

# the DRAMATURGIES project

This feature is designed to complement and develop the reports and transcripts from the *Dramaturgies* project already available on the RealTime website under *Dramaturgies Now* ([www.realtimemedia.net](http://www.realtimemedia.net)). It has been co-written by the *Dramaturgies* team of Peter Eckersall, Paul Monaghan and Melanie Beddie, except where otherwise indicated.

## OVERVIEW

*Bombs need to be thrown, but they need to be thrown at the root of the majority of present-day habits of thought.*  
Antonin Artaud

*Dramaturgies*, established in Melbourne, Australia, in 2001 by Melanie Beddie, Peter Eckersall and Paul Monaghan, is a research and development laboratory that aims to explore, reflect on and give rise to dramaturgical practice in—and as a basis for—making innovative performance in Australian theatre. The *Dramaturgies* team undertakes activities to promote and research dramaturgy in a variety of ways: through our practice as dramaturgs, in discussions and research symposia, in publishing and teaching, and in the *Dramaturgies* workshops and creative development projects.

In this special *Dramaturgies-RealTime* supplement, we would like to offer our thoughts on the importance of dramaturgy in and for Australian theatre, some discussion on how that elusive word ‘dramaturgy’ might be defined, what the role of the dramaturg is and might be, and a succinct, edited coverage of the three main *Dramaturgies* projects undertaken between 2002 and 2005. Reports and transcripts of the first two events can be found online; included here, for the first time, is a detailed report on *Dramaturgies* #3. Our objective is to provide a point of focus for continuing debate on the nature of dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in contemporary Australian theatre practice.

## WHY DRAMATURGIES?

*Dramaturgies* arose because many of us in the performing arts wished to have a forum for airing and developing ideas about performance that was less pressured than the rehearsal room. The project exists to encourage a dramaturgical practice that will help to enrich our theatre culture and its practitioners. Our first three projects have been structured differently but with some common aims. Firstly, we want to create an environment in which there is a focus on process and not product. Uppermost in our minds is the question of where contemporary artistic practice sits within an ever-expanding cultural industry. As ‘producers of culture’ in Australia our work is constantly under external pressures to satisfy market and industry needs and so, within the parameters of the *Dramaturgies* project, we think it is important to allow ourselves to sometimes get things started without necessarily finishing them.

Another important aim of the project as a whole is to broaden our own preconceived notions and extend our individual practice of dramaturgy by fostering new working relationships with others. We do this by inviting a broad range of arts workers to our forums and providing them with a platform to express their ideas. In this way we also stimulate conversations between practitioners across various art forms.

All our projects work to encourage nationwide discussion about dramaturgical practice and the ever-evolving role of the dramaturg. In fact we see our work in developing these forums for dramaturgical research as an aspect of our work as dramaturgs. Our constant aim with the *Dramaturgies* project is to remain excited by ideas about art creation and hopefully to excite others in the process.

## DRAMATURGY TODAY

The craft of dramaturgy seems to come regularly into focus as an aspect of theatre practice that calls for attention and redefinition. In Australia, this process has been especially evident from at least the late 1960s, when the notion of an ‘authentic Australian’ (as opposed to British, American or European) theatre culture began to significantly affect the way theatre was imagined and practiced. Dramaturgy might be due for special attention now for a number of aesthetic and ideological reasons.

In the aesthetic sphere, Australian dramaturgy before the 1980s was dominated by a limited definition of dramaturgy as consisting *purely* of literary management and ‘script doctoring’. Since then, however, the evolution of hybrid spaces for theatre has extended and expanded beyond these models to include performance, dance, technical and production dramaturgy. Words, of course, continue to play a crucial role in theatre—in those forms of theatre, that is, that use them. The so-called ‘anti-text’ movement is to a large extent an illusion. What has occurred, simply, is that the importance of non-literary dramaturgical activities in the production process itself has been increasingly recognised. Moreover, technical innovations and ever more diverse means of production and dissemination have made the theatre environment even more structurally complex, poly-cultural and information rich than before, and these developments have generated the need for creative specialists who keep track of the complicated flow of ideas, technologies and forms. The rise, especially in academic departments, of performance studies with its interest in investigating aspects of cultural theory in, and through, performance has generated a need for a new kind of dramaturgy which responds to the post-modern influences currently engaging many theatre artists. As a practice that is often called upon, in the rehearsal and development process, to ‘contextualise’, to keep alive the memory of alternatives in the pressure cooker environment of production, dramaturgy—potentially—lies at the cutting edge of creative praxis.

In the socio-political or ideological sphere, as Australian artists continue to participate in debates about theatre culture, and seek to make productive analyses of and interventions into dominant social and cultural constructions, the need to develop a specifically *political* understanding of dramaturgical practice also grows. As Peter Brook said to his company in Africa (as they squabbled over whose turn it was to do the washing-up), ‘the way we work is our work’.

The importance in contemporary theatre of dramaturgy as a confluence of literary, spatial, kinaesthetic and technical practices, worked and woven in the matrix of aesthetic and ideological forces, was succinctly stated by playwright John Romeril in the first *Dramaturgies* forum:

*I live today in an age in which words represent an incredibly corrupt medium. The feeling I have is that we are living in an age of liars, where what is spoken is almost inherently untrustworthy. In those circumstances, I suggest that the theatrical response to go into dream state, to go into physicality, to go into visuality, is to maybe ask an audience to make sense in areas of their own sensibility that have not been invaded by the general corruption to which language in our time is being subject.*

The fact that these words were spoken by a playwright made them especially acute. ■

“dramaturgy...a confluence of literary, spatial, kinaesthetic and technical practices, worked and woven in the matrix of aesthetic and ideological forces...”

## AIMS OF THE DRAMATURGIES PROJECT

The *Dramaturgies* project aims to:

1. Explore the wider contexts and possibilities of dramaturgy as a strategy to intervene in and transform aspects of contemporary theatre practice; to promote dramaturgy as a tool to challenge cultural norms and established systems of production while aiding in their realisation and development.
2. Promote a model of dramaturgical practice that investigates theatre as a cultural system as well as an aesthetic one, so as to expand the political and aesthetic dimensions of theatre as interrelated aspects of contemporary cultural production.
3. Widen the base of dramaturgical practices to include a consideration of playwriting, direction, devising, design (sound, light, space), curatorial work and programming, and company/artistic directorship.
4. Create contexts for debating and challenging contemporary theatre culture, both amongst the wider community and within specialist theatre communities, in order to expand Australian theatre’s capacity for discussion, reflection and intervention.
5. Make a comparative study of dramaturgy, drawing on experiences of artists nationally and internationally.
6. Promote these models of dramaturgical practice in the context of real-world professional production systems, so that the work of dramaturgs can be recognized as integral to theatre production in a period dominated by economic rationalism and cultural conservatism.

## DRAMATURGIES IN BRIEF

Over the past four years, *Dramaturgies* has produced two dramaturgical forums and a three-day workshop. In addition, it has been a site for wider critical discussions and debates regarding the practice of dramaturgy in Australian theatre.

**Dramaturgies #1** was a Public Forum (November 1, 2002), entitled *The Artist as 'Agent Provocateur' and Cultural Interventionist*, held in partnership with the 2002 Melbourne International Arts Festival. Local and international festival participants responded to a set of prepared questions and propositions about the politics of their practice. The wide-ranging presentations were followed by questions and discussion from the large audience.

