

Passages on Emergent Ecologies of Dramaturgying*

**Pasajes en Ecologías Emergentes del Dramaturgear
(Dramaturgying)**

**Passagem em Ecologías Emergentes do
Dramaturgear (Dramaturgying)**

Álvaro Hernández**

Ph.D. Candidate ABD, Graduate Group Performance Studies, University of California Davis / Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Facultad de Artes ASAB, Bogotá.
Correo electrónico: alvrodriquez@ucdavis.edu

Revista Corpo-grafías: Estudios críticos de y desde los cuerpos / Volumen 6 – Número 6 / Enero – diciembre de 2019 / ISSN impreso 2390-0288, ISSN digital 2590-9398 / Bogotá, D.C., Colombia / 38-53.

Fecha de recepción: 18 de agosto de 2018

Fecha de aceptación: 24 de septiembre de 2018

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.14483/25909398.14226>

Cómo citar este artículo: Hernández, A. (2019, enero-diciembre). Passages on Emergent Ecologies of Dramaturgying. *Revista Corpo-grafías: Estudios críticos de y desde los cuerpos*, 6(6), 38-53 / ISSN 2390-0288.

***Artículo de investigación:** Este artículo hace parte de la tesis doctoral del autor, en el marco de la investigación en curso titulada: Ecologías Emergentes del Dramaturgiando.

******A performance artist, theater director, actor, playwright and professor at ASAB Colombia. He has received a number of international awards, and has participated in and created performances in Asia, Europe and Latin America. He has been the artistic director, playwright and dramaturg of Entropico Teatro since 2003, and has extensive international training in theatre, an MA in Playwriting from the National University of Colombia, and is completing his PhD in Performance Studies at the University of California, Davis. His research lies at the intersection of affect, activist philosophy and performance, dramaturgy and ecology, practice, trainings, physical actions and bodily approaches, performance ecology, and violence and performance. Hernandez has also collaborated in artistic and research projects with indigenous communities of the Amazon and has developed performances with Colombian communities involved in the armed conflict. His most recent project 'What do we not know about an empty chair' premiered in Bogotá, September 2016.



Abstract

The essay focuses on the work of co-composition that occurs among the movements of a performer with a 50 meter rope within the contexts of creation in two different productions. Through studies of the action of these particular practices in making the pieces for performance, this essay reflects upon the moments felt when not even the idea of a resolution has come through, nor has the coherence of its particular substance arisen to definable terms, but rather when a felt sense of not-knowing is luring the relations of actions to an indefinite effect. Such a particular condition is what I call dramaturgying and the affective time-space of its occurrence is rehearsal. The space of indeterminacy that comes across the mattering produced by the entanglement of forces and relations carried by a practice, can enable the potentiality of a realm of relations in which the emergence of otherwise coherences and sensoriums may be made possible. The piece is developed through work in localized and situated practices in relation to particular materials that enable in the milieus of ecologies the emergence with/of different sensoriums. Each of these practices with materials enable affective co-compositions of time-space, they move through the connections emerging out of the experience in rehearsal, enabling anew potentialities and opening up to otherwise human and other than human relations. Each practice is an experiment in processual dramaturgy that occurs in a milieu in which zones of contact emerge, blurring and stretching the very limits of the limit in the emergence of the dramaturgying. They are experiments to risk bodies onto “the edge.”

Keywords: dramaturgying; dramaturgy; knots; rope; subject; process; ecologies; emergent.



