

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

Howard & Karen Pape Present

by Julia Cho

APRIL 11 - MAY 3

directed by Fran Smith



The Language Archive Study Guide

The Language Archive

By Julia Cho

The Playwright



About the playwright:

Julia Cho wrote her first play in eighth grade about a motley group of people stranded in a bomb shelter during nuclear fallout. No one at the time foresaw Julia would go on to be a playwright, least of all herself. Hailing from the suburbs of Southern California and Arizona, Julia pursued theater education consisting mainly of Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals and bad Shakespeare. Luckily, a class trip to New York and a chance encounter with John Guare's 'Six Degrees of Separation' changed all that. Fascinated with the forces and choices that determine who we are, Julia often writes

about good people who mean well but do not-so-good things. She strives to write with brevity, honesty, humor and a dash of poetry. She has received a New York Foundation for The Arts grant, residencies at Seattle Rep/Hedgebrook's Women Playwrights Festival and The MacDowell Colony, and was a finalist for a Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Her play BFE won the 2004 Weissberger Award. She has received commissions from Ma-Yi Theatre, New York Theater Workshop, South Coast Repertory and the Mark Taper Forum. Julia is a graduate of Amherst College and has degrees from UC Berkeley, NYU and The Juilliard School.

UPSTAGE INTERVIEW with PLAYWRIGHT JULIA CHO

Excerpted from: <http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/upstage/archive.pdf>

What inspired you to write *The Language Archive*?

One spark for the play came from a newspaper article about the last speaker of a language passing away. It was the first time I realized languages could be endangered or extinct and the idea made me enormously sad. I'd always thought of language as something persistent and omnipresent, and suddenly I saw how fragile it was and how easily it could be lost. But I don't think I consciously set out to write a play about extinct tongues. What interested me most was the kind of person who would care about such a thing, a person who would devote his or her life to the preservation of something that was impossible to save.

What do you think your play is about? Does the play have personal resonance for you and if so, how?

At its most reductive, it's about communication and relationships.

But it's a play that also celebrates language – its beauty, inventiveness and variety. I envy people who can speak many languages. But I also think that even within the same language there are many different modes of speaking. And so the play is also about the languages within language – how a couple or even a person can have a language that is unique and particular.

On a more personal level, a lot of the play also grew out of my own sense of loss. My parents speak Korean but I never learned it. And so when I was reading about how easily languages go extinct, I really took it to heart. I've always felt guilty for not speaking Korean but in a way, that guilt has been a gift. Because without it, I probably never would've thought to write this play.

How did you research the world of the play? What kind of research did you do?

I read some books and articles – there's one article by Jack Hitt that is particularly well-written. But most of the world of the play is made up. I'm not a very good researcher. I sometimes find that the more I know, the more limited my imagination becomes.

You also write for different mediums like movies and television. What are some of the different challenges in writing for stage, screen and TV?

I find all forms of writing extremely challenging. One of the particular challenges of writing plays is that as time goes by and life gets more complicated, it's harder for me to find the kind of solitude and quiet that allows me to sink into my subconscious. That's the place plays truly come from, not from external things I read or see, but from some deep current within me. I can't force myself to write a play out of an idea. I have to be still and quiet and let the play come out of its own accord. But it's all fairly mysterious to me. Once a play is written, I can look back and see what idea led to it. But there are many ideas that never succeed in becoming plays at all. And why one idea deepens and develops while another idea falters and fades I still don't understand. And I find the entire endeavor is suffused with a certain sense of failure. You're trying to capture the sublime and so there's a certainty that you will fail, no matter how hard you try. Even my best plays have elements I'm not happy with, certain things I could've done better if only I'd been wiser or had better tools. And I have a lot of failed plays behind me too. I know they're necessary steps in my development as a writer. But I'm always aware that I'm capable of writing a terrible play as much as a good one. When a loose collection of writings and ideas begins to take shape as a play, I always hold my breath because it could just as easily turn out badly as turn out well. Television is hard in different ways.

TV scripts are like incredibly complicated puzzles. There's usually an intense time pressure: you might have a few weeks to write a script (though it's often shorter). And there are a lot of people to answer to: the showrunners, the network, the production company, etc. So you're basically trying to complete this huge task in very little time with a production schedule bearing down on you. It's been likened to laying track down before a speeding train. It's also been a challenge for me to develop the muscles that TV writing requires. I've had to develop a better sense of structure and visual storytelling – and I still have a lot to learn. But there's something satisfying in learning a new skill and it can be fun to slip into someone else's world and voice.

Who are your favorite playwrights? Do you find reading or seeing other plays helpful? How do you feed yourself as a writer?

