

Telephone

A PLAY BY ARIANA REINES

Dramaturgical Casebook

OCTOBER 6TH, 7TH & 8TH, 2017

STUDENT ACTIVITIES CENTER BLACKBOX

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



Khristián Méndez Aguirre

MFA IN PERFORMANCE AS PUBLIC PRACTICE

Telephone

A PLAY BY ARIANA REINES

Production Casebook

Khristián Méndez Aguirre

MFA IN PERFORMANCE AS PUBLIC PRACTICE



Why a casebook?

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Casebooks are dramaturgical tools to try and capture the entire process of a particular production. Generally, they are compiled by the dramaturg.

Telephonically speaking, this is a switchboard into, out of, through, towards and away from the production. Use as such, it will not resist you.



Contents

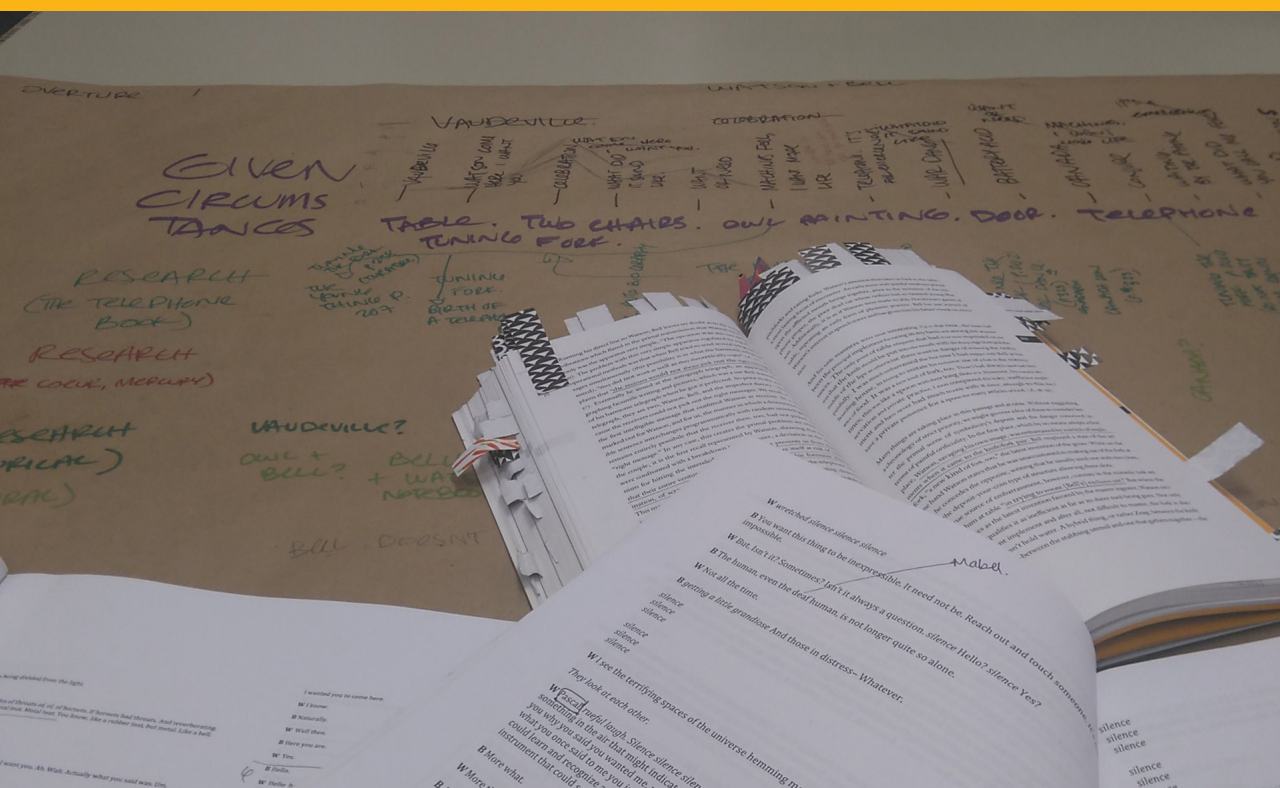


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Project Narrative

P R E - P R O D U C T I O N



THIS PRODUCTION TOOK ALMOST A YEAR to complete. **Khristián Méndez Aguirre** began preliminary conversations about self-producing it in November of 2016 with peers and collaborators. Khristián first became familiar with the show in November of 2014, when it was produced by an undergraduate class led by professor **Jodi Baker** at College of the Atlantic.

Méndez read the script, became fascinated with it, and kept the idea of producing it in the future. Although he was involved in this particular production as a graphic designer, he was overseas during the production process, and never attended a rehearsal or any of the showings.

After discussing the show with playwriting faculty member **Kirk Lynn** at UT Austin, Khristián found out that it was one of Kirk's favorite shows. Kirk offered to support Khristian in getting the rights, if Khristián wanted to pull together a team to make it happen.

Similarly, watching then 2nd-year MFA Directing student **Hannah Wolf's** production of *Drylands*, sparked his imagination about how he might go about producing a show without formal affiliation to the mainstage season.

Over December, Khristián went up to Maine and chatted with his friends and mentors who were involved in the 2014 production, to glean advice on how to tackle such a show. In particular Karen Waldron (faculty member in literature) offered advice about not letting *The Telephone Book* intimidate him.

Once he was back in January, Khristián started working through *The Telephone Book* by **Dr. Avital Ronell** and conducting preliminary research about the original production through a 1-credit independent study with **Dr. Andrew Ian Carlson**.

Throughout the spring, Khristián collected information on the different productions of the play (see p. 432). Through a colleague, he found out that the most knowledgeable scholar on Avital Ronell's work, **Dr. Diane Davis**, was a faculty member in the Department of English.



Dr. Davis (Diane) was instrumental in shaping the production. It was through individual meetings with her that Khristián realized he'd understood *The Telephone Book* backwards. He thought that both the book and the play were about how the invention of the telephone had changed communication. In fact, it was the opposite. Paraphrasing Dr. Davis:

The telephonic logic that Avital Ronell proposes that *before* we had the telephone, we were already making and taking calls. Like Moses hearing the burning bush, Jesus calling Lazarus into being, patients with schizophrenia hearing voices, and so forth. It was the fact that we already were making and taking calls which helped us conceive of something like the Telephone to begin with.

The play suddenly became much richer, and much harder. Khristián asked Dr. Davis what was a useful way to introduce this text to the production team—given that most of them would likely not read it before working on their crafts.

Dr. Davis told Khristián that *this is why she doesn't teach *The Telephone Book* anymore, it's almost too difficult to grasp*. Nevertheless, she applauded Khristián's efforts in tackling the project.

As Spring progressed, Khristián began recruiting designers to work on the show with him—given that he'd have to wait after the mainstage auditions had taken place to ask actors to be involved in it.

The first designer to be on board was **Aaron Kubacak**, costume designer. Khristián mentioned the project to him, and he became interested. Since the play hadn't been cast at that point, there wasn't anything specific that Aaron could work on, so he read the script and began preliminary research instead.

At the same time, Khristián began assembling a research pinterest board of his ideas of what the play was, isn't and could be.



Khristián had discussed the project with a few undergraduate actors, but hadn't found folks who were both food fits for the parts *and* who were both available and interested in committing to the roles.

Khristián had discussed the project with **Brooks Laney** and after an unsuccessful audition for the mainstage shows, Brooks approached Khristián to let him know he was available. He and Khristián met over coffee in May to discuss the roles, but it quickly became clear to Khristián that Brooks would be a good fit for Watson *if* they could find a Bell that had good chemistry with him.

Khristián was really keen on having a mixture of BA and BFA actors in the cast, given that they bring different assets to a rehearsal room. As such, he really wanted to find an actor who was suitable for Miss Saint among the BA student population. Dr. Carlson suggested he talk to **Megan Todd**, and on the last day of classes Khristián sat down to chat with her and discuss the role. He suggested she should look over the script, and see if it was something she felt would be interesting and exciting for her. A few days later Megan let him know she was in.

Around that time, (this was early May) Khristián made an attempt to book the space in the SAC Blackbox to produce to show. **Cooper Roe** lent us his graceful assistance through the booking process. When requesting the space, the director found out all of the weekends except for October 7th had been booked. his created a conflict with the production of *Anon(ymous)* by Naomi Iizuka that he was one of the dramaturgs for.

Knowing that he was either going to have to wait until next semester OR he'd have to produce the show in parallel with his commitment to *Anon(ymous)*, Khristián went ahead and booked the space.

At this point, Khristián had discussed with **Alex Hanna**, the possibility that he'd take on the project as a lighting designer. However, the conflict of schedules made it impossible for Alex to stay in the project, and as such, Alex suggested Khristián



should reach out to incoming 1st-year lighting design student **Austin Shirley**.

Then, Khristián reached out to **Ryan Alvarado** to see if Ryan would be interested in reading for Alexander Graham Bell. It was out of a suggestion from collaborator and friend **Rama Tchuente**. Ryan replied soon after expressing interest—Ryan felt like a good Bell, and as such the cast was finalized.

The actors met at Khristián's house in late May for a first table read, so that Khristián could split up the sections of *the lovers* among them. After the table read, they tried swapping a few sides and kept those. That first table read left several questions hanging in the air, since the text is so dense and seemingly nonsensical. Nevertheless, there was good energy in the air!

One way that Khristián offered for them to think about their characters was to ask them, from 1 to 10, how well did they feel they know their characters.

Brooks was at about a 6, Ryan was at a 6, and Megan was at a 4. He asked them to try and get to a 7 by the end of the summer, so that rehearsal could bring everybody to a 9, and the audience at the showings would bring us to many different 10s.

The cast and director split for the summer, Khristián asked the actors *not to come off-book, so that they could discover the rhythm of each character in rehearsal*.

Over the next few weeks, Khristián spent considerable time reading all 438 pages of *The Telephone Book*, as well as *Mercury* and *Coeur de Lion*, two poetry books by **Ariana Reines**.

This reading process resulted in about 100–110 passages from *The Telephone Book* that he separated into quotes for the actors and quotes for himself. It also resulted in a more solid understanding of the text of the play, the parts that the play left out (like the monster, frankenstein, connections to Hamlet, and portions of Watson's childhood.)





From Khristián's notes:

There is a strong feeling, after reading *The Telephone Book* of destabilization. You don't know what the hell you just read. And I think the play is trying to do the same.

In the same fashion, reading *Coeur de Lion*, and to a lesser extent, *Mercury*, I think I understand which parts of the text of the play came from Avital Ronell's ontological propositions and her performative writing, and which parts of the text of the play came from Ariana Reines' intellectual constructions and artistic sensibilities.

Through this reading process, Khristián produced a large-scale paper document on a about 30 feet of kraft paper, where he charted the dramatic action of the 1st and 3rd acts of the play, and which references from which page of the texts he was working with referred to it. A mapping of dramatic action and its contextual written sources, so to speak. (P123)

Soon after this conceptual mapping, Khristián met with Lighting & Set Designer Austin Shirley to discuss preliminary designs. Austin brought pen and pencil sketches of how he'd envisioned the space: the



only inputs that Khristián gave him was that it was to be traverse seating, and the text of the play.

Also, since pretty early in the conception process, Khristián **knew he wanted to involve the audience's telephones** because in the theatre they're always told they should switch them off. A show about telephones in 2017 should also be made *with* telephones.

When Austin brought the sketches, he had created these rectangles and squares on the floor of the stage with light. Khristián thought it would be the perfect space to place the audience's telephones during the show. Austin also had ideas of using piping from the ceiling into the floor, creating a space for the play that was very much a space of transition between sides. In between the two sides of the audience, in between the two sides of the stage, and in between above and below.

Austin was sure that his ideas for the squares would be ditched when Set Design conversations came into place, but since there was no Set Designer at the



time that Khristián met with Austin, they agreed that Austin would take care of both fronts. In any case, they both realized the play didn't need an elaborate set (and since other than the money for the rights they weren't getting any funding or material support from the department, they decided to go lean.)

Soon after that, Khristián had a preliminary conversation with Aaron over the phone about costumes. Both Aaron and Khristián imagined the actors to be in period costumes for the first two acts, and then including a much more contemporary look. Probably in black.

Khristián didn't have the actors measurements yet, and Aaron would be away working out of state, so they decided they would work on the looks once Aaron got back.

In the meantime, Khristián made way in writing the actor's packet, which was finalized on June 15th.

The packet (p.342) contained instructions on how to use it, the background for the play and production history, a short analysis of each of the acts of the play, and historical background on each of the characters. Finally, about half of the packet contained quotes from *The Telephone Book* which were either helpful to get a sense of the world and language of the play, or which spoke directly to what the historical characters *did* or *wanted to do*.

For this packet, Khristian read Carl Jung's *Psychology of Dementia Praecox*, and Watson's autobiography: *Exploring Life*. The Jung text helped flesh out the different dimensions behind Miss Saint's character—her three different complexes and the manifestation of each complex. This text also provided context for her character that guided the staging choices. Since Ariana Reines didn't provide with context as to where Miss Saint was during the performance, we decided to lean into the space we had and have her be aware of the audience's presence. We hadn't quite figured out what her intention was, but we trusted that the text would help us find it.



Watson's autobiography provided some interesting context for his character, in particular just *how* open he was to take calls from the universe. The text explained the origins of the halo, the horse and the piano, Watson's walks in the woods and multiple other things that hadn't happened at the time the telephone was invented (but that the playwright nods to through the lines.)