**Dramaturgies #2** was a two-day conference (Feb. 21-22, 2003) exploring both wider cultural contexts and detailed aesthetic aspects of dramaturgical practice, held in conjunction with the School of Creative Arts, Melbourne University. Panels of theatre artists drawn from diverse practices and locations discussed themes such as dramaturgy and devised performance, playwriting, dance, design, sound, structure and curatorial practice. A concluding panel of theatre company artistic directors considered questions regarding the potentially important role of the dramaturg in the artistic life of a theatre company.

**Dramaturgies #3**, a workshop lasting just over three days (Sept 22-25, 2004), was a practical exploration of dramaturgy as a research and development process of generating new work. Thirty-three participants, drawn from varied artistic—professional and cultural backgrounds, and from every state and territory of Australia, participated in

the project. A working theme 'of hope and dread' framed our work. Through varied tasks, inputs and experiences, participants explored thematic, aesthetic, social and historical aspects of dramaturgy. In *Dramaturgies #3* we sought to intervene more directly in the practice of dramaturgy, to make connections between what had been discussed in our forums and the future development of dramaturgical practice in Australian theatre. This required a great deal of thought and experiment to make the transition from discourse to practical exercises and creative development.

*Dramaturgies #1* and #2 were funded by Arts Victoria. *Dramaturgies #3* was funded by the Australia Council. It was on their initiative that the project was able to increase its scope to include the whole of Australia.

The first three stages of the *Dramaturgies* project have been generated in a consecutive and developmental manner. We began with specialised theoretical issues, then moved to investigating wider contexts of dramaturgical practice, and then applied theoretical understandings to dramaturgical praxis in ways directly related to professional practice and the working lives of dramaturgs. We are currently exploring a number of possibilities for future stages of the project, and would greatly appreciate any and all suggestions from readers.

We make no claims to exclusive expertise in these areas, and recognise the diversity and quality of theatre-workers all over Australia exploring dramaturgy in a variety of ways (not necessarily in the specific role of dramaturg). More than fifty theatre artists, all with diverse expertise and from around Australia and across the globe, have contributed to the *Dramaturgies* projects. They have discussed their work, spoken more broadly on important

themes, and participated in collective workshop investigations. We thank all participants for their continuing generosity and warm support. We would also like to acknowledge our sponsors and thank them for their crucial support: The Australia Council, Arts Victoria, The Melbourne International Arts Festival, *RealTime*, and the School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne.

## CONTACT US AND PARTICIPATE IN THE FUTURE OF THE DRAMATURGIES PROJECT.

Given that one of the primary aims of the *Dramaturgies* project is to foster discussion about dramaturgical theory and practice, the *Dramaturgies* convenors are keen to hear from you.

We are investigating the possibility of setting up an online forum in which issues of dramaturgy can be discussed (for an example of how this might work, see the U.K. Dramaturgy Forum at [www.dramforum.net](http://www.dramforum.net)). As a first step towards this idea, please send us your thoughts on anything in this feature article, on anything else connected with dramaturgy you would like to mention or discuss, or simply to be included in our email mailing list.

Please contact us by email at [dturg@bigpond.net.au](mailto:dturg@bigpond.net.au) 



## DRAMATURGY AND THE DRAMATURG: 3 VIEWS FROM THE DRAMATURGIES CONVENORS

### 1. WHAT IS DRAMATURGY, WHAT IS A DRAMATURG?

Peter Eckersall

#### DRAMATURGY AND DRAMATURGS

Under the headline 'Dramaturgs Take a While to Defend Themselves', the following exchange is recorded in a piece in *The New York Times*:

*In exasperation, a moderator, herself a dramaturg, asked all six members of one panel to state the mission of a dramaturg. Here is what she got. 'I'll probably get killed for saying this, but I don't know the answer', said the first who was a dramaturg at NY's Lincoln Centre. 'I look for patterns in things', said a second. 'I am a mediator between the actor and the director', said a distinguished dramaturg from the Volksbühne, in Berlin. A fourth person, who worked as a dramaturg and designer said: 'A dramaturg is a great equaliser and a glorious leveller of all that goes into theatre collaboration'. The fifth was a dramaturg working with a Shakespeare company who said: 'I want to be sure that every actor understands every word and every line and every scene that's in the play'. 'Dramaturgs answer questions', said the final panelist, 'it's the job of the dramaturg to make those questions as deep and as difficult and as provocative as possible' (William H. Honan, 'Dramaturgs Take a While to Defend Themselves,' *The New York Times*, March 12, 2002, p B2).*

The UK-based Dramaturgy Network are similarly wide ranging in their attempts to define the work of dramaturgs. Originally, a *dramatourgos* was a composer of drama, i.e. a playwright. The literary connection remains; 'dramaturg' is commonly used today to refer to the literary adviser working at a theatre, who participates in the rehearsal processes, and develops and/or ensures that the 'integrity' or the spirit of the play is not lost in the heady world of rehearsal and production.

#### BARBA'S 'WEAVE' OF DRAMATURGY AND DRAMATURGY AS A WAY OF REFUSAL

The director, Eugenio Barba, proposed the idea of dramaturgy 'as a weave':

*The word text, before referring to a written or spoken, printed or manuscript text meant a weaving together. In this*

*sense, there is no performance without text. That which concerns the text (the weave) of the performance can be defined as dramaturgy (Eugenio Barba, 'The Nature of Dramaturgy', *New Theatre Quarterly* 1, 1985, p75).*

Just as Barba asserts there is no performance without text, discussions about contemporary theatre point to the fact that there is no text without performance. The performance text—a complex, interactive system of forms, techniques and aesthetics—can be identified and analysed alongside the play text. Thus, for Barba, dramaturgy is everything that has action or effect; not only text and actors but also 'sounds, lights, changes in the space', and so on. Actions in the theatre 'come into play only when they weave together, when they become [performance] text' (Barba 1985, p76).

The weave is clearly not an object, nor an exercise that can be learned with precision. It is not a technique, or manifestation of training, but rather, a process and attitude garnered from the fruits of experiencing all these dimensions. Such careful theatrical constructions, created with particular objectives in mind, are realised in the context of the social world. In this regard, it is important to note that the weave is not only the creative combination of theatrical elements, but also expresses an attitude or belief system about the context surrounding theatre's production and reception. Barba explores the political dimensions of the dramaturgical weave in comments about art as a state of refusal and disorientation. He writes:


*Artistic discipline is a way of refusal. Technique in theatre and the attitude that it presupposes is a continual exercise in revolt, above all against oneself, against one's own ideas, one's own resolutions and plans, against the comforting assurances of one's own intelligence, knowledge and sensibility (Barba, 'The Deep Order Called Turbulence', *TDR* 44, 2000, p56).*

Dramaturgical processes need to be questioned and rethought accordingly; to realise the potential of theatre, dramaturgical states must lead to acts of revelation. In Barba's terms, this means working towards a refusal of singular expe-

riences and a 'dramaturgy of changing states when the entirety of what we show manages to evoke something different' (Barba, 2000, p60). Taking this idea further, it is interesting to think about dramaturgy as a process of being undecided and, by virtue of the fact of creative indecision, of being in a relational state of intercession.

