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Presence of Minds: The Importance of Active Exploration and Response in Dramaturgy

A Thesis Presented

by

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This thesis is the result of a period of research aimed towards identifying and analyzing the methods by which a number of dramaturgs engage with projects that necessitate unique and innovative approaches. Upon examination, these experiences provide concepts and ideas that can have a larger application for the dramaturgy of any project, and open up the potential for an expanded dramaturgical practice. The main ideas derived from this analysis are: the necessity for the dramaturg to be present and active in rehearsals, the ability of a dramaturg to give responsive and creative input that moves beyond purely scholarly concerns, the value of providing response that is non-prescriptive and exploratory rather than explanatory, and the importance being able to aid creative exploration of the significances and associations that arise in a project while understanding where the integrity of the piece lies. While none of these methods are necessarily new or uncommon, it is valuable for any dramaturg to be familiar with them and understand their effectiveness when engaging with the dramaturgical process of any project.

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Chapter 1

Ars Dramaturgica

The landscape of our modern theatre environment consists of an extensive spectrum of projects and performances vast in nature. The varying dramaturgical needs these projects present often demand expansions of the dramaturg's breadth of responsibilities, as unique and innovative approaches become necessary for in-depth engagement with the material. The nature of these methods places the dramaturg in a position of a not only an academic, but an implementer and flexible collaborator. A dramaturg who is present and active in rehearsals, responsive to material, able to advance their research beyond scholarship, and provide investigative rather than prescriptive feedback becomes a vital part of the creative process, and blurs the line between scholar and artist.

The following essay is a look at how the role of dramaturgs and the demands placed on them are evolving in our modern theatre environment, and explores how innovative concepts from individual approaches can hold relevance for an expanded dramaturgical practice. These examples will show ways in which dramaturgs strive to move beyond the confinement of being merely a "scholar" and seek out ways to bring their work into the larger creative process. Looking at how these approaches are congruous with dramaturgy at large will explore an expanded definition of dramaturgy and open up potentials for engaging the process. Due to the fact that the range of work being discussed is so varied, I will be using the term "project" to be inclusive of any theatrical venture.

The quintessence of dramaturgy is a dedication to exploring, working, and living in the worlds of others. Whether working on a well-established play or a project in development, their position is unique in regards to the depth to which they become on intimate terms with the material. This by nature requires scholarship; however, the way in which a dramaturg will utilize their research and knowledge should move beyond merely explanatory concerns into a more exploratory ambition. In order to achieve an ideal relationship with a project, the modern dramaturg should be aware of and open to a variety of approaches, as the questions raised by any process can benefit from an expanded dramaturgical practice.

Ask any dramaturg and they will tell you about their carefully honed and constantly evolving “dinner table” definition: this is what they said to friends, relatives, and acquaintances that inevitably ask, “so what exactly *is* dramaturgy, anyway?” It might more than likely contain some explanation about doing historical and contextual research, acting as a resource for a production, and helping a playwright develop new work. This is often followed by some sort of disclaimer that the job really is much more diverse, but worded in such a way that discourages further inquiry. This is partly a product of the fact that one can only rehash the minutiae of all the possible realms associated with the job to a loosely interested audience so many times before growing tired of it; however, many dramaturgs would be hard-pressed to deliver a definition that truly encompasses everything that the job can be. All dramaturgs of course have their own personal experiences in the field and those of others they know to draw from, but when it comes down to it there is no good way to comprise all of the possible functions of a dramaturg into a concrete definition.

The role of a dramaturg can fall into several categories: literary manager, production dramaturg, new play development dramaturg, and deviser. In her article “Dramaturgy: An

Overview” from the book Dramaturgy in American Theatre, Anne Cattaneo similarly delineates several categories for what dramaturgy most often encompasses. First comes the idea of the literary manager, who is someone who helps research, select, and develop a particular theatre’s season of plays. As Cattaneo points out, this can often focus on “classical plays and revivals,” and may involve researching, recommending, preparation/editing, and helping all members of the artistic team understand historically and contextually significant specifics. Next come the jobs of assembling/creating text from existing material, creating a production book, choosing new plays for development, working on new play development, being the “in-house critic,” and finally conducting research (Cattaneo 6-12).

These broad categories suggest many of the roles a dramaturg might take on, but the tasks that those roles necessitate can be heterogeneous. Why is it then that in American theatre “dramaturg” is frequently synonymous with “researcher?” Indeed much of our work centers around research, but the image of the dramaturg burning midnight oil in the library with stacks of books seems to be an outdated misunderstanding and underestimation of the potential they can bring to a production. In reality, all artists involved in a production do research of some sort to benefit their job, whether it is character development as an actor, concept development as a director, or searching for inspiration as members of the design team. The dramaturg typically fills in the rest, functioning as the mortar that holds together the individual bricks of research the rest of the artists bring to the table. This also puts the dramaturg in the unique position of having a wide range of understanding and an adaptable, multi-faceted point-of-view based on the depths to which they must get to know the world of the play. For this reason, it is very unfortunate when the dramaturg merely becomes the human encyclopedia for a production, answering questions and providing information without allowing their intense relationship with the world of the play

to filter more readily into the creative process. It's like Dante having Virgil by his side, but only using him to ask whether he's pronouncing the names of the rivers correctly.

Regardless of how or if a dramaturg is being utilized, dramaturgy itself is an essential part of the theatrical process. Dramaturg Geoffrey Proehl puts it perfectly by pointing out that although “The dramaturg—the person who appears in the program with this title— is not finally essential to the rehearsal process... dramaturgy—that deep, often personal, even idiosyncratic understanding of the forms and rhythms crucial to a play as written and performed—is, however, inseparable from theatre making, whether or not the word itself is ever used” (Proehl 27). Along the same lines, Anne Cattaneo defines production dramaturgy as a set of tasks that can be carried out by any number of artists in the theatre, providing a extensive list of titles for those who engage in some form of dramaturgy: “dramaturg, literary manager, literary adviser, artistic associate, playwright-in-residence, director... artistic director” to name a few (Cattaneo 5). What a dedicated dramaturg brings to this process is a breadth of experience and knowledge that can resourcefully enable all artists involved to reach this understanding.

For example, one idea that is mentioned time and time again is the ability for the dramaturg to foster conversation. They can make sure that voices are being heard and that avenues are being explored. Rachael Shteir speaks to this when she claims that a dramaturg should “aim towards the imaginary theatre” (Shteir 166). Theatre artists and administrators are often under the pressure to make sure a play happens; what a dramaturg can do is keep the ideal in mind and be as resourceful as possible to bring the production as close to those ideals as possible. Furthermore, being an artist necessitates being wrapped up in one’s own vision to some degree. A dramaturg can ensure that the spirit of the piece doesn’t become beholden to one vision when possibility is ripe for exploring. Additionally, dramaturg Maxine Kern contends that

in the world of commercial theatre, a dramaturg can help “push against the confines of what is commercially viable” (Kern).