The director decided to not work with a dramaturg from the get-go after he couldn't find a collaborator that would be equally invested in and willing to tackle something like *The Telephone Book* just for the love of it.

During the summer, Khristián worked to paper-block watson+bell and the lovers, trying to find within the groundplan that Austin gave him, what was the relationship between the characters. **Traverse seating had been the arrangement of choice, because so much of the show is about our relationship to others, that it felt very natural to do so.** In contrast, two of the other American productions of *telephone* were on a proscenium, and one more was in the basement of a masonic hall.

Khristian didn't really do a firm list of practical needs for the play from the beginning, which would make him have to re-consider his choices as he got deeper into the design process. For example, in this paper-blocking, the door that Watson comes from was on the other side of the stage from Bell's desk. Later, when reviewing the stage directions (which indicate a wire should run from the table to the door), he and Austin decided to move the table over right next to the entrance, creating a bit of a vacuum on the other side of the stage.

The only stage directions in the show are at the top of watson+bell: they call for a table, two chairs, telephone equipment, and a painting of an owl on the wall. So he figured the other side would have the painting of the owl.

In the spirit of trying to have as much possible done before the semester started, Khristián also spent about three weeks working through the poster for the

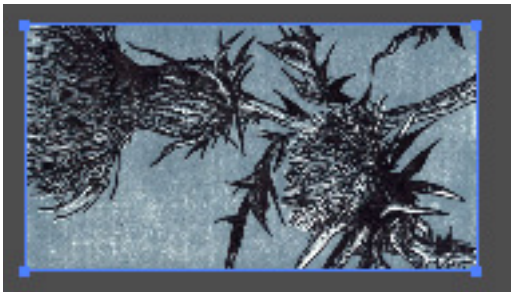
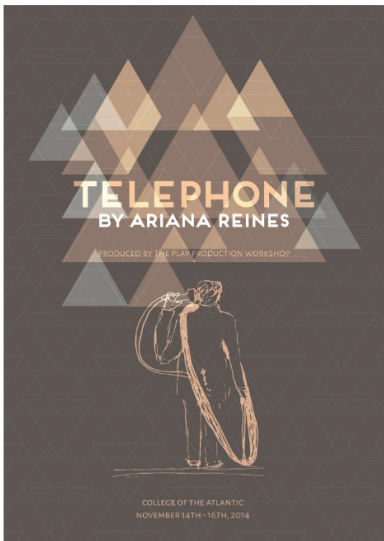
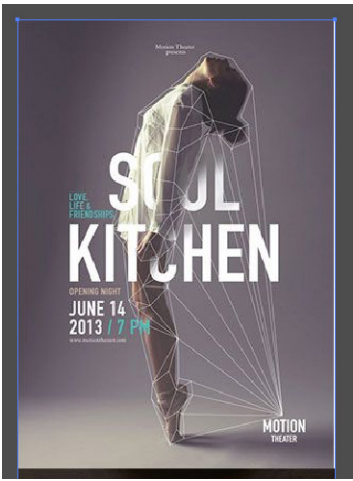
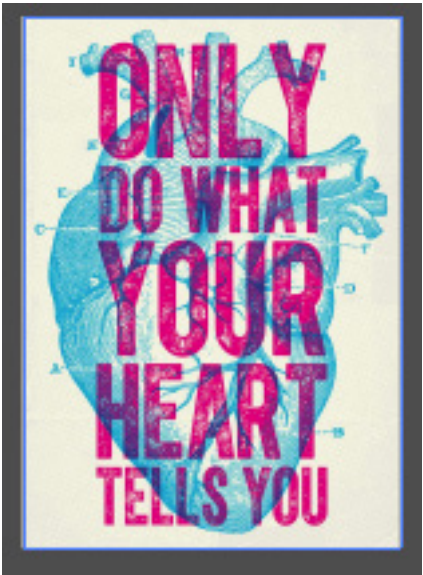


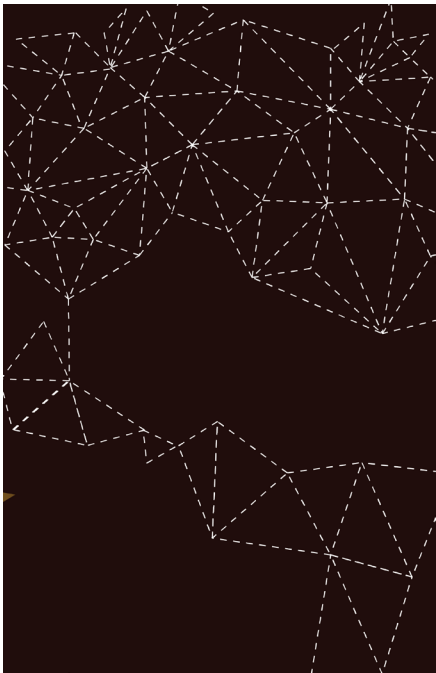
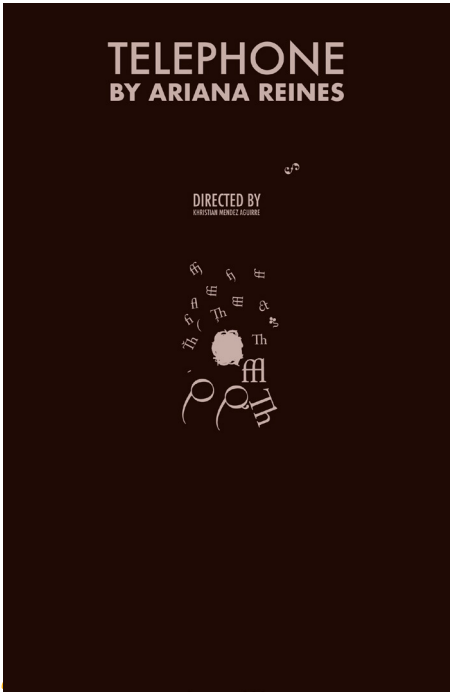
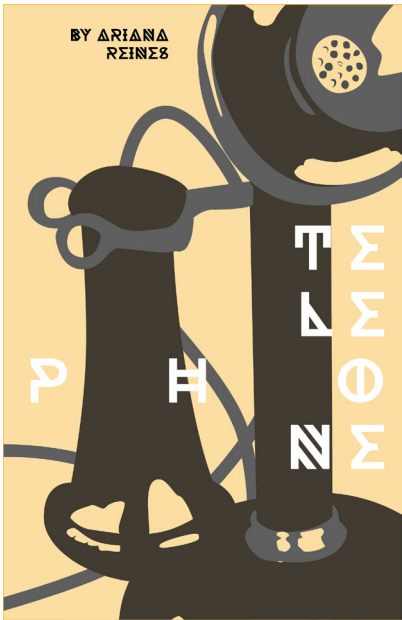
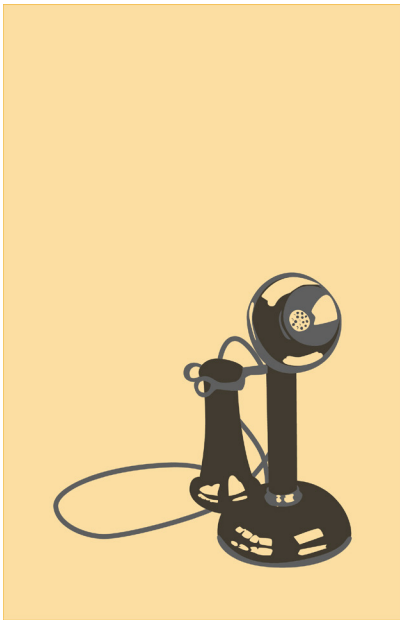
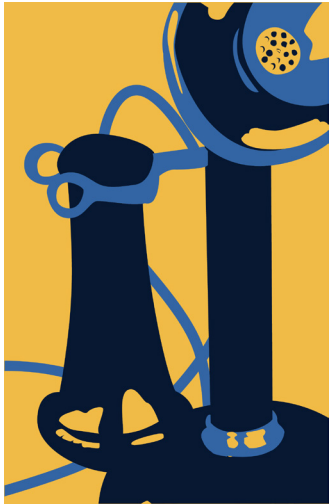
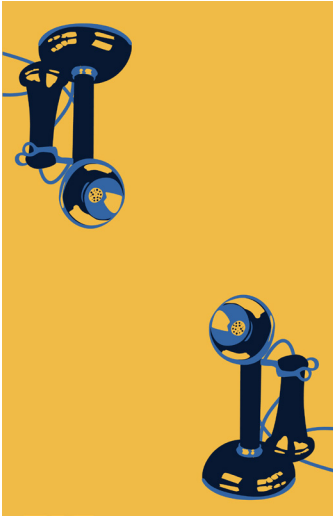
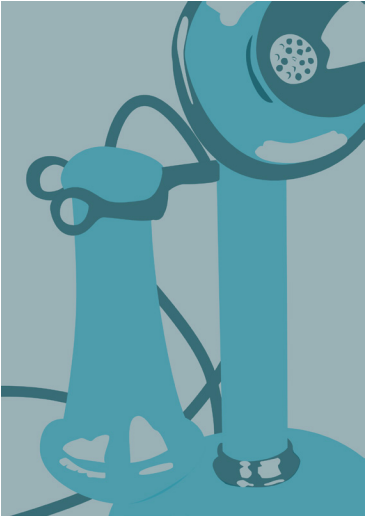
show. He went through multiple drafts of the poster before arriving at the final draft. Rama Tchuente and Eli Weinberg's input through this drafting process was quite helpful. He also designed promotional materials that he ended up not printing in order to save money (since he fronted all of the expenses for the printed materials).

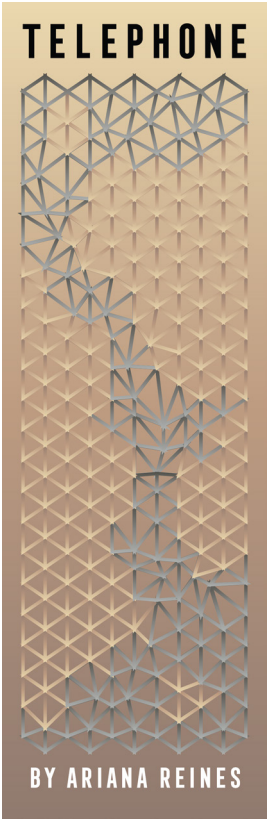
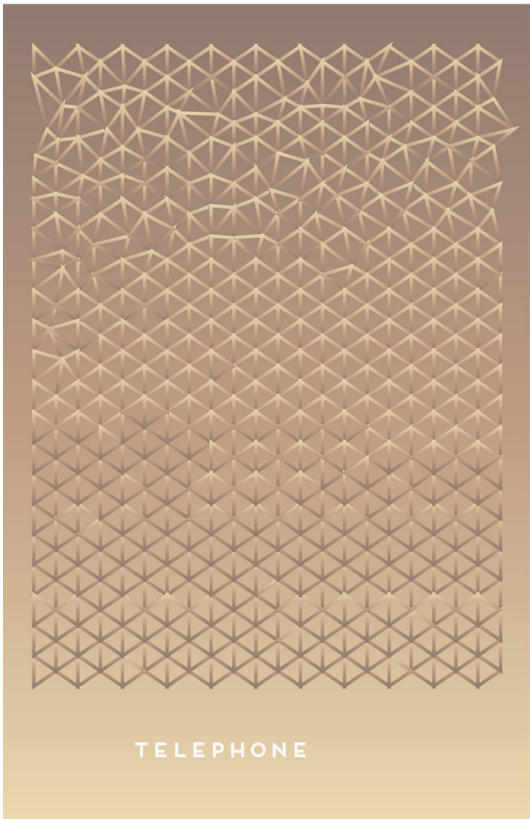
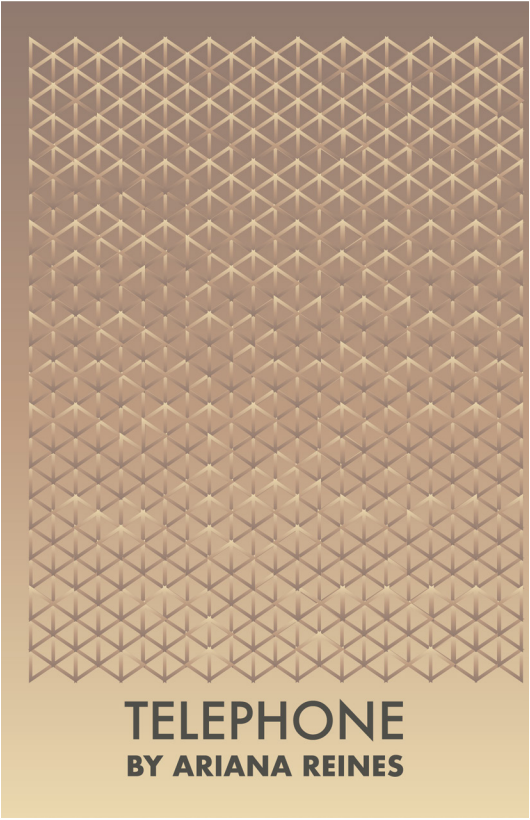
What follows are inspirational images and drafts.

