

**AFROCENTRICITY**

**X**

**DRAMATURGY**

**Lindsay A. Jenkins**

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# Welcome from Lindsay A. Jenkins

I am so grateful that you have chosen to join me on this journey. I am a dramaturg and producer based in Los Angeles, CA by way of Dallas, TX. I am a lifelong theatre nerd with both a BA and MA in Theatre Arts. My areas of specialty are Black Performance Heritage and Embodied Practice. Through my studio, The Body Is A Shrine, I hope to merge these two interests and offer people a unique way of understanding movement, story, history, culture, performance and memory.

This project, Afrocentricity X Dramaturgy, was created in response to my own experiences as a theatre student in search of methods that reflected the rich performance heritage of the Black diaspora. After teaching this workshop to diverse audiences over the years, I have realized that this approach resonates with many cultures and people from all walks of life. If you want to learn more, visit my website:

[www.LindsayAJenkins.com](http://www.LindsayAJenkins.com). In addition to being a dramaturg, I am also the founder of Maroon Arts and Culture, an organization that empowers artists and audiences with brave spaces to create work, collaborate, and celebrate the global Black diaspora. You can follow our work at [www.MaroonArts.com](http://www.MaroonArts.com).



# LEVEL SET: WHAT IS A DRAMATURG?

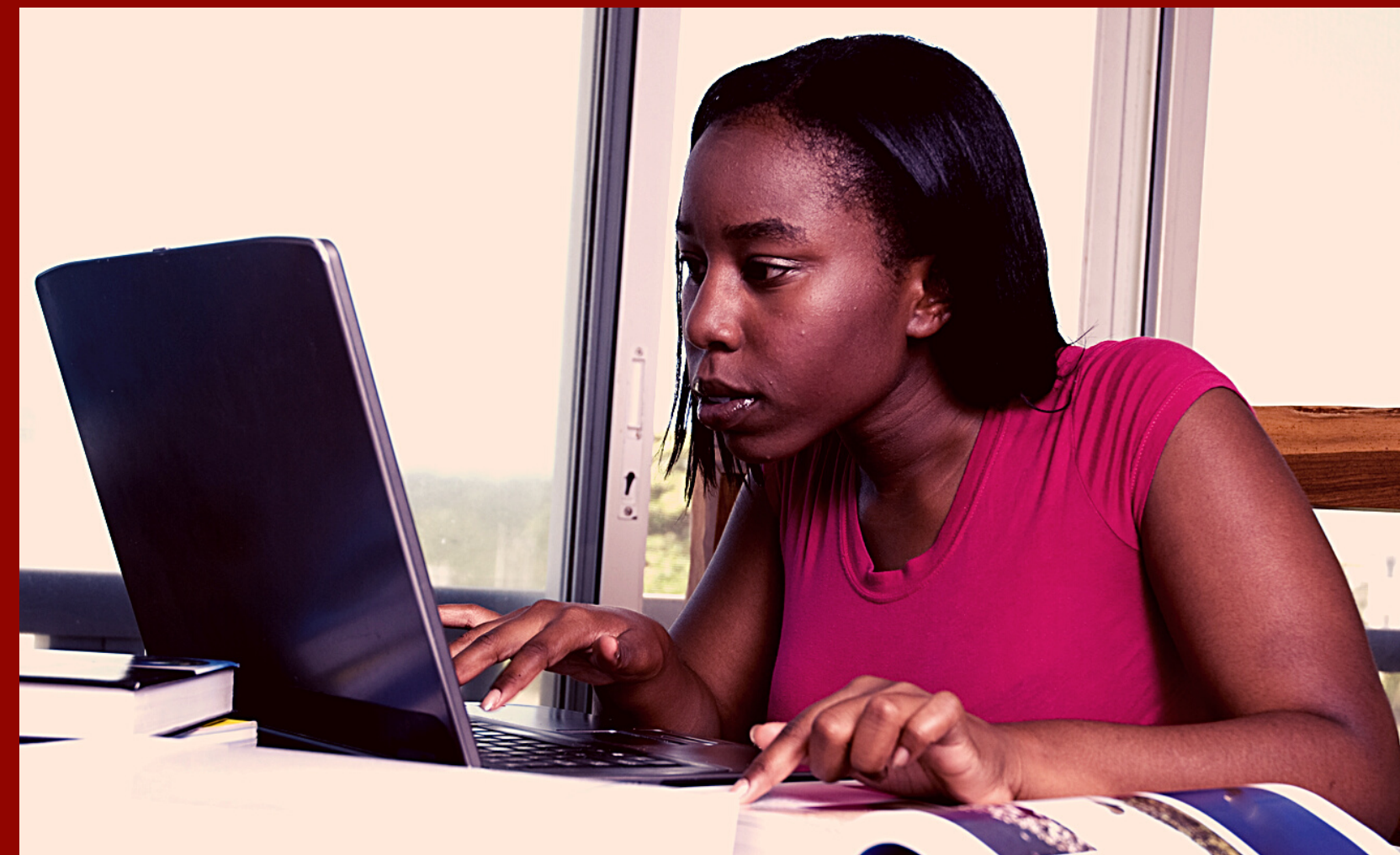
Dramaturgy sits at the intersection of history, critique, performance theory and presentation. It is a broadly interpreted, difficult to define term. As Mary Luckhurst writes in "Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre", dramaturgy in the United States and Canada "is now well established, though always accompanied by a good deal of hotly contentious debate (Luckhurst, 109)." Essentially, the dramaturg works with artists on the development of new creative work and the contextualization and research around existing work. A few dramaturgical responsibilities include:

