

## Devising as Pedagogical Practice in Latin American Theatre

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In 2005, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education devoted a special issue of its journal, *Theatre Topics*, to the question of devising, referencing a terrain well-mapped in theatre scholarship yet still somewhat controversial in pedagogical terms. “Devising” includes the collective creation of scripts (in practice, often based on ethnographic material or on adaptations of narrative texts or of existing classical plays) as well as the collective development of performances through extensive use of improvisational body work that often takes the form of nonvocal explorations of directorial prompts. Devised productions have been much praised in reviews of work done in professional contexts, especially in the form of the festival-linked solo performances that have frequently, albeit erroneously, been thought to be a peculiarly North American form of art.<sup>1</sup> These projects, especially those by people of color who derive their material from autobiographical or ethnographic work, can be particularly inspirational for Latina/o and Latin American-oriented performance programs and pedagogies in the US. The challenge, then, is not with devising per se, but rather with determining how to incorporate student devising adequately into “rigorous” theatre study, where the word “rigorous” stands in for a host of often-underexplored presumptions about methodologies and practices. In some theatre programs in the English-speaking world, such as those typically associated with the United Kingdom, devising methodologies and practices are a standard part of the training; in the US, there is much more reluctance. This reluctance is generally framed in variations on concerns that devising is student—rather than professor—centered, that it has a long timeline, and that the results are unpredictable.

Reading through the *Theatre Topics* special issue is a peculiar experience for a Latin Americanist theatre scholar or practitioner, because there is not a single example or case study from the Hispanic or US Latino world, despite

a token acknowledgment in many of the articles of the widespread influence of Brazilian Augusto Boal and his fundamental work on the Theatre of the Oppressed. This blind spot adds a rather ironic perspective to comments like that of Anne Berkeley, who stresses that devised theatre highlights “[t]he uses of theatrical performance for ALL students in the work of forming identities and values” (3). At the same time, we need to take seriously the repeated message of these articles, which is that devised drama and its radical pedagogies are typically seen as having a transformative effect, and it is a performative mode that speaks, or should speak, to all. As Ronlin Foreman of the Dell’Arte School comments, “The goal is to create a courageous theatre, based on people in relationship, passing beyond the peripheral situations of our lives and into the circumstances that define the human condition” (97).

For those of us who work with Latin American theatre in an academic setting in the United States and who would like to give our students a taste of the challenges and rewards of developing and staging productions of any sort, whether devised or traditional, the big questions we always ask ourselves include where to begin, with which models, in what balance of textual reading and production work, and in which language. Since many of us work in departments in which the language of instruction is Spanish, the last question seems the easiest to answer. Colleen Ryan-Scheutz and Laura Colangelo, among others, argue forcefully that performance provides language learners “opportunities to speak in less controlled and more creative ways [...] bring[ing] learners closer to real-life use of the target language” (375). There is a proven academic benefit for the students in performing in another language with respect to language acquisition and fluency, something that I have seen borne out in practice over many years of working with theatre in Spanish in the US academic setting. Yet, I am convinced—having done both scene work and full production—that the advantages of performance in the target language are best achieved when the stakes are high, not just scene work in a classroom setting, but full performance for a diverse public.

I work with a theatre troupe named Teatrotaller (founded in 1993), a largely student-run project whose mission is the production of high quality plays in Spanish and Spanglish for the local community. We frequently enjoy collaboration (and sometimes leadership) from community members, though I am ultimately the professor of record for the theatre production course associated with the group. We are very proud of our record of consistently producing excellent work on a regular basis and have achieved an enviable international reputation that has garnered us invitations to local and regional

universities, more distant Latin American festivals, and events in Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, and Argentina, as well as Canada, France, Belgium, Israel, Romania, and China. (We were not able to accept this last invitation due to the time it would have taken out of the student semester, always a consideration.) More recently, we have established an intermittent collaboration with Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India, which includes multilingual devised performances (*Our Stories, Their Stories*, 2013, and *Dear Earth, Hope You Are Keeping Well*, 2015) as well as a distant collaboration on our 2014 presentation of Caridad Svich's *Upon the Fragile Shore* and a planned 2017 co-presentation of a devised play-in-progress in January (India) and March (Ithaca and El Paso). Because our participants are generally very creative, the temptation to use devising methodology is almost irresistible for me. It seems a natural next step, but I recognize that it is by no means an obvious one for either performance or language pedagogy.