Resumen

Este ensayo se propone reflexionar sobre los momentos sentidos a través de la acción de prácticas particulares en el hacer de un performance, cuando ni siquiera se ha manifestado alguna idea de resolución, ni la coherencia de su sustancia particular se ha materializado en términos definibles, sino más bien cuando un sentir sentido de no-conocer atrae las relaciones de la acción a un efecto indefinido. Tal condición particular es lo que llamo Dramaturgear (Dramaturgying) y el espacio tiempo afectivo en el que ocurre es ensayo. El espacio de indeterminación que es atravesado por la materialización producida por el entretrejado de fuerzas y relaciones transportadas por una práctica puede activar la potencialidad de un campo de relaciones en el cual la emergencia de otro tipo de coherencias y sensorios puede ser hecha posible. Esta pieza se desarrolla a través de trabajo en prácticas localizadas y situadas en relación a materiales particulares que permiten la emergencia con/de distintos sensorios en el entorno de ecologías. Cada una de estas prácticas con materiales activa co-composiciones afectivas de tiempo-espacio, que se mueven en el curso de las conexiones emergiendo de la experiencia en el ensayo, permitiendo nuevas potencialidades y la apertura a otro tipo de relaciones humanas y otras que humanas. Cada práctica es un experimento en dramaturgia procesual que ocurre en un entorno en el que emergen zonas de contacto que difuminan y expanden los límites del límite en la emergencia del dramaturgear. Son experimentos que arriesgan cuerpos al borde.

Palabras clave: dramaturgia; dramaturgiando; nudos; cuerda; sujeto; proceso; ecologías; emergente.

Resumo

Este ensaio tem como objetivo refletir sobre os momentos sentidos pela ação de determinadas práticas na realização de uma performance, quando nem mesmo alguma ideia de resolução se manifestou, nem a coerência de sua substância particular materializou-se em termos definíveis, mas antes, quando um sentimento de não-saber atrai as relações de ação para um efeito indefinido. Tal condição particular é o que eu chamo Dramaturgear (Dramaturgying) e o espaço de tempo afetivo em que ocorre é um ensaio. espaço indeterminação que é atravessado pela materialização produzida pelo entrelaçamento de forças e relações transportados por um prático pode ativar o potencial de um campo de relações em que o surgimento de outras consistências e sensorial pode ser possível. Esta peça é desenvolvida através do trabalho em práticas localizadas e localizadas em relação a materiais particulares que permitem o surgimento de / de diferentes sensores no ambiente de ecologias. Cada uma dessas práticas com materiais ativa co-composições afetivas do tempo-espacio, que se movem no curso das conexões emergentes da experiência do ensaio, permitindo novas potencialidades e abrindo-se a outros tipos de relações humanas e outras que o humano. Cada prática é um experimento em dramaturgia processual que ocorre em um ambiente no qual emergem zonas de contato que confundem e expandem os limites da emergência dramaturgica. São experimentos que arriscam corpos no limite.

Palavras-chave: dramaturgia; dramaturgear; nós; corda; sujeito; processo; ecologias; emergente.

Excerpts on Emerging Ecologies of Dramaturgying

The writing here tries to think through the encounter with the material and about the emergence of an ecology of dramaturgy. The materiality and the mattering produced by the forces and intensities of such an encounter release an affective ecology distributed through the act of “roping”. Through a study of “micro-actions”, this paper is interested in how these acts of making together manifest the coming into existence of worlds through that making, processes of becoming form and “taking-form” that cannot be isolated from the “affective time-space” of their occurrence. The paper is written in the process of its making with a rope and so it takes form in its carrying. Each furling and unfurling, pulling and knotting of the rope gives place to new traces, carriers of not-known potentials. It experiments with language through the accidents that actualize the force of the encounter making both language and action to act one upon the other, changing in the emergence of its coming together.

ROPING

A fifty meter rope is packed and unpacked every day at the beginning and end of each rehearsal. Tied up together and throw inside a bag without any real care, and then next day or next rehearsal unpacked and untied of every knot that has joined, clipped, fastened, manifested, in the messy mass that the rope has become inside the bag, then taken out and carefully coiled, gathered together into a spiral form and finally laid on the very center of the space. Two performers, one of whom in this case also acts as the director and the other as the dramaturg, take one end and the other and both slowly pull in opposite directions.



Rope from the performance What We not Know about an Empty Chair. Directed by Alvaro Hernandez. Personal .
Figure 5. Roping, from What We not Know about an Empty Chair. Directed by Alvaro Hernández.
Personal Archive Alvaro Hernández. 2016.

