

N1Theatre Source Code Series

by Robert Craig Baum

Introduction to *Genet At Mettray: Selected Plays* by Dennis Moritz

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Lee Kenneth Richardson (1950-2020) as *Uncle* in the January 2019 iMPeRFeCT Gallery N1Theatre production directed by RCB

1.

Dennis' work is the subject and object of theatre legend. Anyone who knows anything about Lower East Side dramaturgy or the Philadelphia avant-garde scene knows Dennis Moritz. But, strangely, within a few months his work disappears. In a unique way, he and his work are wonderfully transient, and interdimensional. You start to wonder if the conversation you just had with that person (Dennis) using this phone (mine) or such-and-such email account (ours) actually took place. Moritz is neither here nor there.

“They fade, the words fade.”

— from *Something To Hold On To*

You need to know before reading this essay or either of his books, before directing any of his plays, before even thinking of acting in one of his productions—you need to know that Dennis and his work are a royal

pain in the ass to find and develop as a playbill beyond a one-off show or teach a theatre course in any curriculum or carry on a conversation with him over bagels in the Lower East Side: his theatre demands everything of you and your ensemble and your audience. And then, it's gone. Yet at the same time, there's a record of the performance—a paper trail. You can say with assurance: yes, this theatre does, in fact, exist. Dennis Moritz does, in fact, exist. You've met him. Many times. You've shared meals with him, walked Chelsea with him, watched him eat pancakes at the Quechee Diner after your Vermont café show *They Fade, The Words Fade* (January 2012). You've studied his plays as part of your own research bibliography at UMN-Twin Cities (1998-2001) and the European Graduate School (2004-2010) especially when you've attempted to revisit ideas from the August Wilson Fellowship (1998-2001) that brought Dennis to you by way of Laurie Carlos and her sacred and profane intervention at Penumbra Theatre (April 1999).



Lou Bellamy (mentor), Founding Artistic Director of Penumbra Theatre (St. Paul, MN)

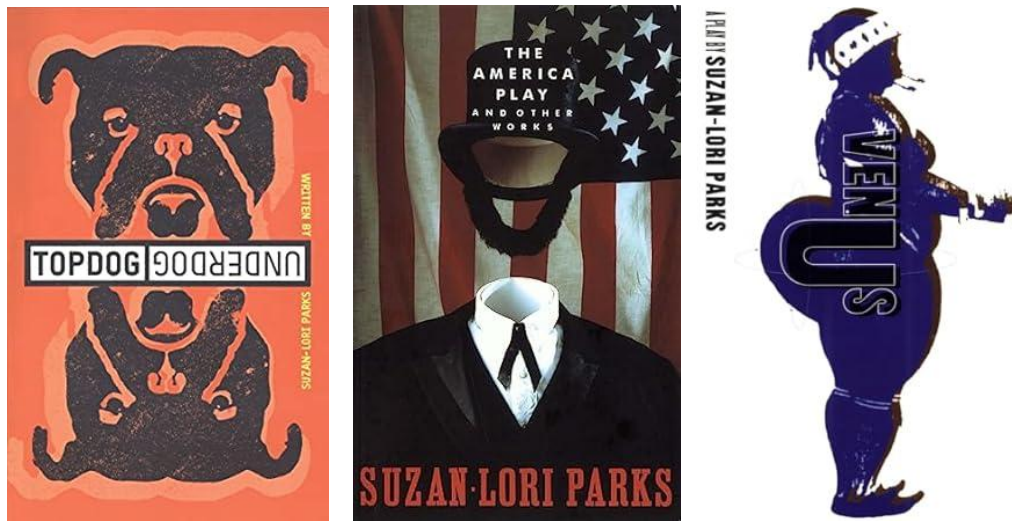
But, like the work's stage and academic classroom history, much like Suzan-Lori Parks' inclusion then expulsion from *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Dennis' work has achieved anthological status: *Something To Hold On To* (1995) collection as well as the publication of his play *Just the Boys* in the anthology *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe Theater Festival* (1997).

In a state of utter graduate school chaos—which summarizes nicely my three years in Minneapolis-St. Paul—I received Dennis' first collection (same title as the play that eluded me before, during, and after my first encounters with Lower East Side artists from the 80s and 90s).