While a strong final production is an important goal for all of us in Teatrotaller, my own interest lies, in the final analysis, less in product and more in process—pedagogy rather than (pre)professional training. Hence devising, a form that responds profoundly to the “taller” part of our troupe’s name, and the focus in this article on process rather than the content of any specific final script or on a performance review of any of our shows. Devising is also, *pace* the *Theatre Topics* special issue with which I began this chapter, arguably a fundamentally and frustratingly under-recognized Latin American contribution to theatre practice.

When we think of the most relevant devising or devised theatre projects in the Hispanic world (often called “creación colectiva” in Spanish), we inevitably remember Mexico’s Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes (founded 1997), Peru’s Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani (founded 1971), Colombia’s Teatro La Candelaria (founded 1966), Cataluña’s Els Joglars (founded 1962), and the granddaddy of them all, the Teatro Experimental de Calí, or TEC (founded 1955). Many of these groups are in dialogue with and learned from Boal, whose theories and practices of Theatre of the Oppressed were systematized in the 1960s and circulated in many forms throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the importance of Enrique Buenaventura and the TEC in systematizing a method for collective creation cannot be overstated. Buenaventura’s model—first tested in the TEC with its late 1960s reorganization—has been widely adopted and adapted throughout Latin America since the early 1970s (see Rizk), although not without controversy from more radical practitioners, who reject the concept of “method” and its presuppositions. While early Latin American proponents of

devised theatre recognize a heritage that includes inspiration in and dialogue with projects like the US-based Bread and Puppets (1963), Living Theater (1947), and Teatro Campesino (1965), it would not be difficult to argue that in the Southern Hemisphere this kind of work took on a prominence it never achieved in the North. In some theatre communities in Latin America, devised projects became a dominant presence throughout the 1960s-1980s, grounding a practice that remains fundamental today. Arnold Sutcliffe, for instance, mentions that already in 1972, 28 of 32 groups that performed in Chile's Jornadas Regionales de Copiapó presented devised work. Likewise, Cipriano Argüello Pitt describes collective creation as a "rasgo constitutivo de la identidad teatral de Córdoba," despite the many structural and economic challenges facing this style of theatre, particularly in Argentina (5).

There is one inevitable consequence of these differential histories: Despite the inevitable turnover in the longest-lived of these groups in Latin America, the commitment to a sustained collaboration over an extended period of time is very strong. The actor-authors and other members of these groups, who have worked together for many years, some since the founding of the group, are highly seasoned professionals who know each other's working methods exceptionally well. Still, they will spend long stretches in the creative process—each new, original performance will have successive iterations, often taking several years of intense work to reach its final form. This is, of course, one of the reasons that professional devised productions are so often highly praised for their creativity and their rigor (that word again) and why student-devised productions are so often critiqued as tentative and clearly in-process.

Miguel Rubio Zapata, the Yuyachkani director, states trenchantly that "la creación colectiva es el gran aporte de aquello que podemos llamar la moderna tradición del teatro latinoamericano." He argues, furthermore, "hay que repetir siempre que la creación colectiva no es una fórmula y no supone necesariamente un método. . . . Se trata, más bien, de una actitud abierta a la propuesta, una disposición para confrontarse sintiendo el otro, . . . una actitud ética antes que estética."<sup>3</sup>

Two important assertions need to be underlined here: first, Rubio's claim that collective creation is what distinguishes modern Latin American theatre, and second, that this practice is founded on an ethical stance, given priority over aesthetic concerns, what he also calls an attitude rather than a methodology (exciting in principle, but hard to sell to curriculum committees). The performer, thus, is primarily an activist whose strategies are fundamentally political, working in the service of an ethical commitment, using physical-

ity to define a space of “acción comprometida [. . .] en las problemáticas de urgencia de su contexto” (*Cuerpo* 23). This mission of creating original works to address acute political and social issues is overtly shared by Teatro la Candelaria (Santiago García) and Teatro Experimental de Calí (Enrique Buenaventura). Rubio, García, and Buenaventura, unsurprisingly, have maintained open dialogues with each other over the many years of their theatre practice and share a commitment to the kind of artistic and theoretical work derived from their preference for collective creation/devising techniques in which all the actors are co-authors and all the participants, including the audience, become co-presenters.

