





HOWLROUND

REPORT

From activities supported by the
AMERICAN VOICES NEW PLAY INSTITUTE

JULY | 2010 - JUNE | 2011



Introduction

Writing year-end reports is always a strange task. By the time all the information is gathered, the year you are reporting on feels a million miles away. As an organization you've moved on because you know that resting comfortably on the successes of the past won't move you to the future, and the American Voices New Play Institute is all about the future—the future of the field, the future of new work, the future of the theater artist.

That said, it's the work of 2010/11 that brings us to this moment as I write the report at the start of 2012. Much of what has comprised the energy of this iteration of the New Play Institute will move to Emerson College in July of 2012 to form a new Center for the Theater Commons. What will remain here at Arena Stage will be the playwright residencies and Theater 101.



This was an important time to solidify the playwright residencies at Arena Stage and programming two resident playwright productions for the 2011/12 season did just that. Karen Zacarias's *The Book Club Play* and Amy Freed's *You, Nero* were put on the schedule for Fall, 2011. In addition, amazing work was done to begin to integrate Theater 101 into the literary office activities of Arena Stage. These two programs working side-by-side have amazing potential to fully bring audiences up close and personal with a playwright and her work. Though it happened just after the time frame of this report, it's worth noting the profound interactions between resident playwright Karen Zacarias and the Theater 101 participants for *The Book Club Play*. Both artist and audience were enriched by the exchange.



Most importantly, what emerged in the year that this report covers is clarity and substance around what we mean by “documentation and dissemination.” HowlRound took shape, the New Play Map began to fill in, and New Play TV went from an idea to an oft-used resource for sharing panels and processes with those unable to attend in person.

As I write, between ten and fifteen thousand people a month are using these tools on a regular basis—contributing to HowlRound, finding themselves and others on the map, and watching livestreamed events online. In making documentation and dissemination matter we are extending the reach of the field to include activities and ideas that live outside of the rehearsal room and beyond traditional theater spaces.



We would contend, as David Dower did in his report to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, that too many theaters are stuck behind the gates of opportunity. Our energies for the scope of this report have been focused on unlocking those gates and finding ways to revitalize a field that often feels too narrow and is found serving too few.