Defining the job of the dramaturg (a term that isn't even included in Microsoft Word's default spellcheck dictionary) is inherently problematic because the job itself evades consistency. This is likely what draws many people to the field: the opportunity to play a variety of roles on a wide range of productions. For this reason, it seems counter-intuitive to try to pigeonhole dramaturgy into specific boundaries. One time in conversation with Daniel Burson, the Literary Manager for Maine's Portland Stage Company, he offered me a more comprehensive description; he claims that the dramaturg becomes on intimate terms with a text, and opens up avenues for the production team into the world of the play. This explanation is simple and accurate, general enough to encompass many possible tasks the dramaturg takes on but descriptive enough that it provides a clear picture of how a dramaturg can fit into and benefit a project. It says nothing about centering one's work on a prescriptive role, nor does it do anything to relegate the dramaturg only to the realm of scholarship and not artistry.

The following essay will examine an array of instances where dramaturgs have contributed to a project by utilizing innovative or atypical methods. Projects that this type of dramaturgy often occurs for include: devised works, post-modern or post-dramatic pieces, shows that employ unconventional methods of staging or use of technologies, dance theatre, puppet theatre, and many other forms present in modern American theatre. Often this type of dramaturgy bridges the gap between new play development and production dramaturgy; for example, devised works by nature are both “new plays” and a production rehearsal process. Similarly, post-modern and post-dramatic pieces can be largely dependent on staging, and non-

text-based works require a completely different approach than those with a text. However, this can also include conventional texts that are produced in an unconventional manner.

In an article written with Liz Engelman, Michael Bigelow-Dixon identifies the ways in which artists engage with ideas in theatre. According to Bigelow-Dixon, there are those who generate ideas, those who identify ones that are worthwhile, those who develop those ideas into something larger, those who add finesse and nuance to the world that has been created, and finally the criticizers who, “energize an idea and its expression through creative analysis and enlightened context” (Engelman and Bigelow-Dixon 94). He goes on to lament the fact that dramaturgs are “often relegated exclusively to this fifth step,” when “dramaturgs can generate, identify, develop, and finesse ideas about as well as anyone else in the theatre” (94). The plea he issues, however, is not to directors or administrators but to dramaturgs themselves: “let’s not work in the margins, let’s not only respond, let’s not restrict our imaginations to fit an out-of-touch job description. Let’s be inventors and architects, enablers, and advocates for the theatre of our time as we dream it.” (94).

Dramaturg Maxine Kern echoes Bigelow-Dixon’s sentiment, stating how important it is for a dramaturg to make the effort to find ways to insert themselves into the process when opportunity arises. “If there’s a need for a hole to be filled, and it’s something that a dramaturg could take part in [but doesn’t], I find that quickly the dramaturg gets eliminated from the next step” (Kern). She provides an example from an experience working on a new opera based on a Gertrude Stein piece: “I wasn’t set up to give a presentation, but at the last minute there was a nod to me, and I didn’t take it... and I watched it as a miss throughout the whole process. There were people there who did not know how it worked, and didn’t have a clue, and could have” (Kern). As a dramaturg, finding opportunities to apply one’s knowledge and abilities effectively

can be vital to any project. The ability to branch out from conventional notions about the function of the dramaturg and the use of an expanded dramaturgical toolbox allows a dramaturg to follow their impulses in order to best serve a project. According to Liz Engelman, “when we find ways of working from our own impulses and interests, we become the instigators, implementers, generators— drivers— of a project” (Engelman and Bigelow-Dixon 95).

In an interview about her professional experience, Maxine Kern shared details of a project about the Shaker community, which she worked on with the Three Graces theatre company. The company’s belief is that an actor “cannot portray a world that [they] haven’t experienced... so several rehearsal hours are given over to dramaturgy... actual walking into rehearsal... At that point a dramaturg can be a director, can be an actor, can take all of the information they have about the acting process on its feet to get the actor to experience the world of the play” (Kern). For example, in order to address the fact that a large part of the Shaker experience revolves around confession, Maxine had the actors read rules about confession that were outlined in a children’s book. They then took these ideas a step further and performed confession as a group, and “when the scene came up with confession, they’d already... gotten those emotions alive. That kind of thing is dramaturgical because it’s coming from historical materials made alive and up on its feet” (Kern).

In seeking an expanded process, a dramaturg must approach any project with a certain amount of intuition. Defining dramaturgy with concrete ideas of roles and tasks creates a dilemma, as one must always measure their work to standards that are anything but universal. In reality, what any individual project needs is as unique as the project itself. It is counter-productive for the dramaturg to try to make pre-determined tasks fit into a project that might benefit from an alternative approach. The dramaturg needs to be viewed (and view themselves)

not as serving one specific function, but rather as representing potential within a project. Given freedom and using intuition, they can explore a range of avenues that will lead the project towards its ideal.

For example, the dramaturg can act not only as a provider of meaning or context but also a navigator through the associations and significances arising throughout the development process. It can be argued that this is the job of all artists involved in the piece, but the benefit of utilizing a dedicated dramaturg is their unique position in the creative process: dramaturgs are dedicated to exploring, working, and living in the worlds of others. Whether it is the world a playwright is building through a script or the world a director is crafting through a production, the dramaturg humbly asks to enter it, not to impose a vision but rather to explore and respond. As experimentation and exploration shape the world of the piece, the dramaturg can provide immediate response and feedback with consideration to a variety of perspectives in order to help everyone involved recognize the potential and significance of what they're creating. Dramaturg Tori Haring-Smith likens the role to that of a dance teacher: “the partners who must learn to agree upon the rules of the art they create together are the director and the audience. If one partner thinks that the music calls for a waltz, and the other hears a tango, the teacher has failed because the dance partners have not decoded the music in the same manner” (Haring-Smith 46).

In an article from 1997, Sky Gilbert states that conventional dramaturgy is often viewed as making sure a play or production “contains equal and balanced contributions” from the elements of plot, character, dialogue, and theme (Gilbert 26). While this is a gross oversimplification of what a dramaturg does, both new play development and production dramaturgy often revolve around a text, which is primarily composed of these four components. Historical research, glossaries and presentations, the revision of problem areas in a new script,

and other such concerns all revolve around exploring and elucidating these elements. While Gilbert acknowledges that these components may be present in any type of project, he asserts that dramaturgy can include many more elements (such as poetry, image, and movement), and that the presence of any one element is not necessary, nor is the balance of the elements present.

In resistance to simply analyzing how these elements are functioning within a text, Gilbert postulates that “work which is stylized or experimental often depends so much on heightened performance that no amount of discussion around a table can get to the heart of a piece” (Gilbert 27). The difference between these approaches is what Gilbert defines as being “responsive” rather than “paternalistic” (27). Bringing research to the table can be valuable in helping to explore, enlighten, unearth, define, and inspire, but the dramaturg must be able to respond to all the elements in a project. In the rehearsal space, the dramaturg doesn’t merely provide a distillation of knowledge to help define these elements, but rather can help all the artists involved to discover, investigate, and develop them. The outdated idea of an invisible dramaturg who toils away in the library alone and makes only sporadic visits to rehearsals is insufficient. While discussion and communication are still an integral part of the process, in order to become on intimate terms with the world of the play, the dramaturg must be where it is truly present: the rehearsal.