Specific, celebrated Yuyachkani solo interventions include performances in public squares and other venues by Ana Correa (*Rosa Cuchillo*) and Alfonso Canepa (*Adiós Ayacucho*), and the much lauded collaboration of Yuyachkani and poet José Watanabe in developing Teresa Ralli’s staged *Antígona*, all of which are productions that derive from the tormented history of violence in Peru and have been performed in the context of, and alongside, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work. In each case, the work evolves from a long process of study, rehearsal, and the selective editing of images for compilation in the final performance project.

A somewhat different perspective comes from Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes, directed by Claudio Valdés Kuri, a relative newcomer in this long-lived set of troupes committed to devising techniques and a significant presence in what Susan Bennett calls the phenomenon of globalized theatre. For instance, troupe dramaturge Analola Santana says that *De monstruos y prodigios* (2000) was the product of nine months of rehearsals, in which members of the troupe were given the challenge of turning a conference talk into a performance text, largely through a series of physical experiments and oral improvisations (87-88). Their later piece, *El gallo* (2009, a collaboration with British composer Paul Barker, who also spent many years in Mexico), relies on musical form. The product of an even longer rehearsal period, it is in essence an anti-opera on the making of an opera, a kind of avant-garde *Chorus Line*. It does not need surtitles for either national or international audiences since it is sung entirely in nonsense syllables. With very little that is identifiably Mexican, except a reference to “lucha libre,” the play breaks stereotypes about what a Mexican person looks like by featuring performers of Afro-Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and East Asian backgrounds. (The director comes from a Lebanese immigrant background.)

On the one hand, then, all these works seem grounded in a Latin American collective creation tradition with parallel commitments to authorizing actors, highlighting social issues, and developing plays through long rehearsal processes. Like the Andean groups, Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes has a social extension, albeit one aimed at ecological rather than political goals. The troupe's mission statement emphasizes that "su trabajo escénico se fortalece con la ejecución de proyectos educativos, de bienestar social y ambiental que unifican el quehacer de Ciertos Habitantes" (website). Likewise, similar to the techniques used by Yuyachkani and other groups, rehearsals involve the synergy of devising techniques working upon autoethnographic content derived from the actors' "real" lives (Kien 351). On the other hand, the troupe's mission statement proudly defines its aesthetic location as a "punto de referencia para la vanguardia teatral latinoamericana" (website). In this sense, successful staged projects from this troupe, as Kien notes, seem to inherit more from globalized performance projects like Cirque de Soleil and the theatrical traditions of Dario Fo, Richard Schechner, and Peter Brook (349) than from Augusto Boal. Yet, like the more overtly political plays of other Latin American groups, *El gallo* is portable and adaptable.

I am personally drawn to the risky vanguardism of Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes, while at the same time, as a scholar and teacher, I find the more straightforward Boal to be a generative influence in both my theoretical work and theatre practice. This duality is refracted in Teatrotaller's devise practice as well. Thus, while most of our devised work over the years can be traced directly to the tradition of politically committed work in the Boalian tradition, our most fully developed drama utilizing devise methodology, *Adult Roy's Badland* (2012), the only one of our devise dramas to be performed internationally to date, is much more closely aligned with the globalized aesthetics of a group like Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes. In contrasting our *FaceBOOKED* (2011) with *Adult Roy*, it is clear that we gave ourselves permission in the first case to present a rough, in-process project, something also signaled by its performance in a non-theatrical space. The second production, performed in Cornell's largest and best-equipped theater, needed to be polished, rehearsed, and re-rehearsed so as to speak across language differences to an international audience in a prestigious festival.