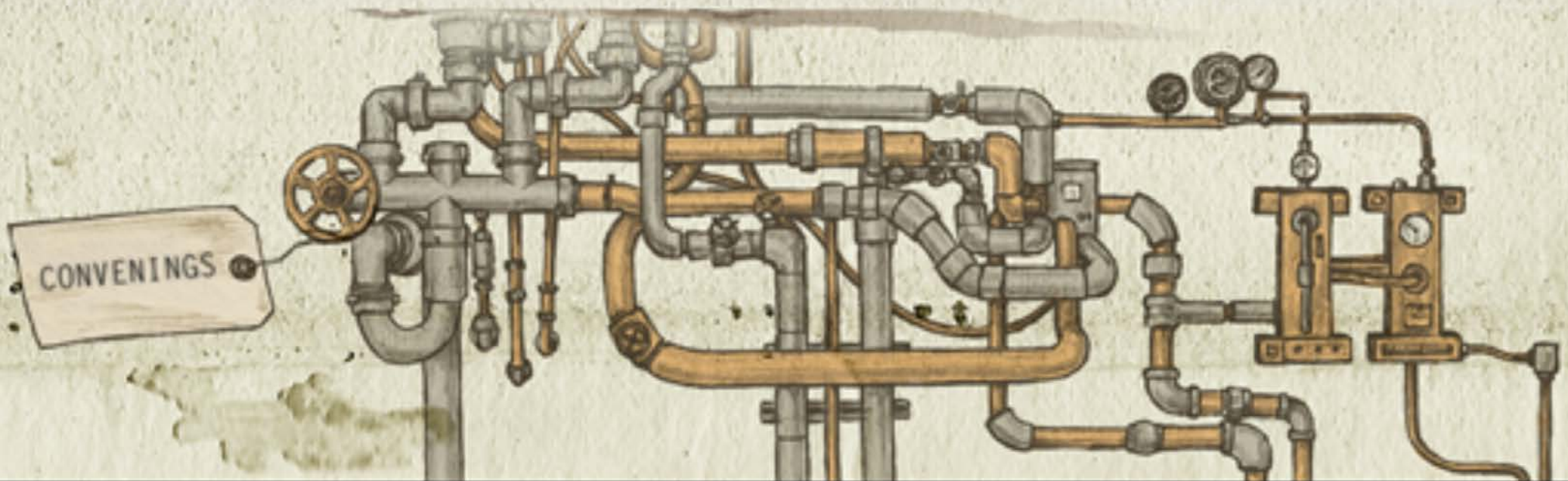
Polly Carl

Director, American Voices New Play Institute

From Scarcity to Abundance - Capturing the Moment for the New Play Sector:

January 2011

By Ben Pesner





THEATER 101

Theater 101

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

A program  of the
American Voices New Play Institute

January 2012

Video by Thom Wolf

Day 1:
Orientation

Week 1:
First Read

Weeks 3 & 4:
Open Rehearsals

Week 5:
Tech &
Invited Dress

Week 6:
Opening Night

Week 7:
Closing Event

Week 8:
Send Feedback Survey
Close Budget

- 1 Year:
Select Theater 101 Shows
Clear with Artists Involved

- 3 Months:
Finalize Budget & Schedule
Open Registration

- 1 Month:
Prep Orientation Materials
- 1 Week:
Welcome Email with Schedule



- Don't Forget**
- Blog & Online Community
 - Enrichment Events
 - Making 101'ers feel at Home!



Build your own
Theater 101!

[Click for Toolkit](#)

THEATER 101







Resident Playwrights

Katori Hall



Name your memoir:

Oreogirl

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

Piano Lesson. It was the first play I performed where the words fit in my mouth. I played Berniece and it seemed as if my instruments knew the notes already. August captured a way of expression that I heard tumble from my Big Mama's mouth. It made me feel like the stage could possibly be my home.

Describe your favorite place to write?

Trains.

What are your writing rituals?

I have none.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

A doctor.

Lisa Kron



Name your memoir:

Whim of Iron

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

In 1985 I saw the Split Britches Company perform their play *Split Britches*. I couldn't imagine how such a thing had been created. It was so beautiful and complete and so utterly unlike anything I had ever seen before. It was non linear—that blew my Midwestern *mind*. And—they made it themselves. To me this was a revelation.

Describe your favorite place to write?

Couch. Windows. View.

What are your writing rituals?

Sacrifice of a goat. Burnt offering. Rending of garments.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

Don't know.

Amy Freed



Name your memoir:

I'm a Hundred Fucking Years Old Already and I Need a Fucking Hit!

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

William Inge's *Picnic*. I auditioned for a community theater production in tenth grade, got in the show (I played Millie the Tomboy) and the experience saved me from my pathological shyness and fear, forcing me to realize I wanted to be part of life.

Describe your favorite place to write?

My workroom overlooking my backyard.

What are your writing rituals?

Avoidance, avoidance, and more avoidance.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

Happy? But that's overrated...

Karen Zacarias



Name your memoir:

Girl Without Borders

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

The musical *Evita* had a profound effect on me. It was a piece with a strong female lead that told a story about Latin America. In the 1950s, my grandmother tried to become the Evita of Mexico; her story did not end happily. The first time I saw my father weep it was at a Spanish production of *Evita*. To this day, I can still sing most of the lyrics. My Colonel Peron is quite good.

Describe your favorite place to write?

A crowded cafe, close to the window, with the din of people talking. I'm there and not there...writing about one world while being part of another.

What are your writing rituals?

No play is formed the same way...and yet all of them need the same things to come to life...a computer, a window, music, dancing, walking, and food.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

An international diplomat specializing in peace-accords.

Charles Randolph-Wright



Name your memoir:

Being Wright

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

As a child, *A Raisin in the Sun* gave me permission to be a writer. In college, *Trouble in Mind* made me realize I had no choice.

