 2005, p. 106). In our case, this figure provided, simultaneously, training and insight.

## PERSONAL INTEREST

Even though, to a certain extent, I had been granted the creative authority to design the story based on the material created by the actors, as a researcher and teacher I was more interested in providing necessary tools through creative processes and/or training, in order to offer creative space to an independent performer who has the capacity to tackle, resolve and organise dramaturgical questions. Barton (2005) describes the "internalized dramaturgical objectivity" (p. 104) favoured by his company, Number Eleven Theatre, in terms of constant "self-examination and reflection" (p. 107). In other words, the principles that help the construction of a play are understood while construction itself is unfolding.

*One by One* challenges the hegemonic presence of the written work on stage. As a consequence, it can be classed in the category of 'physical theatre,' a general term that includes a variety of theatre styles. According to Murray and Keefe (2007), physical theatre differs from text-based theatre in three fundamental aspects: 1. The nature of the relationship with the pre-existent text (if there is one); 2. The creative, that is to say authoring, role of the actor's performance; and 3. A distinctiveness rooted in the performer's body and in the compositional and dramaturgical strategies employed in the manufacturing of the emerging performance text. *One by One* makes apparent all of the above, but it also acknowledges that the term 'physical theatre' is insufficient to describe its poetic style. Canadian scholar, Cassandra Fleming (2013), states that

the term physical theatre has now become a short-hand used to acknowledge the growth and development of intentionally physicalized training, rehearsals and production aesthetics, and numerous practitioners and companies now define their own work as physical theatre, or are often problematically labelled with this category by others (p. 40).

She goes on to say that, while the term appears to demonstrate close connections between various practices, in

reality the applicability to such a wide range of performances often makes it unclear what type of work 'physical theatre' is meant to represent. One could go even further and say, with Dymphna Callery (2001), that the term has become undefinable, or that "at its simplest, physical theatre occurs through the body, rather than through the mind" (p. 4). This renegotiation of the role of physicality in theatre performance and pedagogy, whereby "the intellectual is understood through physical engagement of the body," (p. 4) does not go too far from Jacques Lecoq's (2002) idea that "the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant" (p. 9). It is in this definition that we placed the dramaturgical orientation of *One by One*, a play that gives pre-eminence to situations over the written text, and to the knowledge of the body over rationalism.

## SUGGESTION AND DESCRIPTION

*One By One* is a tragicomedy about finding the meaning of life through death. Bonnie, the protagonist, is a young woman who has just discovered that she is terminally ill. At the same time, she meets Marty, a charming young man. Bonnie denies her life and subsequently her love for Marty. She keeps her illness hidden, up to the point when she realises, mere instances before expiring, that accepting her death is the only solution to discovering the meaning of life and love. The story evokes the tragedy of life and proposes a poetic reflection on the human condition and the struggle to reach the unattainable.

The show was reworked in 2012 and presented in a second season in 2013, aiming towards a further development of the narrative structure, set design and live music. In May of that year, a select group of guests was shown a stripped-bare version of *One by One*. There was nothing more than the actors and the musicians on stage. During a debate that took place after the show, one comment from an audience member stood out. The debate addressed a particular scene towards the end of the show, when the protagonist is in hospital and her lover arrives, after discovering that she had been hiding the truth about her illness. This scene had always been executed with a great level of precision and concentration, which created an emotionally charged atmosphere that garnered great audience response. However, one element did not work that well during the first season of *One by One*. Originally, the music had been played with too much emphasis, providing an emotional description of the situation, like a clue as to how the audience was meant to interpret the scene. When this aspect was acknowledged, the music was reworked, so that in the open rehearsal it was presented in a subtler form.

While I was explaining the changes and the rationale behind the intricacies and nuances of the music played during the hospital scene, an audience member interrupted me and asked, "Was there music in the hospital scene?" The audience member had been so immersed in the world of the play that he had not noticed the musical props to the atmosphere. This response indicates the power of suggestion, an essential principle the company used in its search for the appropriate means to communicate its aesthetic objectives. The immersed audience member had been captured 'inside' the world of the play because the elements of the scene (actors, music, action, rhythm, energy) had been arranged in a way in which nothing was described but everything was given to interpretation.

This was, to a great extent, the effect of the actors' contribution, as they were enabled to improvise their acting and, as such, to individualise the experience. But this play with spontaneity was not without its artistic risks. From the beginning of the creative process, there were a few aspects the actors had to observe every time they played their roles in *One by One*. The exclusion of verbal language was one of them. The actors felt compelled to compensate for the absent words by employing redundant, symptomatic behaviour, such as small descriptive, commentary-like movements, or what Gilman (2014, p. 79) has called "parasitic gestures." Actors used these gestures to 'fill in' the action of the story, without realising that, in fact, they were employing empty gestures.