It just happened, the arrival of Dennis Moritz; much like the way most of the audience received *Uncle* at the Bowery Poetry Club (June 2012, Father's Day). Something happened. I was here one moment (on stage with Billie Jo Konze) then I was there (outside the venue drinking Seven and Seven with an old friend and musician Greg McMullen) and now I'm here again (at my iMac revising this essay). Before. During. An(d) after (shock) experiences of performing or attending his work.

Once upon a time—April 1999, to be exact—the Mother of Us All, Laurie Carlos, stopped me in the community center parking lot on my way out of a *for colored girls* rehearsal at Penumbra Theatre. At the time, I was serving the UMN-Twin Cities and Penumbra as an August Wilson Fellow. She was a curator for Penumbra’s monthly new works project and dramaturg for the *ntozake shange* choreopoem revival.

Mother had that look in her eye, the one I associated with “battle stations” aka “I’m about to drop some serious shit here, Robert, so listen up.”

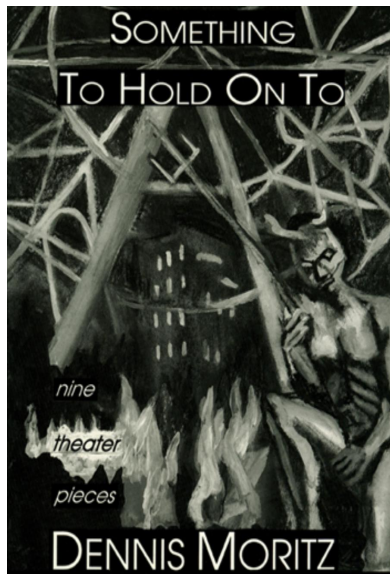


Like most theatre students of the mid-to-late 1990s, I was mesmerized by All Things Suzan-Lori Parks. I still am. In her work I had found a new way of approaching American theatre from within performance art and other avant-garde traditions, perhaps even the musical (1960s heyday) and antebellum 19th century literature (Melville and Hawthorne and Stowe) and modernist 20th century fiction (Faulkner and Ellison and Pynchon). She struck me as a magnetizing force. She still does. Very much.

Clearly, the producers and creators of *Hamilton* were also paying close attention to her work at the time of its ascension into classrooms, journal articles, and granting circles. Perhaps the *Hamilton* team also located in her work prototypical remixes of American stage traditions (realism, magical realism, hybrid dance/spoken word) as well as encountering a dramaturgy built on the sheer brilliance of *Topdog/Underdog*, Parks’ Pulitzer Prize winning drama of 2000. It’s hard to say. But, it’s safe to say *Hamilton* would not have been able to premiere on the Lower East Side at The Public let alone create an Andrew Lloyd Webber/Cameron Mackintosh-level audience-loving, history-making, and return-of-investment championing stage spectacle if it hadn’t been for Parks’ work. Yet, even here with *Hamilton*, we can locate another secret history reaching back directly to Dennis Moritz.

“This is the source, Robert,” Laurie Carlos said that April 1999 without missing a beat, without releasing me

from my look of confusion as I just stared at the cover of *Something To Hold On To*, Dennis' first collection of plays. She didn't let up for ten seconds. No. That's not accurate. She didn't let up for seventeen years.



After our parking lot meeting, I immediately read the book cover to cover, noticing how *Uncle* answered her challenge to find the “source code.” While sitting in Lowetown, St. Paul at the Red Dog Café, I had my “eureka” moment. (Note: *Uncle* has been reprinted in the *Genet at Mettray* collection.) A half hour later while pumping quarters into a grocery store deli photocopier and tending to my first born George in his stroller, I realized I was standing inside theatre history.

Wait. Hold up. History? Theatre history? Theatre history was made inside a downtown St. Paul corner market, video store, broke-ass Kinko's? Come on! Really? Is it the case that history sounds like a dying coin-operated xerox machine moaning and harmonizing with the blaring top of the pops muzak while my ten month old son George sipped away at his third juice box? I was just copying plays, so enough with this history lesson. I remember being hungry but also unable to eat because I was so excited to have made a deep connection to a new playwright.

This seemingly random moment (now remembered as epic) wasn't at all glamorous, or even particularly noteworthy. Like Martin Esslin seeing Artaud for the first time (*Theatre of the Absurd*); like Eric Bentley traveling to Palermo to chronicle a puppet show (*In Search of Theatre*); like Larry Neal publishing reviews and lead essays on LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and the Black Arts Movement; like Sydné Mahone leading *Moon Marked and Touched by Sun* with Laurie Carlos' *White Chocolate for My Father*. Is this how history is made?