## DEVELOPMENT OF NEW WORK EDITING AND PROOFREADING,

- Individual clients
- Script Consultations
- Script Coverage
- Story Editing

## PRODUCTION DRAMATURGY, CULTURAL CONSULTING

- Background information
- Historical and Cultural context
- Research Packets
- Research Presentations
- Audience engagement



# THE FRAMEWORK

**Rooted in heritage and focused on the future, Afrocentricity X Dramaturgy (AXD) is an approach to the development of creative work that centers Black experience and interrogates White gaze. Drawing on research from Africana studies, theatre arts and performance studies, this perspective looks at the development of creative work as not just a process, but a way of understanding and interacting with the world around us and- more importantly- the world within us.**

Sparked by personal experience, rooted Black performance heritage and influenced by embodied practice, AXD first outlines a method, identifies current practices, then theorizes on the futures and possibilities for the development of Black Art.

- We begin with a discussion around Black identity and posing the question: How Black identity can be centered when there are various Black identities?
- Once the Black experience is placed at the center, we then explore how doing so affects the way source material is accessed and understood.
- Finally, we bring in historical and cultural references that help us understand Black aesthetics as embodied practice. This encourages us to explore ways to connect with performance that have come before us and dwell within us in order to utilize self-discovery as a foundation for artistic choices.

AXD is born out of the critical need for performances written from an Afrocentric perspective to be analyzed, contextualized and developed within the same framework. In the spirit of *Black Acting Methods* by Sharrell D. Lockett and *Black Performance Theory* Ed. by Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, Afrocentricity X Dramaturgy seeks to empower Black artists through culturally relevant methodology.

# CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE AFROCENTRIC DRAMATURG

## Is text the best method?

Consider This: For many members of the Black diaspora, reading and writing (especially in a native tongue) has historically been a punishable crime. Additionally, for many performers, the body is the chosen instrument.

## What do we consider a primary source?

Consider This: With the criminalization of writing also came the criminalization of other methods of record keeping including singing, dancing and drumming.

## Where is White Supremacy present in the development process?

Consider This: European aesthetics and beliefs have seeped into every crevice of contemporary art. How does that limit the potential of Black art? For example, the proscenium is not just an architectural choice. It creates further separation between audience and performer and creates distance instead of community.