It was noticed in our play that habits in the actors' bodies were sometimes made more evident and certain parts of the body were unnecessarily engaged in gestures, which generated a lack of clarity. Because of the casual, yet conscious, character of these movements, they cannot be considered useful physical actions. Stanislavski (1989) talks about the need for everything that happens on stage to have a purpose. He calls for psychophysical unity. In his acting theory, the body and mind must react together. The same idea is also addressed by Jerzy Grotowski (1980), who describes the integration of body and mind as an act of self-sacrifice: "The actor makes a total gift of himself. This is the technique of trance and of the integration of all actor's psychic and bodily powers" (p. 16). Or, as Copeau (1990) puts it, with the intention of strengthening the role of psychophysical unity in the art of theatre-making, "for the actor, the whole art is the gift of himself. In order to give himself, he must first possess himself" (p. 72). The above practitioners agree that clear actions happen when everything is distilled down to the most precise and economical gestures and movements, and that this phenomenon occurs when everything that is superfluous, unnecessary, excessive is eliminated from the actor's gestures and movements. This, on the other hand,



Actor Cole Jenkins and an audience member on stage during *One by One*; Image by Peter Jennings CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

happens only when there is an organic integration of body and mind.

In order for the actors to be able to refrain from providing clues to the audience, a series of constraints were introduced, which allowed the story to develop in the right direction. Firstly, mime was not accepted. This meant that the actors were not allowed to use any kind of gesture that would describe an action, idea or sentiment. When used as replacements for words, gestures are at risk of becoming descriptive, and so the actors were asked to refrain from illustrating things, for example by pointing or utilising literal gestures. In order for *One by One* to succeed as a silent (non-verbal) piece, the actors had to avoid explaining the situations or emotions they were involved in.

Following this model, which I am inclined to call 'suggestive logic,' it becomes necessary to point out that the actors also had to act in relation to limitations posed by the fictional reality represented on stage. More concretely, they had to avoid creating scenarios and realities that were not present in the rehearsal room. Consequently, elements such as invisible props, for instance, were banned. The cast of actors easily absorbed this model and soon it became second nature. It was interesting to see how quickly the performers accepted this limitation and how they became very alert every time they appeared to have lapsed into descriptive modes.

Description and explanation were avoided in all aspects of the production of *One by One*, including the musicians' parts. Their contribution to the piece had to be something between evocative and suggestive, contributing to the creation of the world of the play and following the

characters and the action.

All these aspects are, in fact, different ways of approaching the same question: how can we tell a story without being descriptive? To me, description as a narrative mode is an account, a report, an illustration and an explanation. It is a mode of transmitting a mental image that is fundamentally alien to the narrative form. The function of all theatre is to convey mental images through its own means of communication, and every element of production surely does that. The basic distinction insofar as the suggestive mode of conveying is concerned is that it denies the benefit of the psychological comfort that comes with explanation. In order to signify, theatre (but also other narrative forms) does not need to offer exposition and commentary. In the words of Walter Benjamin (2006):

There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener, the more completely is it integrated into his own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later (p. 366).

Suggestion, however, belongs very much in the world of narrative. It is a proposition, a clue and an indication, and as such it ignites the audience's sensory experience and makes them think. Benjamin (2006) also states that "the more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens

to impressed upon his memory” (p. 367). In short, suggestion is, therefore, a process through which one person guides the thoughts, feelings or behaviour of another person and, as is very much the case of *One by One*, he/she does so without the other person directly knowing it.

## **DEVISING ONE BY ONE**

The first provocation of the devising process was simple. It consisted in finding answers to the question: who are the lovers at the centre of the piece? In order to produce such answers, the actors had to individually improvise their everyday routines, following the scenario ‘a day in the life of’, described by Stanislavski (1989). Both actors improvised waking up, having breakfast, going to work, having lunch, going back to work, going home, catching a bus, preparing dinner and going to bed. Each actor approached this structure differently and each part of the scenario was an independent improvisation with a beginning, middle and end. The scenarios were introduced by questioning the facts of the scene: does your character have a job? If so, where? From there, they were asked to improvise their character arriving at the office in the morning. Nothing was pre-arranged or discussed. We did this in the sense outlined by Barton (2005), who describes Number Eleven’s approach to creation as “a developmental process that resists – indeed, discourages – practically all gestures of prefabrication” (p. 105). In the same way, LAB Theatre’s method of devising pushed actors to make choices on the spot and to test them later, during improvisations. As a result, the actors, who became quickly aware of the obvious lack of explanation and description, discovered their characters through action. They built their characters from scratch, according to their own understanding and experience, rather than following a prescribed text.