One of my favorite writers is Caryl Churchill. Her early plays are touchstones, of course, but it's her later plays that leave me in awe. They're just extraordinarily written: spare, theatrical and uncompromising. But I also love the classic American writers: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, O'Neill. And I love Chekhov.

There are also certain plays that have left a deep impression on me. Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*. Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*. Horton Foote's *The Young Man from Atlanta*. Most of these I've never seen, only read. But they're so clear in my mind it's as if I did see them. But seeing a great production is inspiring in its own way. I recall seeing Churchill's *Blue Kettle* at BAM years ago, and there's a moment during "*Blue Heart*" (one of the two plays that make up *Blue Kettle*) when children burst out of cupboards and run around stage. It was one of the most joyous moments I've ever seen onstage. And that joy could have only been realized on stage; a line of stage directions doesn't even begin to convey it.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to write for the theatre?

Write as much as you can. Write until you write something good. And then write something else good. Keep writing good things as long as you can. Everything else will take care of itself.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on trying to take my own advice.

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The Design Process for *The Language Archive*

Set Design

At Live Arts, creative designers work with volunteers to generate the looks and sounds for productions. Recently Geri Schirmer (dramaturg) met with Howard Pape (co-set designer) to find out more about the set design process.

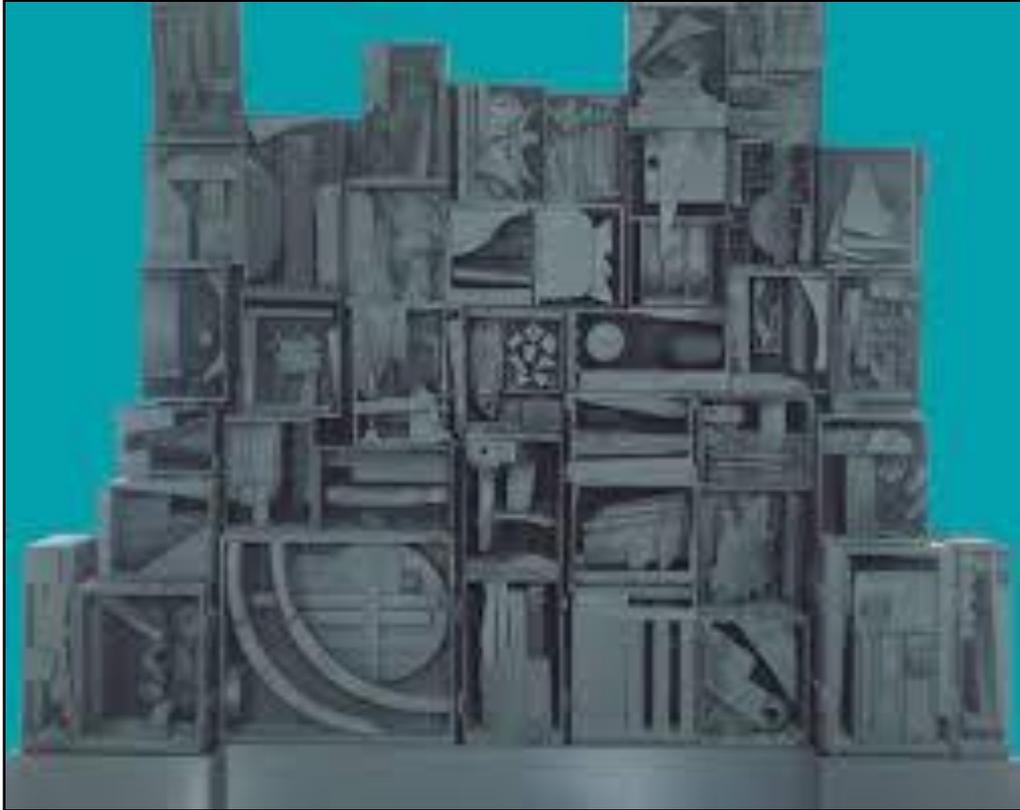
Long-time friends, Howard Pape and Fran Smith (director of *The Language Archive*) had several conversations about the quality and atmosphere they wanted to achieve for the set of “The Language Archive”, along with co -set designer Grady Smith. Although Howard has been the Lead Carpenter on most of Fran’s plays, this is the first time he has also been one of the designers. Their starting point was that there should be no walls –only open spaces. Howard referenced the line in the play in which Alta and Resten state: “Walls are thin. Practically non-existent.” Because the space in the Founder’s Theatre is small, they wanted to make the most of the space and thought that a minimal approach to the interiors of the play would be best.