PULLING

Both performers slowly attend¹ to the rope-making of pulling almost equally distributed forces, nonetheless in difference, in a tension that is gradually breaking loose in every other direction. There are not two bodies pulling a rope but a roping, a collective emergence, a co-composition of tendencies that come-together and lure us to a proximity that nevertheless cannot be attained without a distance, without a differential.² For the effect gathered in the pulling of this rope-roping occurs in the distance that sustains the energy of both the pulling and loosening, the

¹ Attend here implies to move with and be moved by the material. It suggests an engagement that brings forth the energy of the encounter, the full presentness, or presencing to borrow Hunter's terminology (see her article on Affective Politics in this journal) that is mobilized by the process. It thus occurs in the doing, not in advance of it, but across, and in that way the attending is not the capture of what happens but the openness to what else could, a-tension to the possible. It implies an act of extending, slowing down, paying attention and to "stay with."

² See Massumi's concept of relation of non-relation (2011:20)

coming-together and the excess on which the event comes to be felt. The forces of this pulling are the co-composition of the movement of both the actual and the virtual, they both intersect in the unfolding of the event and while some actualize most continue as remnants and excesses that multiply as potential yet to come fully actualized and fully actively affecting the shifting movement of its future re-orientation.³ Erin Manning says following Whitehead, “a body never pre-exists its movement,” it bodies, it is bodying. (2014, 164)⁴ It is not a rope and two bodies pulling but a fielding, a collective sensing, which activates a relational attunement. The pulling of the rope actualizes the intersects and mobilizes within the interstices of roping, a field force of relations not yet manifested, not given in advance of the event but yielding the latency of its possibility of existence. For what actually happens – the pulling – contains both what it is and what “could come to be” the excess part of it, – rope /roping/and- however not actually manifested. What actually took place is always embedded, enlivened by what virtually passed through it, what did not manifest and yet is part of its happening (Debaise, 2017).⁵ As with the pulling of this rope there are latencies, vibrations in their process of “taking-form,”⁶ and yet those forms, once arrived, will never be just that, “not only”⁷ even if in this very moment of emergence it is the only thing they are.

Every new rehearsal attends, slows down, pays attention to the tendencies, potentialities, new emergences that unfold across this roping. Every time the rope is extended, in amongst this roping its movement moves and moves us varying the intensities coming-together in such an ecology of practice. The act of pulling should not require any effort but just a continuous micro-displacement, a subtle continuous shifting that unsettles any sense of position unfolding a flexibility, that moves across the interstices, that maintains the rope as the axis of their roping, the in-betweeness that preserves just the right tension, not here or there but rather nowhere which is also an everywhere, a pulling and contracting that opens up a nodal point of encounter, not a common point between two bodies – which would mean to reduce the encounter to the commonality of those individuals – but a collective sharing that maintains and sustains, stays in a-tension that lures yet-to-come unfoldings of matter-making. This be-coming together realizes the collective latency of an impulse, the vibration that moves along this happening is carried across the myriads of unfinished, never to finish forking paths. Impulses push and pull, not from the inside of a body’s intention, they are rather orientations that distribute the forces moving along, amongst the messy pool of potential. Impulses are in-pulses not because they ome from the inside but because they are moved by what Massumi and Manning call the “in-act.” (2014)

3 The interlacing of the actual and the virtual. See Manning’s essay on Anarchive. (Forthcoming)

4 In Whitehead the subject is an emergence, a vector that does not exist prior to the event of its emergence. (Debaise, 2017).

5 See negative prehensions in Whitehead. While things take form and actualize that does not mean that they’re just that, whatever was carried and refused in the shaping of its actualization keep “moving” and potentially active, as a new force carrier of possibilities of existence. (Debaise, 2017:74)

6 “Taking-form” is a term used by Erin Manning. (Manning, 2014 and Forthcoming)

7 I am borrowing Marisol de la Cadena’s term. (De la Cadena, Forthcoming)

The movement moved by the tension and a-tension of/with the rope is an axis in which distributed forces meet, the drive-pulsion that occurs in the course of its eventing, right / nowhere / in the middle. The two performers adjust continuously to the shifting energy that roping moves, they try their best to sustain the relational attunement, the passage that organizes this field of relation just by attuning to an active quality of stillness, the pulsion driven by the effect yet to come, an affective tonality emerging in a field felt of felt sense from which the connections emerge. This micro-displacement not seen, not yet actual but quite felt, does not rest here or there, on one side or the other, it keeps adjusting among the changes that subtle movements, even non-movements push, pull, sink, resist.