» EARLY PROGRAM JACKET DESIGN THAT WAS LATER EDITED TO MAXIMIZE SPACE AND REDUCE COSTS.♦



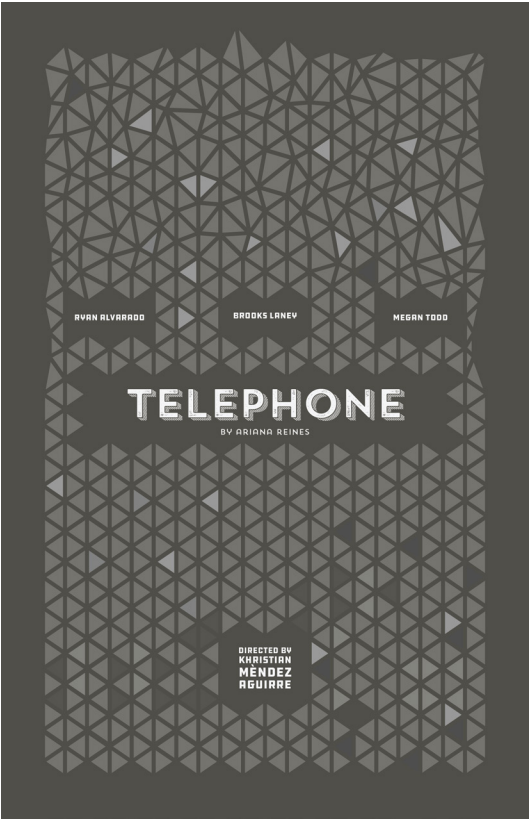


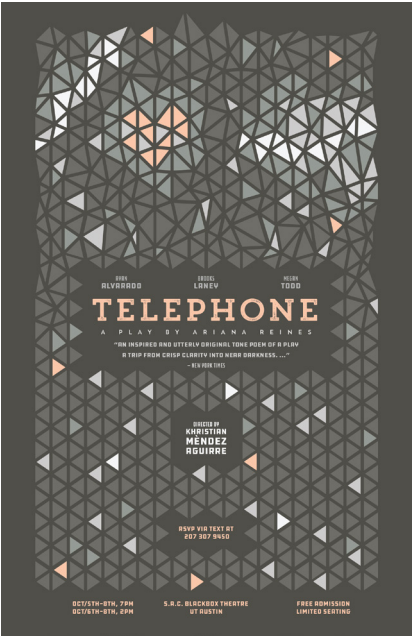




TELEPHONE
BY ARIANA REINES







RYAN
ALVARADO

BROOKS
LANEY

MEGAN
TODD

TELEPHONE

A PLAY BY ARIANA REINES

DIRECTED BY
**KHISTIAN
MÉNDEZ
AGUIRRE**

RSVP VIA TEXT AT
207 307 9450

"AN INSPIRED
AND UTTERLY
ORIGINAL TONE
POEM OF A PLAY."
— NEW YORK TIMES

OCT/5TH-8TH, 7PM
OCT/6TH-8TH, 2PM

S.A.C. BLACKBOX THEATRE
UT AUSTIN

FREE ADMISSION
LIMITED SEATING



By the end of the summer, Khristian's composer friend **Akshaya Tucker** sent an e-mail blast to a network of sound designers and composers, with the text from the Overture explaining the project and an introductory paragraph from Khristián:

I'm a second-year MFA student in Theatre & Dance, who's looking for an electronic composer // sound designer who would be excited receiving a highly poetic prompt as the basis for an overture of a play I'm directing this fall. The play is about the invention of the telephone, hearing, electricity, chaos and coordination. I'm envisioning a range between 3-5 minutes but I would be happy to venture a shorter or longer piece depending on how the source material speaks to you. The play also calls for 3-4 other shorter recordings of individual lines (1 line per recording.)

Two weeks later, four sound designers had replied—and Khristián was typing the response e-mail to one of them when an e-mail from **Mike Vernusky** dropped on his Inbox. Mike had just found out about the project, and sent Khristián a link to his website.

Khristián invited Mike to join the project, and in lieu of a first-meeting, he asked if they could do a reading of the play with the cast and entire design team at his house. That way he'd get to see the designs that had already been made, and get a sense of the rhythm of the piece from the voices of the actors.

The reading went well, and there was a similar sense of how-is-this-going-to-come-together. That reading was the first time that the designers were all meeting each other. Aaron asked a question about how much time there would be between Acts 2 and 3, given that this would mean Megan had to get out of her dress and into her lovers' clothes.

The director wasn't sure, at that point, where intermission was going to be. It seemed like putting it between acts 1 and 2 would make more sense, timewise, but he feared they'd lose people if they placed it between act 2 and 3.



They also discussed the child's voice for beat **a** from the lovers. Khristián suggested they needed to find a child, and Mike said his then 4-year-old son Flint would be thrilled! Initially, they said it might be best if they record at Mike's house, but they ended up recording Flint using the microphone from an iPhone since the recorded didn't need to be pristine.

At this point in the process, Khristián was in the process of securing space to rehearse in Winship, after e-mailing **Jessica Champion**, the building manager.

Right before starting rehearsals on August 30th, Khristián met with Brooks and Megan at his house to do some more table-work right before starting rehearsal. Ryan was unavailable the first week of rehearsal, due to a pre-existing commitment for another show.

Brooks and Megan had done some research over the summer—Megan read Jung's *Psychology of Dementia Praecox*, and Brooks had started reading Watson's autobiography.

Brooks and Megan felt that they were at a 6 and 5, respectively, regarding the scale they were given at the top of the summer. They felt that the more they learned about the characters, the more complicated the characters got.

During these meetings, Khristián shared with them how he was going to split the beats of the first two acts. This made miss saint much more manageable for Megan.

At this point, Mike was working on renderings, Aaron had pulled out costumes from the costume stock, Austin had created a lighting plot and a rendering in Vectorworks about what we were thinking, and Khristián had a decent plan of what was to come. Once Khristián sent out the Production Schedule (p.213), we got under way with rehearsals.....

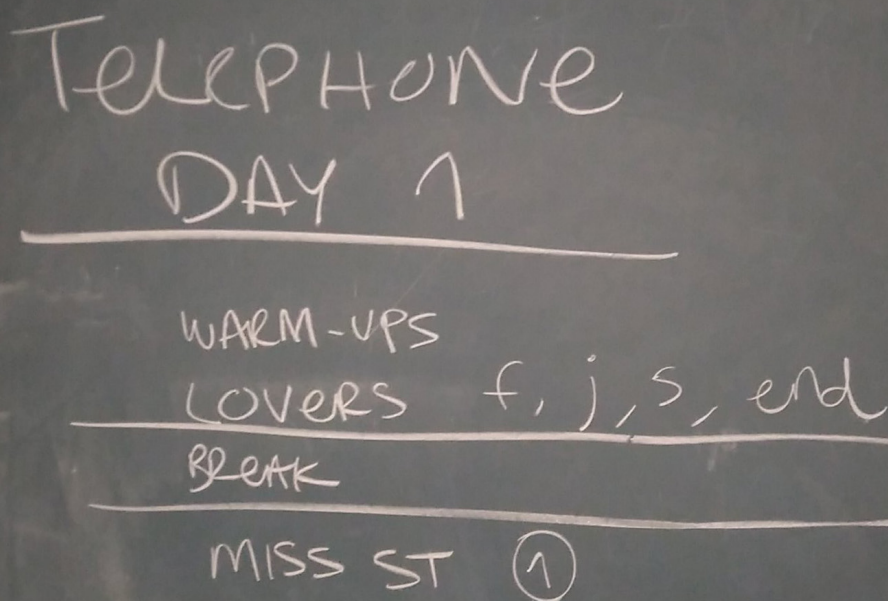


P R O D U C T I O N

TRY

- CHANTING/BREATHING
- TOP OF PLAY Text
- HANDS
 - ADDING TO THE WORLD
- REPETITION

RHEARSAL # 1 TOOK PLACE IN WIN 2.112. Because of Ryan's pre-existing conflict, the first three rehearsals only involved Brooks and Megan. The director set up a plan where he'd work out the scenes that he could work on without Ryan, which were basically all of the Lovers' scenes between Megan and Brooks, and beat 1 of Miss St's Heiroygphical Sufferings.



TELEPHONE
DAY 1

WARM-UPS
LOVERS f, j, s, end

BREAK

MISS ST ①

Through the paper staging, Khristián had come up with some ideas as to how the actors might move about the space during the lovers, but without Ryan it didn't make much sense to try them out.

Khristián gave himself two choices when looking at the lovers: he was going to have to either lean into how many characters there were, and not try to build a narrative through them, **or** build the act in a way



that didn't try to give us a narrative relating to the text beyond what's already written—that the vignettes would serve as a means to access something else.

Either way, we figured part of how he wanted to stage this involved fleshing out the transactional terms for each of the beats. And so, the first part of rehearsal involved working with Megan and Brooks to find what was in the texts.

The method for working on the majority of the beats for watson+bell and the lovers involved reading the scene, and asking the actors what they thought was happening—once there was a common language as to what that was, the actors went ahead and tried it out.

The lovers presented an interesting challenge, in that there was seemingly nowhere to really ground the text.

Brooks and Megan worked through **f, j, s,** and **end**. Two of these, **j,** and **end** were re-cast during tech-week, once the shape of the act had become much clearer.

After a short break, Brooks was released, and Khristián and Megan worked on the first beat of Miss Saint. An exercise that Khristián introduced as they worked on the space was that Megan should try to say the entire beat with as blank an expression on her face as she could do—so that if she had any movements involved, those were extremely intentional. It involved starting and stopping a few times, but Megan got the hang of it by the end. This choice was later questioned by one of the production dramaturgs, and was ultimately not kept.

Much of this first day with Miss Saint involved walking around the lecture hall space as Megan read her lines, to try and find the actions that came to her instinctively. Because the lecture hall had chairs, Khristián noticed that Megan gravitated towards the chairs and spoke to them as if they had people in them—an instinct that would inform much of the rest of the act subsequently.



Rehearsal # 2 brought the first logistical challenge: rehearsal had been scheduled on a home game day. Brooks made Khristián aware that there'd be no parking that day, and as such, rehearsal was cancelled that day. Instead, **Rehearsal # 2.1** was re-scheduled for Sunday, and part of it involved time at a 1st fitting for the costumes with Aaron.



Khristian Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

to Brooks, Megan ▾

Saturday, September 2nd.

WIN 2.112

4pm Brooks: Watson + Bell, beat 21 (only W's monologue)

5pm Brooks + Megan: Lovers f, j, s, end

6pm Megan: Miss Saint 1



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

to Megan, Brooks ▾

Sunday, September 3rd.

Costume Shop + WIN 2.112 (if locked we'll be rehearsing in the atrium)

4pm - 1st fitting @ Costume shop.

4.30pm - Brooks & Megan: **lovers f, j, s, end**

5.45pm - Brooks: **Watson + Bell beat 21** (only W monologue)

6.45pm - Dinner Break. Brooks Released

7.45pm - Megan: **Miss Saint 1 & 2**

9pm - End of Rehearsal, Megan released

That **first fitting** was also the first time that Khristian was seeing the actual costumes that Aaron had pulled out (after seeing his Pinterest board and some conversation.) Aaron included garments for Watson and Miss Saint's costume which had iridescence to them. Khristian at first felt that these didn't really belong on the 'serious' world of the play, and he also wondered, since he was trying to highlight the queer nature of Watson and Bell, that this costumes were going to be a too-stereotypical way to show that.

What was exciting to Khristián, however, was the fact that the iridescence of the costumes would gel nicely with the shine of the set pieces and the intentionality behind how they chose to use light.

The more he saw the characters in the costumes, the more they made sense. Aaron also made a comment that the clean, empty space with the



geometric shapes would allow the lushness of the fabrics and the more intricate organic shapes in the patterned garments come out.

In that rehearsal they continued to flesh out each of the lovers' beats involving Megan and Brooks, and they also began working on one of Brooks' monologues the one from beat 21.

All of Brooks' monologues had a degree of abstraction to them that felt hard to make playable. Brooks had a hard time accessing what the words really meant. Like with the other parts in acts 1 and 2, they read it, talked about what it might mean, and tried it on its feet.

Khristián offered Brooks the option to replace the words "one" and "the other/another" with the names of two friends of his. That way, it was easier to navigate what Watson was saying, and most importantly—what Watson was trying to do through his words.

For Megan's beats (1 and 2 that day), they continued to experiment with how she could be engaging just by staying in the place where Khristián had asked her to stand. This piece was going to be so hard, that every choice (including the choice to not move) had to be made hyper-aware of what came before and what came after. This would help the actor and director to avoid unnecessary repetition.

That same weekend, Khristián sent the materials for the show (including a script and the actor's packet) to **Kristin Perkins**, and **Alexis Riley**, who would then join the team as Production Dramaturgs. This was because Khristián knew he was going to need extra eyes in the room, and because he sees production as a space to collaborate and open up opportunities for colleagues (and younger students) to practice skills they're interested in or find valuable.

Kristin was fascinated by the script, she described it as reminding her of *Waiting For Godot*, *Hamletmachine* and *Love and Information*.



Alexis became intrigued by act 2, and since her own research pertains to performance of mental health, she signed on to serve as an advisor specific to Act 2.

Khristián invited them to rehearsal before making a firm commitment, so they got a sense of the work, and to see if they were going to be good matches for the project. Kristin, in particular, expressed that she didn't want me to have too many cooks in the Kitchen, but with such a small team, and a clear articulation of the lines between Dramaturgy and Directing, Khristián felt that it could work.

That same weekend, on September 4th, Khristián had the first meeting just with Mike to work on the Overture and the other sound pieces. Mike had read through the score on the script very carefully, and had a set of sounds to share with Khristián—bells he recorded while travelling in Asia, lots of telephone sounds, a massive collection of sound effects on vinyl, among other things.