Of course, I am not suggesting that we adopt a strategy of willful confusion or obscurity in theatre as a way of discovering a political voice. This may have been a successful form of expression for the 1960s underground, but for most people working in theatre today, the goal of communication, and even entertainment, is a much more compelling and challenging one. We should not be trying to keep alive the collapse of representation in the avant-garde notion of performance as ecstatic chaos; rather, to remind ourselves that theatrical representation is dramaturgical; our process is about structural critique, not structural disorganisation. Dramaturgy is nevertheless subversive in that it is a process that reflects on theatre production from the perspective of the production, while simultaneously being the aspect of the process that keeps an open view. Dramaturgy is conditioned by this relational maneuver; intimacy intermingled with alterity. It is a memory of possibilities, of traces of creative processes that arise and are potential. While dramaturgs must work in response to the demands of production, we may be able to explore a creative tension with those same productions regimes. The question we might ask ourselves then, is how can dramaturgy offer the sense of refusal and resistance to closure so as effect a theatre of changing states?

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This forum aims to imagine and redefine such a practice of critical dramaturgy. We always maintain and desire that the arts extend beyond their events and activities—that they take on a life that is unimaginable. Dramaturgy is a process that might describe this transaction and this possibility. In this sense, making theatre is collective dramaturgy. Fresh in many of our minds too is the possibility of dramaturgy as a mode of resistance—a way of refusal in Barba's terms. Let us consider therefore how dramaturgy makes for great theatre, how dramaturgs work for creative and enduring resistance. 

## 2. DRAMATURGIES AND THE DRAMATURG

Paul Monaghan

To think about ‘dramaturgy’, we have to separate it—temporarily—from ‘dramaturg’. This is because the range of tasks that many dramaturgs undertake in Australia and overseas has been determined historically by a restricted understanding of the notion of ‘dramaturgy’. By focusing on dramaturgy, we can expand our thinking about what a dramaturg might do. If we approach the question the other way round, and define dramaturgy according to what many dramaturgs presently do, then we risk failing to uncover the core meanings of the word and the practice.

In addition, it is important to recognise that using the plural form, *Dramaturgies*, is more useful than the singular; although there *is* a central field of meaning, a central field of activity invoked by the term, its manifestations are and should be diverse.

There are generally two distinct but related ancient Greek derivations suggested for the word ‘dramaturgy’: *drama-t-ourgos* (the ‘composition’ of the drama), and *drama-t-ergon* (the ‘work’ of the drama) (Pavis, 1980: ‘*dramaturgie*’; Barba, 1985: 75). But both words were so rare in Greek that the derivations are virtually nonsensical. Nevertheless, these two ‘derivations’ reflect two different understandings as to what is meant by the word, and consequently two different practices: one is concerned with literary text (hence ‘script doctor’, ‘literary manager’ and so on), the other includes the text along with all the other elements of performance—space, light, movement, and so on (whence ‘production dramaturg’, ‘technical dramaturg’). In addition, the practice has been divided between one based in aesthetics (the text and/or performance by itself, according to its own internal coherence) and one based in sociology and ideology, or socio-political, cultural and historical contexts.

While on the surface these ‘derivations’ reflect meanings that diverge, underneath lies a common core meaning, and the split between them can be easily explained. While the history of Western dramaturgical practice (let alone non-Western) is complex, the Western split can be traced back to Aristotle’s fourth century BC *Poetics*, in which he claimed that one didn’t need to experience a performance of tragedy; everything you needed was in the text. But in the fifth century BC, before Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, theatre (tragedy and comedy) was always and only experienced as performance. And the tragedians not only wrote the words of their plays but also composed the music, choreographed the dance, and directed all of it. The notion that dramaturgy means ‘the composition’ of the drama needs to be seen in this light: at the beginning of Western theatre there was no separation between play text and performance: the tragedian was a play-wright in the true sense of the word, a smithy of plays. What’s more, theatre practice was seen as an integral part of the public life of the community; theatre clearly and deeply reflected on and debated—obliquely in the case of tragedy, more directly in the case of comedy—the socio-political, religious and metaphysical issues of the day.

Dramaturgy in this more inclusive sense, then, means ‘working the drama’, just as metallurgy is ‘working the metal’ (Cardullo, 1995, 1). In a 1985 article, ‘The Nature of Dramaturgy: Describing Actions at Work’ (Barba, 1985), Eugenio Barba outlines his understanding of dramaturgy in this sense, as ‘the work of the actions’ (using the *drama-t-ergon* derivation), where ‘action’ refers to all the elements of performance (text, light, sound, movement, space, design, shifts in all of these through time, and so on) woven together in ways that create interpretive frameworks. Barba stresses that the ‘weave’ of actions occurs on two planes: *simultaneity* (the layering and relative hierarchy of all that is happening at the one time, in one moment) and *concatena-*

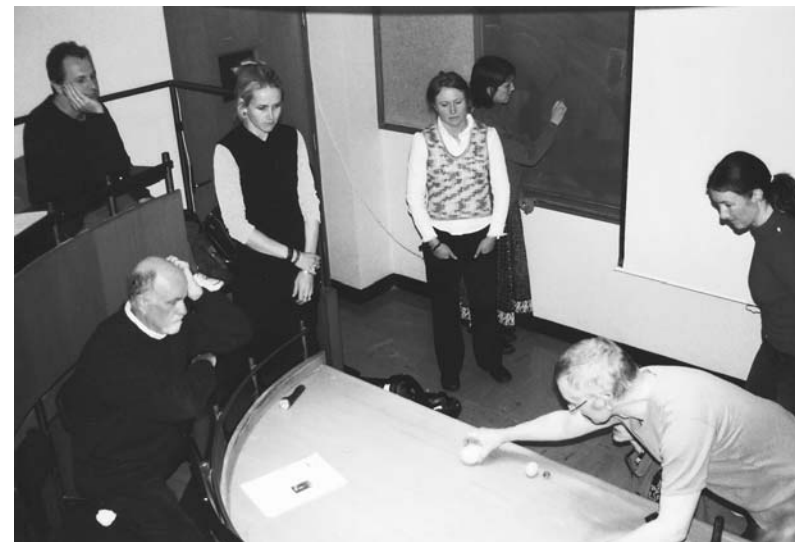
*tion* (the accumulation and structuring of those moments, motifs, narratives and sensory experiences through the course of the performance). The ‘life’ of the performance, he says, consists of a balance between these two aspects of dramaturgy. Play text dramaturgy tends to favour concatenation over simultaneity, while the dramaturgy of devised work often fails to sufficiently structure the work, losing itself at times in a mass of layering.

In a later article, ‘The Deep Order Called Turbulence: The Three Faces of Dramaturgy’ (Barba, 2000), Barba focuses on charting the difficult course between order and turbulence in the creation of new work. At one pole is chaos, too much disturbance, resistance to fixed meaning and an overload of the experiential; at the other is rigidity, a lack of the sensual and an over simplification and overstatement of meaning. He identifies three kinds of dramaturgy: *organic or narrative dramaturgy* (‘the composition of the rhythms and dynamisms affecting the spectator on a nervous, sensorial and sensual level’), *narrative dramaturgy* (‘which interweaves events and characters, informing the spectators on the meaning of what they are watching’) and *the dramaturgy of changing states* (‘when the entirety of what we show manages to evoke something totally different, similar to when a song develops another sound line through the harmonics’; Barba, 2000: 60). The overall dramaturgy of new work, the interweaving of all three of these *Dramaturgies*, needs to chart the course between turbulence and rigidity.