Figure 6. Rope pulling, from Gardening Coreographies. Directed by Regina Gutierrez. Dramaturg Alvaro Hernández. Still taken by the author from Justin Streichman's video of the piece. 2018.

What is at stake is how the encounter takes form, knowing that there is not a mode but just the middling that emerges in virtue of its connections, always different and always singular, and thus the problem is not the rope, “not only” but the way we relate to it, the ways in which materials get to be met, felt, approached, sensed. The forms in which, with which we deepened and opened a collective sense and share of this middling. For practices intensify our experience of materials, they disrupt the balance of common sense and immerse and submerge into the pool of distributed connections, unbalancing sense making and withdrawing from the precarious balance, almost off balance, what may be, “could be” and is not yet, the myriad of fragile, incomplete connections from which the affective ecological mess comes to its worldings.



Figure 7. Rope pulling, from What We not Know about an Empty Chair. Directed by Alvaro Hernández. Personal Archive Alvaro Hernández. 2016.

Once and again in each rehearsal the two performers approach to the material and every time they do they learn not to know and in not-knowing come to know that difference is made by the terms of the encounter. What remains is the modes of attending and a-tension through which the terms of the encounter break loose. For attending is also an adjusting to what changes that provokes a deeper sensing of the material, but to deepen does not mean to fix, or to reduce the material to a particular knowingness but on the contrary to make it loose, to leave it open and thus enabling what may come to do and may come to be, to enable vectors, possible lines of flight on which potential is carried, to get entangled in the web of relation. Attending is a sort of filter that subtracts without reducing, it adds as it breaks loose “minor differences” and in so doing it gives way to what exceeds, to what remains in/as potential. Materials open up by the in-pulses moved by the practices we commit to, making emerge new modes of attending, attention and a-tension, loosing up the mesh of entanglements through which ecologies are assembling and breaking loose the exceeding the “worlding in which we are thrown.” (Massumi, 2011, 110)

Stay with the rope and once you feel you're caught into something break it loose, get loose, move along the in-pulse of its change of direction and make room for something unpredictable to happen.

KNOTTING

Two performers stay pulling with a 50 meter rope. While the length of the rope is passing, intensive qualities emerge gradually changing the tension and disrupting the orientation of the pulling. And in the pulsion of this pulling there is a pause, a yielding force, a flexibility that curves the strength of the impulse. The disparate forces meet an obstacle that needs to be traversed and that transverse the movement of the rope, they cling, adhere, bind into, bind together, the rope enmeshes, twists, disturbs the forces in-tension and tangles up, moving one part upon the other, folding, interlacing the multiplicity of strands from which the movement of the rope gets tied into a knot.



Figure 8. Rope knotting, from Gardening Coreographies. Directed by Regina Gutierrez. Dramaturg Alvaro Hernández. Still taken by the author from Justin Streichman's video of the piece. 2018.

The rope in itself is already a knotting, a continuous concatenation of changing directions, a chain of movement reorienting itself in each knot, that is why keeping the rope in its pulling motion is a constant reorientation of minute, “even immobile speeds continuously shifting.”⁸ The rope is passing, moving force upon force, entering the threshold that ties up a connective multiplicity, smoothly sliding into the cross-crossing of relation, into the knot-making. For as Nancy says “the tying of a knot is nothing... but placing into relation.” (1997, 111) Two performers stay with the rope pulling and the rope gradually curves into itself, refusing its orientation, re-orienting into a knot. A moving knot “nots,” refuses to be tied and by its passing enters into a connectedness that has no beginning or end, it knots, it ties and breaks loose in movement of change. The knot just created, needs to be undone just by this pulling, and each new unknotting, untying, is a loosening up that throws the bodies into change, there is no beginning or end but a journey of connections. The threshold that the roping knots and unknots is felt, moves the trajectory of doing, and each transit into a knot that immediately unknots, ties and gets untied, carries both its immediate past and its present, it is “present of its pastness”, (Manning, 2008) “gone and yet, it is there,” non-sensuous perception in Whiteheadian terminology (1933, 181). Immediately a knot is tied it is already on the way to its untying, its concatenation and its shifting. The moving from knot to knot is a continuous shifting, a persistent change that mobilizes relations. The performers adjust to the knotting, stitching in a movement of contour. The knotting weaves change without any plan moving towards its shape.