Fran said that the language and the actors are most important to the story of “The Language Archive”, not the physical setting.

To create the look of the Archive, Fran brought the work of artist Louise Nevelson to the designers, and they were able to recreate the sense of collection and gathering that her collages bring forth. (see photo below). Howard explained his approach to the color – or lack thereof – of the Archive. He said that in the Archive, nothing is alive – it is the repository of things that were once vital and breathing, and have had the life taken out of them. The items along the shelves of the Archive are blackened – they are dark and recede into the walls. It is a stark contrast to the white lab coats of George and Emma, who are the only living beings in the Archive.

Contrarily, the train station/ living and the bakery /kitchen area have items in color and are made of natural materials. Those locales are where people who are alive and active reside. In this way, Howard and Grady felt they were to put the focus on language, the most important element in the play.

Howard concluded by saying that as a first-time designer, he was given the script to read and was able to envision the people inhabiting the space. He appreciated the chance to build another wonderful set, and relished the opportunity to create the worlds in which “The Language Archive” breathes.



This image of an installation by Louise Nevelson was one of the inspirations for the set of “The Language Archives”.

Designing Props

Thoughts from TLA props designer, Kim Cutshaw

Designing props is like other putting together other pieces of a production- creativity and being able to tune in to the director's vision and the set designer's thoughts is important. I try to get a pretty clear picture of what they are looking for- time frame, concept, look and feel, realistic or whimsical, etc then I can then head out shopping for just the right thing. In community theater there is an art to this- I have to borrow or shop on the cheap. It helps to have an eye for things that can work creatively -buying or making things that please the actor, director, and stage manager. For "Man of La Mancha" I made the shield out of a Spanish style mirror, for "Into the Woods" I made a wedding arch out of a hula hoop and ribbon and silk flowers, for "Guys and Dolls" I made menus from old Cuban travel ads. I find EBay helpful, and I know what the antique shops offer locally in a 50 mile radius. I often browse places like Big Lots, the Dollar Tree, and Good Will to make sure I know what is on hand so that I know where to go to shop for things. Good thing I like vintage- I often end up getting something for myself when I get props for a production. The best thing about helping with props is that it is flexible and can be done on my schedule- which is busy with full-time work and my children's evening activities.

Costumes

Here are some photographs that inspired designers Jessica McCoy and Betty Hales as they designed costumes for *The Language Archive*. These photographs inspired the costumes for the characters of Alta and Resten.



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Notes from dramaturg, Geri Schirmer on the importance of language in *The Language Archive*:

In researching endangered language, which were the centerpiece of “The Language Archives”, I came across many websites representing organizations whose mission it is to find, record and preserve endangered languages. Many of these groups work in concert with their peers to fund field research and academic study. Below are two of the organizations that I found to have very complete websites concerning these endeavors. I am including their web addresses, as well as the website addresses of several other groups for your perusal.

1. Endangered Languages: A project by the Alliance for Linguistic Diversity

<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/>

About the Endangered Languages Project

Humanity today is facing a massive extinction: languages are disappearing at an unprecedented pace. And when that happens, a unique vision of the world is lost. With every language that dies we lose an enormous cultural heritage; the understanding of how humans relate to the world around us; scientific, medical and botanical knowledge; and most importantly, we lose the expression of communities’ humor, love and life. In short, we lose the testimony of centuries of life.

Languages are entities that are alive and in constant flux, and their extinction is not new; however, the pace at which languages are disappearing today has no precedent and is alarming. Over 40 percent of the world’s approximate 7,000 languages are at risk of disappearing. But today we have tools and technology at our fingertips that could become a game changer.

The Endangered Languages Project puts technology at the service of the organizations and individuals working to confront the language endangerment by documenting, preserving and teaching them. Through this website, users can not only access the most up to date and comprehensive information on Endangered Languages as well as samples being provided by partners, but also play an active role in putting their languages online by submitting information or samples in the form of text, audio or video files. In addition, users will be able to share best practices and case studies through a knowledge sharing section and through joining relevant Google Groups.

2. UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

<http://en.unesco.org/>

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/>

This website has several short videos of the last speakers of their languages with translations that describe the importance and emotionality connected to people losing their native tongue.



©Google / ©UNESCO

Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger

It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century. With the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages, humanity would lose not only a cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded, in particular, in indigenous languages.

However, this process is neither inevitable nor irreversible: well-planned and implemented language policies can bolster the ongoing efforts of speaker communities to maintain or revitalize their mother tongues and pass them on to younger generations. The aim of UNESCO's Endangered Languages Program is to support communities, experts and governments by producing, coordinating and disseminating :

- tools for monitoring, advocacy, and assessment of status and trends in linguistic diversity,
- services such as policy advice, technical expertise and training, good practices and a platform for exchange and transfer of skills.