Although Barba writes of ‘refusal’ and ‘revolt’, his understanding of dramaturgy is based primarily in aesthetics, in the actualities of performance. But as we all know, the performance is experienced and decoded by audiences, and no audience member can experience or decode a performance—or a play text—without the conscious or unconscious influence of their own and the text/performance’s socio-political, cultural and historical contexts. The ‘work of the actions’ does and must include this field of influence. The tradition of dramaturgy as cultural intervention, involving political and cultural agitation, ideas and beliefs, belongs to this sense of ‘action’. And by extension, in a manner that bridges the aesthetic and political spheres, dramaturgy involves the critique of performance/play texts as cultural production, as well as their study and documentation, and critique of theatre as a medium to explore and express socio-political and cultural issues and ideas. This is the sense of dramaturgy in the German tradition of Lessing and Brecht. Dramaturgy in their terms involves a critique of theatre and society, of theatre *in* society, a refusal of accepted stories and accepted means of telling them. For Brecht, the dramaturgy must reveal and cause change in the ‘real’ world of daily, lived experience.

Dramaturgy, then, in its broader meaning today, and the sense that the *Dramaturgies* project is exploring, combines aesthetics and ideology, form and content, ideas and execution, the intellectual and the practical, the hammer, the body, the poem and the state. As Helbo et al write in *Approaching Theatre*, ‘Dramaturgy, in the contemporary meaning of the word, is concerned with the relation between the means of expression (the narrative material, stage space and time, formal organisation) and the vision of the world to be expressed’ (Helbo et al, 1991: 2). Writer and dramaturg Maryanne Lynch put it nicely in *Dramaturgies* #2, when she said, ‘structure makes a work out of text, however text is defined, but structure itself is a work made out of its context’.

Needless to say, the dramaturgy of a work is not something confined to a particular style of theatre. Realist theatre, anti-realist, symbolist, expressionist,



Paul Monaghan, objects and dramaturgy, Anatomy Theatre, *Dramaturgies* #3 Denise Damianos

dream-scape, image based, physicalised: all theatre is based in dramaturgy in the sense I have been outlining, whether consciously or not.

### DRAMATURGY—NOUN, VERB OR VERBAL NOUN?

At the heart of dramaturgy lie three key verbal nouns: selection (or choice), construction (or structuring), and framing (for interpretation). Meyerhold wrote, ‘In art, it is always a question of arrangement of the material’ (in *The Actor of the Future*, quoted in McAuley, 1999: 126). This generalised statement only makes sense in the context of the discussion above. But in proposing that dramaturgy is best described by reference to *actions*, as activity, as selection, construction and framing, I am consciously opening up the range of tasks that a person overseeing the dramaturgy of a play text, production or theatre company (let’s call him or her, the ‘dramaturg’!) might undertake.

It is worth asking, finally, where and when is the dramaturgy? Is dramaturgy the selecting, constructing, and framing by one or more persons, or is it the ‘action’—in the sense of the ‘work of the drama’—that is generated by those activities once it is present and active inside a work? In other words, is ‘dramaturgy’ something that people do, or is it the result of what they do? I think it is ultimately the latter, but just as it is reductive to separate the aesthetic from the ideological aspects of dramaturgy, it may well be misleading to separate the making of dramaturgical choices from their effects.

### THE DRAMATURG

If we understand the field of dramaturgy as I have outlined it above, then we see how complex and varied the work of someone overseeing or curating the dramaturgy of a theatrical work might be. Dramaturgical activity occurs before, during and after production, shaping repertoires, shaping the individual work, shaping the medium itself. ■

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If the dramaturg continues to be brought in as a kind of script or project doctor then their role will remain one of merely servicing existing ideas. It is only when dramaturgy is integrated into the early stages of the development of new work that the contribution of the dramaturg can be fully realised.

### 3. SO WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED THE DRAMATURG?

*Melanie Beddie*

Dramaturgy can be thought of as the midwife between theory and practice. It can provide a process for bringing ideas into a concrete form. It can also allow for the essential luxury of contemplation and evaluation of both process and product. It is already a part of our everyday theatrical practice, and our aim in the *Dramaturgies* project is to make its contribution more apparent and hence more useful.

There is a multiplicity of roles the dramaturg may fill and there are many and various ways that individual dramaturgs work. One way to delineate the role of the dramaturg is to consider the two broad but distinct areas where a dramaturg works: one is project-based and the other company-based.

#### THE PROJECT DRAMATURG

A dramaturg employed on a project must have their role specifically defined according to the needs of that project through discussion with the key creative artists. The same dramaturg may work on a variety of projects and on each occasion find a different approach for making a valid contribution.

Often it is a role that consists in supporting and servicing other people's ideas. At its best it is about being part of an artistic team working towards a common goal. Sometimes it can be the role of the dramaturg to help articulate this common goal and to assist in structuring research and rehearsal models to help achieve the desired outcome. At other times the dramaturg may be principally linked with certain members of the creative team—say the writer or the director—in this case it is their job to support and integrate the work of that artist into the project as a whole. Dramaturgy is also often aligned to the research and development stages of a project and much of the work will have been done by the time the work proceeds to rehearsal and production.

I have on another occasion referred to the image of an idealised dramaturg who is a rather saint-like creature—able to provide constant firm but fair analysis, reassurance, non-interventionist guidance, unswerving support, a gently critical eye; she or he is never self-serving and always able to discern what is best for the project. This version of the perfect dramaturg is also always able to work with expert balance and good judgment and is never subject to the pressures and stresses of the working environment. What we forget in this paradigm however is the darker side of sainthood that is revealed in his or her role as unruly heretic, perpetual martyr and determined visionary often with a very sure sense of a direct line of communication to their chosen deity. Dramaturgs, like saints, can be ruthless and unrelenting but these qualities coupled with patience and flexibility may well be their strength.

#### THE COMPANY DRAMATURG

Within a company structure however a dramaturg may have an ongoing role that evolves over time as the company changes and consolidates and the dramaturg is able to develop continuing relationships with a group of artists. Under these conditions it is possible for the dramaturg to work not only on specific projects within the company but also more broadly as a cultural advocate and can assist in creating a challenging vision for the company. One of the company dramaturg's most vital roles is to become the memory for the whole company, to remember past efforts and uncompleted desires which those artists caught up in the day to day running of the company and the creation of the immediate product may have let slip from their collective memory.

If the project-based dramaturg can learn from the saints then perhaps I could suggest that the company dramaturg study the conservationists—people who work in and with the current landscape furiously trying to hang on to what we have. These conservationists have a feeling of responsibility towards looking after

the existing species, whilst also desperately nurturing diversity and ensuring that new landscapes and evolving environments can flourish alongside established ones.

Whether they work in a company or on projects, a dramaturg must consistently provide a dynamic contribution by bringing a broad artistic and cultural view to their work. And despite their many possible functions, what can be said with confidence about a dramaturg is that they are almost always concerned with *structures*, either of the material contained in the artwork itself, or in the setting up of processes that allow the work to develop and grow.

The creative act is about making decisions—ones that include and exclude material and ideas. Antonin Artaud defined cruelty as 'unrelenting decisiveness' and he talks about the fierce mental determination required to create art/theatre. The dramaturg must often work to ensure that decisions are made during the creative process but at the same time must be prepared to suggest that these decisions can be reversed or overturned. Here the memory of the dramaturg again becomes all important in recalling and offering other options which may help the work forward. Anne Bogart, the contemporary American director, offers her view of this process when she talks about the Japanese words *irimi* and *ura* which she came across when studying the martial art, Aikido.