Chapter 2

Taking Flight

In the spring of 2011, towards the end of my second year of graduate school, I approached a local community college about working as a dramaturg on one of their productions. Although the school didn't usually utilize a dramaturg, their theatre department had a close relationship with mine, and I was told that they might be amenable to the idea. After speaking with Charles Wittreich, the department chair, it turned out that he and another professor (Andrew Wittkamper) had been playing around with the idea of a devised piece for several years and were planning to produce it that semester. They were very receptive to my offer, and quickly brought me on board as the dramaturg for the project.

The show, which they titled *The Icarus Project*, was at its core a presentation of the Greek myth of Daedalus. What Charlie and Andy had hoped to do was to employ puppets in the telling of the story, using a joint development and rehearsal process as a means through which to explore, among other things, how they would take shape. Charlie admitted that he hadn't realized this type of project even had a name until somebody at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival had introduced them to the term "devised." He and Andy had been throwing around the idea for *The Icarus Project* for about six years, and after becoming familiar with the current proliferation in devised works, they decided that it was finally time to get the project off the ground.

This information raised some important concerns: not only would I be working on a show where the dramaturg was not a typical part of the production team, but I would also be working

on something that was not text-based. The former concern was in many ways very liberating: if they didn't have a prescribed role for the dramaturg, then I could negotiate my level of input on the production. However, the latter concern made me a bit apprehensive, as the majority of my dramaturgical training had me prepared for more traditional text-based matters; having directors who hadn't anticipated how a dramaturg might fit into this process and no script to use as a map meant that I would have to discover my own way of becoming useful to the production team.

Fortunately, both Charlie and Andy expressed a willingness to let me be as artistically involved with the process as I was driven to be, which allowed me the opportunity to feel out where I was needed. Much of a dramaturg's usefulness lies in being resourceful, so I was compelled to be as much of a resource for the production as possible. Initially, Charlie and Andy tasked me with researching puppetry theory. I was able to find a good amount of information, but there was one important thing to remember: I was supposed to bring it into a group of student performers who had never touched puppets in their lives. Even after distilling the dense theory into accessible notes *and* convincing busy student actors to read them, there's only so much that written notes can teach about a physical art. It was clear that if I was going to make an impact, I was going to have to get my dramaturgy off of the page and on its feet.

My first instinct was to try to bring in a master puppeteer that would be able to run puppetry workshops with the performers. Unfortunately, finding a puppeteer who could travel to the area and train a team of student performers on short notice with little compensation proved to be difficult. Although I had no training in puppetry myself, I did have knowledge of movement-based techniques from classes and workshops I had attended. Drawing on many of the recurrent ideas brought forth in my research, I tailored a series of exercises for the performers that I could run before rehearsals, designed to raise the students' awareness of their personal physicality,

articulation, and space, which they could then apply to exploring the range of potential with their puppets. The exercises were largely based on Jerzy Grotowski's work, but selectively trimmed and modified in order to cater to the unique demands of puppetry.

In the program notes for the production, I wrote a bit about the concerns that I hoped these exercises would address:

The utilization of puppetry in performance creates a unique set of demands on the performer that differ from the typical challenges of the stage. First of all, the performer must exist in a dual state on stage as both character and operator; they must recognize themselves as a performer and yet perform through an object. The usual means of expression available to an actor on stage are removed, and they must instead discover how to focus their performative energies outside of their bodies. The puppeteer is also required to discover "who" their puppet is through a process of exploration, including how it moves, what it can and cannot do, and what gives it life. The line between puppet and prop is thin, and is different for each puppet. It is imperative that the operator(s) of any puppet discover what brings that puppet to life, not through imitation of reality but an exploration of the world created through performance; only when the unique characteristics and abilities of a puppet are discovered does that puppet truly come to life. (Petty)

This bit of information, which was the result of research on a variety of theories of puppetry from around the world, ended up being truer than I realized. Watching this process take place became an invaluable source for understanding the dramaturgy of the piece. A good example would be the relationship between the Baby Icarus puppet and Joe, its puppeteer. Icarus is a small child for the first third of the performance, and is portrayed via a three-foot tall puppet composed largely of burlap and wire mesh. When Joe first started to practice manipulating this puppet, it looked awkward, clunky, and silly. Although I provided a good amount of puppetry theory designed to help the performers understand how to approach manipulating the puppets, no amount of notes can impart a skill. Watching Joe practice over the course of rehearsals, it was

fascinating to see how every night his puppet came to life a little bit more. Eventually, he had discovered and developed such a unique character in his movements that the puppetry influenced the development of the scenes. Throughout the development and rehearsal process each performer (and designer) developed their skills and made new discoveries, which in turn influenced the shape and direction of the project as a whole.

The puppets ranged from ventriloquist-dummy sized for Baby Icarus, to gigantic *War Horse* style for the Minotaur, to shadow puppets and elaborate costume pieces. The puppets themselves were designed through a process in which the performers created “test puppets” using scrap materials such as butcher paper, dowels, markers, and miscellaneous props and costume pieces that were available. This fostered a creative spirit in which the pieces of the performance in development influenced the design of the puppets, which in turn inspired specific elements and moments within the performance, and continued back and forth as such throughout the entire process. Even as puppet designs were solidified and constructed into their permanent forms, the new limitations and possibilities that the finalized puppets presented would open up changes and elaborations in the performance. When the performance was revived for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival over half a year after the initial run closed, the constraints of the new venue once again necessitated changes that in turn influenced further development of different aspects of the performance.

Dramaturgically speaking, this process of give and take provided a fertile ground for creation and discovery. As the defining traits of the puppets and performance continually expanded, I was asked to provide observations in terms of the structural integrity of the piece. The production team was concerned with whether the predetermined narrative was coming through clearly, but as the piece developed this became secondary to whether elements of the

performance were congruous to the context being created on stage. For example, there was a problematic moment where shadow puppetry was utilized in a scene where Daedalus (who until this point was portrayed by a live actor) dreams he has murdered Talos. Responses to this moment varied, but many people had difficulty picking up on exactly what was happening. Adjustments clarified the puppetry of the scene, but it still seemed that something was not coming across about the story we were attempting to convey. In the revival of the show, however, the moment worked perfectly. There were no changes to the orchestration of the scene, but rather a simple updating of the Daedalus cutout, which now sported his signature helmet. In lieu of dialogue, this distinctive, illuminated, neon blue helmet had become a symbol of his power and hubris. Without it, the sudden introduction his puppet lacked context and became untrue and confusing.