Describe your favorite place to write?

I love having a view—especially of a city surrounded by water.

What are your writing rituals?

I prefer quiet. I prefer comfortable clothes. And a lot of light.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

A doctor.

Project Residencies



Lynn Nottage



Name your memoir:

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Medical School

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

The first play that I ever saw had the deepest and most profound impact on me. It was an innocuous offering called *Succotash On Ice*. It was a strange transformative experience, where for a few moments I understood that I was in a forum where lima beans and corn could sing and dance together. It was a singularly transformative experience, and I have been chasing that feeling of wonder all of my life. It has become my career.

Describe your favorite place to write?

Other than my bed, my favorite place to write is in an old arm chair in my parlor. It's set in a spot that catches the most beautiful light in the late afternoon, and for twenty minutes it the most perfect serene place in Brooklyn.

What are you writing rituals:

I start all of my projects by carefully collecting songs, and assembling a soundtrack that sets the tone for what I'm writing.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

A human rights activist.

David Henry Hwang



Name your memoir:

Yellow Face

What play has had the deepest effect on you?

Perhaps *Tooth of Crime*. It was the first play I read when I decided to take theater seriously and it gave me a sense of freedom of limitless possibility.

Describe your favorite place to write?

In my office. Currently using an old TV cabinet as a desk, but I'm meeting with my office designers in an hour to begin making myself a proper space.

What are you writing rituals?

I like to write in the mornings, on yellow legal pads, with a Montblanc ballpoint pen (blue ink, broad tip), and cradling my favorite pillow.

If you were not a playwright what would you be?

A historian or an electric violinist.



Producing Fellows

We believe in the importance of the role of the creative producer in making theater. It's been an issue that we've covered in HowlRound in pieces by both David Dower and Stephanie Ybarra. The producer was supplanted by a triumvirate in the American theater—the managing director, artistic director, and the dramaturg. The purpose in emphasizing producing is in part to acknowledge the importance of rethinking the line we draw through the middle of organizational charts dividing who gets deemed creative and who gets deemed administrative. It's also to embrace the collaborative enterprise of theater and the need for an effective process for bringing competing creative interests together for the success of a single production.



[David Dower's, It Must Have Been Easier for Joe Papp](#)



[Stephanie Ybarra's, Confessions of a Creative Producer](#)

Our approach, however, to training producers is less focused on throwing inexperienced and eager theater practitioners into the rehearsal room to take on some strange mix of providing emotional support to more experienced artists and running to get coffee for everyone. Instead, we emphasize learning the art of producing more gradually and through building community. Our producing fellows this year are responsible for producing our New Play Blog, our Monograph, some readings for our resident playwrights, three convenings, weekly “howls” on Twitter, livestreaming #NewPlay TV knowledge sharing, and generally aggregating the #newplay knowledge commons where artists come together to share ideas and imagination.



Producers have to be multi-tasking, self-possessed, well-informed communicators to successfully steward projects in any form—Polly Carl talks about this more in-depth in the HowlRound post “A Creative Room of One’s Own.” Our hope in revitalizing the art of producing is that we will be training and mentoring a new generation of theater artists to create healthier and more effective creative institutions.



[Polly Carl's, A Creative Room of One's Own](#)



Melanie Farmer



[Interview with Melanie](#)

Name your memoir:

I had a dream once that I had written my autobiography and I was discussing it with Oprah. In the dream the name of my book was *This Is How It's Gonna Be*—I feel like that's as good a title as any.

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

The first play that I ever read that made me realize I loved plays was *Streetcar Named Desire*. My favorite play I have seen/worked on was *First Love* at Lincoln Center Festival.

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

If I'm directing I usually go through the text pretty extensively, I mark beat shifts and make timelines.

If you were not working in your current position what would you be doing?

I don't know, I guess I just wander into things, so it's a little hard to predict.

Jamil Jude



[Interview with Jamil](#)

Name your memoir:

What Happens When You Say Yes

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

Stick Fly and Piano Lesson

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

Does an extreme sense of doubt/self-loathing and insecurity count as a ritual? If not, I like creating a team ASAP and always end rehearsal with saying one word from the play, a quick prayer of thanks, and the name of the play (which I stole from someone else).