Additional websites:

1. The Endangered Language Fund
<http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/about.php>
2. Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics: The language Archive
<http://tla.mpi.nl/>
3. Endangered Languages Archive
<http://www.elar-archive.org/index.php>
4. Digital Endangered Languages and Music Archives Network (DELAMAN)
<http://www.delaman.org/index.html>

5. Mercator: European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning
(part of the Fryske Academy)
<http://www.mercator-research.eu/research-projects/endangered-languages/>

Esperanto: The Language of Peace

In *The Language Archive*, one of the characters is learning a constructed language called Esperanto, developed by Ludvic Zamenhov in the late 1800's. Millions of people still learn Esperanto today in an effort to speak a common language with people from a multitude of cultures and countries.

Advantages of Learning Esperanto

By Ken Price
(Excerpted from <http://www3.sympatico.ca/kenprice13/esperant.htm>)

Esperanto's impressive success as the language of international communication is due to three basic advantages. It is easy to learn. It is politically neutral. And it has many practical uses.

Esperanto is easy... Esperanto is much easier to learn than any other language. In fact, it can be learned in about a quarter of the time needed to learn a national language! The spelling is easy: each letter has exactly one sound. The pronunciation is easy, and the accent is always on the next to last syllable. The grammar is easy: there are only sixteen rules, with no exceptions. (That means, for example, that there are no irregular verbs.) The vocabulary is easy, too: many international words are used, such as telefono (telephone), biologio (biology), and matematiko (mathematics). Esperanto gives a very "natural" impression in spoken or written use; and, because of its high ratio of vowels to consonants, it is often said to resemble Spanish or Italian.

Esperanto also uses prefixes, suffixes, and interchangeable endings to reduce the number of words to be learned. For example, in English we make the words friendly, unfriendly, and friendship from the root

word friend. Esperanto carries this idea much further, making the vocabulary easier to learn.

In short, Esperanto has been rationally constructed for ease of learning. This has made it especially popular with busy men and women who cannot spend years learning a foreign language, which would be useful in only a small part of the world.

Esperanto is neutral...The second major reason for Esperanto's success is that it is neutral. It belongs to no one country. Many people in America and England say that English is already spoken so widely and is such an "important" language in the world that it should be officially adopted by all nations as the international language. This view is very unpopular in many countries.

Esperanto is not the property of any one nation, group of nations, or social class. It belongs to everyone. It has no political or historical implications to hinder its acceptance. Every person who uses Esperanto is on an equal linguistic footing with all other Esperantists.

Esperanto is practical...Esperanto offers exceptional practical advantages. Coordinating these advantages is the worldwide organization, the Universal Esperanto Association.



The UEA, from its headquarters in Rotterdam, maintains a network of over 2,000 representatives in about 100 countries, sponsors many international activities, and issues a Yearbook containing the addresses of its representatives and information on current international activities. There are more than a dozen international professional associations including, for example, teachers, scientists, journalists, doctors, and lawyers. These groups sponsor meetings, publish journals, and otherwise promote the technical use of Esperanto. Other international organizations serve the interests of Esperantists who share the same religious affiliation -- such as Catholics, Protestants, Quakers,

Buddhists, Bahai's -- or who share a hobby, such as stamp collecting, bicycling, chess, or computers.

...for travel Travelers who know Esperanto are not confined to talking with a few people who cater to tourists. By writing to an Esperanto representative in each place they visit, they can be sure of being met and helped. Wherever they go, they know they will find friends who speak the same language and share common interests. They will meet and talk with the people of the country, instead of merely looking at its monuments. At international meetings where Esperanto is used, they can be sure of clear and animated discussions in corridors, lobbies, and nearby cafes, free of earphones and interpreters.

...for correspondence

Through Esperanto you can get to know other countries and their people without ever leaving home. Books and magazines in esperanto bring the news and culture of other countries to your door. And, through friendly correspondence with people in other countries, you can broaden your horizons and learn more about the world.



Criticisms of Esperanto , Submitted by Judith Meyer, 11/13/2007

Excerpted from:

http://esperanto.info/en/basic_information/common_objections/common_criticisms_about_esperanto

Common Objections

There are many languages that are dying and men create new languages.. wouldn't it be better to try to preserve already existing languages?