The Icarus Project ended up developing in such a way that puppetry only constituted about half of the performance, with the rest of the characters being portrayed by live actors. However, there still was no text, and aside from a handful of vocalizations there was no dialogue. The story was told through intricate choreography, ranging from pantomime to elaborate dances. Having no background in either, I once again felt at a disadvantage: how was I supposed to aid the development of the choreography without having experience as a choreographer? This concerned me until I realized that I didn't need to think like a choreographer in order to be a useful dramaturg. Lacking a text to work with, I simply needed to immerse myself into the world being created in the piece. The choreographer and performers didn't need answers or suggestions, but they did need somebody who could exist in the reality of the show, somebody who could respond not to the skill of the choreography or its execution, but to its effect. Somebody who could see how individual elements fit into the production as a whole and

ask questions that might be overlooked, leading to more solid internal logic and integrity in the piece.

In the end, the incredible effort and dedication of the students brought the puppets to life in such a way so that one would never be able to guess merely three months prior, none of them had ever so much as touched a puppet. The performance itself was a look at several scenes important to the story of Daedalus and Icarus, but because there was virtually no dialogue the focus shifted from the narrative to the wonder and majesty of events in the moment. The live characters moved via choreographed patterns that were reflective of what they represented, but they interacted with the puppets in such a fluid manner that audience members were instantly able to accept their coexistence. While the loose narrative of a collectively known myth provided context, what made *The Icarus Project* compelling was world that came alive on stage each evening.

As dramaturg, I didn't compile an encyclopedic volume of research, nor did I have a library of materials about Greek history and myth. While research was contributive, my usefulness existed not on the page but alive in the space. This experience taught me two things: first, that the idea of the dramaturg as a researcher or scholar who sits in the back of the room and provides historical and literary context is insufficient. Second, it made me realize that any dramaturg will have a relevant and indispensable place in the theatre if his or her work is able to move beyond the purely intellectual and into the realm of the artistic and practical, becoming alive in the physical space as well as the minds of the artists.

Chapter 3

The Visible Dramaturg

Sky Gilbert's assertions and my experience with *The Icarus Project* both deal with instances where the dramaturg's presence in rehearsals is a necessary due to the nature of the project. However, even when this is not the case, there are many ways in which having the dramaturg present in rehearsals can be advantageous. In their article "Journeys Without Maps: Dramaturgy of the Post-modern," Kathleen Flaherty and Deborah Hurford discuss their experiences working on post-modern productions. Flaherty starts out with an important idea, which is that any play should have "integrity" or "wholeness... that the organization of incidents (plot) is deliberate, and the *way* the story is told is as important as the story itself" (Flaherty and Hurford 31). Dramaturgy often searches for this integrity in terms of the text, or how a production engages with the text. However, projects that don't involve or emphasize a text still require Flaherty's idea of integrity: deliberate organization and an equal importance of content and form (especially when form *is* content).

According to Hurford, Artistic Director of Azimuth Theatre, "In performance, the *text* includes all sensory material: the spoken word, sound effects... maybe even what goes on in the audience's minds" (Flaherty and Hurford 31). This expanded idea of text opens up the range of focus for a dramaturg; instead of looking only at written language, the dramaturg must explore the implications of a variety of facets of the production. A larger context is being created, and the dramaturg must be aware of the range of interpretations that arise. Through the exploration and understanding of associations that exist in project as it is being developed, the dramaturg can

open up avenues for exploration while also making sure that this idea of “text” maintains its integrity in terms of the artists’ intentions.

In reference to post-modern projects, Deborah Hurford declares, “the key difference for the dramaturge in this process is that she must experience the process rather than imagine it since the performance and text are not separate” (Flaherty and Hurford 33). She goes on to emphasize that all artists involved should be present during the process of development and production in order to “‘experience’ the text” (33). In the type of project that she describes where the heart of the play lies in its performance, text-based models of dramaturgy are simply at cross-purposes with the needs of the work. Material resources such as textual research, while still potentially beneficial for encouraging exploration and inspiration, cannot open up the proper avenues into the world of the play in these circumstances. However, this creates an exciting opportunity for the dramaturg, as it requires them to think not only as a scholar, but also as an artist.

Another important distinction is raised by Hurford, who points out that a, “unified view based on absolute values,” is often the basis of dramaturgy for realistic/naturalistic works. She goes on to explain how, in the post-modern work, “there is no single 'correct' interpretation of the text,” because audience members individually interpret what they experience “based on their unique histories, values, and perspectives” (Flaherty and Hurford 32). In work that fractures narrative structures to some degree, whether through non-linearity, extreme abstraction, or gestalt presentation, the natural inclination of the audience is to derive some level of semiotic significance from the piece regardless of the artists’ intention. For this, Hurford offers dramaturgical advice: the more that the form is abstracted, the wider the range of interpretation becomes, which avoids a semiotic trap of leading your audience to mistakenly infer a particular, incorrect, intention (32).

Hurford also stresses that it is important to understand and acknowledge that your audience will interpret the piece based on what is symbolically significant to them. Flaherty claims that this is what separates art from propaganda: “the use of symbol instead of sign” lets audiences come to their own conclusions and a communal understanding. “The integrity of the piece becomes a matter of collective intuition,” she says, “what the dramaturg brings to the collaboration is a knowledge of structure” (Flaherty and Hurford 33). The dramaturg cannot do this simply by reading a script and providing feedback and context. It is not about merely balancing the elements that comprise a plot, or making sure that the narrative unfolds clearly and logically, but rather an understanding of where the integrity of a piece lies, what makes it whole, based on exploration and intuition. The job of the dramaturg is most readily done in the development/rehearsal process, because the nature of post-modern theatre creates context and subtext through staging.

This leads Hurford to declare that, “the post-modern medium demands a change in the way we define the role of artists in the creative process” (Flaherty and Hurford 33). Flaherty and Hurford’s insistence that the dramaturg be present during the whole process is understandable because the nature of what they’re describing requires the dramaturg to act as an artist rather than just a scholar. Confining the dramaturg to a prescribed role can be detrimental to the potential of what they can bring to *any* project, because no single project offers a definitive method with which to approach the job of dramaturg. The nature of each project is unique and requires a negotiation of the territory; regardless of the project, a dramaturg's toolbox must be diverse. Falling back on conventional practices can prove to be a poor model for the dramaturgical needs of any piece.