*Simply translated irimi means 'to enter' but it can also be translated 'choose death'. When attacked, you always have two options: to enter, irimi, or to go around, ura. Both, when accomplished in the right manner, are creative. To enter or 'to choose death' means to enter fully with the acceptance, if necessary, of death. The only way to win is to risk everything and be fully willing to die...this does make sense in creative practice. It is also valuable to know when to use ura, or going around. Patience and flexibility is an art. There is a time for ura, going around and there is a time for irimi, entering. And these times can never be known in advance. You must sense the situation and act immediately* (Anne Bogart, 2001: *A Director Prepares*, Routledge, p.50).

#### CURATORIAL DRAMATURGY— THE EARLIER THE BETTER

The range of dramaturgical practices in this country is already very diverse, and that is its strength. This diversity of practitioners means they can respond to a range of situations and encompass many artistic processes. Dramaturgy in Australia is at an important time in its growth and is beginning to be viewed as more and more essential to the health of the theatre community, especially for those companies who seed new work.

For me dramaturgy is at its most challenging and productive when it is viewed as a part of the curatorial process, and I believe that the most exciting aspect of dramaturgical practice is best likened to that of a curator. In the world of visual art or craft the role of the curator is well understood and I think that dramaturgs can learn a lot from these models. At present, in their day-to-day work earning a living, the dramaturg usually responds to work and situations which already exist and which need some form of intervention. But in order to vivify and enhance their work I believe that dramaturgs could profitably play a much broader role in the initiation and creation of work for the theatre.

In fact it is my belief that dramaturgy in Australia will not flourish until the dramaturg is *consistently* a part of the initiation of a project or commission. If the dramaturg continues to be brought in as a kind of script or project doctor then their role will remain one of merely servicing existing ideas. It is only when dramaturgy is integrated into the *early* stages of the development of new work that the contribution of the dramaturg can be fully realised. ■



Light as dramaturgy, Lizzie Patterson and photons; *Dramaturgies* #3 Denise Damianos

[the dramaturg as conservationist looks after] existing species whilst also desperately nurturing diversity and ensuring that new landscapes and evolving environments can flourish alongside established ones.

## DETAILED REPORTS ON EACH STAGE

### DRAMATURGIES #1 (NOVEMBER 1, 2002)

*Dramaturgies #1* was a Public Forum (November 1, 2002), entitled *The Artist as Agent Provocateur and Cultural Interventionist*, held in partnership with the 2002 Melbourne International Arts Festival. This forum featured local and international artists participating in the festival, who responded to a set of prepared questions and propositions about the politics (in its wider and fluid sense) of their practice, about whether they saw their work as a ‘cultural intervention’ and whether politics and cultural intervention were desirable in contemporary theatre. The wide-ranging presentations were followed by questions and discussion from the large audience in attendance.

The panelists in this forum were Federico Leon (writer & director, *Mil Quinientos Metros Sobre El Nivel De Jack*), David Pledger (writer & director, *K*), Scott Rankin (director, *kNot @ HOME*), Renato Cuocolo and Roberta Bossetti (makers, *Interior Sites Project*) and, on video, Romeo Castellucci (writer & director, *Genesi*). We had interviewed Castellucci in the week prior to the forum.

Castellucci’s response to the notion of cultural intervention and politics in his work was short and to the point: the theatre was ‘just a condition I live in’ and the world provoked him to make art:

*I happen to be in the theatre just like a dog happens to pass through a piazza. And for this reason I don’t feel like an agent of provocation and I don’t have the will towards intervention. I just happen to be there. More than someone who provokes I feel like someone who is provoked, someone who is acted upon...The world acts upon me, all the time. The mere fact that the world exists. Because the world is not sufficient, it’s not enough, here is the reason why art was born—starting with the fact that the world is not enough.*

When asked in what way he felt his theatre was political and ‘dangerous’, Castellucci answered that the ‘primary political sense’ of theatre was ‘the idea of the politics in the individual. It creates this need in the individuals. Here is how theatre can once more be a dangerous art. And from this point of view theatre *must* be a dangerous art’. Theatre created a community that was ‘accidental’, but nevertheless the creation of community was also a political act. When he talks about danger in theatre, he said, ‘I talk about tearing apart the law that governs that language as we know it. Language we belong to, but language that keeps us prisoners. I believe we can push further’.

Cuocolo and Bossetti also stressed how dangerous theatre should be—not in any abstract sense but by staging intimate, quasi-biographical theatre in their own home. ‘Theatre has to make politics, and has to be a direct intervention’, said Cuocolo:

*When I say that theatre doesn’t have to speak about politics but rather make politics, it means that all the choices that we make started from the ways in which we build the company, the ways we relate to our audience, the ways in which we relate to the narrative, with the history of that theatrical language.*

The ‘dangerous’ relationship with their audience, Cuocolo said, consisted of a very personal and challenging approach to the ultra thin dividing line between art and life in their work. The *Interior Sites* project in the 2002 festival involved an audience of 7 staying overnight in their house. Their work, he said, was more like performance art than theatre. He also emphasised that the impetus of their theatre was always ‘something that is inside of us’, and an important layer in their work was ‘the reconfiguration of the domestic’.

Pledger and Rankin spoke of theatre’s ‘ripple effects’ and ‘concentric circles of consequence’ as a cultural agency that extends from a singular activity, enlivens, and creates opportunities for social-cultural interactions. Rankin’s *kNot @ HOME* was described as a framework for political acts—art as way of accessing power. Rankin said that his

work with his collaborators was focused on three aspects of theatre as cultural intervention:

*...the cultural intervention in the discussion of ideas, the making of story that the future will become for the individuals who are experiencing the issues that BighArt deals with...and that that process of making will give the opportunity for changing a social trajectory...Secondly, that if those individuals change their—for instance, criminal behaviour, if that’s what they’re doing—then the community must be affected and must change around them...And then thirdly, the way in which the heady world of social policy etc makes the future for us, we must take the work that is made into those forums, so it is cultural intervention in a highly targeted and unapologetic way that is not denying the importance of the exquisite form and beauty of something we make in the end, but being really, really savvy...in the way that the work impacts in the broader community...*

Rankin criticised the idea that ‘genius individuals’ make the work that we then passively receive. The future, he said, ‘should be discussed by all of us...artists deliver the moment of story-making to people who are busy with other things, so that they participate in it’.

Pledger spoke of the politics of process as praxis that underlies his creative approach. The elements of making theatre—his collaborators, his understanding of the world, and his use of literature, media and popular culture—come to shape the production as a whole. The company’s work is built around ‘the idea of the body as the agent of design in the space’, and is characterised by physical and visual images developed over a long period of working together. In recent years, said Pledger, media had been located centrally in their work:

*We’ve deliberately used technology as a medium of communication...having technology in the work actually means that we critique the use of it in society, so that its presence in the performance space becomes part of the critique of the performance, of the subject matter of the performance.*

NYID’s current work, *K*, was a response to the contemporary world, specifically to events like September 11, the repression of civil liberties, new anti-terrorist legislation and so on, with Franz Kafka’s novels as a direct influence on the sensibility of the work. Castellucci’s suggestion that the world provoked him into making art comes to mind here. One of the most important aspects of making an intervention back out into the world, said Pledger, outside oneself and one’s group, is ‘how the piece is prepared and put together, so the community of artists that you’re working with becomes absolutely critical’. Like all their work, *K* was:

*...about saying well, actually this is how we feel about this problem and this is how we’ve tried to solve the problem for ourselves. However the problem is a problem we’re going to go out with when we leave the theatre, and these are the problems that we want to have dancing around in your brain for not just one night, and not just after coffee at the end of the show, but for the next day, and the days after, and the weeks after that.*

It was up to the audience, then, to decide if a ‘cultural intervention’ had been made. Federico Leon emphasised the importance of form over story when talking of political intervention, and for him this meant the ‘personal relationship’ between performance and audience. Intervention was ‘a personal opinion’, and this was effected by means of the quality of interaction with especially small audiences in intimate spaces, by crossing the borders between them. Peter Eckersall noted in response to this idea that, in a world of borders and constraints, interventions through the community of theatre might cross the boundaries imposed on the world: an idea of interaction as intervention. ■

... the large number of...artists turning to dramaturgs and choreoturgs is transforming [a] threatening vision into a flexible model for getting a perspective on your work, good craft advice and serious help in sustaining your vision.