# AREAS OF INTEREST FOR THE AFROCENTRIC DRAMATURG

**What is the Black Experience?**

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**Handling Source Material**

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**Taking Research off of  
the page and putting  
it in the Body**

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# AN AFROCENTRIC APPROACH MEANS CENTERING BLACKNESS



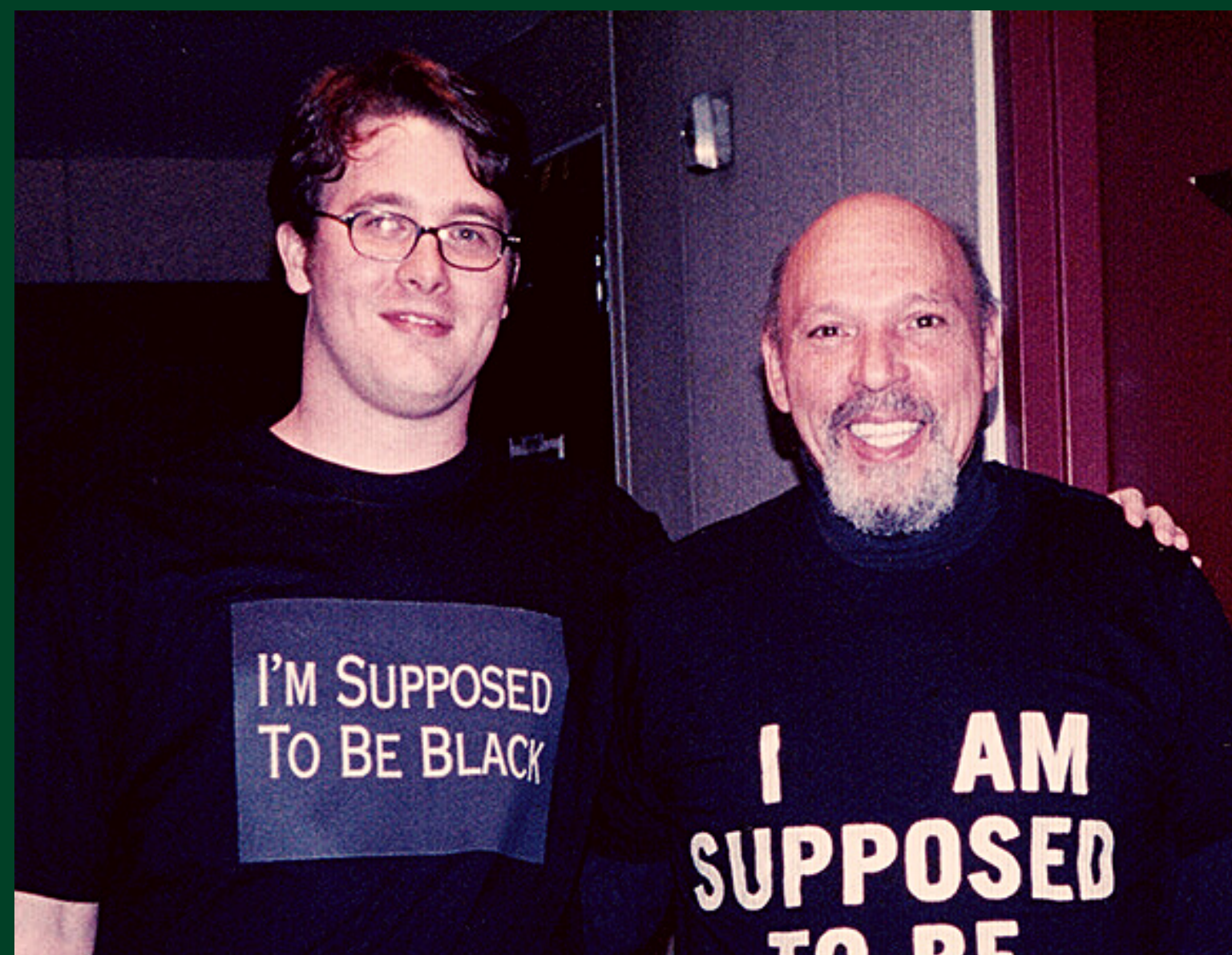
But how when  
there is no  
singular black  
experience?