In an article titled “Dramaturging Non-Realism: Creating a New Vocabulary,” Tori Haring-Smith tackles these same issues: “Working with non-realist productions changes the dramaturg’s role in the rehearsal process. Dramaturgs working with realism strive to find ‘the answer’ to research questions” (Haring-Smith 50). On the other hand:

Dramaturgs working with non-realism must cultivate more playfulness in their own questioning. They must open up meaning, not secure it. They must point to the gaps in the text not as holes to be filled in, but as sites of meaning that escape simple representation through language or image. They become less the source of answers and more the source of questions. As the advocate for the script and the liaison both between the director and the actors and between the stage and the house, the dramaturg must be cognizant of, and prepared to support, the new processes of exploring meaning in non-realism. (Haring-Smith 50)

Haring-Smith makes the comparison that, rather than searching for coherence, the dramaturg of a non-realistic project looks for “the pattern, the meaning in the ink blot” (Haring-Smith 52). She asserts that, “to illuminate meaning in non-realism, dramaturgs do not trace narrative or mine a character’s depths, but rather identify complex patterns of action, image, and language” (50). Here is the crux of the matter: dramaturgy has its heart in scholarship, which is a large part of what it enables it to benefit a project. However, what a dramaturg can provide proliferates when they bring not just scholarship into the ring, but active participation with the creation process in the form of observation, interpretation, and response. For all intents and purposes they act as an artist, and their most valuable input will not only come from literary research or a collection of sources, but also an active engagement with the collective creative process.

One way in which a dramaturg can engage with the process is by helping to develop a “web of meaning” when dealing with a character's dialogue and actions (Haring-Smith 47).

While realism begs the question of “why,” the dialogue in non-realism may eschew subtext, and actions must often “be taken at face value” (Haring-Smith 47). Traditionally, the dramaturg might provide assistance by offering the actor some background on their character: the contexts of their life (time period, region, occupation, etc.), resources for exploring their psychology, perhaps an in-depth exploration of their dialogue and actions. When the nature of the work renders these concerns immaterial, the dramaturg no longer seeks to “[clarify] the meaning of the text for the character who is speaking,” but rather to help explore “the many cultural contexts (historical, literary, visual, and emotional) of the play that encompass all the figures’ speech as well as their actions to create meaning” (48). It is obvious that this requires scholarship; however, the way in which a dramaturg will utilize their research and knowledge is exploratory rather than explanatory. It is almost a counter-process to traditional dramaturgical research, because rather than distilling focused information into a relevant chunk of knowledge, research should be opened up to reach its fingers into all possible realms of association and connection.

In describing his experiences working on devised projects, Bruce Barton takes a look at Eugenio Barba’s ideas about dramaturgy. He designates three specific categories:

The first is an “*organic or dynamic dramaturgy*, which is the composition of the rhythms and dynamisms affecting the spectators on a nervous, sensorial and sensual level”... The second is a “*narrative dramaturgy*, which interweaves events and characters, informing the spectators on the meaning of what they are watching”... The third... is the “*dramaturgy of changing states*, when the entirety of what [is shown] manages to evoke something totally different, similar to when a song develops another sound line through the harmonics.” (Barton 6)

Barton focuses particularly on the third category, paraphrasing Barba’s idea that “the dramaturgy of changing states taps into a spectator’s instinctual interpretive capabilities” (Barton 107). What

Barton and Barba are claiming about this particular form of dramaturgy is that through the simultaneity of the first two categories, new ideas, associations, and interpretations arise. This concept implores the type of exploration advocated by Flaherty, Hurford, and Haring-Smith, and further expresses the need for a dramaturg to be present in the rehearsal space. However, Barba's ideas of "dynamic" and "narrative" dramaturgy are not exclusive to devised work, but rather are necessarily present in any performance. Therefore, it makes sense that a dramaturg would be just as important to identifying and understanding the significances of the "dramaturgy of changing states" in any production, devised or not.

Although Barton was initially unsure of how well the physical and instinctual nature of a devised project would lend itself to having a dramaturg, he soon discovered otherwise:

This general sense of disequilibrium was not the product of a context or process antagonistic to dramaturgical inquiry... Obviously, this approach significantly decreased the amount of front end dramaturgical preparation I could bring into the beginning of a developmental process that resists—indeed, discourages—practically all gestures of prefabrication. From the outset, I was aware that my involvement would require a higher level of active engagement and accelerated response than had been demanded of me in my experiences in text-based developmental dramaturgy. (Barton 110-111)

Here it is clear that Barton's dramaturgical approach required moving beyond the completion of specific assignments usually allotted to dramaturgs and into a more responsive role. What he describes as "front end dramaturgical preparation" is the type of work that, while useful to a certain degree, is unable to anticipate all the needs, ideas, and possibilities that arise during a production process. Although the nature of devised work compels this style of approach, the active presence of an engaged and responsive dramaturg in rehearsals allows movement beyond scholarship alone in order to more fully address the dramaturgical needs of any project.

In a devised project, many of these needs arise out of the specific nature of the work. Barton observes that in his experience, collaborators on a devised project “employ a heightened degree of discipline, rigor, self-reflection, and self-evaluation. As a consequence, the function of the dramaturg—to question habit, to complicate unreflective expediency, to dig beneath the surface of unearned presumption—is, in fact, inextricably woven into the company’s understanding of creation” (Barton 112). One effect this has is that dramaturgy becomes such an essential part of understanding the developing work that all artists become active participants in the process. However, this also raises the question of what the person specifically designated as dramaturg can provide in this environment. Barton found that “ultimately, truly effective dramaturgy of physically-based work... must likewise demonstrate that its merit is, like the creative act itself, earned in the moment” (112). Rather than being a provider of external knowledge, the dramaturg must be committed and responsive to the internal dynamics of the project as they occur.

While this style of dramaturgy is intrinsic to the type of work that Barton describes, a dramaturg who is able to provide immediate response to numerous aspects in a rehearsal setting is universally useful. As Barton explains, “the potential for deep dramaturgical insight may only be realizable through a surrender of the safety of physical and imaginative distance and by means of a fundamental relocation to within the spatial, rhythmical, and conceptual site of collision” (Barton 112). If the three types of dramaturgy described by Barba are indeed present in all theatrical projects, then the dramaturg’s presence in the physical realm of rehearsals is necessary for their complete engagement with the piece. A dramaturg is effective in the moment when they can respond to manifestations that are “pregnant with communicative potential[;] these literally pivotal instances are also likely not to be repeated or recreated” (112). The intricacies of any

performance can offer up countless moments like this, making the dramaturg's active presence in the rehearsal space of substantial value.

The ability to observe and respond to developments in the rehearsal process also enables the dramaturg to act more like an artist in the process. According to Barton, "combining this level of access with the privilege of moving throughout the rehearsal space allowed me to construct a composite perspective... I was invited, as dramaturg, into the creative dialogue in what was, for me, an unprecedented level of engagement" (Barton 113). Realistically, the input a dramaturg offers in this process may be similar to the concerns they'd otherwise typically address. The perspective of a dramaturg in rehearsal is beneficial because it is reactive rather than prescribed. Instead of delivering information that the other artists have to recall and apply, the dramaturg can use their distinct point of view to provide input where it will be practical and useful. What Barton observed from his experience was that "the impressions of the dramaturg's second perspective [were] accessible at the moment of impact (i.e., at the moment of most immediate potential)" (114).