One of the things that really excited Khristián was the possibility of broadening what a 'call' meant by including animal calling sounds. As such, they included a whale sound, an elephant sound, and several type of primate sounds woven through the clicks, licks, bells and rings from the overture.

This is a directorial choice that Khristian would like to examine more carefully. His intent of broadening what the call meant might now have been met, but it made the work more interesting?

That meeting essentially consisted of Khristián picking sounds from the sound effect catalog so Mike could use those as building blocks (along with anything else he wanted) to craft the overture.

They also talked about how to get the rest of the sounds—beat N from the lovers was going to be a recorded voice sound by Megan. This was later changed and given to Brooks' so he'd have his own 'solo' beat during that act.

The plan was to bring folks in to Mike's house so they record all of the necessary voices (pre-show message, "no"s for act 2, fight and child for act 3,) but everything ended up being recorded on telephones.



The remainder of Week 1 saw Ryan integrating himself to the ensemble after his previous commitment was over, and the actors working through most of the beats in the lovers, and at least half of the beats in acts 1 and 2.

On **Rehearsal # 8**, Kristin Perkins joined rehearsal and saw a run of the beats we had until then. She asked several good questions about the work that we were doing—the relationship between Watson and Bell, and the shape of the overall act.

After this, it became clear to both Khristián and Kristin that she'd be a great fit for the project and he invited her in the following capacity:

Kristin would attend 1–2 rehearsals a week, until tech week, and would also help compile a list of “constellations” from the production team, where they would share information, pieces of art, plays, or anecdotes that they play reminded them of. Khristián was really keen on not having the dramaturgical information on the website be a way to “crack” or “understand” the play in any capacity—rather, a way to engage with other materials that spoke a similar language, attempted similar undertakings, or that we were just reminded of. These were to go live a week before the show opened, and they would be shared with people attending the talkbacks.

Alexis, on the other hand, would attend a few rehearsals, whenever we were working with Miss Saint, and offer questions pertinent to her. Both Megan and Khristián were extremely wary of presenting Miss Saint in a way that would deminorize anyone suffering from schizophrenia, or would create a generalization about people with that diagnosis.

At that point, Khristián reached out to faculty member Rusty Cloyes and USITT to try and find a stage manager (which he'd been looking for since May!) but alas, no luck was had.

Not having a stage manager definitely presented challenges: there were no rehearsal neither performance reports to contribute to this casebook, scheduling was all handled by the director and a few scheduling mistakes happened because of this.

At the top of week 2, Khristián introduced both of the production dramaturgs to the rest of the team, and Kristin came to her first rehearsal, **Rehearsal # 8**.



At this rehearsal, she watched a run of the first 2/3rds of act 1, and gave Khristián a set of questions to think about.

Mike produced his first draft of the Overture at this point, and shared it with Khristián via e-mail.

The rest of the second week saw the team creating preliminary blocking for each of the acts.

That Friday, the *Téléphone* cast began their rehearsal with a warm-up along with the cast of *Anon(ymous)*, a play that Khristián was serving as a dramaturg for.

That warm-up was inspired by the rehearsal techniques of Double Edge Theatre, out of Massachussetts. The focus of the warm-up was to infuse a sense of joy in the actors, and to make them be full present in their bodies.

After the 30 minute warm-up, the casts split. Khristián asked the actors to draft a version of the lovers using what they had just been given as an input. They had very little time, and produced an early draft of a piece that was quite interesting.

Up until that point, Khristián had a set-up for the act three that involved them standing on a triangle in front of or near their phones. They had one stool, and were either standing, sitting on the floor, or on the stool. After each letter of the alphabet, they would pass the stool to the next person.

There was something cyclical and interesting about that piece, but it wasn't quite working (for Khristián or the actors.)



Instead, they built a much more interpretive approach to it where they were dramatizing the characters using all three actors: either involving the third actor as a non-speaking character in a scene that only had two characters, or by using the third actor to embody something that didn't normally need an actor (like the distance between two characters.)

They showed this draft to Khristián and he quite liked it, but obviously they needed to work more on them.

It was at this point that Khristián decided to be a little more experimental with what types of warm-ups they did so they could be both physically warmed up, but also present and artistically stimulated.

Something they worked on that the actors quickly were excited about was a type of warm-up where they would use their headphones and play a song they knew the lyrics to. The idea would be that they could dance it out and sing along if they wanted to (as long as they didn't over-exert themselves.) This was introduced in rehearsals during the second week and was built upon for the rest of the rehearsal process.

That day, **Rehearsal # 11** they finished blocking the first and third act. Megan was released and they'd finish working on her act during Saturday—just in time for a first paper run with costumes and the dramaturgs.

For **Rehearsal # 12**, they had a costume fitting for Ryan, they finished blocking the second act, and did a costume tech for the lovers. They also did some initial work on the War Dance.

The War Dance was hard to crack because the line calls for a “loud and as savage as possible” war dance. Unless it was to be a form of improvised movement that would be either not very interesting to watch and/or unsafe for the actors, Khristián felt like it needed to be an actual dance form. At first, he thought gumboots dance from South Africa, and these were the steps that they rehearsed that day.



Alexis, Riley and Khristián's friend from Maine **Lucas Burdick** all came for the run. The actors were still on book, but they were on costumes.

It was an opportunity to see the flow of the whole show for the actors (up until this point, they had rehearsed acts one and two separately and didn't really get a chance to see what the other two acts looked like.)

They show definitely began to take shape in acts one and two, but it was clear that the war dance and act three still needed work.

One of the things Khristián most loved about this run was that he had a chance to get the actors to trust his choices.

When they were blocking Act 2, Khristián and Megan found a **beat 6** that contained a really long list of items that Miss Saint lists. Khristián was thinking about how to signal that these pages had so much detail in them, and wanted to distinguish between a period or a comma from the flock of dashes that separated the list. Megan mentioned that it seems like she's trying to remember something, and she said that when she's trying to remember something, she makes a noise kind of like "tsk" with her tongue and the front of the roof of her mouth. So she tried it in between the items of the list. Khristián liked it and they kept it.

The question then was how to make this seem like it belong in the play. So he asked Brooks to include it during **beat 17** while Watson is thinking about things. Brooks mentioned that it felt really unnatural, but Khristián asked him to do it just to trust him.

During the run, Megan saw Brooks doing that sound for that specific beat, her face shifted.

There wasn't time for anyone to talk between the two acts, but when Brooks saw Megan making that sound, he understood why. Which improved the trust between the actors and Khristián (or so Khristián thinks).



Alexis, Kristin and Lucas felt that the first two acts of the play were in a really good place. Some clear intentions had been established for the first act and the blocking with the traverse seating made it engaging, the second act had some strong choices and had captivating moments that would be strengthened once the actors were off-book.

The third act, however, wasn't quite engaging. It didn't feel like a good place to finish the play.

Lucas made a comment that the play was maybe about astrology. With Bell, Watson and Miss Saint corresponding to the last three planets of the solar system: Bell as Uranus, Warson as Neptune and Miss Saint as Pluto.

Uranus: Uranus, God of the sky and the heavens, is the ruler of Aquarius. In Astrology, the energies of Uranus are electric and crammed with change. Uranus is forward-looking. It balks at tradition, and celebrates originality and individuality.

Neptune, God of the Sea, is the ruler of Pisces. In astrology, Neptune is considered a planet of inspiration, dreams, psychic receptivity, illusion, and confusion. Neptune rules spirituality, and all things subtle.

Pluto, God of the Underworld, is the ruler of Scorpio. (In Greek mythology, the corresponding god was Hades). In Astrology, the energies of Pluto are transforming. Pluto represents subconscious forces, ruling all that is "below the surface". On the up side, Pluto is associated with renewal and rebirth.

Since Reines is an astrologer and writes about astrology in her poetry, this reading didn't seem too far-fetched—and gave us some things to think about as the rehearsal process continued.

Alexis, who had signed on to look at the representations of mental health onstage because



that is part of her academic interests, found very little to be problematic about Miss Saint, but offered some ways to think about her going forward. Specifically, the distinction between Hallucination and Delusion, so that those could feed our dramatic arc.

Kristin asked some really good, pointed questions about what are the characters moments of joy and moments of discovery ("Is Bell Ever Happy?").



2:30
1pm Monday

Telephone Full Run

Is bell ever happy?

Questions

does he know
when he says
"I know"

Supposedly are level?
Why does he make char?
how urgent is the question "did you
care for me?"
What are the drawers?
↳ Bell not making any
How bored do you want Bell
seen?

What is
the joy?

What is it fast, what is it slow?
What is the language, manner
lost interest

obsessive
anxiety
↓
questions
↓

Our device is an extension of...
↳ what Watson stands

~~Love Questions~~

How do you have more
of tennis (at the end of a...)

How internal is Bell's thinking?
do you want it slow? do you want
low energy?

After Lucas, Kristin and Alexis left, Khristián debriefed with the actors.

They all realized that they were in a much better place than they thought, but also this meant they had an opportunity to dig through the deeper layers of the play. Khristián told them that he'd be pushing them further and further along, so that they wouldn't go loose.

It was also the first time that Megan ran the full piece in costume, and it was quite exhausting for her—so it was very clear that the intermission would have to happen between acts 2 and 3.

The actors seemed excited to make more specific choices, and even to get off book!

That Sunday, **Rehearsal # 13**, Megan was off, and Khristián worked with Brooks and Ryan on their monologues individually.

Khristián struggled finding a way to work with Ryan that allowed him to be vulnerable onstage. A lot of this one-on-one work involved some text analysis, breaking down the monologue into each of its parts, but also trying it out a few different ways to identify what were the words speaking to. This is one of the areas where Khristián feels like he can improve his future work with actors—by not pointing out things they're doing wrong (because they will only become more self-conscious) and instead motivating them when they're doing what he wants them to do.

Work with Brooks was tricky too, in the sense that the monologues were very hard to break intoactable beats. This part of rehearsal could have benefitted from Khristián establishing potential intentions and beats and tactics for Brooks to try.

The third and fourth weeks of rehearsal saw the team spend time establishing clearer objectives and choices for the characters.

Rehearsals 14-17 were basically runs and re runs of specific sections of the first two acts with the actors.



Dr. Carlson attended **Rehearsal # 16**, which was the actors' first day off book. They were nervous that he was there, when he joined, but also because it was the first day that they had a faculty member visit rehearsal. Khristián definitely felt self-conscious and wondering if he was doing the right thing, mostly because he asked Andrew not to say anything during rehearsal, so they could debrief the morning after.

It was a bit of a slumpy rehearsal, with actors calling for lines, and the actors were hard on themselves, but they made some progress.

Rehearsal # 17 involved trying out a few dance sequences for the War Dance, in which Khristián thought they could use South African gumboot dance, but he still had reservations about what they were gonna do. Instead, he asked himself what would he LOVE to see onstage—and he realized he'd never seen two men dance latin music onstage. He invited his friend **Adriana Linares** to come teach the boys how to dance cumbia. He realized no one in the audience would know that the stage direction was asking for something loud and savage, and it would take care of the need to celebrate with physical dance. Plus, in an act rooted in white European characters, nobody would expect them to know how to dance cumbia.

Khristián and Brooks and Ryan tried it, and it seemed to stick, so they decided to keep it.

Afterwards, **Christine Gwillim** joined rehearsal to help work with the boys. They ran the whole act for Christine, and she gave them some pretty pointed suggestions: “Are these two in love?”, “I think they wanna fuck each other’s brains”. Christine then asked them to try and run their scenes as if their goal was to seduce each other. That was too easy, so instead she just asked Brooks to seduce Ryan, and Ryan to resist it.

The suggestion worked quite well—and it made Khristián realize that he'd been giving the actors directions not to play the sexual tension from their characters out of fear of being labelled a “gay play”. So then he went ahead with confidence asking the actors to play that up much more than they



previously had until that point.

Khristián set aside **Rehearsal # 18** in its entirety to be the space where they cracked the new act 3. For this, he decided to try a technique that would build on how they had been warming up at the beginning of rehearsals by dancing to songs each person knew (but using their headphones.)

Each actor was asked to bring a song they knew the lyrics to. They began rehearsal with a usual stretch and voice warm-up, then used the Double Edge technique for 20-25 minutes, and then proceeded to try the exercise Khristián wanted them to do.

Using the songs they had brought, each actor was asked to lead the rest of the company in song and dance. They were to improvise the moves based on the song and the lyrics. That way, since they already knew the song and the lyrics, all they had to worry about was how to move. The rest that anyone else had to do was to follow the leader.

Ryan brought “it’s my life” by Bon Jovi, Brooks brought “There’s a honey” by Pale Waves, Megan brought “S.O.B.” by Nathaniel Ratliff and the Nightsweats, and Khristián brought “Bird Song” by Florence and the Machine.

They debriefed after doing the movement exercises, with Khristián focusing on asking them to distinguish the movement styles from each other. The actors were thus able to articulate what were the ways in which they moved differently across the space (and who where they moving for!)