Given the timelines mentioned above for the professional Latin American troupes, often measured in years, it may seem outrageous to propose that students engage in any kind of collective creation project. Our production schedule is typically ten weeks, generous by professional theatre standards,

but far short of the intense and lengthy commitment made by members of, say, Yuyachkani or Ciertos Habitantes. In addition, we know that many of our group members will have absolutely no background in theatre work, while others will have a considerable body of experience—another challenge for the instructor, who has to measure the needs for training and apprenticeship for some of the participants, while keeping things intellectually exciting for the more experienced troupe members. A third challenge: Any project programmed to continue into a second semester runs the risk of losing collaborators, and any project that crosses the boundary of the academic year will certainly lose valued participants to graduation.

Teatrotaller has an affiliation with Cornell University through the Latino Studies Program; the Department of Performing and Media Arts has traditionally declined any level of collaboration or support, although we hope things are beginning to change in a more positive direction because of fruitful collaborations in the last several years. We also frequently collaborate with one of Ithaca's small professional theaters, Kitchen Theater, and with community groups like the Latino Civic Association of Tompkins County and upstate farmworker groups. We perform in a variety of auditoriums and theaters, mostly on campus, but have also presented plays in churches and community centers and outdoors on the Ithaca commons. While many of the students who participate with the course/troupe will do so on a one-time basis, we have a surprising number of faithful veterans, including students who participate every semester during their Cornell career (this will frequently add up to participating in 6-12 productions), and, in a couple of cases, for years beyond; one of our most valued members, Carolina Osorio Gil, began with the group in 1999 and is still active today. We are a repertoire group, interested in reaching out to the community in the social activist sense, hence projects like our informative video skits aimed at upstate farmworkers, and also in the more crass butts-in-seats sense, introducing the Spanish-speaking and Spanish-learning public to this cultural form. We offer a variety of different kinds of performances from comic staples to thought-provoking drama and do our utmost to provide new and interesting challenges for our performers.

Most of Teatrotaller's plays are workshopped to some extent, more often than not with relatively modest revisions to an extant script. At other times, the project evolves over the course of a semester as a true collective creation collaboration between the actor-authors who develop modules out of theatrical play and improvisational work, the director who refines and shapes the results, the playwrights who serve as scribes and organizers of textual material, and



the instructor. Examples include the satirical *Día de campo* (2003), inspired by our students' outrage at the US invasion of Iraq; *Kan Balaam* (2009), a production focused on questions of indigenous rights in Mexico; several projects on immigration, including *Crossing the Line* (2007), a response to the wave of deportations in upstate New York and the increasing isolation of the farmworker population; our mash up of technology and immigration *FaceBOOKED*, and the immigration-rave *Adult Roy's Badland*. The result of these collective creation projects tends to be high-energy works-in-progress, which the students find satisfying as ethical projects, and at the same time I find satisfying pedagogically. They are a product of intense research in the more traditional academic sense as well as research into the body and its possibilities.

What these works have in common is their origin in current events. Teatrotaller members tend to be profoundly concerned about the political environment and committed to finding an appropriate artistic response that will supplement other forms of activism going on in the area. For *FaceBOOKED*, news reports covering the issue of immigration served as an important source of material, especially the rabid broadcasts of Fox News and the xenophobic materials on the Minuteman website. The students in the group were energized by their commitment to activism around the Dream Act and particularly found themselves inspired by the true-life story of one of their classmates and a leader in the group, a DREAMer who had been detained by ICE (Immigrant Customs Enforcement) agents in Rochester one semester short of graduation and nearly deported until the intervention of the Cornell administration saved his academic career and allowed him to return to school. Central to our discussions as well were increasing reports of surveillance of social media for immigration control purposes. Because many of the farmworkers in our area are increasingly fearful and isolated in the current atmosphere and tend to put themselves in danger through indiscriminate use of social media like Facebook, a set of students did intensive research on immigrant rights. They created a spin-off project: pedagogical scripts, vetted by legal experts, to serve as the basis for short videos on topics identified by farmworker leaders as their priorities, a project that developed in tandem with the production of the comic devise drama.