So, I called Mother when I got home later that evening: “It's *Uncle*, isn't it?” I said with great enthusiasm but with an intonation that also communicated my snickering subversion of Suzan-Lori Parks. (We theatre folk

can be extraordinarily competitive.) “Yes,” she affirmed. I continued: “With the BACA Downtown writers and performers there was a before and after *Uncle* moment, wasn’t there?” / “Yes.”

It was like we were speaking in a subterranean coded language about the source; two agents working the wings of American theatre’s strange academic and commercial territories. In the theatre lobbies, university libraries, international conferences that brought a strange tribe of dramaturg and dramatist and scholar together in cities far and wide: LA and Minneapolis and Boston and Broadway and DC and Atlanta and Austin and Helsinki and London and Paris and Zurich and Tokyo and Copenhagen. Something was up during the late 80s and early 90s that is archived in Dennis’ work, something I immediately recognized as vital to our collective understanding of at least two if not three generations of theatre artists.

It felt like I had experienced a “Knock, knock, Neo” *Matrix* moment. A tap on the existential shoulder and a hip check out of one cosmological time/space experience into a strange yet familiar world of another time space (what Freud has called “the uncanny”).

In other words, this experience of first reading Dennis Moritz (essentially on a dare!) then later finding myself talking about Dennis Moritz at conferences, fighting for his inclusion in Playwright Center grants, then Facebooking about writing theatre with Dennis Moritz in a 9/11/11 Facebook group, and then producing Dennis Moritz in Vermont later that same year (we’ll get to that in a bit), and designing sound and lights and costumes and stage for Dennis Moritz (at a cafe in VT), and then sharing draft beer and burger and great conversation with Dennis Moritz in White River Junction, VT, then shooting the shit in my Quechee, VT living room after he took a nap—you know—like you do—a nap. (Talk about falling into a comfortable relationship immediately, a familial bond from the start between dramaturg/director/producer and playwright: wide awake, fast asleep.)

“Man, I’m tired,” he said as he ascended the stairs after arriving at my house in Quechee, VT after his long drive up from Philly (December 2011). My kids and wife introduced themselves to him. We talked in the living room. I could tell he was tired. He asked if he could take a nap. Sure. A little weird, but sure. So, he took a nap in the sunroom. Again, like you do.

Later while sitting at the dining room table that would later become our situation room for *They Fade, The Words Fade* (four performances at the Limerick Irish Eatery in January 2012), I glanced through the sliding glass door at Dennis dead asleep on my sunroom bed. I wondered: Is this how it happens? Is this what Mother of Us All wanted to happen in April 1999? Did She know? Had She already visited this moment, you know, Mother style? I think She did. I think She knew. In fact, I know She knew because I asked her in October 2015 at Dennis’ Grand/Essex apartment during a tempest that shook the Co-Ops without mercy. She replied without missing a beat: “You needed to know that you were and still are—both of you—only working with part of the story. You need this part of the story so we can tell more of the story.”

“Most will deny it. But, Dennis is the source.”

– The Mother of Us All (Laurie Carlos)

See what she did there? She didn't disrespect her friend and collaborator Suzan-Lori Parks or prop up Dennis Moritz or challenge the prestige or impact of other Lower East Side playwrights and artists she mentored and admired and deeply missed. She merely wanted to hack this bit of source code data into the theatre machine (or in Artaud, as N1, as virus) to help us all visualize and listen to another conversation within the larger cacophony of expressions called American theatre.

When she said "you," she was precisely challenging all of us. Not just Robert and Dennis. Everyone. Theatre historians and dramaturgs and artistic directors and the journalists who cover our art and the scholars who publish dissertations and articles and deliver conference papers and conduct regional workshops on contemporary American theatre—this is Mother saying from inside This World observations She has delivered from Between Worlds, what I call in the BlackTheatreWorld project: "the fourth stage of presencing and interdimensional metabolic dramaturgy."¹

While handing off *Something To Hold On To*, the Mother of Us All emphasized how "this [book] is what we all were aspiring to achieve back in the day. All of us. Most will deny it. But, Dennis is the source." She had appealed forcefully to the dramaturg and litcrit and critical theory parts of my heart and soul. She also intensely activated the writer, the producer, the designer, the composer, the historian, the professor, the fan of theatre that makes me think—transformative—entertaining moments I will never forget. "It's all inside this book," she insisted.