### DRAMATURGIES #2: WORKING THE WEAVE (FEBRUARY 21-22, 2003)

*Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter*

*The following is a slightly edited version of Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter’s report on Dramaturgies #2. The full text is available online where you can also find their more lighthearted report delivered at the end of the forum.*

Dramaturgy is a hot topic. It’s been on and off the boil since the late 70s with a lot of resistance to and misunderstanding of the role of dramaturgs, their function, their training, their artistic status and their power. A rather intimidating monodimensional view of the dramaturg as ally of the director and the theatrical status quo has prevailed for over 20 years. However, the large number of small to medium sized companies and individual artists turning to dramaturgs and “choreoturgs” is transforming this threatening vision into a flexible model for getting a perspective on your work, good craft advice and serious help in sustaining your vision. This quiet development has been aided by the rise of hybrid arts practices and the emergence of different kinds of dramaturgy not solely centred on the written text. Attitudes (but not necessarily funding resources) have also changed about how long it takes to develop a script or a collectively devised performance. Back in the 1980s Playworks began supporting women writers with a more measured dramaturgy than the Australian National Playwrights Conference’s hot-house approach where it also wasn’t always clear whether the people cast in dramaturgical roles were in fact dramaturgs. It’s interesting to see, under the leadership of chair Champion Decent and the 2004-5 conference director Chris Mead, a well-worn model given new life. Other models have emerged, particularly in the Australian film industry where sustained attention is paid to the importance of script development in the Spark ([www.realtimearts.net/rt56/phelan.html](http://www.realtimearts.net/rt56/phelan.html)) and Aurora ([www.realtimearts.net/rt55/ayshford.html](http://www.realtimearts.net/rt55/ayshford.html)) programs. These don’t have to be imitated but they suggest ways of nurturing creativity unclouded by other purposes.

The first *Dramaturgies* forum took a global view of dramaturgy, focusing on the importance of seeing the developing work in a socio-political context and the dramaturgical role as an inclusive one involving all the artists in a project. In February 2003 a second conference, *Dramaturgies #2*, was held for 2 days at Melbourne University. This time the focus was on the dramaturgical process (when and where does it happen, with writers, devised by groups), the kinds of dramaturgy practiced (eg by lighting designers and sound artists working on productions) and some analogous practices (eg art gallery curatorship). What follows, given the scale of the event, is a brief, even cursory summing up of some of the key utterances and issues.

...the dramaturg keeps the memory of the writing, the workshop and rehearsal process alive, as well as bringing to bear the cultural history of theatre and its processes, thus 'countering historical amnesia'.



The weave as action, Angela Campbell; *Dramaturgies* #3 Denise Damianos

#### WHAT DRAMATURG?

Peter Eckersall bravely attempted to delineate the big picture of dramaturgy, ranging through various models, across continents and performance traditions (see Peter's essay in this feature article, which is an edited version of that lecture). The picture of the ideal dramaturg that emerged was of a sounding board, a collaborator and mediator who democratises the creative process making sure every actor understands every word and can answer questions (deep, difficult and as provocative as possible) about the work and not just the work as a script. The German model, inevitably debated over the next two days because of the dramaturg's power in German theatre (adapting, translating, helping choose plays), positions them as those who 'guard the integrity of the play'. Although mostly seen as a supportive role, Eckersall argued that it should challenge, with the dramaturg as agent provocateur, crossing borders, mediating complex interactions and connecting theatre with culture. He cited Eugenio Barba's metaphor of the weave, 'everything that has action or effect; not only text and actors but also sounds, lights, changes in the space'. The weave is not an object or a skill, he said, it's an attitude, a process, a sensibility. For Barba artistic discipline, and therefore

dramaturgy, is an 'attitude that...presupposes...a continual exercise in revolt, above all against oneself, against one's own ideas'. It's a way of refusal, said Eckersall, against accepting conventional notions. Dramaturgy is therefore a disorientation because it evokes something different. It is a process of 'being undecided', of discovering the creative tensions in the evolution of a work.

However, ranging through the opinions of Brecht, Esslin, Pavis and others, Eckersall made clear the complex position of the dramaturg, involved in the creative process but also as critical observer, responsible for putting the play in a wider context; 'our work touches so many areas of the production process, we do so in an atmosphere of not really knowing our function, thus leading to a kind of ambivalence that surrounds dramaturgical practice'. Viennese writer and satirist Karl Krauss declared the dramaturg, 'a potential artist who is unable to provide convincing proof of his or her art. He or she is an artist without either the means of expression or the tools...The dramaturg does not risk his or her skin every night'. Others have written of dramaturgs and their 'poverty', as 'artists without tools'. Although Eckersall challenged these notions, they recurred over the two days of the conference with some surprising animosity towards dramaturgs coming from a few experienced hands. In the meantime, Eckersall celebrated the significance of 'the new poetics of dramaturgy' concerned with fractures, disorientation and flows and in which making theatre is a collective dramaturgy.

Some of us were beginning to wonder if this dramaturgy can be practiced without a dramaturg—so we quietly worried at that. The discussion that followed included a valuable reminder that the dramaturg keeps the memory of the writing, the workshop and rehearsal process alive, as well as bringing to bear the cultural history of theatre and its processes, thus 'countering historical amnesia'. Eckersall noted, in an exchange about different attitudes to dramaturgy, that it is part of an intellectual tradition in Europe, a reflective one. 'In Australia', he quipped, 'it's a matter of getting the play on and not reflecting too much'. He later added a handy label for the brisk cut and paste school of script editing sometimes practiced by our major companies—'industrial dramaturgy'. Whatever one's slant, the session's emphasis on sustaining vision, the significance of various kinds of memory and the importance of cultural intervention held promise for the dramaturgical process, though perhaps not so clearly for the dramaturg.

#### WHO'S TALKING? WHO'S LISTENING?

In the session on dramaturgy and devised performance, where collectivity often rules, Maud Davey (Vitalstatistix) declared that because dramaturgs 'are not responsible they can be quite radical in their suggestions'. A number of us quietly tucked away 'responsibility' for something else to worry at. She described having John Romeril as dramaturg on *Crying in Public Places* (2000) as like having an extra brain. Clearly wary of dramaturgs (seeing them as potentially 'improving' a work to the point of damaging it), Davey fantasised in a later session an ideal situation in which she'd have a clone of herself as dramaturg to her director self, 'to do what I'm not good at'. Bruce Gladwin (Back to Back Theatre) described himself as a director-dramaturg working with a full time ensemble over a long timeframe and using a dramaturg only as a script consultant for a couple of weeks. For Gladwin the key to dramaturgy is collective continuity of collaboration. Paul Monaghan took up Barba's weave and the way the weave of action involves everything, like a multi-track sound recording. But as strong and rich as the weave is, the structure might be weak and that has to be addressed dramaturgically. Elements of the weave, for example, can be deployed in various structural ways—sound as a trigger or for slowing time.