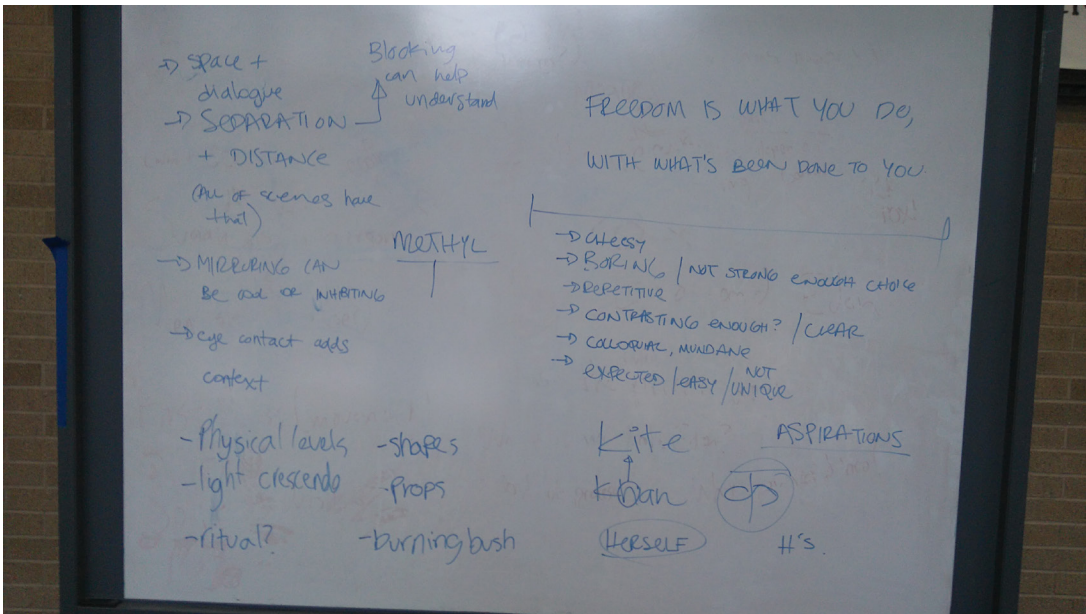
Ryan, for example, often had movements that felt like he was performing the song for a live audience (holding a microphone, acting like there was a stage or an imagined audience, etc). Khristián had really specific movements and used up all the space in a way that didn’t make it clear if/where there was an audience, but the movements felt quite specific and rehearsed. Brooks’ movements were more fluid, less specific and felt more like they were in a concert moshing with people. Megan’s were too, except Megan danced with her eyes closed most of the time—



her movements were for herself.

Having done an *extensive* warm up, they started trying the beats of the text.

Each actor (and the director) was given an opportunity to try things out for each of the act—even if they had nothing to do with what they had been doing before.



The actors then made a list of the things that **were** working, but the act overall felt like it needed something. Ryan suggested that it needed “some sort of crescendo”, like a climax.

What **was** working were the different physical levels they were playing with, the shapes they were making, eye contact, and illustrating separation and distance (this separation and distance felt like it was pretty key to what the act was about.)

It also felt like there was a significant amount of fear in the room—and Khristián thought it’d be useful to name that fear. As such, they wrote what were the things that they were afraid about: being cheesy, boring, repetitive, mundane, expected, easy, not contrasting enough.

Khristián realized that the fact that they were three actors meant that there was always going to be a



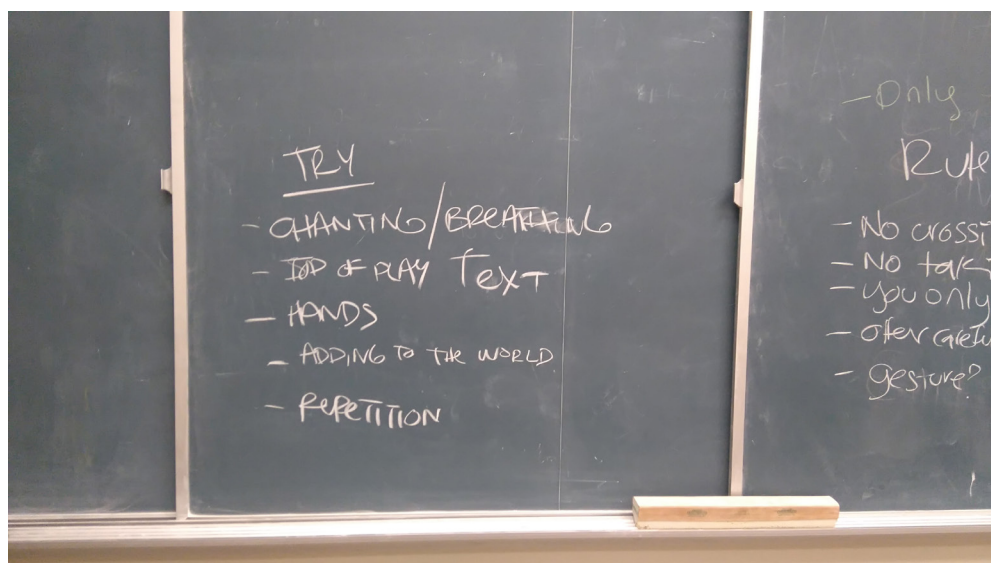
triangle shape with them—and that it was probably best if they used that shape intentionally.

Khristián asked them to, just for fun, try saying the lines for one of the beats while slowly bending their knees so they would crouch—all at the same time. And then to do the next beat all by trying to get up—this was right before break.

There was something really interesting about that effort, so although the sequence wasn't entirely clear, they agreed to keep it. In fact, Khristián began to see that they had come up with enough different things to try so that they could start actually composing the act. They took a dinner break over at Jester City Limits, and got back to work.

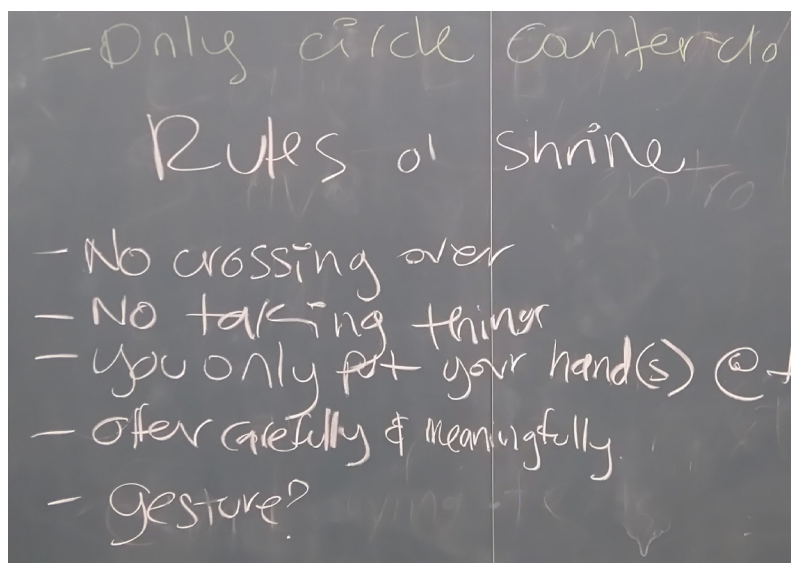
They ended the day having composed most of what ended up being **beats a - j** for the lovers. They wrapped up the rehearsal with a debrief of what worked that day, in terms of the rehearsal techniques, and by laying down to listen to Mike's draft of the Overture in the dark.

Rehearsal # 19 was much shorter, and they used it to write the rest of the act. They started, this time in WIN 2.112, by writing what they had liked about what worked the day before and things they wanted to try.



Kristin joined this rehearsal, and saw a run of what they came up with the day before.

Most of her questions had to do with clarifying what this new space was—what was allowed to happen in it and what wasn't. So the company started a second running list of “Rules of the Shrine”.



And thus! most of Act 3 was completed. Khristián communicated to the design team that there had been a shift in the act, they now called it a “Telephonic burning bush”, and wanted to establish a sense of ritual. It was really the design, once they moved into the space, which would help establish a sense of ritual....

Rehearsals # 20-24 saw the company working with dramaturgs Alexis Riley and Kristin Perkins to tighten the piece along with Khristián.

On **Rehearsal # 25** we got access to the space, and were able to block out some of the spacing in the SAC blackbox before beginning technical rehearsals.

During **Rehearsals 26 through 28** we built the lighting cues, tightened the sound cues, and got the show ready for our four performances.



Contexts for the play

PRODUCTION DRAMATURGY is the articulation of the relationship between three different worlds:

- 1) the world that the play came from (historical/social/scientific/cultural/artistic background),
- 2) the world that the play contains (the characters within the play and the environment they inhabit) and
- 3) the context that the play is to be presented in (why this play now.)

This section contains written accounts of all three—only limited by the fact that words will always fail to capture exactly what we mean.

THE WORLD THE PLAY CAME FROM

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

As much as the telephonic apparatus was the product of two men--Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas A. Watson, *Téléphone* is the product of the work of two women: philosopher and scholar Avital Ronell and poet Ariana Reines.

The text that the play is derived from, *The Telephone Book*, was first published in 1989 by University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln & London. A 490-page volume, *The Telephone Book* seems at first to be concerned with how the invention of the telephone changed COMMUNICATION, or COMMUNICATIONS. A careful read of its contents, though, yields surprise--it is as much about the calls that we were answering before the telephone was even invented.

According to the pre-eminent Ronell scholar, Dr. Diane Davis, *The Telephone Book* puts forward a telephonic logic. The telephone connects things and at the same time maintains the distance among them.

The text examines connection and disconnection through Moses's burning bush, the use of the colon, and the 'monster' Frankenstein. Leaving us with a question, how the hell can we hang up?

The text of *telephone* is a dramatic take on this dense, layered work. A lasagna of telephonics, emotion, and such. Reines chose to explore Ronell's reading of queer undertones --some of them quite homoerotic-- between Watson and Bell's relationship. These two characters take up part 1. Part 2 of the play is an intense study off Miss Saint, B. Saint, a patient of Carl Jung who believed she had a telephone inside of her. Part 3 is a series of vignettes, disembodying (for the act happens completely in the dark) and voicing several of the concepts present in the play.

Much of the written information about the play is about its productions, or about the source text, so little is known about why exactly this play was commissioned by the Foundry.



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
ABOUT THE AUTHOR & PLAYWRIGHT

AVITAL RONELL is a continental philosopher. That is, her work finds its place among a tradition of European philosophers. Called by “the most interesting scholar in America”, her oeuvre spans topics like stupidity, drugs, haunted writing, and the telephone. She wrote one of the first attempts to theorize the AIDS crisis, and an essay on the police beating of Rodney King, which Artforum deemed “the most illuminating essay on TV and video ever written.”

The Telephone Book was her second book, it shares the destabilizing nature, bold and performative writing style that the rest of her works carry. After reading Ronell’s work, you don’t know what you know anymore about the subject in question. It is hard to encounter texts which synthesize the many nuances present in *The Telephone Book* correctly, but this does not temper with the force of the book’s questions and its unrelenting examination of the calls we have always taken. ■

ARIANA REINES is an American poet, playwright, performance artist and translator. She has published several books of poetry, including *The Cow* (2006) *Coeur de Lion* (2007) and *Mercury* (2007). *The Cow* which won the Alberta Prize in 2006. *Telephone* is her only published play. Reines was the youngest person to be appointed a Roberta C. Holloway Lecturer in Poetry at University of California at Berkeley and she currently is a Professor of the Practice of Poetry in the Department of English at Tufts. ■



THE WORLD THE PLAY CONTAINS

CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS AND ANALYSIS

Bell & the origins of the telephone

The historical Alexander Graham Bell was born in 1847 in Edinburgh, Scotland. As we know, he's part of the pair who is credited with inventing the telephone. He had an older brother, Melville Bell (Melly on the script). Since he was a kid, he was good with voices, ventriloquism, and taught himself the piano. His mother, Eliza Grace, began going deaf when he was 12, and he developed a form of speaking to her into her forehead, and she could hear him. His concern with Eliza's condition led him to study acoustics. His grandfather, Alexander Bell, his father Alexander Melville Bell, and his uncle all taught elocution.

The telephone is essentially electric speech. For which you need sound and electricity. We could say that Aleck, as his family knew him, put the speech in electric speech, and Watson put the electric in electric speech.

He got sick in 1867, while he was working in London. He suffered exhaustion. At the same time, his younger brother Ted was ill with tuberculosis. Ted ultimately died in 1867.

Bell's father was developing a system called Visible Speech—an early form of phonetic orthography—which AGB was helping with.

After Bell was getting better, he traveled with his parents, and Ted's widow to Canada. They bought a farm there. AGB loved the environment, and the air helped him feel better. Near the farm, Bell found the Six Nations Reserve. He learned their language, Mohawk, and he translated it into Visible Speech symbols. Because of his keen involvement with the Reserve, they named him Honorary Chief, and took part of a ceremony where he wore a Mohawk headdress and performed traditional dance.



In 1871, Alexander Bell, AGB's dad, was invited to the Boston School for Deaf Mutes, but he declined it for his son. Bell trained the school's instructors in Visible Speech, and performed other trainings like this elsewhere in New England.

When he returned to Canada later that year, he continued working with his "harmonic telegraph". The thinking behind this telegraph was that messages could be sent with different pitches, but Bell didn't have the skills to finish the transmitter or receiver.

Bell chose to return to Boston as a teacher instead of continuing his studies. His dad set him up with the president of the Clarke School for the Deaf. There, Bell taught Helen Keller, and they remained in close contact throughout the years. In fact, Helen's autobiography was dedicated to AGB.

Bell taught and continued his practice, trying to find enough time to continue his research. He kept "night owl" hours, and was very meticulous about keeping his work a secret. His health began to falter, and in 1873 he decided to focus only on his experiments in sound.

The only two students he kept were 16-year-old "Georgie" Sanders and 15-year-old Mabel Hubbard. Sanders' father was wealthy, and he offered Bell a space in a Salem, Mass. home where Georgie Sanders' grandmother lived. Mabel was deaf because of a Scarlet fever, when she was five.