We then concluded the moment by making some kind of strange impromptu hand-to-hand ritual gesture on the spot (like a kung fu high five or something), and she walked down North Kent Street to her car parked on Dayton Avenue (there was never any parking at the cultural center) as I just stood there holding this book. Very confused. Quiet. Smiling.

¹ Dr. Sonja Kufninec's April 1999 seminar story: Laurie Carlos, Lou Bellamy, me in the seminar focused on *for colored girls* and then the aftermath driving on the West Bank of the Mississippi in Lou's 72 caddy.

3.

I didn't know it at the time, but Mother was right. This "all" she had described as a source code was a hack (conjuring) in and of itself targeting all past and present theatre historiography of the 1990s and 00s, and not just a clear statement about the vital yet simple but infinitely deep work of BACA Downtown. This "all" was a way of writing I had first encountered in dada, surrealism, German expressionism, Artaud, Genet, Albee, Sarah Kane: an affective, presentational style that had more in common with Brecht and Amiri Baraka than Tennessee Williams and David Mamet. This "all" was big at the time. Suzan-Lori Parks was all the rave at the time. Laurie, Suzan-Lori's mentor, was the key source code for the transient yet always present Dennis. And now (and then, April 1999) I had been handed a book of plays that I instantly loved. How many circles were being formed and completed, birthing yet more possibilities, more worlds, more words, more and more and more "all" (everything, everything, an all encompassing everything).

The Mother of Us All reminded me quite a few years later—during Obama's re-election Fall 2012, yet another apocalyptic moment of America's cyclical apocalyptic fits, to borrow from Lee Quimby—of the secret this great, underestimated, and wholly individuated theatre movement (BACA Downtown) carried quietly into many different futures: "same room . . . same air" (Laurie Carlos, 2:05 a.m., January 21, 2012).



(left to right) Dennis Moritz, RCB, Laurie Carlos (April 2013), Grand Avenue LES

What she meant by this centers our attention on one of the most radical (though basic) statements about artistic development I have ever encountered: theatre artists work best when supported (and challenged, of course) by a community of theatre artists. It is the job of producers and literary managers and directors and all support staff to nurture this Zen-like "way" of being-in-the-dramaturgical-world (with more moxy than namaste). This almost axiomatic notion of an assumed (imagined, actualized, hoped-for, realized) community drives all that Dennis has attempted to do since the 1980s. This ethical, aesthetic, political, and personal understanding of how to create dramatic art together absolutely cannot be fabricated or phoned in

or assumed as even possible even though we always hope we will build it so people will come (i.e., *Field of Dreams*). We need to remember how the conditions for this level of intense, productive, supportive, and revolutionary art repeats, recycles, and presents the possibility of a cohesive and enduring community over and again in American theatre. Oftentimes, however, we swing and miss the curve ball.

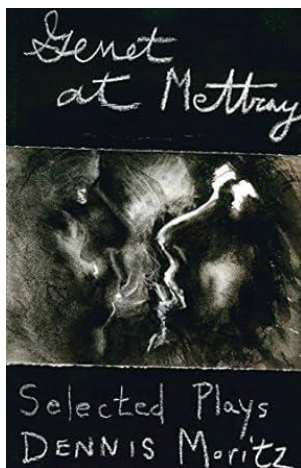
Fall 2015 happened to be one of those moments, a quantum leap back and forward to engage, recover, and intensify the process of individual and institutional support that allowed for the emergence of theatre's most intense multiplicities experienced in the 80s and 90s. This was Dennis' time (and space) . . . again. . . . I was able to participate and witness this moment with Dennis and Laurie as part of my travels from East Islip, Long Island to the Lower East Side, usually after my courses at Fordham Lincoln Center let out.

In collaboration, in dialogue about *The Pork Chop Wars*, Laurie and Dennis realized their lives and work were forged in the same creative fires of the Lower East Side in the 1980s and 90s, a parallel geographical and familial influence that Suzan-Lori Parks experienced at the time.