**This does not negate intersectional experiences, but points out that Black skin will often trump other identities. Blackness is evident, visible and assigned with centuries of meaning."**

Harvey Young writes that critical memory "assists the process of identifying similarities—shared experiences and attributes of being and becoming— among black folk not by presuming that the black bodies have the same memories but by acknowledging that related histories create experiential overlap" (18).





**THE REALITY IS THAT THERE IS NO  
UNIVERSAL BLACK EXPERIENCE.  
RATHER, AN INFINITE NUMBER OF  
EXPERIENCES THAT ARE BONDED  
TOGETHER THROUGH SHARED  
CULTURAL AND CRITICAL  
MEMORIES.**



**"...Yes, my entry into the theatre is political. Largely because of my race and my gender. I am political without opening my mouth. My presence is political. The way I negotiate my presence is political. If I tried to deny my politicalness, I would be even more political."**

**ANNA DEVEARE SMITH**



# HANDLING SOURCE MATERIAL

## THE ARCHIVE AND THE REPERTOIRE

In her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor outlines how a rift “between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practiced/ knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (Taylor, 19) has resulted in the glorification of the written word over performative practices.



## **THE ARCHIVE**

### DECOLONIZING THE ARCHIVE

Re-examinig how the archive is contextualized.

### RECENTERING MARGINALIZED VOICES

People often believe that there is no archive of enduring materials written by people of color. This is untrue.

### PUTTING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS IN CONVERSATION

We have to remember that materials do not exist in a vacuum.

## **THE REPERTOIRE** PREDATES THE ARCHIVE

Practices like oral tradition, art and ritual performance were in existence for centuries before the written word.

## REFRAMES PRACTICES THAT ARE CONSIDERED CRUDE

Many cultures don't inherit a literary history that is exclusively marked by the written word, rather, a legacy of embodied practice that takes on many forms.

## CAN BE PRESERVED, BUT MUST BE CONTEXTUALIZED

Presentations are tools that can be used as demonstrations, lectures, speeches, reports, and more. It is mostly presented before an audience.







## **Afrocentricity X Dramaturgy theorizes that**

Whereas creative work that centers black experiences should be developed, contextualized and critiqued through a lens that also centers Blackness;

and

Whereas an Afrocentric approach requires the prioritization of the repertoire and an appreciation for oral tradition and embodied practice;

and

Whereas actors are frequently tasked with taking in historical and cultural information, making it personal and then interpreting it in the body...