The organic development of themes during improvisations was directly related to the internal organisation of the actors’ body, mind and sensibility. The state of discovery and the journey into the creation of a theatre work often becomes an adventure into an uncharted territory, where the body is discovered to be both object and subject. The most significant challenge for the performers was to remain in the dark, not knowing, or only knowing the bare minimum necessary for them to discover the elements of the story.

By the end of this first phase of the work, each actor created a fictional history for their respective character, by accumulating the various things that had happened during improvisation. The actors found their character’s behaviour, thinking process, their rhythm, general attitude and

personality, so they could move to the next question: where and how do Bonnie and Marty meet? I proposed several scenarios, which were based on the daily routines previously improvised. The strongest situation turned out to be a bus setting.

Marty is in the bus when Bonnie enters and sits in front of him. Marty wants to flirt with her. She is not aware of his intentions. The interaction progresses and after a while she stands up and exits, leaving her bag behind. Marty watches her disappear around the corner and then sees the forgotten bag. That had been the moment waiting to be discovered. It was something that would unite them indirectly. Marty now had Bonnie’s bag and needed to find her in order to return the object to her. This situation gave the story a real possibility to explore a relationship that had started almost accidentally.

However, since we were creating a scene entirely dependent on description, we quickly ran into a serious conceptual problem. To convey a bus, the actors had to illustrate its reality: they mimed seeing a bus arriving, hopping onto the bus, greeting an imaginary bus driver, walking down the aisle, acknowledging the presence of other passengers, choosing a seat, looking out as the bus moved and even miming the movement of the vehicle in motion. We had broken our own rules. The solution, though, was simple. The same situation previously conceived of as taking place on a bus could be easily transferred to another scenario previously improvised by the actors: a park setting. In the new situation, we were able to introduce the formerly difficult scene in a most indirect way, without the need to describe the surroundings. Nothing was done to mimic the park. The stage was left bare, with the exception of a park bench, and that was enough.

## **LAB THEATRE AND THE INTERSECTION OF ACTING TRAINING AND DRAMATURGY**

The question of description is familiar to any theatre maker. Why is it that, every time one has to deal with dramatic composition, improvisation and dramatic writing, the form created is essentially descriptive? In order to understand and address this issue, it is necessary to look at the intersection between acting training and dramaturgy. The learning and understanding of physical action and dramaturgy are both centred on the same aspect: the investigation of laws of ‘composition of (dramatic) action.’

When describing the work done in L’École du Vieux-Colombier, Copeau (2000) identified that the core of learning the craft of acting is based on improvisation. He used the term ‘dramatic instrument’ to explain the first step towards the

development of the actor's non-descriptive creative impulse. For Copeau, the core of the school's teaching methodology was the development of the actor's body into an instrument and a source of theatrical events. For this to happen, the actor should have a body and mind that are free, inventive, reactive, spontaneous, disciplined and sincere. According to Copeau, a free 'dramatic instrument' is central to acting training, since the main purpose of an actor's education is to develop 'dramatic instinct' through a systematic approach.

The idea of dramatic instinct is inherent to human beings; it comes from the need to identify with others through a ritual of transformation whereby one's real identity becomes fictional identity. This ability is noticeable in children's behaviour; more precisely, in their inclination to imitate and copy the world. For the actor, the development of dramatic instinct is only the beginning of the process of acting.

Students need to work daily on their expressive abilities in order to consolidate their 'dramatic instrument,' comprised of body, mind and spirit. This makes apparent the fact that discovering the dramatic instinct is not enough; what is also required is a constant development of the thinking behind the various choices made by actors, the ability to use their intelligence in action, and the modelling of their thinking through creation. This is what Copeau (2000) calls the 'dramatic sense': an act of self-knowledge, self-awareness and concentration that leads, essentially, to self-effacement, or the ability one acquires to become another. In order to understand this process, actors need to focus on dramatic actions only (improvisation), as the dramatic sense can only be said to exist through action. In this way, it is essential to withdraw to a place where all actions are born, a place where all meaning and pre-formation of action are organised at their most basic level. According to Copeau, this can only occur in silent improvisation. For him, non-verbal communication precedes language and the process of engaging with improvisation without verbal language allows actors to investigate the essence of dramatic action.