His work has been produced all around the country, settling in for a series of encounters at theatre and performance spaces (and projects) like The Painted Bride, the Joe Papp Public Theatre, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Freedom Theatre, The Poetry Project, BACA Downtown, and the Bowery Poetry Club. He worked regularly with David Marcus and Libby Emmons (Stickies) in New York as one of a series of regular playwrights working in small spaces (like Limerick Irish Eatery and the Main Street Museum in Vermont). He curates new works for the Boog City project founded by David Kirschenbaum.

No one writes or thinks like Dennis. When we started regularly communicating with each other on Facebook, theatre wasn't our focus. We were both obsessed with politics and American culture a decade after 9/11 inside a particularly strange "between" moment (aporia) so many people thought would be the "promised land" post-Obama. Then, slowly, I realized I was talking with the playwright whose work was thrust in my face (I mean, hands) by the Mother of Us All back in April 1999.

4.



Like her life's work, Dennis' art helps me breathe a little easier even though directing and performing his work is anything but tranquil. His characters say or half say or stutter their way through and beyond truth in search of something to hold on to. He is utterly fearless, inspiring—demanding, in a very specific way—affecting an intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical commitment that shatters all artistic and audience expectations.

Plays like *Genet at Mettray* and *Hungry Heart* and a revival of *Something To Hold On To*, *Uncle*, and *Just the Boys* by N1 Theatre/N1 Academy (Vermont and New York City) continues his linguistic, structural, and spatial experiments (as in time space, as in slipstream, as in mesmerism, as in fantasy, as in unraveling the very fabric of

what we all might be able to agree on and call “now” or “normal” or “Monday” or “America” or “Planet Earth” which I still think is best described as interdimensional or the function of a William Burroughs “interzone”). Dennis presents these challenges in a way that quite frankly pushes directors and producers and actors and musicians to draw from everything they know, every experience they’ve had, and every way of thinking they’ve feared or found comforting. It is all present. It is a glorious pain in the ass. And it is the ultimate theatrical joy ride.

RCB: *How’s that for the introduction, so far, Dennis? I shouldl*

try to not be so understated in my enthusiasm about your work.

Moritz: *(Laughs)*

So. Why do you think 2017 [and right now] is the right time to revisit your work, for example, Just the Boys? What features speak to this generation of audience?

Quick cuts. Mosaic structure. Self sufficiency of scenes. Music/cho- reography construct mini allegories. Brief punchy dialogue. Musical (language) monologues said rhythmically with under music. Coheres heterodox styles. Hail the internet jumbling. Twenty years ahead of its time.

Your characters are so vivid and real yet enigmatic. Here, not here. I, not-I. What do you enjoy about them when you read or see them again here in this collection?

Boys in the garage, their culture. How they have fun. Their methods of mutual emotional support. The Girls. Their culture. How they enact revenge when dumped. Funny. Jokes. Compelling milieu. Strong individuated characters. Strangeness. Familiarity. Lots of vitality.



George Baum (Director), Zilla Glory (Anzia) filming *Hungry Heart* (May 2018)

Hungry Heart is essentially your meditation and remixing of the life and writing of Anzia Yezierska.

Somewhere between adaptation and documentation, your play is unique to both your style and sense that she is still trying to speak to us again, just as you are attempting again.

How do you convey this complex story (her life, her work) to the very Lower East Side culture out of which she emerged two or so generations ago? ([Hungry Heart article](#))

Again, mosaic structure with punchy scenes vary the texture of the plays. A contemporary form. Anzia and Anzia’s fiction retains vividness and authenticity as it is transferred into a dramatic idiom. The play is true to

the feel and message of the original stories and their moment of composition while using contemporary techniques of structure and presentation.

What's the appeal to this generation of Jew and non-Jew alike?

The Jewish immigrant culture of the early twentieth century is of inherent interest to the NYC area. Many are descendants of that immigration. Because these stories are heartfelt and of universal appeal and identification, “Hungry Heart” can be presented to multiple audiences. Romantic love. Misunderstandings between parent and child. The inclination of mainstream culture to stereotype and limit access of those judged to be different.

So, Anzia and her stories and your project help us to see ourselves differently?

Yes. Anzia’s life itself is a modern parable. Anzia was born into an orthodox Jewish culture of defined roles. She made a writer’s life. In doing this she abandoned traditional role models of motherhood and wife. A modern tale of female emancipation.



Beverly Gunn in Dennis Moritz’s *Love Song* (d. Will Rittweger, 2021)

What kind of access (or limits) does an embrace of multiple approaches to a subject provide you as a playwright?