In an interview with Lynn Thompson, Norman Frisch provides some insightful details about his process working as a dramaturg on experimental forms of theatre. According to Frisch, "dramaturgy is essentially the practice of relating form to content, or style to subject matter," a definition that echoes ideas from the Flaherty/Hurford article referenced earlier (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thompson 273). In a realistic production, where the form (the performance) is based off of the content (the text), the dramaturg strives to bring everyone closer to the world of the text in order to strengthen the cohesion between the two. The research and observations that a dramaturg brings to the production serve to reconcile differences between the presentation and the work being presented. On the other hand, as I've already discussed, not all projects offer a

clear distinction between form and content; instead, they may influence each other and are often indistinguishable. Here, the job of a dramaturg is not founded in text, but rather an active engagement with the development process.

Frisch's approach to this type of engagement is based primarily in fostering, engaging in, and promoting conversation. In describing one particular rehearsal process, he states, "I would talk with all the people engaged in the process about what important elements were rising to the surface" (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thompson 293). Much of the process that he describes in this interview follows along these same lines; that is, creating purposeful circles of conversation based on intense awareness of the work that is developing. One reason this is so important, claims Frisch, is that "collaboration is often a euphemism for compromise, in the negative sense." He corrects this false idea by stating, "collaboration is giving over to the belief that whatever you arrive at together will be better than what you would have come to on your own" (283). Much like the dramaturg can serve as liaison between the playwright and director in productions of new work, a dramaturg can forge that same connection between all of the artists involved on any project. A dramaturg who is close to the developing work is aware of many points of view, and can "expose the ideas underlying the work and hand and extend the circle of input and discussion" (275).

This also relates to the notion of the dramaturg as an artist, as such intense involvement with the development/rehearsal process puts the dramaturg in a position more akin to a deviser or creative collaborator than resident scholar. The dramaturg that functions as a contributing artist offers a unique point of view, as they are invested not only in the developing piece but also the visions and ideas of the other artists. They aid the ability to create meaning, context, and wholeness by fostering investigation, exploration, and collaboration. As Frisch observes,

“artists... are not looking for more ideas; they have plenty of their own – usually too many. They are looking for me to help shape or maintain a process in which ideas and perspectives other than their own are flowing” (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thompson 274). Frisch accomplishes this by listening and observing, and then asking questions and presenting ideas that reflect the various points of view of those involved. He repeats things that he has gathered “in the right context and at the right moment” with the goal of “constructing circles of dialogue” (275). Here we approach a blurring of the lines separating dramaturg and artist: having a personal hand in the creative development of the work, opening up windows to exploration of form and content, all by being the advocate for the work based on one’s own observations about the work, the process, and the artists.

Frisch’s statement that artists want help shaping and maintaining a process where a multiplicity of ideas are considered is reminiscent of the idea of the dramaturg as a surrogate audience member. This term describes a practice through which the dramaturg observes and responds to the process and work with the eye of a spectator, while keeping in mind whom their potential audience will be. However, a dramaturg is almost the antithesis of an audience member because of how close they become with the project. The dramaturg can also observe with the eye of an actor, director, designer, deviser, scholar, critic, and psychologist. He should not be limited to pointing out inconsistencies and unclear passages, but rather should be able to advocate a variety of points of view, either out of necessity for tackling an issue or to open up potential when it presents itself. Simply put, the dramaturg should have the ability to advocate the ideas and perspectives of anyone involved in the process, creating the type of atmosphere that Frisch describes.

Similarly, just as the dramaturg negotiates discrepancies between the artists, Frisch describes an experience working on a non-text-based piece where, “my role was to reconcile the seeming contradictions; to allow different planes of meaning to exist simultaneously alongside and top of and underneath one another” (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thompson 292). As various points of view and new ideas are continually filtering into the work in a devised process, the dramaturg is in a prime position to mediate these ideas so that they fit properly. This may involve helping the team discover what to hold on to and what to abandon, while other times it may be a matter of exploring the system of symbols at use, and the semiotic significances that may be present in all elements of the work.

Frisch also provides an example of how a dramaturg can mediate problematic ideas within a project: “a common difficulty in multimedia work is that the creators tend not to let the use of technology flow from the subject matter. Instead, they look for content to demonstrate a technology. Usually this doesn’t work... and people tend to get caught up in technological challenges and forget what they originally intended to say” (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thompson 276). Technology is often utilized in experimental work due to its heavy saturation in modern culture and the potentially limitless possibilities it presents for exploration, experimentation, and innovation in the theatrical setting. A dramaturg who is truly invested in the integrity of the show can recognize when content is being built around the technology and not the other way around. Here the dramaturg must mediate this relationship, once again ensuring that the form is not superseding the content. Through an understanding of the structure or integrity of the project, they can ensure that the use of technology isn’t untrue to the project, and that it is significant beyond its novelty.

Frisch's approach offers a picture of an expanded dramaturgical practice where a dramaturg is able not only to provide scholarship, but also to invest themselves in the developing work and the artists involved. Here, a dramaturg able to act as a catalyst for stronger creative collaboration, while at the same time providing insight based off of experience, knowledge, expertise, and a unique point of view. In another interview conducted by Lynn Thompson, Shelby Jiggetts-Tivony provides a similar model for collaboration: "to collaborate is for individual artists to come together with a common goal, and each person is free to do what they do, wholly, fully" (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thompson 265). The potential for what a dramaturg can provide for a project multiplies when they are able reach beyond a confined role and explore a more elaborate collaborative model.

Chapter 4

Against Protocol

Playwright and director Erik Ehn views the dramaturg as somebody who can explore and create, rather than simply answer questions. According to dramaturg D.J. Hopkins, “Under Ehn’s model, research would be... not the drive to ‘solve’ or ‘explain’ problems or conflicts in the text, but instead, the drive toward independent development of an equal and opposite idea” (Hopkins 5). This approach involves research that is free to move outside the aims of the other artists, rather than research based on them. The freedom to explore and create puts the dramaturg on a level of an artist closer to that of the other collaborators, which as Hopkins explains is a key factor in Ehn’s approach. The work of a dramaturg should help to create, rather than only to understand. “Research should trouble the production,” Hopkins insists, “not simplify it.” (5).

Hopkins confronts some of the problems associated with confinement to conventional research and protocol building. He claims that because the dramaturg’s research comes after the visions of the director and designers, he or she is expected merely to “serve the belated function of providing the actors with characterological data of limited impact on the overall production” (Hopkins 2). He criticizes the idea that the dramaturg is expected to act with decorum and only pursue lines of research that other members of the team feel are “relevant,” ultimately robbing the dramaturg of creative influence. He asserts that, “The library can be an unhelpful place to locate the dramaturg, an exclusionary site away from the rehearsal room and the work of making theatre” (3).