The 'dramatic sense' corresponds to the same principle of psychophysical unity proposed by Stanislavski (1988), who states:

each director has his own way of outlining his plan for the work: there are no fixed rules. However, the initial stages of the work on psychophysical procedures that originate in our own natures must be respected exactly (p. 106).

Stanislavski refers to psychophysical procedures as the organic body/mind, and he further explains that the organic

body/mind is evidenced as a high level of responsiveness where the body responds to the demands made by the mind without being redundant, defaulting and incoherent.

To Stanislavski, this high level of physical and mental alertness is apparent when there is no separation in the actor's body and mind. In this way, one's impulse to say or do something represents the external response of that same impulse. In other words, the 'inside' and the 'outside' are one organic body/mind. Stanislavski explains that it is easier to understand this aspect of acting training when analysing what stops the flow between the 'inner' and the 'outer' in terms of dramatic actions. He asserts that the body is redundant when the inner impulse results in more than what has been demanded. This is perceptible in those actors who move too much, when the body is not economical, when it acts in vain, is excessive, says more than what is necessary, and the body reacts to the impulse made by the mind more than once. For example, when an actor utilizes more gestures and movements necessary to convey an idea.

Stanislavski also affirms that the body is defaulting when the external response to the inner impulse is incomplete. This is as if the body were responding to the mind only partially, or as if the body were able to hear only part of the demand made by the mind. This is evident when an actor does not fully embody a mental image or play only a percentage of what the imagination is visualizing. The illustration of this example is when an actor utilizes less gestures and movements necessary to convey an idea.

Finally, Stanislavski demonstrates that the body is incoherent when it responds to something different from what the mind is demanding. In this case, the inner impulse is demanding something, but what the body expresses is completely different. This is the case of an actor who thinks he/she is doing one thing, but in fact is doing something else. In this instance, this example is when an actor utilizes gestures and movements that do not correspond to what is necessary to convey an idea.

In all the three cases mentioned above, the central point is the clear separation between the idea or the impulse of the actor generated in his/her mind and the external physical expression of that idea and the right amount of gestures and movements needed to express a dramatic action.

Both Copeau and Stanislavski argued that there are fundamental principles at the foundation of acting training that are centred on the development of instinctive abilities; but, in essence, both of them were searching for an actor/creator who was free, reactive, spontaneous and inventive, able to trust their intuition and, as a result, capable of producing dramatic material that was poetic in nature or, rather, non-descriptive.

The actors in *One by One* began to experience the organic body/mind integration and the suggestive logic during the process of creating and performing the play. This aspect was not separated from the rest of the elements of performance. Its full integration with the totality of the production was noted by the reviewer Matt Baker (2013), who pointed out that:

There is magnificent beauty to this show, as the audience is guided back and forth between both extremes of the tragicomical spectrum. Performers Katie Burson and Cole Jenkins should be lauded for their intensive physical and emotional investment to the piece. Their discipline to their craft, quite simply, warrants unabashed praise... and one can only conclude that *One by One* is a full theatrical experience (n.p.).

## CONCLUSION

The development and research of new theatre forms in the last fifty years have expanded the conventional use of the term 'dramaturgy' to new territories and contexts. In particular, the areas of devised theatre, physical theatre, visual theatre and post-mimetic theatre have all, in different degrees, proclaimed the dissolution of traditional dramaturgical methods by redefining the role and the function of the author in the process of theatre-making. They share distrust in the value of traditional methods, some of which consider the text of a play as a starting point of all theatre experience. At the same time, and as a consequence of the aforementioned distrust, the new forms of dramaturgy have been placing emphasis on the spoken word, with its unstructured potential to free performance of the constraints of written texts. Another aspect privileged by some of these novel methodologies is the distribution of the authorship function amongst all participants in the creative process. This latter aspect brings about a 'democratisation' of the act of theatre-making and, more importantly, allows the actors to become creators by investing their own experience and identity in the dramaturgical act.

The general characteristics of devised theatre and physical theatre were put to the test by *One By One*, the silent tragicomedy prepared and performed by LAB Theatre, in Auckland. Regardless of the methods or theatre languages used during the making of the show, what became clear was the central role of dramatic composition, which related directly to the understanding of concepts such as 'physical action,' a core part of LAB Theatre's work.