My process opens a way to enter pure art, image and scene jockeying, to enter the theater as art form, which means quick cuts, genre eliding, a way to own a flexibility allowed and expected of museum art, sculpture and painting. I often think my works need to be performed in museums, in museum performance spaces. A release from sequential narration and quotidian assumptions.

I'll jump right to my first, long-standing conclusion: you create multiple worlds and offer audiences a chance to see a single subject from many angles – like a theatrical art installation, a mosaic, a prism . . .

The installation is our mental cosmos. Lovely. Eddying. Eddying out. I write love lyrics and paeans to those sweet moments.

Tell me more about how you engage in this process and approach with well-known and lesser-known historical or cultural subjects and themes?

The prism fascinates me. Cubism. A deconstruction of cubism. (Joke.) How we appear how we are. Faces. Looks. Faces. Assemblages. I love the schism between how we feel integrated and whole while often existing as an assemblage of fragments. Acts we do intensely. Different. Various. Contradictory. Do they add up. Do they make a continuum. How do we relate to the contrary and dis-related identities we are.

Rather than opt for a single through line or rising/falling action and other well-made play elements, you do something else that's fascinated me in particular since first encountering your work through Laurie Carlos and Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul. Tell me more about this "something else."

I don't relate to rising and falling narrations, the action of overcoming obstacles. The football game life, chess and checkers. Not how I experience life. Intermittences. Moments. Extended metaphors, radiant and informing. A plane or plate pulled out from a cubist simultaneity. One or two planes at a time. That is true to memory and reference. Discrete memorable events that continue to inform.

Here's where I find your life as a playwright and life as Dennis Moritz inseparable. One of the most "memorable events" you often cite in our conversations over the years is your experience with BACA Downtown.

Yes.



Dennis and RCB were once able to summarize N1Theatre while enjoying Indian food (February 2019)

What was it about that experience that stayed with you?

At BACA the audience was assumed. We did not write for the audience. We wrote to extend the dramatic form and give voice to our idiosyncratic (idiomatic) selves. Subjective was sacred, where it all started. I continuously broke form. Even from work to work. I took that to do my job. A fabulous audience sold out BACA. They went with us. Working hard with us. An obsession for the new and the authentic.

What lessons from BACA can be carried forward to this moment?

Perhaps some kind of embedded program or workshop. Digital archives (like a BACA wiki) are already in the works at the N1 Academy. But, BACA strikes me as different from “community outreach” or “education” platforms. How does the BACA experience get archived and yet not just become another theatre movement or moment stored on dusty shelves of theatre history’s very limited, and extremely slanted memory.

Much work at BACA originated from the nitty-gritty struggle to stay alive and sane. Radical formal experiments devised to give those struggles shape and power.

The BACA theater scene educated. It should be parsed, imitated, reconstructed, reconstructed differently. Intense learning happened there. We were drawn together. My plays were directed by artists. Distinct visions. Productions heavy with their subjective DNA fascinating to me as a wordsmith, a writer of theater pieces, theater works. After the first experiences I stopped including notes. The auteurs were going to rip. I took my challenge to write words of tough identity and clear process. The auteur visions at BACA almost always stayed true to the essence of my work.

So, we need to build an archive of this disappearing work, right?

Let the folks who were at BACA have their say. Interviews. Preserve archival videos, pics, programs, artistic statements, reviews. Remount the many seminal productions. Archive the scripts. Archive artist’s careers.

Here’s where drama and history and life and archive seem to come together in your work. In many ways, human beings—you know, the people who come to theatre—live lives that are extremely prismatic. How does that relate to the personalities and figures and (dare I say) “auratic individuals” who populate your drama?

Historical figures are prismatic, talked about, argued about, enmeshed in events that elicit debate. Their lives over, we know them through report. There is a tendency to bowtie and clean up the narrative. I’m not interested in that. Life is fragmented, scattered, clear moments and fog. Instead of sequential narrative, I write scenes that are tiles, moments as part of a mosaic. Audience does assembly. The overview, metaview, even elements of narration, is the audience property. The theater piece is a point for audience departure and interpretation. Like any other work of art. You tell me what it means.

It is my hope that *Genet at Mettray: Selected Plays* will serve as a theatre historiography source code for the reader, the scholar, the producer, the director, the colleague, the undergraduate and graduate student of theatre in general, Lower East Side and Philly theatre of the 80s and 90s through today.