If you were not working in your current position what would you be doing?

Working at an elementary school, trying to establish my theater company, and regretting past actions.

Pablo Halpern



[Interview with Pablo](#)

Name your memoir:

It Could Have Been Worse

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

The Real Thing by Tom Stoppard. It revealed in a brutal way the intolerable pain of infidelity and the complexities of human relationships

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

Thinking that it was a terrible idea to take it and planning how will I deal with the consequences of total failure.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

I would be playing drums for Harry Connick, Jr.'s band.

Erin Washington



Name your memoir:

BOOM

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

I really love Suzan Lori Parks *In the Blood*. I have read it a million times and love the *soul* of it. The way the story is told is so progressive and hit me in the right spot.

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

When approaching a new project I like to gather with my peeps (my team) and chat about the spirit of the piece. Figure out how we can best set the atmosphere for the work. I love to have much food and much study at the same time.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

I would be a music producer/executive of an indie label and travel the world and expose the masses to the most beautiful independent music ever!

Kevin Becerra



Name your memoir

Divaturgy: The Unauthorized Autobiography

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

I'm pretty sure that after I read *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* my head exploded and my life was ruined.

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

First, a burst of excitement. Then a period of denial. Finally, a parade of brilliance at two o'clock in the morning that usually results in me restructuring my approach.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

I'd be working at Barnes & Noble, trying to find that one book with the blue cover and the words inside.

NEW
PLAY
TV

NEW
PLAY
MAP



HOWLROUND







HowlRound

Feedback and noise, voices and discourse on the state of new work. Making new plays is a noisy business.

HowlRound encourages theater makers to get loud and share the shouting with the field. We invite you to join the conversation as we bring together interviews, opinions, ideas, and innovations.

HowlRound was created to fill a gap in the journalism of the field. We wondered why there wasn't more discussion led by artists about the challenges of making theater in the twenty-first century. So much has changed and is changing about our field and we have new tools that can foster transformative and transparent exchange. The journal has quickly become a place for community dialogue with ten thousand readers a month posting comments, reposting articles, and adding to the discussion via Twitter and #newplay.



Each article gets anywhere from one thousand to five thousand readers, and one gratifying outcome of the journal has been seeing the language of these online conversations enter everyday parlance at convenings, conferences, and even around the rehearsal room. There's a passion in our field to return to some of the values that shaped the not-for-profit theater movement and to create new values around shared resources, leadership, and the role of artists in institutional life.

This is a crowd-sourced journal. Over half of the articles come because artists send pitches to the editor that they track down on the "About" page. The content is a contribution to the cultural commons that makes up the artistic and intellectual history of our field and embraces the idea that our work adds social value to the concentric communities we inhabit.



The five most read articles in the six-month period of this report include:

[Mat Smart's, The Real Reason Playwrights Fail, - 5,710 readers](#)

[Polly Carl's, Notes on Generosity in the Theater, - 4,557 readers](#)

[Meiyin Wang's, The Theater of the Future, - 2,172 reader](#)

[Polly Carl's, Was I Born This Way? - 1,258 readers](#)