Hopkins addresses this problem more specifically by criticizing the idea of a dramaturgical “protocol” due to its expected contents, which often consists of a mixture of biographical information, historical overview, a glossary, and relevant criticism. What he proposes instead is the creation of what he calls a “counter-text,” which is, “the results of a period of independent dramaturgical research and development, and the contribution this material makes to a theatrical production” (Hopkins 2). The counter-text doesn’t have to take on any particular form or format, but serves to open up meaning and potential in a production. It is “a body of work developed collaboratively in the course of production” through the investigation and compiling of information inspired by the text/production at hand (12). Rather than being a product of solitary research done outside of the space, it is material that has been inspired and influenced by an engagement with the process. Hopkins’ idea is reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze’s line of flight: “movements of deterritorialization and destratification” (Deleuze 3). The exploration a dramaturg conducts through a counter-text is a deterritorializing of idea and meaning within a text, leading off in its own direction.

Once it has been assembled, Hopkins proceeds to “draw on the counter-text for contributions that would inform the visual, textual, and narrative elements of the performance text” (Hopkins 12). He uses his own example from when he served as dramaturg a project called *Skin*, for which he used writings by and about Austrian-American Psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich to inform many elements of the process. While Reich was not directly referenced or relevant to the play, the body of work collected about him displayed many ideas that were congruent to ones in the project material. The counter-text that Hopkins compiled created associations and contexts that informed, inspired, and helped to shape many elements of the production. This type of research draws on the style of dramaturgy used more frequently in devised and non-realistic

projects: creating and exploring potentials, finding webs of meaning, investigating semiotic possibilities, and inspiring the creative process in contrast to merely providing scholarship. However, the practices outlined by Hopkins in the creation of a “counter-text” inherently suggest a “text” is present. For any production, widening dramaturgy from focused research to conceptual development creates the potential for an expanded process and product. All dramaturgy inspires in some way: historical and contextual information serves to inspire actors by bringing them closer to their characters and the play, designers by inspiring what they create, and directors by opening them up to elements of the text they may not have originally understood as meaningful. The counter-text achieves the same effect, but instead of merely bringing the artists closer to the “fact” of the text, it draws out other significances within a wider discourse.

Hopkins also provides examples of other theatre artists who approach their dramaturgy in a similar fashion. Mark Bly creates what he calls a “casebook” rather than a protocol, a difference he describes as being “a tool for exploration, rather than a prescriptive, formulistic guide to staging a particular play” (qtd. in Hopkins 3). While the change may seem semantic, the connotations speak volumes. A “protocol” suggests just that: procedure to be followed, a formulistic method consisting of rules about what is and is not to be done. A “casebook,” on the other hand, is reminiscent of a detective or psychiatrist’s collection of documents, gathered not based on what does and doesn’t belong, but rather containing anything at all that might prove to be useful to some measure at some point in time. It is evidence, speculation, exploration, hope, chance, intuition, and potential.

Chapter 5

Response Ability

Although the approaches described in the previous section are in relation to unconventional work, they depict methods that can be brought over into any type of project. For example, many of the articles I've discussed place an emphasis on exploring the world of the piece. In an article from *Theatre Topics*, Mark Bly discusses how less restrictive world exploring can benefit the new play development process. In describing a play development course he teaches, Bly shares that "instead of viewing the plays as an invalid that we diagnose and then volunteer prescriptive commentary about, we offer descriptive commentary focusing on the play's inherent strengths and the laws that govern the world of the play" (Bly 19). He describes an approach that "concentrates on asking questions about the world of the play rather than merely offering a one-dimensional perspective or interpretation" (19). Just as the dramaturgy of a devised process relies on opening up possibilities of meaning, the traditional script in development can benefit from the dramaturg as a source of questions rather than a source of answers. Bly suggests that one primary way to accomplish this, among others, is by "measuring our impressions of the new play against [the playwright's] original intentions" (20).

The idea of the inquisitorial dramaturg isn't a new concept, but how questions are employed can have a great effect on the process. In regards to this, Bly addresses the benefit of treating the play in development as a world to explore: "If we approach a play as if it were a new world, we should encounter it free of assumptions. We cannot expect it to behave the way we are used to, nor should we dramaturgically "terraform" it. If we try to make it conform to how we

believe a play should “work,” we may lose the possibility of a new creation or new form evolving out of it.” (Bly 20). His warning speaks to a very real pitfall in new play development, as incomplete and unpolished plays often present “problems” that require “fixing.” In treating the developing play in the same manner as a devised work, with openness to meaning and a willingness to explore rather than define, Bly offers a model that promotes true dramaturgical development rather than what I’ll deem “dramasurgical” editing. He also warns against what he describes as treating the play like a “blueprint for action” rather than understanding it as a system of signs and symbols, which again raises the importance of exploring semiotic potentialities (22).

D.J. Hopkins also takes issue with prescriptive dramaturgy, addressing the problems that arise when dealing with play development:

One of the most common functions of a dramaturg in a professional/institutional theatre setting is to provide support for the development of new plays, and in the convention-bound setting of regional theatre production, this support often takes the form of critical input calculated to clarify, simplify, and, all too often, homogenize a new play. In the context of such conventional dramaturgical practice, the library and research become the tools of mere information-gathering—pronunciations, definitions, watered-down history. (Hopkins 4)

While this seems harsh, it is not a condemnation of the research that a dramaturg brings to a production. Recalling his idea of a counter-text, Hopkins quotes Erik Ehn’s claim that a dramaturg “creates a space that neither the writer nor director are able to enter; and to which they are both attracted” (qtd. in Hopkins, 5). The key idea here is that research should not merely explain but also explore, which in turn will foster creation and discovery.

Bruce Barton echoes similar sentiments about new play development: “the playwright whose work is being workshopped regularly experiences a critique of her play as text, and is thus

cut off from a discussion of her play as production” (Barton 104). In particular, he takes issue with the idea that new play development and production dramaturgy are viewed as such separate tasks in the theatrical world. While new play development affords (or even necessitates) a level of revision or restructuring that is not a common in a staged production, the exploratory spirit of production dramaturgy can bring great benefit to the development process. Barton expresses the thought that “frequent, systematic exposure to the eyes and sensibility of a trusted dramaturg can effectively promote increased levels of self-reflection and self-evaluation” (116). The difference is that the dramaturg focuses less on the effort to remedy and more on an effort to discover. The integrity of the play as a text is not necessarily indicative of its integrity on the stage; therefore, it makes sense to approach the developing work with an effort to understand and investigate rather than as an editor.

Although the nature of this process affords a dramaturg the creative space to become intimately familiar with the work being developed, Barton laments that “the dramaturg of new play development is regularly ‘excused’ from the process at much the same time as the writer, and thus similarly disconnected from the realization of the very theatricality that it has been her job to prompt and prioritize at all times throughout the evolution of the text” (Barton 105). The problem here again is the notion that there is a distinction between the tasks of new play development and production dramaturgy. Treating these jobs as defined, distinctly separate ventures creates a false dichotomy that assumes not only that there is no overlap between the two, but that either one is absolute in the first place. Dramaturg Maxine Kern made a similar observation about her experience with a new play festival for which the theatre utilized dramaturgs in the development process but not in the production process. She observes, “there were some [plays] that would have been more successful if the dramaturg who knew the heart of

the play, the structure of the play, the facts of the play had been there” (Kern). Expanding the idea of how a dramaturg can serve a project requires an understanding of dramaturgy as a particular relationship with a project rather than a specific set of tasks.