By 1874, the telegraph had become the backbone of Commerce, and there was great financial and economic pressure to increase its capacity. Bell was receiving substantial financial support from the parents of Hubbard and Sanders, and he was in pressure to get going. Bell realized he didn't have the necessary knowledge to finish.

In 1874, Bell met Thomas A. Watson, an electrical designer and mechanic. With the support of the patrons, Bell hired Watson as his assistant. One June 2nd, 1875, Watson accidentally plucked one of the reeds from the contraptions, and Bell heard the over-



tones of the reed. This machine could transmit indistinct, voice-like sounds but not clear speech.

In 1875, Bell developed an acoustic telegraph, and applied for a patent in the U.K., to the subsequently apply for a patent in the U.S.

The first, famous phone-call was made in March 10th, 1876. ■

Watson

Thomas Augustus Watson was born in 1854, he was 7 years younger than Bell. His name was the first to be said through the Telephone.

Watson was originally a bookkeeper and a carpenter, and was hired by AGB as his assistant for the invention of the Telephone. By the time AGB hired him, Watson knew enough about electricity and building, that he put the electric in electric speech.

Since he was a child, Watson made attempts to listen beyond what most people listen to. His best friend from next door and him attempted to contact spirits by placing their hands on a table, knocking and waiting to see if something would knock back. Apparently, whatever they were trying to contact spoke to back to them, and they were frightened.

He was also a little traumatized when the family's cat died, and was then taxidermized into a statue. What scared him most was the mouth of the cat, in his own re-tellings.

He had an extremely sensitive ear, and it is only fitting that he would then have the honor of taking the first phone call. ■

Miss Saint

Dressmaker, unmarried, born in 1845, Miss B. Saint was admitted to Jung's mental facility in 1877. By the time she was admitted, she had been hearing voices for a while. The voices questioned her character, and told her she had drowned her children in a toilet, and she had stolen a pair of scissors to poke out a child's



eyes. She spoke pretentiously, according to Jung.

“She naturally has no insight into her illness, though up to a point finds it comprehensible that her delusions are not understood. There is no imbecility; Her speech is altered only where her delusions are concerned; otherwise she speaks normally, reports on what she has read, and defines ideas in a clear way, provided they do not touch the complex.”

She speaks in a way that is unintelligible for those who interact with her, but this does not mean there is no method to her madness. Jung distinguished three different complexes: a complex of superiority, a complex of injury, and an erotic complex. All intermingle, and manifest themselves through a series of word associations. Underlying her condition is a series of voices that speak to her as if they came from many different telephones.

The most astonishing thing about the 54-page article that Jung wrote about her (and which Reines used, up to the point of transcribing sections of it for act 2) is that Jung does not consider to fully understand her condition. She’s an unknowable entity. She resists us, like the play overall.

About her demeanor — she spoke really quietly sometimes, to the point that Jung needed her to speak up and she would get irritable after that.

Her complex of superiority manifested itself in words like Socrates, being double, polytechnic, and irreplaceable. For the most part, anything positive that she says about herself during her dialogue, speaks to what she knows is owed to her. She is owed money, and she expects a payment every day.

It is unclear to her whether she is Socrates, or whether she is like Socrates. Sometimes she affirms the house, sometimes she is like the house, sometimes she is the house.

Her complex of injury also stems from her being at the institution where Jung studied her. She went there, like Switzerland, out of free will, but then she



was retained against her will. Her suffering is a paralysis, it is unknown and hieroglyphical, (as a side note, hieroglyph means higher writing.)

She refers to Drs Hufeland and Gessler, who were good doctors, and she seems to have a funny relationship to have with her Dr.

Finally, her sexual complex manifests itself in known relationships (Emperor Francis I and Maria Theresa, for example. Jung is quite unclear about what exactly is the meaning of this sexual complex and how it relates to her condition. ■

The lovers

At a first glance, the name implies romantic lovers. But the truth is that these 50 or so lovers have wildly different types of relationships. Best friends, parents and children, phone-sex-workers and clients, a threesome, long-distance relationships, and so forth.

Their voices capture the loneliness, yearning, distance, pain, confusion and challenges of loving a loved-one who is far away. They do so in different ways — a parent hears a child tell a story over the phone, two lovers explore the nuances of their sexual dynamic over the phone, two people far away try and do small-talk while really they know they'd much rather be together in real life.

The hard and fast rule with the lovers is just that we need to learn from each of them by what their words say, and what they don't say. ■



THE WORLD THE PLAY IS PERFORMED IN

WHY THIS PLAY HERE AND NOW

What does taking calls (from far or near) do to us? telephone is not a play to shame people against smartphones, cellphones, or the NSA, *but a closer observation of the simple (and marvelous act) of making/ taking a call and its surrounding loneliness.* An observation of what is it like to have a speaking device on our pockets, that is at once ear and mouth. Unlike so, so many pieces of art (theatrical and otherwise) who seek to warn us about the dangers of technology—as if all artists always truly know better than the public—this play places us at the level of our peers, if perhaps closer to our telephones than they.

Even deeper than re-questioning the act of using a telephone, this play pushes us to pay attention and ask: what is it really, to take a call. The telephone wasn't revolutionary because it first enabled us to transmit ourselves, *but because it enabled a possibility we already knew existed.* Through a burning bush, through necromancy, through hearing voices as the schizophrenic does, through the act of shouting across the water as the greeks did, calling and receiving calls from far away through older telephones than The Telephone was something humans were used to.

It is also, in a world where queer and female voices are wanting to make themselves heard, an act of revisionist history. *It highlights the queerness of the relationship between the two men who gave birth to the telephone, queering the art of telephony forever. telephone queers invention, inviting us to ask who else do we remember unquestioned.*

Finally, it is an offering. An offering for those who long to hear or see their loved ones but must settle with their electric voices and pixelated images. ■



Analysis of the play & dramaturgical suggestions for a directorial-design concept for a new production.

Before Act I, there is an overture in the dark. House-lights go down, and we go from “inaudible silence to gradually audible silence;” For production, this recalls the sound that speakers make when you know can they are on but there is no actual sound coming from them. There is arousal and anticipation at what will come out of the speakers, if also some trepidation from those who know the sound is potentially going to be too loud.

The overture involves electric, percussive, tonal and vocal sounds that stimulate the imagination. Then they slowly increase in intensity (though not in frequency) until they become mixed. The overture is not meant to be messy or disorienting--at times the playwright suggests coordination and beauty so the audience has an access point and does not feel alienated.

Act I, watson+bell, happens soon after the historical first call is made through the device we call the telephone. The audience is in fact in the same room that it happened (with Watson initially in the adjacent room.) The characters interrogate each other about what they’ve done and what they could do in a gush of energy, wonder, deafness, and a constant build of sexual tension and emotional intimacy from a Watson that hears it all to a Bell who listens selectively. The call of this act drops soon after W proposes they contact what he’s been hearing this whole time.

Act II, miss saint’s heiroglyphical sufferings is a 29 minute study on Miss B. Saint, a patient of Carl Jung who believed she had a telephone inside of her. It is Miss Saint who most clearly illustrates the connection that Ronell was trying to create between accepting calls through a technological device (the telephone) and accepting pre-telephonic calls.

She battles between lucidity, memory, and the pestering voices around her. She tricks the audience into feeling like she fails to communicate her condition,



but it is through her inability to communicate that she manages to transmit herself—we understand her incapacity to communicate.

Act III, the lovers, is a series of vignettes that exist to anonymous characters, each named after a letter of the alphabet, plus a final vignette titled “end”.

This is perhaps the act that is easiest to read on the page, and which contains the most potential for dramatic inquiry. This play

Téléphone is character-driven. It is an invitation to exist in these three separate spaces, listen to how they function (as those spaces resist us). The story it tells is that of three separate world that are made with the same fabric. Across the play the language invites imagination, it provides enough stimulus, enough chaos, enough structure and enough beauty to stimulate the audience. It also runs the risk of frustrating them, if they do not know what to expect.

■



For a production at the University of Texas at Austin, the following recommendations could make a strong production:

Aesthetic distance

Following the cues from the text, the production should providing enough structure that the audience can identify what is going on and access what the play has to offer and enough apparent chaos to de-stabilize what they think the play is about. This has the potential to alienate, frustrate and confuse the audience, so it will be important to communicate to them that they play, like the book it is based on, will resist them. This has implications for acting, costumes, lighting, set, and sound. I would not recommend utilizing projection or integrated media.

Acting

The three acts have different demands from the actors--the first act will rely on the two actors having palpable chemistry with each other, so the audience can read the questions they pose to each other as a way to understand their relationship. Their relationship will serve as a vehicle for some of the more expository ideas that the play carries “do you think machines ever feel lonely for the people they were fashioned to assist” and “if the lord had meant to house speech in machines, he would not have given us tongues.” Meisner work can help sharpen that dynamic among the two actors, without slipping into the ‘tactics’ that Stanislavski would suggest they should use.

The actress cast to play Miss Saint will need to be not only comfortable carrying a third of the play with her, but also tying the language to physical impulses on her body that are responding to various stimuli: the voices around her, the kitten and baby that live on her spine, the people she lives with, the dresses she used to make, and the recordings the audience



will hear too. These are what she responds to. Act three will likely require a more inventive approach to developing it. The words are deceptively simple, and unless the acting choices are really clear the audience will get confused about what's going on. Short of sign-posting to the audience that we are not looking at scenes interspersed, each of the lover vignettes has to be different from the other ones. Some of them we will have recorded, but the majority of them will be acted.

Vocal training using Patsy Rodenburg's three circles of engagement (1st, 2nd and 3rd) will be useful when training the actor's voices and their physical choices to play these characters.

Costumes

Because of the historical characters in the play, and that we tend to associate history with "truth" and legible narratives, it will be important to appease that expectation from the audience. Costuming is a clear place to do that through costuming. Nothing else will be period, so grounding the characters through costume, hair and make-up will also ground the action of the play in each of the three respective worlds. The lovers will likely wear contemporary clothing, informed by the palette of the historical characters.

Lighting

Lighting is a good place to attempt some of the more abstract elements of the play. It will direct the audience's focus, and there's something about this play that is very yellow, coppery, or electric. Energetic, warm, dry and dark.

Set and props

The set for this play is minimal. We need a table, two chairs, telephone equipment, and the painting of an owl. It would be fantastic if there were ways to interact with the set that spoke to the shift in the three worlds, in ways that were legible and clear.

Sound



Sound is probably the most expressive element of this play. Considering the amount of darkness, how abstract and open to interpretation are the directions in the overture, the overture and other sound effects should have a cohesive, familiar and layered texture to them. The use of human voices is important, and it should be done in a way that stays close through human register (no alterations of their pitch, timber, or the sonic frequency with which it is usually spoken.)

Community engagement and printed materials:

This play asks a lot of the audience. It brings attention to something as mundane as a telephone, and it asks that we re-imagine what it is to take a call, what it is that we become when we take a call. In a milieu where there is a lot of art blaming our cell-phones for making us less connected, more distracted and passive receivers of content, this play should not engage with that narrative. The only audience conception that could be pushed is the notion that technology is always bad, it always makes our lives worse, and that it is a natural extension. Ronell's thesis is not that the telephone changed us, but that the telephone was invented because we already had the ability to take calls (burning bush, miss saint, etc.)

The program materials should contain language to massage the audience expectations of this being a traditional play.



Design Research, Sketches, & Renderings











Play Production History

1ST PRODUCTION

NYC's The Foundry Theatre commissioned this play in January 2008, and the play premiered Off-Broadway on February 6th, 2009 and ran until the end of that month at the Cherry Lane Theatre. This production was directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, featuring Matthew Dellapina, Gibson Frazier and Birgit Huppach. Telephone won two Obies in 2009--one for Schmoll's directing and one for Huppach's performance.

2ND PRODUCTION

In 2013, when the Theatre Ninjas company, out of Ohio, produced it in the basement of the Masonic Temple of Ohio City. This production was directed by Jaime Bouvier, and featured Holly Holsinger, ray Caspio and Ryan Lucas. This production ran for two weeks: May 30th - June 15th, 2013.

1st TRANSLATION

In 2014, French translator Hillary Keegin created an original translation of the text into French, which was workshopped at La Générale du Nord-Est, and presented to the public on June 20th, 2014. This production was directed by Hillary Keegin, and featured Perrine Guffroy, Céline Pérot, David Stanley and Jean-Baptiste Verquin.

3rd PRODUCTION

That same year, a group of students at College of the Atlantic, in Bar Harbor, ME, produced the play as part of their Play Production Workshop course. This production was directed by Jodi Baker, and featured Isabel Shaida, Eloise Schultz, Sophie Cameron, Ursula Ostrander, Corrie Ingall, Mackenzie Watson, Kate Young, and Jack Shaida. As far as I know, this was the first production of Telephone at an educational institution. This production ran nov 14th-16th, 2014.