Two performers pulling the rope and every time a knot is made and unmade they attend to what changes, move to the side of the rope and take one among many books of anatomy and philosophy lying on the floor. They pick a word, or a few words – each time they use a different book – and try to follow what movement moves, the change that was moved by the sliding knot. This time they use words, they write. The writing writes a body that gets to be undone, with no support of muscles or bones.

*(Knot with the ellipsis. Write in between the ellipsis and get to move with the orientation moving and the one just coming in the fleeting point).*⁹

A second time, one of the performers uses the knotting to be moved, being made by the knotting, following the trajectory of change in each knot. The performer lies on the floor on top of the rope and without moving moves. A bodying is being made.

8 A fragment of a text written by Regina Gutierrez and Alvaro Hernandez for a performance piece called “Gardening Coreographies” (Performed in 2018).

9 A proposition for writing during the process of creation of “Gardening Coreographies”. (2018)



Figure 9. Rope knotting, from *What We not Know about an Empty Chair*. Directed by Alvaro Hernández. Personal Archive Alvaro Hernández. 2016.

*Towards a non-definition of Dramaturgy. The dramaturgying of dramaturgy. A passage on “Emergent Ecologies of Dramaturgying.”*¹⁰

Loosening. *To make loose or looser. To set free or release from bonds or physical restraint. To undo, unfasten (bonds, a knot, or the like). Now usually: To render looser or less tight, to relax, slacken. To weaken the adhesion or attachment of; to unfix, detach. To become loose. To make less coherent; to separate the particles of. (Oxford English Dictionary, Online Version)*

¹⁰ “Emergent Ecologies of Dramaturgying” is a larger research of the author of which this essay is part, that involves different materials, practices, locations and situated ecologies intersecting the practice-notion of dramaturgying in very different ways.

Over about three years, I have been working with a 50 meter rope bought in Bogotá, Colombia and transported in a big black suitcase to several other places. That suitcase is now the rope's suitcase, this rope's suitcase. During this period of time I have participated (as a director, dramaturg, performer and/or playwright) in the whole process of creation of two different performances in which the rope was never thought to be a part. With both performances the rope landed without any clear clue of how to use it, or what the role of it was – and it was never the intention to know.¹¹The rope was just a material, an object to work with, to become with, to stay with, it was an open site for relations and not-knowing.¹² What mattered most was how the working of the rope could undo what we knew or thought we knew of it in advance, and how the work could then lead us to exceed our possibilities of imaging it. With each of those performances the rope could actually be dismissed, set aside, but the work would tell us if it worked, it would open the field of potential, thinking-doing on the site, in-situ, as whatever could have been imagined or done with/by this rope was right there on the eventness of the roping. Working with the material would develop modes of attention and attending that in turn would realize ways of engagement through/with which particular practices got to be attuned.

Fred Moten in his book *Stolen Life* (2018) part of the trilogy *consent not to be a single being*

Instead of first engaging with a direct practice of contact and encounter with a rope, I would like

works on the idea or the process of “anassignment,” which is, “the disavowal of the very idea of

to try first the multiple ways of meeting a rope through the languaging of possible actions,

an end point: the task at hand, the activity in question is aleatory” (227). Anassignment enables

or actions acting upon the encounter of certain languaging, just as a proposition to envelop the rope

to think the work of study as a co-labor in process that is not directed towards the completion of

into multiple dimensions of the experiencing of language upon a material, with a material...

the assignment but rather to the unmaking of the very structure of evaluation and accumulation

Working with a 50 meter rope.

that sustains the hierarchies of a certain political order. In a similar way to Moten's

I'm looking for all the combinations I can find between the word rope and a preposition that affects the action of the rope

“anassignment.” dramaturgying practices incompleteness as the site to experiment with change, it

I think of the modes of the rope tangled in the connection rope... with

11 The performances are “What We not Know about an Empty Chair” (2016) in which the author of this essay worked as director, performer, dramaturg and playwright and “Gardening Coreographies”(2018) directed by Regina Gutierrez, in which I was one of the performers and the dramaturg. The essay on “Affective Politics” by Lynette Hunter in this issue gives a major description of the first of these performances.