May it challenge your comfort zones about theatre history, dramaturgy, theatre theory, historiography, theatre archivization, the academic territorialization of one set of theatrical memories over another.

May it stay with you and shift how you think about other kinds of theatre, popular or not, international or national, poetic or realistic or surrealistic or Noh.

May Dennis' work disrupt, disturb, and deconstruct your notions of how to build a character, how to stage a scene, how to create events within scenes that become larger events the way a cluster of ideas and images ebb and flow, appear and disappear in cinema and other digital arts.

May this work empower your craziest and zaniest and least orthodox understanding of who you are and what you do as a person or a playwright, director or dramaturg or theatre historian.

May he surprise you.

May he encourage you to search for and embrace all surprises that happen inside the theatre world of living ideas, moving concepts, and playful poetry.

May his work also serve as a burr, an errant burr that constantly asks for your attention, all of your attention. Not just a bit of this theory or a bite of that dramaturgical tradition. But, all of you.

May it invite you to bring all of you to the space, mental and theatrical.

May it forever prick your mind and cause you to remember who you are and what you want to do inside and outside the theatrical mentality of people and situations that simply are—they are here—they are a part of who we are – these characters, these situations, these events, these poetic shadows are all parts of a greater whole that Dennis sees as a structure, a method, a way to move through all the world's stages.

May it fuck you up forever.

So, we should remember him.

Even if just for this moment, this book.

More than an exercise in dramatic memory and collective response to the human condition, Dennis' theatre is a metabolic dramaturgy that demands all of you.

Yes.

He has written short plays and poetic fragments and multiple act performances. His monologues and short plays inspired and influenced the early work of Suzan-Lori Parks as an extension of Dennis' three-decade long friendship and collaborations with Laurie Carlos.

Yes.

People in "the know" have considered Dennis' work some of the strongest dramatic prose and performance art and experimental representational practices written at the end of the second millennium.

Yes.

His work remains under-produced—almost forgotten. But, it is precisely this mystical quality and aporetic tendency of his work to become nomadic and foreign and strange yet at the same time as familiar as breathing that necessitates his inclusion in theatre research, curriculum, regional and major productions opportunities for the continued revitalization of American and World Theatre.

Yes.

Dennis' theatre is haunted by an uncanny spectre, something familiar and strange like an invocation for his actors, collaborators, and audiences to finally deal with unfinished business (the literal definition of spectre).

Yes.

Each time his work is performed, the artists must create new rituals and new ways of moving and talking and develop new approaches to poor theatre. Sometimes, it's imperative to say "fuck it" and go out to the dollar store and find some party favors for "Something To Hold On To" or Salvation Army store clothing racks for "Uncle" costumes.

Yes.

Even sound design for a Dennis Moritz show becomes an overwhelming dance with Everything and an unbearable collation and elimination and application process where sound contributes to a spectacle space without any of the budget, any of the support staff, or any of the latest equipment.

Yes.

You can design and direct a Dennis Moritz show from under the stairs of an Irish eatery in Quechee, Vermont with as much audacity as expected at the old Bowery Poetry Club or Nuyorican Poets Cafe or Temple University or Freedom Theatre or Theatre Ariel.

Yes.

This is the theatre of Yes inspired by the theatre of Noh. This is theatre that affirms the fragility and resiliency of the human condition. This is poetry in motion, poetic presentations of people, places, things, ideas, histories both hidden and obvious.

Yes.

This is theatre. This is the kind of theatre I want to write and direct and perform until my last breath. This is my friend, my mentor, my partner, my reason for even bothering to do theatre again after the death of August Wilson in 2005. This is why I live to read his words in public, perform them for students, explore them in my writing, and encourage others to do the same.

Yes.

This is an affirmation of life. A celebration, if you will. But, it is also a work of mourning that inspires others to remember themselves and their families and their whole forgotten (or burned to death) histories.

Yes.

This is how the legend ends for me. In another moment of anticipation. A future-now, as Gilles Deleuze once put it. A hoped for encounter with myself or someone like myself who desperately right now needs these words, needs these plays, needs to understand how theatre functions at its deepest source code so this person, this new me, can also stand in the presence of the Mother of Us All with a look of confusion and excitement, exhaustion and wonder as you or I or Dennis or anyone holding this book passes it on and on and . . .

— RCB, October 2016 and June 2025