2nd TRANSLATION

According to Reines' website, a Norwegian translation and subsequent production will take place in Lillehammer, Norway, in 2017. ■



Production Calendar

Telephone - Production Calendar V-1							khrist
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A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
		<i>Aug 30</i>	<i>Aug 31</i>	<i>Sep 1</i>	<i>Sep 2</i>	<i>Sep 3</i>	
		DARK	DARK	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	
				6-8pm		5-7pm	
				TBA		TBC	
						1st Fittings 4pm	
<i>Sep 4</i>	<i>Sep 5</i>	<i>Sep 6</i>	<i>Sep 7</i>	<i>Sep 8</i>	<i>Sep 9</i>	<i>Sep 10</i>	
Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	
6-10pm	6-10pm		6-10pm	6-10pm		4-9PM	
Rude Studios	WIN 2.112		WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112		TBC	
<i>Sep 11</i>	<i>Sep 12</i>	<i>Sep 13</i>	<i>Sep 14</i>	<i>Sep 15</i>	<i>Sep 16</i>	<i>Sep 17</i>	
Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	
6-10pm	6-10pm		6-10pm	6-10pm	4-9PM	4-7PM	
WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112		WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	TBC	
<i>Sep 18</i>	<i>Sep 19</i>	<i>Sep 20</i>	<i>Sep 21</i>	<i>Sep 22</i>	<i>Sep 23</i>	<i>Sep 24</i>	
Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	
6-10pm	6-10pm		6-10pm	6-10pm	4-9PM	4-7PM	
WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112		WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	TBC	
<i>Sep 11</i>	<i>Sep 12</i>	<i>Sep 13</i>	<i>Sep 14</i>	<i>Sep 15</i>	<i>Sep 16</i>	<i>Sep 17</i>	
Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	
6-10pm	6-10pm		6-10pm	6-10pm	4-9PM	4-7PM	
WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112		WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	TBC	
<i>Sep 18</i>	<i>Sep 19</i>	<i>Sep 20</i>	<i>Sep 21</i>	<i>Sep 22</i>	<i>Sep 23</i>	<i>Sep 24</i>	
Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	
6-10pm	6-10pm		6-10pm	6-10pm	4-9PM	4-7PM	
WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112		WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	TBC	
<i>Sep 25</i>	<i>Sep 26</i>	<i>Sep 27</i>	<i>Sep 28</i>	<i>Sep 29</i>	<i>Sep 30</i>	<i>Oct 1</i>	
Rehearsal	Rehearsal	DARK	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	Rehearsal	SPACING & Q2Q	
6-10pm	6-10pm		6-10pm	6-10pm	4-9PM	9AM-5PM	
WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112		WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	WIN 2.112	SAC BLACK BOX	
<i>Oct 2</i>	<i>Oct 3</i>	<i>Oct 4</i>	<i>Oct 5</i>	<i>Oct 6</i>	<i>Oct 7</i>	<i>Oct 8</i>	
TECH	1ST DRESS	DARK	FINAL DRESS	SHOW #1	SHOW #2	SHOW #2	
6PM-9PM	6PM-9PM		6PM-9PM	6PM-9PM	6PM-9PM	1PM-3PM	
SAC BLACK BOX	SAC BLACK BOX		SAC BLACK BOX	SAC BLACK BOX	SAC BLACK BOX	SAC BLACK BOX	



Rehearsal # 2 Call Schedule



Khristian Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Brooks, Megan 

Saturday, September 2nd.
WIN 2.112

4pm Brooks: Watson + Bell, beat 21 (only W's monologue)
5pm Brooks + Megan: Lovers f, j, s, end
6pm Megan: Miss Saint 1

Rehearsal #2.1 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Megan, Brooks 

Sunday, September 3rd.

Costume Shop + WIN 2.112 (if locked we'll be rehearsing in the atrium)

4pm - 1st fitting @ Costume shop.
4.30pm - Brooks & Megan: **lovers f, j, s, end**
5.45pm - Brooks: **Watson + Bell beat 21** (only W monologue)
6.45pm - Dinner Break. Brooks Released
7.45pm - Megan: **Miss Saint 1 & 2**
9pm - End of Rehearsal, Megan released



Rehearsal # 3 Call Schedule



Khristian Mendez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan ▾

Monday, September 4th

WIN 2.112

6pm - Brooks & Ryan: Watson and Bell beats 1 - 4

7.15pm - Brooks, Ryan: Lovers e, h, k

8.15pm - Break

8.30pm - Brooks, Ryan, Megan: c, & w

9pm - Megan, Miss Saint 3, Brooks & Ryan Released

10pm - End of rehearsal, Megan Released.

Rehearsal # 4 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan ▾

Tuesday, September 5th

WIN 2.112

6pm - Ryan, Megan: Lovers d, i, l

6:45pm - Ryan, Brooks, Megan: Lovers a - l

7.20pm - Megan: Miss Saint 1 - 4, Brooks & Ryan Dinner Break

8pm - Brooks & Ryan: Watson + Bell 1 - 8, Megan released

10pm - End of Rehearsal, Brooks & Ryan released.

Rehearsal # 5 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan ▾

Thursday, September 6th

WIN 2.112

6pm Ryan, Megan: lovers p, r, t, v

7.15pm, Ryan, Brooks: lovers o, q, u, Megan released

8pm, Ryan & Brooks Dinner

8.45pm - Ryan & Brooks: Watson 8 - 12

10pm (or earlier) - End of Rehearsal, Ryan & Brooks Released



Rehearsal # 6 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks

Friday, September 8th

WIN 2.112

6pm Megan: Miss Saint 4 & 5

7:30pm Megan, Ryan, Brooks: Lovers a - z

8:30pm Dinner Break, Megan Released

9pm Ryan, Brooks: Watson+Bell 13: War Dance

10pm All Released

Rehearsal # 7 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks

4:30pm - Megan, Miss Saint 1 & 2

6:30pm - Megan, Brooks, Ryan - Lovers a - end

7:30pm - Dinner Break, Megan Released

8pm - Brooks, Ryan - Watson 14 - 18

9:30pm - All released

Rehearsal # 8 Call Schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Megan, Ryan, Brooks

Monday, September 11th

WIN 2.112

6pm - Ryan, Brooks: Watson & Bell - 20 - 222

8pm - Megan: Miss Saint 7 & 8

10pm - All released



Rehearsal # 9 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 1

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks

WIN 2.112

Tuesday, September 12th

6pm - Megan: Miss Saint 9 - 10

8pm - Brooks, Ryan: Watson + Bell 22-25, Megan Released

10pm - All Released

Rehearsal # 10 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 1

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks

Thursday, September 14th

WIN 2.112

6pm - Ryan, Brooks: watson + bell 27-29 (yay!)

8pm - Megan: Miss Saint 10 - 11, Ryan & Brooks Released.

10pm - Megan Released

REMINDER Ryan and Megan send me your bios

Rehearsal # 11 Call Schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 1

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan

Friday, September 15th

6pm All Called, WIN 1.134

Warm-up with anon team

6:30pm lovers a - end (yay!), Payne Lobby

7:30pm dinner break, megan released

8pm Ryan, Brooks: Watson & Bell 28 - 29 (yay!),

10pm All Released



Rehearsal # 12 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu> Sep 1

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan 

Saturday, September 16th, 2017

Costume Shop, Payne Lobby

4pm - Ryan: Fitting, Megan called for costume

4.30pm - Megan: Miss Saint (10-13), Ryan Break,

5.30pm - Ryan, Brooks: War Dance steps, Megan break

6.00pm - Ryan, Brooks, Megan: Lovers costume test (with movement as we did y

6.30pm - Dinner Break

7pm - 1st Full run through (with guests)

8.30pm - Notes, end of rehearsal, all released

Rehearsal # 13 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu> Sep 1

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks 

Sunday, September 17th

WIN 2.112

4pm - All called: Debrief from yesterday

4.30pm - Ryan: Monologue, Brooks break, Megan released

5.30pm - Brooks: Monologues, Ryan Released

7pm - End of rehearsal, Brooks released

Rehearsal # 14 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu> Sep 1

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan 

WIN 2.112 (this time it's likely to be true)

6pm - Megan: Miss Saint

7.30pm - Dinner Break, Megan Released

8pm - Brooks: Watson

10pm (or earlier) - Brooks Released

67



Rehearsal # 15 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Megan, Ryan, Brooks

WIN 2.112

Tuesday, September 19

6.30pm (or whenever Town Hall meeting ends) Brooks: Monologue

8:00pm Dinner Break

8:30pm Ryan, Brooks: Watson+Bell

Rehearsal # 16 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan, Andrew

Hi team!

Just a reminder that tomorrow is your first day *off book*. Also, Dr. Andrew Ian C. is joining us after 7.30pm.

See you tomorrow.

Thursday, September 21st

WIN 2.112 (Andrew, Jessica has let us squat in the Payne Lobby since it's not being officially we have 2.112 booked)

6pm All Called - Recording for opening message

6.20pm Megan: Miss Saint; Ryan, Brooks: Dinner Break

8pm Ryan, Brooks: Watson + Bell; Megan Released

10pm: Ryan, Brooks released. End of rehearsal

Rehearsal # 17 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan

Friday, September 22nd

WIN 2.112

6pm: Ryan, Brooks: War Dance, Watson+Bell

9pm Megan: Miss Saint; Ryan, Brooks Released

10pm Megan Released



Rehearsal # 18 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan

Saturday, September 22

WIN 2.112

4pm All called: The lovers

6:30pm Dinner Break

9pm (or earlier) All released.

PS. Please bring a song or two that you know really well and know the lyrics to. I would play in the headphone warm-ups we've been doing.

...



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan

Rehearsal # 19 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan

Sunday, September 24th

WIN 2.112

6.30pm - All Called: lovers

8pm - End of rehearsal

Rehearsal # 20 Call Schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan

WIN 2.112

6pm Brooks, Ryan: Watson+Bell

9pm Megan: Miss Saint; Brooks, Ryan Released

10pm End of Rehearsal

...



Rehearsal # 21 Call Schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Alexis ▾

Tuesday, September 26th

WIN 2.112

6pm: All Called. Warm-ups, Check-ins

6.30pm: Megan: Miss Saint (+Alexis), Brooks, Ryan: Watson+Bell

7.30pm: Megan: Miss Saint (+Alexis&Khristian), Brooks, Ryan: Break

8.30pm: Brooks, Ryan: Watson+Bell, Megan Released

10pm: Brooks, Ryan Released.



Rehearsal # 22 Call Schedule + Tentative plan until Opening n



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 2

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Alexis, Aaron, Kristin, Mike, Austin, jakejakeb ▾

Thursday, September 28th

WIN 2.112

6pm - Megan: Miss Saint

8pm - Ryan, Brooks: Watson+Bell, Megan Released

10pm - All released

Rehearsal # 23 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Sep 29 (13 days ago)

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Kristin ▾

Friday, September 29

WIN 2.112

6pm All Called: Lovers

7.30pm Break,

8pm Lovers

10pm All released



Rehearsal # 24 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas>
to Ryan, Brooks, Megan, Alexis, Kristin

Sep 30 (12 days ago)

WIN 2.112

Saturday, September 30th

7pm All Called: Lovers

8.45pm - Dinner Break

9.15pm - Lovers

10pm - End of rehearsal, all released

Rehearsal # 25 call schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas>
to Ryan, Brooks, Megan, Alexis, Kristin, Aaron, Mike, Austin, jakejakeb

Sep 30 (12 days ago)

Sunday, October 1st

SAC BLACKBOX

12pm all called: Spacing with Austin

2pm lovers run with Austin

3pm Brooks and Ryan: Watson and bell, Megan break

3:30pm Megan: Miss Saint, Brooks & Ryan Break

4:00 1st Stumble through

5:30pm Dinner break, Khristian paper tech with Jake

6:15pm Run with Aaron for costume notes

8pm All released

Rehearsal # 26 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas>
to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Aaron, Kristin, Austin, Alexis, jakejakeb, Mike

Oct 1 (11 days ago)

Monday, October 2nd

SAC Blackbox

6pm All Called: Tech/Q2Q

10pm All released



Rehearsal # 27 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Oct 2 (10 days ago)

to Ryan, Brooks, Megan, Jake, Kristin, Alexis, Austin, Aaron, Mike 

Tuesday, October 3rd
SAC Blackbox

6pm - All called: actors to period costumes and make-up

6.15pm - Photo shoots with Yi Tai Chung (1st in period costumes and then lover)

7pm - Technical run

9pm - Notes + Cue tightening

10pm - End of Rehearsal, All released

Rehearsal # 28 Call Schedule & Note about documentation



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Oct 4 (8 days ago)

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Kristin, Alexis, Aaron, Austin, Jake, Mike 

Thursday, October 5th
SAC Blackbox

6pm All Called: Check-in, Warm-up

7pm Dress Rehearsal

8.30pm Notes + things to iron out

10pm (or, very likely, much earlier than that) End of rehearsal

Performance # 1 Call Schedule



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Oct 6 (6 days ago)

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Mike, Aaron, Austin, Jake, Alexis, Kristin 

Friday, October 6th
SAC BLACKBOX

6PM All Called

7PM Performance # 1 GO

8:30(ish) Talkback led by Kristin (all members of production team invited to join)

9PM (ish) All released

Stage hands tonight: Kristin and Khristián



Performance # 2 Call Schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Oct 7 (5 days ago)

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Kristin, Alexis, Jake, Mike, Aaron, Austin ▾

Saturday, October 7th
SAC BLACKBOX

6pm All Called
7pm Performance # 2 GO
8.30pm End of Performance

Stagehands tonight: Kristin and Khristián

*******Please be wary of the football game***** it starts at 6.
If more than half of the house is empty by 7, we might start a touch late**

Kristin & all: Should we do a talkback today as well? The audience really seemed to enjoy it last night, and even during Final Dress they were so keen on talking about it?? just a thought

Performances # 3 + 4 Call Schedule



Inbox x



Khristián Méndez Aguirre <khristianmendez@utexas.edu>

Oct 8 (4 days ago)

to Ryan, Megan, Brooks, Kristin, Alexis, Aaron, Austin, Mike, Jake ▾

Sunday, October 8th
SAC Blackbox

1pm All Called
2pm Performance # 3 GO
3.30pm Talkback
3.50pm Break

6pm All Called
7pm Performance # 4 GO
8.30pm Talkback
8.50pm Strike
10pm (or earlier, if we're done earlier) All released

Stagehands today:
2pm Khristián and Alexis
7pm Alexis and Kristin



Production Photos













Constellations & Further Reading

WELCOME! You've found your way to the dramaturgy page for the UT-Austin production of telephone. This page has content intended to supplement your understanding and interpretation of this production. It doesn't have answers. For those, we suggest you look somewhere else. This information was written and compiled by Kristin Perkins, Production Dramaturg.