Rachael Swain (Stalker, Marrugeku Company)

brought into play a stage prior to the usual notion of creative starting point: 'For Stalker and Marrugeku, dramaturgy is about the process of negotiation with Indigenous people who do not readily give out their knowledge'. Therefore casting is 'a major dramaturgical function' because of the cultural complexities of dealing 'with multilayered intercultural meanings combining notions of dreaming with contemporary consciousness'. Raising the issue of 'different culture, different dramaturgy', Swain detailed the kinds of cultural negotiations and key personalities involved in creating a new work, of using reconciliation 'as a process of learning to move', of timing ('the importance of going slow: someone might get sick'), and using the South African Truth in Reconciliation Commission as a model of dramaturgical responsibility. The final work, a hybrid performance fusing storytelling, dance and personal histories, becomes a kind of translation for a white audience, encouraging a shift in perceptions.

It had been frequently proposed throughout the conference that in creating a work everyone involved plays a dramaturgical role. However, in the session on 'Dramaturgy, Space, Visuality, Sound and Technology' Paul Jackson opened up the very issue of how such a dialogue begins, a matter raised from the intercultural perspective by Rachael Swain. Jackson said the important thing, in his case, is to ask, 'How can you have a conversation with a lighting designer?' [In another conference, performer and director Chris Ryan described dramaturgy as finding a way in which you can talk to an artist.] Rather than seeing lighting as a history of technology, Jackson argued for it as a history of design, of 'creating narrative with light and shadow', of 'space reacting to bodies', of 'how we want space to move'.

Designer Kathryn Sproul whose projects include working with director Nigel Jamieson on the outdoor orchestral and performance spectacle *Flamma Flamma* for the 1998 Adelaide Festival, described the designer as visual dramaturg, 'a scenographer who writes the stage space creating a text, articulating one beyond language'. Also keeping to the fore the challenge of communication, she claimed that designers are often not called on to sufficiently verbalise, that there isn't an established language for them to deal with directors and little time to reflect. Sproul emphasised the role of the designer in testing the validity of the directors' intuitive ideas, of playing provisional audience. Sound artist and designer Lawrence Harvey spoke about the power of sound, describing himself as a creative mediator in other people's work but also in his own, which he graphically described and where he has to 'step back from himself'. When working for NYID (Not Yet It's Difficult), his aim is to create an acoustic set entailing the spatial and temporal dimensions of sound. What Harvey wants to hear from collaborators is 'not the sound you want but the feeling you want to achieve...If you want to fetishise the text you don't need a designer'.

In the discussion that followed it was agreed that in fact the various designers play a dramaturgical role then, as these artists were insisting, we need to know how to listen to and talk to them; we all have to expand our vocabularies (to speak of design, sound, light); and the artists need to be employed much earlier in the creative process than they currently are. Perhaps, mused Paul Jackson, a work could be initiated from a lighting idea. Lawrence Harvey reinforced the notion of the weave: 'Inherent...are a whole lot of ways that images will move, ways that the environment will respond to a whole lot of input from the actions. As a sound designer, I have not only to respond to the visual information in front of me but also the data information that comes back to the environment that I've been working on to deliver the sound design'.

#### STRUCTURE & SELF-DRAMATURGY

On the second day of the conference, in a session titled 'Dramaturgy, Text and Structure', Yoni Prior

spoke about the experience of being part of Gilgul Theatre where the multidisciplinary ensemble took on the dramaturgy and there was no initial script. Barrie Kosky, she said, was interested in ideas, not character. Everyone was involved in the process and wrote and edited the text, everyone negotiated structure and all took responsibility. Prior said there was a gradual move into areas of specific responsibility. Tom Wright looked after research, Prior teaching and, later, character issues. Michael Kantor shared in developing the choreography. Kosky at the piano controlled the pace. Self-dramaturgy, she said, involved stepping in and out of a work with Kosky as the predominant outside eye and aided by very long development period. Prior described the work as highly physical, highly cerebral, demanding and fractured. 'You had to think, had to be inside and outside the work and you had to deal with different performance modes'.

Describing herself as semi-dance literate, Prior has subsequently been working as a dance dramaturg with choreographer Sandra Parker who wants to develop a more theatrical edge to her work. Prior said she was helping Parker break out of 'choreostructures', integrating different processes, coming up with new combinations of material and dealing with multi-tasking for modern performers who are often in extreme states. She sees herself as adapting choreographic techniques for use with text, looking for musicality, for patterns, listening for the sounds that come out of the body in extremis. She surmised that the rise of dramaturgy was one way of compensating for the increasingly short times available for creating work: 'I think the fact that we had really long processes for Gilgul Theatre allowed spaces for reflection for all of us, so that we could actually step outside and into a third eye position, and have time to reflect on what it was that we did'.

Writer Maryanne Lynch described a variety of experiences of working as a dramaturg, with an Indigenous theatre company, with a youth group and as a script editor late in the development of a particular play. In all of these she saw herself as concerned with structure. 'I privilege structure over text, because there's no work if there's no structure—there's only text...Structure's the thing which makes the texts become more than themselves'. Lynch placed structure next to the relationships between the artist-participants, context and how these 3 intersect. She also emphasised the dramaturg's point of entry in the process. Introducing another metaphor, and one relating to the weave, she described the dramaturgy on one work as analogous to scoring, working to 2 time signatures.

Playwright John Romeril spoke of himself as involved in cultural dramaturgy between Australia and Japan, borrowing from the riches of myriad forms found in our region, extending what we can do in the theatre and, among other things, 'heightening our visibility', given the much higher integration between visual and verbal in Japanese culture. Dramaturgy, he said, is research, a constant preoccupation with structure, 'a blow against anti-intellectualism' and our Eurocentricity, legitimising what theatre can talk about. Romeril's turn (relish it in its entirety online) entailed many more observations, descriptions of the evolution of recent and forthcoming plays (some fine examples of a particular kind of self-dramaturgy) and the passing thought that perhaps it was time for him to buy himself some dramaturgy.

*Maybe only after working for 20 years did I really begin to develop a skill of self-criticism; that thing of swinging from objective to subjective. You need that subjective belief in yourself...That level of commitment is not just an idea; it's a whole visceral lifestyle...to be able to step back and go, 'Oh, that's a crock, Johnno', calling yourself into the office, sitting yourself down, and giving yourself a big fucken rap, 'Now get back out there and fucken do it properly this time!' I wouldn't have minded having someone to say that stuff to me...Can you buy [dramaturgs]? I'll start saving.*

### THE CURATOR AS DRAMATURG

The session on curatorship as dramaturgy was richly informative, suggesting by analogy that dramaturgy is about creating a context for experiencing a work. Alison Carroll described how modernism had 'disappeared' the curator, hiding the significance of their role, their years of training, their personalities, presenting an illusion of non-mediation. Carroll suggested that curators need a sense of theatricality, quipping: 'especially when faced with venues like the Australian pavilion in Venice'. Curators should have a public face, she argued, not least in Australia's arts festivals where the performing arts hold sway. Kevin Murray concurred with Carroll, describing the prescriptive view that 'the curator must not contaminate the data'. He argued that the curator's role should be collaborative, playing witness to the work, providing the perspective with which to see it, where to stand, how to move, just as 'a lot of painters use the stage frame in their work'.