Our 40-minute play *FaceBOOKED* also had a technical inspiration: Luis Mario Moncada's *Nueve días de guerra en Facebook*. The source material did not influence the content of the play; the students took from Moncada's work its collage style and its staging of the performance possibilities of





Photo: Projected slide, created by Alicia Hetrick

contemporary social media. Our concepts for the play were workshopped in class and developed on a Facebook discussion thread, before being written down by several teams working on specific scenes and edited through Google Docs. Student actors created fake Facebook pages for their characters' identities, often with unexpected results in terms of friend requests. The final presentation included live actors, projected Facebook pages with continual updates, a Google Maps search, and a Twitter backchannel for immediate, live feedback and audience interaction.

As one of the students writes, "The challenge of this play from a tech perspective was figuring out how to combine the use of different types of communication technologies with the whole immigration aspect of the play. Overall, I think the two fell hand in hand with one another, and I think this is reflective in the audience participation and their comments on the backchannel and on Facebook. I also liked the fact that there was lots of singing, dancing, and comedic aspects of this play" (*Teatrotaller*). Another notes: "*Facebooked* was an original piece that also taught me something about the reality of theatre. The theatre department has always talked about the

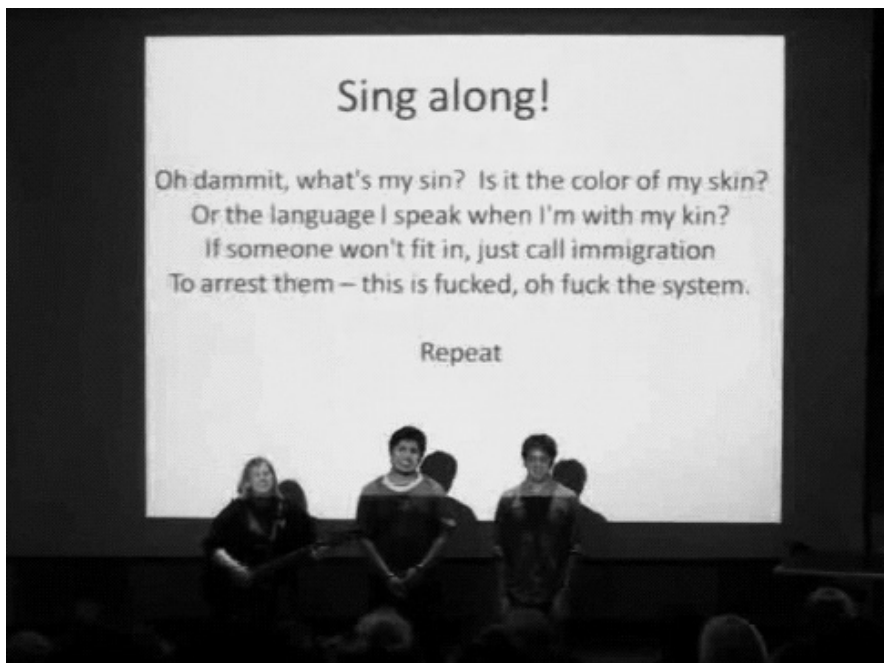


Photo: Still from production, Debra Castillo

history and theory of collaborative pieces, but it wasn't until I was working with several writers, directors, and actors, all with varying levels of theatrical experience, did I realize how difficult collaborative works can really be" (*Teatrotaller*). I think this last comment is particularly important. Students' exposure to a genre of work is typically theoretical; to have to work through the process as an engagement with the form in real space, with a timeline and a production date that involves facing a real audience, is transformative, and what is gained is far deeper than the knowledge acquired from reading theory alone.

*Adult Roy's Badlands*, created a year later, was a follow-up to *FaceBOOKED*, by way of yet another very well received collaborative creation project. When Teatrotaller president, *FaceBOOKED* star and theatre major Jorge Silva was offered a space to perform an experimental piece in one of the university theaters in fall 2011, he turned a three-week development and rehearsal period into a collaborative piece inspired by, and in part adapted from, the play *Latins Anonymous* by Rick Najera, Cris Franco, Luisa Leschin, Armando Molina, and Diane Rodriguez, borrowing the name of that collec-

tive project for what was billed as a workshop event. This performance was later repeated in several other venues, including an academic conference, with a rotating set of actors. As Silva writes, “The goal of this piece was to understand the process of creating collaborative work using the same methods as the playwrights; using safe space and exchanging memories through storytelling, we began to form a piece that utilized excerpts of the play that segued into stories of our individual identities. The cast’s diversity allowed audiences to relate with various aspects of identity, from gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, and provided a space in which safe exchange was possible” (*Teatrotaller*).