Posts:

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXIS RILEY

CONSTELLATIONS

INSIGHT FROM COMPOSER, MIKE VERNUSKY

THE HISTORICAL FIGURES BEHIND THE
CHARACTERS

SOURCES CONSULTED

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXIS RILEY:

I sat down with production dramaturg Alexis Riley the week of the performance to talk about her involvement in the show and the representation of mental health, in telephone and beyond. Alexis Riley is a PhD student whose research focuses on mental health and performance. -KP

Kristin Perkins: *What brought you to this project specifically?*

Alexis Riley: I was having just a casual conversation with Khristián [the director] and he mentioned that in telephone the entire second act is dedicated to a character who is diagnosed with a mental illness. And of course that was right up my alley, and I had a mass of questions for him, and the more we got to talking the more we thought it could be a good site of practical research in terms of how can we make this effective within the show. How can we make sure that the actor is able to perform this with an eye towards ethical considerations? And then, perhaps



in a broader sense, what implications does this kind of work have for the larger theatre and mental health communities?

KP: *And what do you see as some of those ethical considerations?*

AR: There can be a tendency to position characters who are either named or inferred to have a mental health diagnosis as some sort of “other” within the world of the play. To take it a step further, sometimes those productions might use mental illness as a plot device, so it’s sort of the big reveal at the end, that this person was just crazy all along. It might be something that adds dramatics and color, so the histrionics of big gestures and funny voices that might be associated stereotypically with a given diagnosis, or a fear of not being able to read a particular person’s performance of self so that these characters are almost from a horror movie and are meant to intimidate and to scare the audience

KP: *How do you feel like this production answers the ethical questions that you brought up?*

AR: I don’t think it can answer every question. But in this particular script what I think it does well is it maintains an awareness of being positioned as an “other” who isn’t a part of the assumed “normal” community. Miss Saint often talks about how she “suffers hieroglyphical.” So, she knows that people don’t always follow what she is saying and is able to speak to what can oftentimes feel like a very stigmatizing gaze. She knows people are looking at her with a bit of a confused expression, and she speaks to that. I think it has an awareness of the power dynamics that informs that experience particularly at that time. So, she does make references to her treatment.

I think she speaks to her own martyrdom. I find that really interesting to talk about from a trauma perspective. What can we learn if we think about the mental health community truly as a community with a particular history? What can a patient gain from positioning themselves as the inheritor of that



history?

The other thing that I really like about it is that the more you dig into the text the more you see how logical it is, how much it makes sense. So, maybe at first glance it might not be written in and style that we would consider easily accessible based on the norms that we've constructed, but it's so rewarding to invest in the poetry, to take the character at her word, and not feel like you have to layer on the big performative elements. I don't think this role has to be a virtuoso performance; I think it just has to be an honest performance.

KP: *I guess, finally, is there anything else that you would want people to know about this production, about the portrayal of mental illness?*

AR: I'll say two things. I have a lot of admiration for the character. In part because she's not a character, in the sense that this is a historical person, and there's very little available in terms of information about her; what we have comes through from a very problematic text written by her male therapist who had a very different notion of what mental illness was. Just as I'm sure someone fifty years from now will have similar critiques of our own practice. Well, to be frank, there are people currently who mount pretty hefty and engaging critiques, myself included.

But, I think it's very important to consider the fact that she is a woman in a very particular historical moment. And again going back to this idea, this community has a history that informs that identity. I think about, both with sadness and gratitude, the legacy of mental health care, and treatments, and clinical practice.

And so when we understand her as a saint, you know, as someone who suffers this martyrdom, I think on it with with terrible sadness but also with gratitude that she did experience some unethical, poor treatment. Because of that we're able to read the text that Jung produced and say, "That's not acceptable." We as people set a higher standard for care, and it's a standard that we fall woefully short of even now. I



think that that's an important aspect of her story.

In terms of viewing performances that feature characters with a mental health diagnosis. The thing I hope to explore and encourage is for audiences to develop an awareness of the larger cultural, social, and artistic mechanisms that are producing those identities and how those are embedded within a larger power structure that we have to cut through in order to understand and hear stories. So, I would hope that we extend that that same generosity to people we perceive to be "normal" as we do to those who carry a diagnosis. One in five people will experience some sort of mental health concern in their lifetime. I think that in so much as we extend that generosity to those we see on stage, so too we can extended it to those in the audience.

CONSTELLATIONS

This play, *telephone* by Ariana Reines, is an adaptation of a book, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* by Avita Ronell. The Telephone Book, in turn, draws from numerous other sources, including the writings of Alexander Graham Bell, Carl Jung, and Heidegger. This play is thick with symbols and meanings with many interconnected and intertextual layers. We all find our way into the text through our own lived experiences and certain other contextual access points. This play is one star in a constellation of meaning. Khristian and I asked the cast and creative team to provide us some of the stars in their constellation. These aren't meant as answers, only stars burning into our lives and our art.

Presented in alphabetical order:

A collection of screenshots I still have from skyping with a past love during a long-distance relationship, some sweet, many silly, a few desperately sad

A meme that's been floating around that reads, "Remember when we used to write 'BRB?' We don't do that anymore. We just live here."

Charcot's pictures of "hysterical" women



Dead Man's Cell Phone by Sarah Ruhl

"Der Tanz" composition by Schubert

Earlier this week I was Facetiming my best friend who has moved to France. She said "Aw I miss being with you in Austin!" so I panned my camera for her and candidly said "You are here! You are in Austin! Just look!" and then she responded with "Wait! So that means you're also in France!" Instantly, the phone call became my favorite and my only visit to France.

Freud's "Little Dora"

Hallucination- a sense perception that arises in the absence of stimulus

"Insane et Vannae Curae" composition by Haydn

I'm not proud of this one... But in early high school, my best friend convinced me I should finally break up with my, at the time, girlfriend. I knew it needed to be done but I wasn't sure what to say or how. So my friend came up with the idea that I could just call her, put her speaker so my friend could hear her, mute my side of the phone call so my friend could tell me what to say back, and then unmute my side and repeat back to my girlfriend what my friend had told me to say. The poor girl still doesn't know.

"Judith Slaying Holofernes" by Artemisia Gentileschi

Love and Information by Caryl Churchill

Man and his Symbols by Carl Jung

My own diagnosis

PennyDreadful - episode 'a blade of grass'

The American Psychological Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

The Curious Case of the Watson Intelligence



The ICONIC Hamburger phone used by Ellen Page in the film “Juno.”

The ICONIC music video to Lady Gaga and Beyonce’s international hit, Telephone.

The painting, The Lovers by Magritte

The song, “Bless the Telephone” as sung by Kelis

“The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The “iconic” new Taylor Swift lyric, “Sorry the old Taylor can’t come to phone right now. Why? She’s dead.”

Waiting for Godot by Beckett

Witches and other “Mad Seers”

Women in Melodrama

INSIGHT FROM COMPOSER MIKE VERNUSKY



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Production Team

Ryan Alvarado, *Alexander Graham Bell* and *Lover*, is a second-year student in the B.F.A Acting program at The University of Texas at Austin's Department of Theatre and Dance. He has recently been seen at The University of Texas at Austin Cohen New Works Festival pieces *El Camino de Hierro*, *105*, and *It's a Travesty*.

Jake Brinks, Board Operator, is a third-year undergrad student seeking a BA in Theatre & Dance. His work at UT includes directing *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, as well as designing lights for and *Daniel/Rose* as part of the Cohen New Works Festival 2017. He will be seen this November in *The Merchant of Venice* as Lorenzo. He is also the lighting designer for a production in *The Not Knowing* (this December). Finally, Jake is excited to be a part of The Telephone Play team and to get to work with such a talented group!

Aaron Kubačak, Costume Designer, received his undergrad degree in Radio-TV and Film from the University of Texas and is currently pursuing his MFA in Costume Design from UT. He's designed costumes for the UT's Spring Dance Concert, *Momentum*; *Spellbound: A Drag Fairy Tale*, *Horndog*, a student film directed by Ed Hancox; and will be working with the Texas Ballet Theater designing an original ballet, *Henry VIII*. He is also working on the UT Austin Department of Theatre and Dance's upcoming production of *The Crucible*. Previously he worked as a stitcher for Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, NY working on a production of *The Magic Flute* and has been a First Hand and stitcher at Texas Performing Arts. This past summer he designed *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and *Marvelous Wonderettes* for Bigfork Summer Playhouse.

Brooks Laney, *Thomas Augustus Watson* and *Lover*, is a third-year student in the B.F.A Acting program at The University of Texas at Austin. Most recently, he performed as "The Man From State" in The College of Theatre and Dance's production of *In the Red and Brown Water*, "2" in *Al-Halqa (is that how it's pronounced?)* by Drew Paryzer and as "Josh" in the thesis film *Play On* which has been featured in SXSW.



Brooks spent this past summer in NYC training at the William Esper Studio.

Khristian Méndez Aguirre, Director & Pre-Production Dramaturg, is a second-year MFA candidate in Performance as Public Practice at UT Austin. *Telephone* marks his directorial debut in Austin. He grew up in Guatemala City, and between there and Texas he studied and lived in Maine, Portugal, Italy, and India over the past eight years. Previous theatre credits at UT include dramaturging for *A Nervous Breakdown*, as part of the Cohen New Works Festival, and *Anon(ymous)* as part of the 2017-18 mainstage season for Texas Theatre and Dance. Khristián has a fire that is fed by work (of any discipline) that expands his notions of what's possible. He'd like to thank Jodi Baker and the Rude Mechanicals for creating work that achieves *just precisely that*.

Kristin Perkins, Production Dramaturg is a first-year M.A. student in the Performance as Public Practice program. She recently dramaturged a production of *The Crucible* as part of Brigham Young University's mainstage season. She's also worked as an intern of curation and programing at the Museum of Art in Provo, Utah, a kind of adapted dramaturgy. She's had plays and performance art produced around Utah County, and her poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction can be found in numerous literary journals including *AWE*, *Peculiar: A Queer Literary Journal*, and *Inscape*. This is her first theatre credit in Austin.

Alexis Riley, Production Dramaturg, is a first-year PhD student in the Performance as Public Practice program. As an artist-scholar, she is interested in exploring intersections between performance and mental health, seeking to challenge the stigma often associated with mental health concerns. Recent production work includes *Closed for Repairs* (Music Director/Performer), *Call Me Crazy: Field Notes from the Land of the Mentally "Ill"* (Playwright/Director), *One by Four* (Director), as well as several improvised performances (Coach/Performer).



Austin Shirley, Scenic and Lighting Designer, is a first-year MFA candidate in Design and Technology with a focus on Lighting Design at UT. He is the American Technical Director for *Delfos Dance Company* from Mazatlán. Austin has fond memories of sunlight piercing through Big Thicket while going hunting with his father, and even during his brief career as a child actor, it was lighting which commanded his attention. Although this is his first designing credit at UT as a student, he is a familiar face at Texas Performing Arts, where he mentored several graduate students and taught his own rendering technique for lighting design.

Megan Todd, *Miss B. Saint and Lover*, is a third year student, double majoring in Theatre and Dance and in Anthropology. She has been in several shows here at UT including *The Insanity of Mary Girard*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* and most recently *Why Murder is Wrong and the People who love them*. She would like to thank her mom and her best friend for all they do.

Mike Vernusky, Composer & Sound Designer, is a composer and sound artist. His music has been called 'brash' by The New York Times, and 'isolationist' by The Wire.

Vernusky has received numerous commissions and fellowships for his music including Music at the Anthology, Meet the Composer/New Music USA, ASCAP, and the Mexican Centre for Music and Sonic Arts. His work has been exhibited at hundreds of music, film, and new media festivals across the globe, including festivals such as MATA, ICMC Barcelona, Los Angeles Sonic Odyssey, Tribeca Film Fest, Groupe de Musique Expérimentale Marseilles, Visiones Sonoras Mexico City, and New Forms Fest Vancouver.

Mike Vernusky holds degrees from The University of Texas at Austin and Mercyhurst College. Vernusky's music is published on MIT Press, New Adventures in Sound Art, Capstone, Vox Novus, Spectrum Press, and Quiet Design.



WE TOTALLY ACTUALLY SERIOUSLY WOULDN'T HAVE MADE THIS SPECIAL PLAY HAPPEN WITHOUT....

JESSICA CHAMPION's patience with us as we requested
space to rehearse in Winship,

COOPER ROE's, relentless help navigating the reserva-
tion process at the SAC,

ANDREW IAN CARLSON's support and guidance through
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KIRK LYNN's sorcery and encouragement,

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RAMA TCHUENTE's incisive comments and questions

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rhythm,

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input throughout the rehearsal process,

ARIANA REINES' support for student work, and

FLINT SHIRLEY's kindness in sharing his voice,

**We'd like to take a moment to thank *all*
of them from the depths of our
telephonic hearts.**



the end.

(c) Khristián Méndez Aguirre