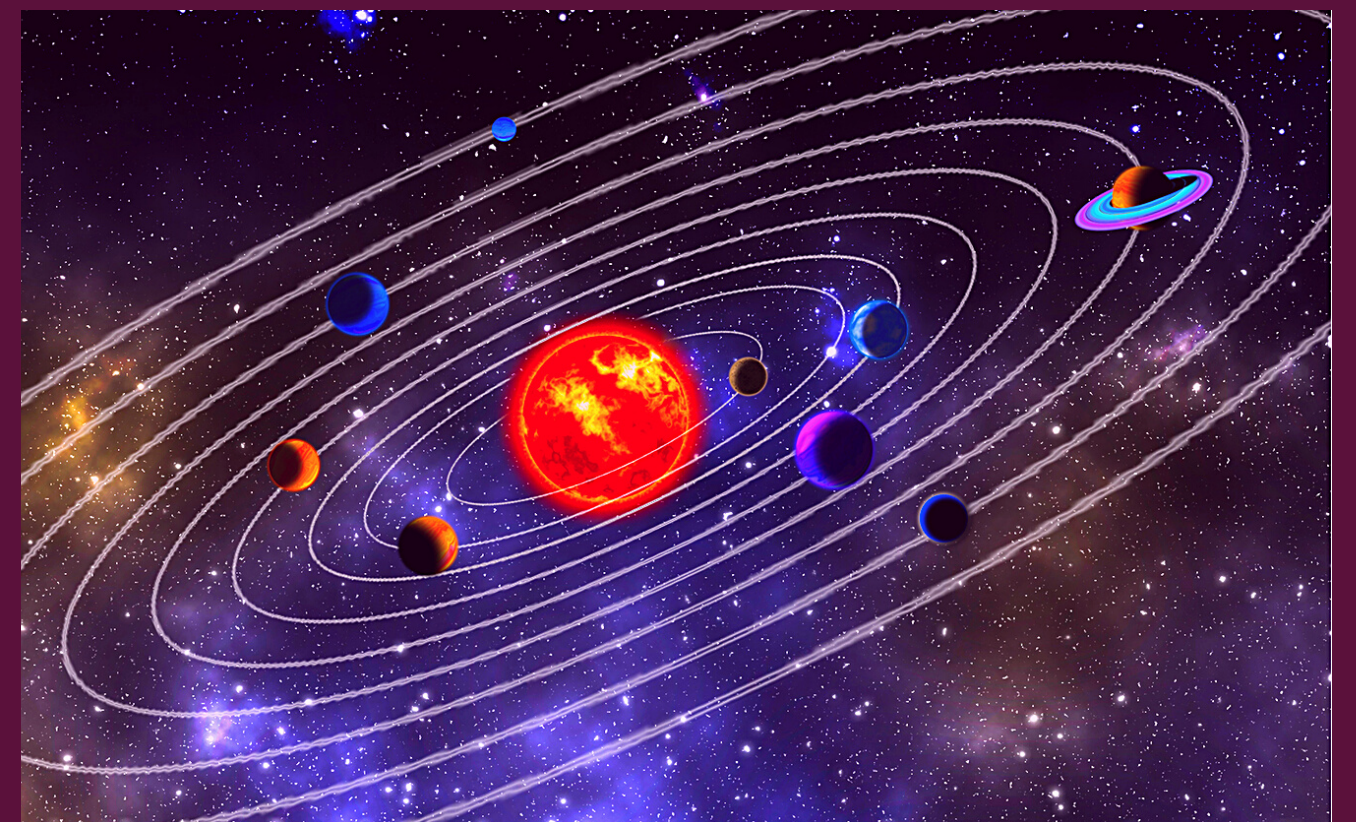
**PERHAPS WE SHOULD CONSIDER  
THE SELF AS A SOURCE**



# SPIDERING DIASPORA

In her chapter entitled, “Diasporic Spidering: Constructing Contemporary Black Identities,” Nadine George-Graves turns the noun ‘spider’ into a verb that describes “a process of journeying, gathering (wisdom and memory), gaining insight, sharing and connecting” (George-Graves 35). George-Graves describes Black identity as an active process that is constantly informed by various sources, while simultaneously adding to the information about Blackness that is available.

Once understandings of Blackness are centered in the Self, theatre practitioners are in a more dynamic position to be able to learn from and add to a rich performance heritage.





***Dramaturgs tend to concern themselves a great deal with history. Performance history, historical context, history of the play, the people, the playwright, and the list goes on. By properly contextualizing historical sources, and encouraging the use of shared, critical memories (accessed through a centering of the Self) Afrocentric dramaturgs can help facilitate both the representation and creation Black performance.***



# Isn't all performance linked to Body Response?

**KEVIN LANDIS AND  
SUZANNE MACAULAY**



# WANT TO DIG DEEPER?

[www.LindsayAJenkins.com](http://www.LindsayAJenkins.com)

Visit The Body Is A Shrine Studio at [www.LindsayAJenkins.com](http://www.LindsayAJenkins.com) for more Afrocentricity X Dramaturgy (AXD) content including LIVE workshops, E-books, visualizations and more!

Afrocentricity X Dramaturgy is as a lecture or workshop for your university or organization.

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**“...ONE OF THE MOST SOUND IDEAS  
IN DRAMATIC WRITING IS THAT IN  
ORDER TO CREATE SOMETHING  
UNIVERSAL, YOU MUST PAY VERY  
GREAT ATTENTION TO THE  
SPECIFIC.”**

**LORRAINE HANSBERRY**







# MAROON ARTS & CULTURE

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*Rebel With A Cause*



**Thank you!**

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