12 Not-knowing is of particular interest to this research however due to the length of this essay will be just marginally touched.

does not work towards the structure or coherence of a work but rather incites modes of

think and rope my own dictionary of actions...

loosening, a species of disorientation that breaks apart the sense of coherence instantiated by

In the beginning these sets of combinations are extracted from a dictionary, several dictionaries,

common sense opening up ways to engage in not-knowing, it refuses the coherent order of

later I speculate into impossible combinations of wording the roping.

working on a path that already knows what needs to be done and how to do it, instigating to stay

Moving from verb to verb in Roping.¹³

in contact with the very materiality in which the encounter of singularities emerged. It is by resisting being caught in a movement oriented towards an end that the practice of dramaturgying sustains a rigorous and constant work of sketching that refuses to enable a resolution, a tying and untying of knots that disperse and distribute the material and slowly traces ways to rework it, revisit it, revise it, restructure it by means of the techniques emerged in the connections enabled by the work being made.

Two performers sustain the very particular pulling and knotting that emerged in their dramaturgying. Pulling and knotting here, are ways of sensing the affective qualities that emerge of the thinking-moving of these bodies, they are not the dramaturgying, but are modes of

engagement with the affective qualities moved by, in between the encounter.

Pulling and knotting are carriers of this intensive quality of continuous change; they are not metaphors of a dramaturgying, they are practices that emerged in the dramaturgying. In a similar way, dramaturgying pulls, moving the relations, and knots, cultivating change. I am thinking dramaturgying within this “loosening”¹⁴ time-space that enables a middling, the messiness in which the excess of experience can be felt. What loosening implies is a porous sense and capacity that facilitates being thrown and being touched and engaging in affective fields of connection and encounter.¹⁵ In this sense dramaturgying is not the work of a dramaturg, nor does it happen only because what a dramaturg does – it can – dramaturgying always happens in the collective, it is the landing site of a multiplicity to come, a co-compositional work that pulls and pushes tendencies and intensities and actualizes in disparate and dispersed ways possible becomings. Dramaturgying sustains the fluid and loose sense of not-knowing. In order to get

13 A strategy to think with the rope as part of the research of the author on “Emergent Ecologies of Dramaturgying.”

14 The word loose has been used in different but similar ways by Lynette Hunter. See the essay of affective politics in this issue.

15 André Lepecki uses the term “errancy” to refer to the work of dramaturgy and the dramaturg.

lost the work and their doers soften up, get loose, disavowing and excising the certainty of knowing, both, of what to do and how to do it. By this quality of not-knowing in which dramaturgying emerges occurs the unfolding of anew experiments in making, opening the potential of possibilities to test the limits, to place the work and the working right at its edge, creating complex interactions, zones of encounter that reorient our modes of engagement.

Dramaturgying is a fragile co-compositional unframing-work, it is not done to frame but to undo frames, to denormalize experience and thus destabilize the habits and hence heighten the force of movement moving towards deterritorializations. By sustaining the processual, dramaturgying embraces the multiplicity of flows that move through these experimental assemblages. From this view, dramaturgying is always larger than human, it builds platforms of speculative action, reconnects and weaves, or perhaps interweaves actions at work, the “work of actions,” and the working work of actions,¹⁶ the myriad of relations that persists in the excess of the processual, which always interconnects in more than human encounters, in emergent ecologies of dramaturgying.

In unlearning to know by not-knowing, by enabling oneself to be thrown in the field force of potential we mobilize unpredictable ways of life-making and open up the spectrum of what we could possibly imagine and do.

¹⁶ I am referring to the notion of Eugenio Barba of dramaturgy as weaving and as “the work of actions”. (2010)

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