Silva’s next project was *Adult Roy’s Badland: A Rave Play*, accepted as a part of the 2011-2012 season in Cornell’s program in Performing and Media Arts—a huge honor for an original student production, the first time ever for any Cornell production on the main stage during the season. *Adult Roy’s Badland: A Rave Play* was the third play in what had become a three-semester *Teatrotaller* sequence of engaged, collective creation projects focused on the theme of immigration. To add to the pressure, *Teatrotaller* proposed this play, sight unseen and still in development, as our performance for the Fall 2012 UNESCO World Festival of Theatre Schools to be held in Romania. As Jorge Silva writes, “It was an opportunity to use all of the resources and relationships I had formed and produce a piece that questioned what theatre could be and collaborate with peers and professionals alike” (*Teatrotaller*).



Photo: Lauren Bigalow

Silva speaks eloquently of the creative process by which this play came into being and the effect that it had on his career decisions

While many students in theatre were very focused on the popular and more traditional notion of performance, I, much like Teatrotaller, sought to invest in more meaningful “non-normative” theatre that addressed the crossroads of performance and intersectionality. With our sound designer and DJ, Sam Tannert, dramaturge Alexander Symes, [video designer Lanny Huang], and director Casey Minella, *Adult Roy* pushed the boundaries of theatre through the use of lighting, sound, movement, and space. Using rave as an aesthetic, we created a world where our hero Roy’s nationlessness manifested personifications of the conflicting forces of immigration. We had the distinct privilege of being able to collaborate not only with the industry professionals at the Schwartz Center, but also with members from Ithaca College and other local artists. I had never been so proud to have such a hugely diverse cast and production team and to this day I look back at *Adult Roy* as being one of the best times of my life. As graduation and adulthood loomed over me, Debra Castillo gave me one more gift—a visit from Carlos Morton. Author of *Johnny Tenorio*, Carlos came to see the show and called it “amazing” and “the next *In The Heights*.” I was in awe that I was able to gain such positive and constructive feedback from an admired member of the Latino theatre community; that experience essentially cemented my decision concerning my future as an artist. (*Teatrotaller*)

For *Cornell Daily Sun* reviewer Tom Moore, “*Badland* really had two distinct audiences: one on stage, raving with the actors, and one in the house seats, watching the play unfold. Thus, *Badland* wasn’t just a rave-inspired play, or a rave-themed play. It was something completely new: a Rave Play. Fully rave. Fully play. From the onstage audience, I have heard nothing but stellar reviews [. . .]. Speaking for myself, raving in *Badland* was a theatrical experience unlike any I’ve had in my life. . . .]. Groundbreaking doesn’t begin to cover it. By the time *Badland* was done with me, bits of my mind were splattered all over the stage like broken glow sticks and my conception of what theatre could be and do had been raved into a sweaty oblivion.”

The play from the perspective of the seated audience was another matter, and while each of these three projects involved audience participation at some level (live tweeting and sing-along with *FaceBOOKED*, extended talk back workshops with *Latins Anonymous*, on-stage dancing with *Adult*



Photo: Joey Moro

*Roy*), the quality and degree of audience involvement varied dramatically. Director Casey Minella gave her interpretation of the contrast between the experiences of the two audiences for *Adult Roy*, one highly active on stage with the actors, one passive, separated from the stage by the proscenium arch: “As a director, I knew that there were going to be two different audiences, that there were going to be two different plays that people were going to be watching. The people [seated] in the house are not being active, and I think they noticed that. Watching art, not actively engaging with it, is something completely different from being onstage in the production, completely submersed in the story” (qtd in Moore).