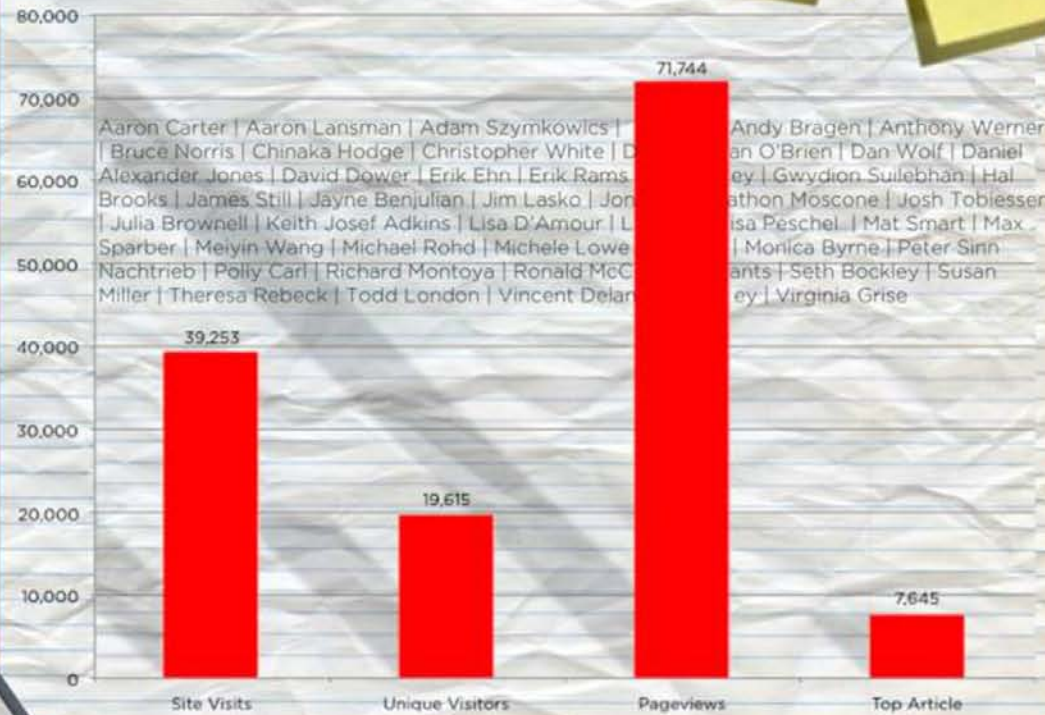
[Hal Brooks', An Interview with Annie Baker - 1,125 readers](#)



HowlRound Statistics

JANUARY - JUNE 2011

average
time on
page:
3 min 4 sec



American Voices New Play Institute Staff



Polly Carl



Name your memoir:

Making it Up As I Go

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

Over the years I've fallen in love with so many plays, and to list one or two or three here would be to betray the love of so many others.

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

I create a new new notebook. I use a Moleskine squared notebook (I like a lot of lines on the page to contain my notes). I usually make a cover by cutting and pasting images that inspire me and somehow relate to my interpretation of the play or project. I have stacks of these, some filled and some with barely any writing.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

I'd be an emergency room doctor or a fashion designer.

Vijay Mathew



Name your memoir:

It's Weird, in a Good Way

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

Christmas Carol

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

Procrastination.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

Making projects happen in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Auroville, India.

Jamie Gahlon



Name your memoir:

*Mistakes Were Made and/or Why I Didn't Become Madonna:
The Jamie Gahlon Story*

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

Rent. I saw it in the seventh grade for the first of what would become many times. It made me realize theater could be current, relevant to pressing realities. That, and that Andrew Lloyd Webber didn't have a monopoly on musical theater.

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

I doodle and I make a list.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

FBI Special Agent.

David Dower



Name your memoir:

Thank You.

What play has had the deepest impact on you?

R. Buckminster Fuller: *The History (and Mystery) of the Universe* by D. W. Jacobs. The text of the play keeps instructing me—every time I come back to it I find it zeroing in on a new frontier in my life.

Do you have any rituals you practice when approaching a new project?

The ocean. The years I was directing shows in San Francisco, I would always go to Baker Beach, the first stage I ever directed on. (It was Battery Chamberlain, an outdoor bunker right on the beach.) I'd just sit and try to reconnect to that first project with the Z Collective and remember my questions. Interesting that as I am preparing to move back to that part of myself, I'm moving back to the ocean.

If you were not working in your current position, what would you be doing?

Sleeping a lot more. And hiking in the Sierras. Or the White Mountains.

A faint, light-colored illustration of a large, spreading tree with a thick trunk and many branches, positioned on the left side of the page. Below the tree, there is a faint outline of a building with a gabled roof and several windows. The background is a textured, light beige color with some watercolor-like washes.

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