*One By One* utilises a visual language, the effect of which is the move of the audience's attention to the actors'

physical presence and their actions. By avoiding description, I was able to develop suggestions, which in turn allowed me to play with the audience's perception, in a balancing act between revelation and concealment. *One by One* made it possible for silence to speak. The company created a story in which nothing was explained or described, and yet the details were presented without compromising the reading of the play. In fact, the audience's participation was equivalent to that of an attentive reader, searching for clues and exercising patience, at the same time listening to what the actors' bodies had to say. This was only possible because both the technical base of the actors and the dramaturgical elements of the story were dealt with as overlapping entities in the process of devising the performance. Thanks to this overlap of dramaturgy and acting training, the theatrical language of LAB Theatre was turned into a systematic approach to the suggestive power of physical actions, evoking the latter's non-rational, anti-didactic and anti-intellectual qualities, while at the same time looking for their capacity to unravel into a series of events and, ultimately, into a story.

I believe that the role of the director/dramaturg is to invest in the actor's training in order to make him or her independent and capable of resolving dramaturgical problems and of differentiating suggestion from explanation. My role in the room is to guide the actors without touching their hands. As a result, the actors end up assuming the function of the dramaturg in the devising process. They can claim authority as the sole creators, since they are no longer dependent on the director/dramaturg. The material created is organised in such a way as to enable the actors to guide the audience, in their turn, without touching their hands.

## REFERENCES

- Arntzen, K. O. (1994). A visual dramaturgy: Equivalent elements. *European performance and theatre towards the year 2000*. *Theaterschrift*, 5/6, 274-276.
- Baker, M. (2011). *Strength in numbers*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatrescenes.co.nz/review-one-by-one-auckland-fringe/>
- Barba, E., & Savarese, N. (2006). *A dictionary of theatre anthropology – the secret art of the performer* (2nd edition). New York: Routledge.
- Barton, B. (2005). Navigating turbulence: The dramaturg in physical theatre. *Theatre Topics*, 15(1), 103-119.
- Benjamin, W. (2006). The storyteller. In D. J. Hale (Ed.), *The novel: An anthology of criticism and theory 1900-2000* (pp. 361-378). Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bleeker, M. (2003). Dramaturgy as a mode of looking. *Women and performance: A journal of feminist theory*, 13(2), 163-172.
- Callery, D. (2001). *Through the body: A practical guide to physical theatre*. London: Nick Hern Books.
- Copeau, J. (1990). *Copeau: Texts on theatre*. London: Routledge.
- Copeau, J. (2000). *Registres VI. L'École du Vieux-Colombier*. Claude Sicard (Ed.), Paris: Galimard.
- Flemming, C. (2013). *A genealogy of the embodied practices of Suzanne Bing and Michael Chekhov: The use of play in actor training*. (PhD thesis). Faculty of Humanities, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.
- Fo, D. (1987). *The tricks of the trade*. New York: Routledge.
- Gilman, M. (2014). *Body and voice: Somatic re-education*. San Diego: Plural Publishing.
- Govan, E., Nicholson, H., & Normington, K. (2007). *Making a performance: Devising histories and contemporary practices*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
- Grotowski, J. (1980). *Towards a poor theatre*. London: Methuen.
- Hodge, A. (Ed). (2000). *Twentieth century actor training*. London: Routledge.
- Lecoq, J. (2002). *The moving body*. New York: Routledge.
- Lehmann, H-T. (2006). *Postdramatic theatre* (K. Jürs-Muby, Trans.). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Matheson, L. (2011). *Totally entrancing entertainment, enlightenment and ecstasy*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=4103>
- Murray, S., & Keefe, J. (2007). *Physical theatres: A critical introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pavis, P. (1998). *Dictionary of theatre: Terms, concepts and analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Pavis, P. (2015). Dramaturgie et postdramaturgie. In K. Amine, & G. F. Robertson (Eds.), *Alternative dramaturgies of the new millennium in Arabo-Islamic context and beyond: Selected papers from the 10th Annual Meeting of the Tangier International Conferences: Performing Tangier 2014* (pp. 15-21). Tangier: Collaborative Media International.
- Perry, M. (2011). Theatre and knowing: Considering the pedagogical spaces in devised theatre. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 25(1), 63-74.
- Stanislavski, K. (1988). *An actor prepares*. New York: Routledge.
- Trencsényi, K., & Cochrane, B. (2014). *New dramaturgy: International perspectives on theory and practice*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

## AUTHOR'S BIOS

**Pedro Ramos Ilgenfritz da Silva** is a Brazilian theatre director, dramaturg, researcher and teacher with experience spanning 25 years. He specialises in the areas of theatre history and theory, clowning, mask improvisation and acting training. He is a senior lecturer of Unitec's Performing and Screen Arts Department, and founder of Mahuika Theatre Company. Pedro Ilgenfritz is also currently a PhD student in Theatre at Auckland University.

Contact: [pilgenfritz@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:pilgenfritz@unitec.ac.nz)