Incidentally, most Esperanto speakers are acutely aware of the need to preserve language diversity and believe that they are actually contributing towards it, because Esperanto doesn't aspire to replace local languages, unlike English, French, Spanish, Chinese, etc. that are promoted at the expense of local languages and have at times forbidden the use of local languages. Esperanto is supposed to become everybody's SECOND language, that is, a language that everybody learns in addition to his native tongue, and then people are encouraged to learn more foreign languages.

Esperanto didn't work out, did it? English is still the most international language.

Yes, right now a lot of people are learning English, just like they have been learning Latin, French and Russian before and might be learning Chinese in the future. The richest nations can push their languages like that and even charge big fees for teaching their languages. Esperanto is a volunteer effort; it doesn't have the big money to advertise nearly as much, so it's pretty much limited to the word of mouth and it will live and grow only due to its intrinsic qualities. Esperanto has already persisted for more than a hundred years, it has more speakers than minor national languages like e. g. Estonian and today it's in a better position than ever because the internet is multiplying the amount of people who will hear about it and who have the chance to learn it.

If mankind was able to put aside all the muscle-flexing about what languages get used as international languages e. g. for the EU's and UN's meetings, Esperanto would be the logical choice. It's neutral, not associated with any one country (which would make other countries start bickering, see France vs. English) and if the goal is for everybody to learn it as a foreign language, it's definitely the most suited, since it was developed for just that purpose.

Other than being easy, what advantages does Esperanto offer? Esperanto has about 2 million speakers, Hebrew about 4 million native speakers.

You can't really compare Esperanto to Hebrew or any language like that. Yes, Esperanto has comparatively few speakers (though there has never been a census and so the numbers cited range very widely between 100,000 and 10 million; most say a few million). However, the speakers are spread throughout the world. It's an advantage and a disadvantage: there is no country where you can be sure that the majority of people will understand you if you speak Esperanto (Brazil would probably come closest), but on the other hand you can find Esperanto speakers anywhere and they are ready to accept you into their homes and show you places regular tourists won't see, just because you speak Esperanto. If you want to visit Israel, learn Hebrew. If you want to visit Japan, learn Japanese. If you want to visit Brazil, learn Brazilian Portuguese. If you want to visit West Africa, learn a few dozen local languages. However, if you are interested in more than just one foreign country's culture, if you want to experience lots of cultures, Esperanto provides easy access.

Isn't Esperanto very Euro-centric? That's not fair to people elsewhere.

Actually, Esperanto's grammar is not Euro-centric and its simplicity and logic will be appreciated by everybody. Only the vocabulary is Euro-centric. And this is not a disadvantage but an advantage for everybody, because the majority of the world's population knows a European language: not just people in North and South America and Australia but also people in Africa typically speak at least one European language. In Asia there are not quite as many people as elsewhere, but learning European languages is still incredibly popular there. Also, Esperanto's vocabulary is so versatile that very few word stems actually have to be learned. For example, it's a common estimate that knowing 500 word roots are enough to express basically anything in Esperanto and most of the rest are just synonyms of words that could be created from those roots.

And what's the alternative? The fairest language would take word stems from every single language in the world. On a regular-sized vocabulary, that results in about 2 word stems per language and a lot of quarreling about which language really common words like "and" are taken from. Assuming that you have a chance to understand words from 10 languages due to languages you studied and cognates, that still results in a language whose vocabulary is 99% incomprehensible to you and everybody else.

Questions to consider after watching the Live Arts production of *The Language Archive*:

Why do the notes that Mary leaves not make sense to George? Can you find the parallel situations in the play where one character is speaking a 'language' another cannot comprehend?

Emma's Esperanto teacher advises her to reveal her love for George, but Zamenhof advises her not to. What is the difference between these two characters? Why does Emma eventually choose to listen to Zamenhof and not tell George she loves him at the end of the play?

How many of you had Grandparents who didn't speak English? How did you come up with ways to communicate with them? How did it affect your relationship with them?

Who did the old man on the train resemble when he was younger? What led you to that answer?

Language does not necessarily equate with Communication. Where in the play is this demonstrated?

How does the playwright use the symbolism of a door to illustrate her point(s)?

The old man gives Mary his "starter". What does this symbol represent? What other symbols does Cho employ in the play?

Cho uses several different ways to say "I love you" in the play, such as "Don't ever leave me"; "You cut my heart"; "Please take out the garbage". Which method is the most successful? What other ways do you think the characters chose roundabout ways of saying what they mean to say?

"To have nothing. To be tied to nothing. To be your own. I think that's both the saddest thing I've ever heard and the most wonderful", says Mary to the Old Man. What do you think – saddest or most wonderful? Why?