Barton declares, “a central role of dramaturgy is to question habit, to complicate unreflective expediency, and to dig beneath the surface of unearned presumption” (Barton 103). This idea of how a dramaturg engages with a project is reflected in his assessment of the dramaturg’s function at large. His approach to devised work requires “scrutinizing and problematizing the distinction between developmental and production dramaturgy,” but he advocates this practice at large when he criticizes, “this common act of categorization... capitalizes upon and solidifies a practical, yet limiting and lamented, divide exhibited in most text-based dramaturgy in North America.” (114).

In discussing the development process of San Antonio's Jump-Start Performance Company, Paul Bonin-Rodriguez presents another dramaturgical approach to experimental theatre that can be brought into any type of production. The group utilized Liz Lerman's Critical Response process, which is an effective tool through which a play in development can receive structured, specific, constructive feedback. The process functions in this manner:

First, the facilitator invites audience members to “affirm” what elements of the performance they found most striking. Those in agreement with a comment are encouraged to snap fingers, rather than repeating same phrases. Second, after a basis of “what works” is acknowledged, the facilitator allows the artists to ask specific questions about how well the audience responded to, understood, or regarded certain moments. Audience members are encouraged by the facilitator to provide answers specific to the questions asked. Again, “snap technology” is encouraged if more than one person has the same response. Third, the facilitator invites the audience to ask questions about certain moments in the performance they may have found intriguing or puzzling. In this

step, audience members are encouraged to make disciplined, “non-judgmental” queries that do not convey an attitude. In the fourth step, audience members are allowed to make comments— comments are identified as any observation that could not be phrased as an affirmation, an answer, or a question— but only after having asked for and received permission from the original artists.
(Bonin-Rodriguez 88)

This process, which I’ve had experience with myself, offers a number of benefits. First of all, it prevents the “too many cooks spoil the soup” dilemma that often arises out of large-scale feedback in the new play development process. Using Critical Response forces feedback to take on a specific structure geared towards serving the play the artist is writing rather than the play the responders would write (common especially with untrained responders). With proper moderation via a dramaturg, it also lets the writer gauge what feelings are most prevalent, bringing to light those who agree but don't want to repeat what's already been said, which at the same time serves to cut back on wasted time (how many valuable comments have potentially been lost due to time squandered on those who insist on reiterating an idea already addressed multiple times in their own words?). Finally, it lets the artist tailor feedback to be most useful for them based on what they're currently working on or hoping to achieve at whatever stage of the process they are in.

Although Critical Response is most often utilized in experimental and devised work, its method of focusing feedback would work just as well on any play in development. While the process is pretty straightforward, Bonin-Rodriguez argues the need for a dramaturg with input from Jump-Start members Steve Bailey and Sterling Houston: “Both artists theorize that the single dramaturg should play an instrumental role in preparation for and during the Critical Response process, helping the artist to ask questions that will explore the possibilities for a new work” (Bonin-Rodriguez 90). Bailey asserts that, “If the artist is not asking dramaturgically-

based questions, if there is not enough critical theorizing from the author, the critique becomes about the show, but not the writing” (qtd. in Bonin-Rodriguez 90).

Chapter 6

An Expanded Practice

The proliferations of theatrical projects that utilize innovative or experimental techniques and elements have often necessitated an exploration of alternative approaches to dramaturgy. Although the function of the dramaturg in any given project's process is anything but concrete, what remains constant is a dedication to intimate engagement with the material in order to open up creative and intellectual potential for the artists involved. Looking at how dramaturgs have engaged with various modern projects opens up possibilities for an expansion of the dramaturg's breadth of responsibilities, and expanded definition of dramaturgical practice at large.

Projects that blend the rehearsal and development process (such as devised works) require a dramaturg to have an active involvement that moves beyond textual scholarship. However, any dramaturg who is able to move their work beyond the purely intellectual by bringing it to life in the space in the form of observation, interpretation, and response can have a deeper impact on any project. The notion that a dramaturg functions in a solitary manner, preparing outside material for use by the production or development team, undercuts the potential for what a dramaturg can contribute. The dramaturg holds a unique point of view that can help the other artists navigate the possibilities and significances of the material being crafted in the process. For this reason, it is important for a dramaturg to be familiar with a variety of approaches in order to find ways to engage more deeply with the project when the opportunity presents itself.

Conventional ideas of dramaturgical materials often focus on providing a source of answers, but some of the most useful dramaturgy comes in the form of inquiry. By expanding dramaturgical research to include exploration, a dramaturg can become a source of questions and inspiration that fosters investigation and questioning among the collective of artists. At the same time, approaching a project in development with an effort to understand and investigate rather than as an editor can open up this same exploratory spirit. While bringing research and other prepared material can be indispensable to a project, the dramaturg can encourage investigation and discovery by being active in the rehearsal space. They can aid development of an idea by fostering exploration and opening up avenues for deeper connection with the material while staying true to the integrity of the project. The active dramaturg can identify where the integrity of a piece lies and use this information while reconciling differences between the artists' intention and execution.

When a dramaturg can actively engage with the creation process, they move beyond the role of scholar and begin to function as an artist. Here, they utilize their research in a manner that is more exploratory than explanatory, as it seeks to open up ideas to encourage exploring possibility rather than circumscribing the understanding of these ideas. A dramaturg who is present in the rehearsal space can respond to moments of potential when they occur, rather than simply providing the artistic team with knowledge that they must determine how to apply themselves. This style of dramaturgy is reactive rather than prescribed, and allows a dramaturg to provide practical input and information when it will have the greatest impact. A dramaturg can also facilitate creative development by using their keen understanding of the material in order to ensure that valuable conversations are happening. In a situation where multiple sets of ideas are emerging, a collaborative dramaturg can advocate many different points of view, and find ways

to make these ideas function communally. Dramaturg Liz Engelman insists, “the dramaturg’s mantra should be, ‘Combine and conquer’” (Engelman and Bigelow-Dixon 95).

As the variety of projects expands in our modern theatre environment, what is required is not a new dramaturg but an expanded definition of dramaturgy. Dramaturg Bruce Barton asserts that, “the inherent curiosity, self-critique, and creative unrest that characterize much of [devised] theatre stand as undeniable reminders to constantly reconsider the normalized activities, categorizations, and institutional structures that define our vocation” (Barton 116). As time moves forward, it will be important for any dramaturg to have a familiarity with a range of practices and techniques from a wide variety of projects. With an extensive dramaturgical toolbox, dramaturgs are able to form more active, involved, and fruitful relationships with projects, engaging not only as scholars, but also as artists.

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