Collaborative creation work is process-oriented, workshop-based, non-hierarchical to its core. Fundamentally, we need to think about how an idea or image becomes embodied, how it provokes dialogue, how that dialogue needs to help clarify the project’s focus, and how to continue clarifying it as the project evolves. At its best, devise work is a flexible, yet structured, exploration of the unknown and encourages risk-taking as well as deep reflection on what it means to make theatre from scratch. It encourages students to think of knowledge as a collaborative and contingent process rather than an objective quantum to be dispensed from a central authority. As Sherman

writes: “[I]t makes transparent the action of thinking not only about what we are doing, but about what assumptions guide that thinking.” Furthermore, Sherman adds, it leaves a space open for discovery and surprise—for a “practice of astonishment” (94).

At its worst, devising can be an exhausting and unsettling exercise in battling frustration, with too little guidance and an ambiguous allotment of authority, under the strict time constraints of the academic calendar that relentlessly ask for process and practice to manifest itself in product(ion), for flexible play to evolve into “the play.” For us as instructors it challenges the principles that define institutional pedagogical practices and ideas about methodology, as well as established theatre production strategies. The outcome is indeterminate.

You may well ask, what then are the advantages of devising, at least some of the time? From the pragmatic, production angle, in my experience:

- It allows a very meagerly endowed group to make maximum use of both human and material resources.
- Performance material can be adjusted to the talents and limitations of troupe members.

From the community angle:

- Tying practice to stories garnered from the community, it encourages and fosters town/gown partnerships, giving back to the community.
- It develops collaboration and strong community building skills.

From the participant angle:

- It immerses the participants in the research on passionately felt, but sometimes unexamined issues, helping them to make sense of the world.
- It gives them a sense of ownership in the project, and results are often seen as transformative.
- It encourages them to see art as more than entertainment.

The great Irish playwright Samuel Beckett’s late novella *Worstward Ho* includes a much quoted adjuration: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” It seems like a concise description of the challenges and benefits of collective creation practice, where participants are encouraged to risk failure rather than taking the more obvious “safe” route of the tried-and-true. Intelligent failures are more likely to surprise us and to result in creative breakthroughs, important insights, and intriguing results. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam quotes Beckett (24), along with a corollary she finds in the title of a 2004 LTTR event: “Practice more failure!” (23). She argues forcefully

in this book that what she calls “low theory”—to contrast it with the more academically validated “high theory” of cultural analysis—saves us from the traps of hegemony, allowing practitioners to lose our way and see the value in getting lost. High theory, with its propensity for adjectives like “serious” and “rigorous,” signals for Halberstam the site of incarcerated knowledge, “a form of training and knowing that confirms what is already known according to approved methods of knowing” (6). Failure, defined in this context, is to be preferred to success: “Alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal” (2).

This Halberstamian space of critique echoes profoundly with the ethically driven collective creation performance practices deriving from the long history of explorations in this practice from Latin American troupes, which are precisely located in the failure of the current systems of knowledge to account for contestatory histories, diverse embodied subjects, minority positionalities, racialized identities, visible gender, and abled differences. Risking failure, then, is also a way of resisting the grand logic of hegemonic theory and its associated methodologies. Failure, as Beckett intuitively offers, offers a way of learning that proposes a different relation to knowledge. To return to Rubio’s distinction between attitude and methodology, it opens the possibility of using attitude and embodiment for exploring lost histories and buried memories, a learning that is also a leaning in towards process.

I hazard a categorical statement: Whether through devising techniques for theatre or in other spaces opened for the messy project of shared knowledge construction, in the space of modern institutional practice with its relentless drive toward excellence and success, it is important for all of us, students and faculty alike, to encounter these risky pedagogies, to take the challenge of failure, and to celebrate the sharing of imperfect products.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example Carlson, Stephensen, and Grace and Wasserman.

<sup>2</sup> Many theatre troupes continue to draw on Boalian techniques; see for example, Brazil’s Centro de Teatro do Oprimido, established in 1986 as a research and performance project.

<sup>3</sup> Quotes are from the original manuscript that Rubio sent me, the text of a talk he gave in Bogotá.



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