### BIG PICTURE

In a final session too substantial to be detailed here (again, read it online), Aubrey Mellor put the current dramaturgical situation in a fascinating 30-year Australian perspective. In an age when the ensemble has disappeared, when financial resources have to be prioritised and forward planning is more and more difficult, Mellor said that dramaturgy was increasingly important, but that it was still being defined and would be different for every company. The history of dramaturgy in this country has certainly been difficult, he said, and has been tied to the battle to get Australian plays onto the stage; it's a tale that includes playwrights banned from the rehearsal room, the word 'dramaturgy' tabooed, the them-and-us schism between directors and dramaturgs and the 'literary manager solution'. Mellor declared, 'For me, [dramaturgy] is now the most important tool for the creation of an original Australian theatre. We've all been doing it in many ways, and the missing ingredient I now find is the dramaturg, and that's the one that we actually need most to be able to give you the sorts of things we imagined we'd all be doing by now, but we're not...'. Julian Meyrick, not taking sides, defined the variables of dramaturgy, while David Pledger took us back to the other side of the dramaturgical coin: 'The theatre company is the dramaturgy. [The dramaturg is] another question all together...What is the dramaturgy? Essentially, the dramaturgy is the operating system of the work for the company, and over a period of time, that operating system accumulates so that you develop a repertoire, and a way of working with a group of people'.

At the close of these two days the value of dramaturgy had certainly been asserted as well as the dramaturgical role of all the artists working on a project. The role of the dramaturg was less resolved. For example, feelings about the dramaturg's 'ownership' of the finished work were sharply divided. Certainly it was admitted that the balancing act the dramaturg negotiates in being, on the one hand, the 'memory' of the creative process and, on the other, an 'outside eye', is a difficult but important one. In general the view at the conference was that it should be flexible, the point of entry taken into account, a mode of communication between artists established and importantly that the choice of dramaturg was crucial for a particular job. And, as with the dramaturgical ideal espoused in *Dramaturgies #1* and again here, the dramaturg should provoke as well as support. Apparent irritants such as whether or not the dramaturg should share the vision, the takings, the praise and the responsibility for failure, would be discussed another time.

*Dramaturgies #2* was an intense and invaluable probing of dramaturgical practice in Australia.

*Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter were guests of Dramaturgies #2.* ■

Debate and creative reflection need to be worked back into artistic processes, and we see these as a critical function of dramaturgy.

## DRAMATURGIES #3 (SEPTEMBER 22-25, 2004)

*Dramaturgies #3*, a workshop lasting just over three days, was a practical exploration of dramaturgy as a research and development process for generating new work. Thirty-three participants, drawn from a diversity of artistic, professional and cultural backgrounds, and from every state and territory of Australia, participated in the project. A working theme 'Of Hope and Dread' framed our work. Through a diverse range of tasks, inputs and experiences, participants were asked to explore thematic, aesthetic, social, and historical aspects of dramaturgy. In *Dramaturgies #3* we sought to intervene more directly in the practice of dramaturgy, to make connections between what had been discussed in our forums and the future development of dramaturgical practice in Australian theatre. This required a great deal of thought and experiment to make the transition from discourse to practical exercises and creative development.

In *Dramaturgies #3* we aimed to highlight four interrelated aspects of the dramaturgical process:

*Thematic:* exploring the theme 'Of Hope and Dread' through a range of intellectual, spatial, visual, sonic, and personal dimensions.

*Aesthetic mediums of theatre production:* foregrounding space, light, motion, text, and sound.

*Social:* through exercises and interventions, the project focused strongly on dramaturgical practice as a process ineluctably inside of and responding to the social world.

*Historical:* through exercises and interventions, highlighting histories and memories of theatre practice as integral aspects of the dramaturgical craft.

We wanted to facilitate research activities in groups as creative exercises. To rethink processes of research and development in this way was a considerable achievement of the project, one requiring all participants to make a creative leap and work experimentally.

### PROGRAM DETAILS & DAILY ACTIVITIES

The program for *Dramaturgies #3* was divided into whole-group activities and activities in three separate groups. The venue was the School of Creative Arts and various rooms on campus, University of Melbourne.

The whole-group activities included an experiential bus and walking tour on the first evening together, group warm-ups each morning, lectures/talks, and daily feedback sessions. The three working groups were each facilitated by one of the *Dramaturgies* team. These intensive workshop groups were given challenges to explore dramaturgical questions through practice, and to produce workshop presenta-

tions in response to general thematic and production oriented dramaturgical interventions. The project concluded with presentations of work and group appraisals of that work. A whole-group discussion and feedback session with reports from each of the three working groups, and an assessment of the project overall, concluded the event. Before the workshop, participants had been informed of the theme, 'Of Hope and Dread', and had been asked to bring with them 'an item' (object, memory, song, text etc) that related to it.

### THE FIRST INTERVENTION: BUS TRIP

Our first dramaturgical intervention was an experiential journey at night. On the evening that everyone arrived at the workshop venue, the whole group embarked on a bus trip to visit key sites around inner Melbourne. Only the *Dramaturgies* team and admin assistant knew what the trip entailed. The ambient exploration of place and space took in visual landmarks such as the futuristic privatised super-road, City Link, dystopic oil refineries, architectural monuments contrasting with everyday inner-suburban space, and, finally—after being cooped up in the narrow confines of the bus for about an hour—a hike by torch light (and a slight drizzle) in the bush park alongside the Yarra River. Musical selections were played at various times in this consciously experiential revisiting of avant-garde site-specific theatre practice. Our intention was to create a sense of arrival, to bring people together in the project, offer a collective experience, and to remind participants of the wider, socio-political and historical contexts of dramaturgy and theatre making. To this end, we aimed to convey the sense that dramaturgical practice is characterised by a strong sense of theatrical momentum and a deeper awareness of the history of experiences in creative practice.

### GROUP WARM UPS

The memory bank of performance-making was explored through high-energy warm-ups that drew on a history of contemporary performance making in Australia. The effect of the two warm-ups combined was to revisit some of the substrata of Melbourne's performance scene, to explore through these exercises some of the determining foundations of contemporary performance practice.

### SPEAKERS

On the first day of the workshop, Peter Eckersall addressed the theme 'Of Hope and Dread'. Both hope and dread reference the present and the future. As Erich Fromm said, 'Hope is a vision of the present in a state of pregnancy'. Peter brought to the gathering some of the key ideas from a recent work by Sydney based writer Ghassan Hage, "Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society" (2003). 'Colonisation' is a process of making space suitable for the coloniser, of controlling spaces and bodies. But the coloniser remains fearful of their acts, and this results in what Hage calls 'paranoid nationalism and the culture of worry'. As Hage writes: 'At the border, the protection of hope sometimes unleashes aggression, hatred and mistrust' (31)—something we have of course witnessed both in the past and more recently in Australia. Australian nationalism is 'paranoid' in that, contrary to the manifest reality of the Australian social condition, the population embraces the idea of the good nation of the 1950s and 1960s, a nation offering security, social welfare, and compassion. But in the globalised world, the good nation is transformed into the torturing nation. Finally Hage compares two ideas that might be at first associated with hope: he considers the state of being 'Rested' in contrast with Howard's formula of being 'Comfortable and Relaxed'. These ideas were to inform the work of the three groups over the course of the workshop.

Rod Quantock spoke to the theme at the end of the first day. Rod's presentation was bleak. He talked about the collapse of the left and his feelings of despair about art's lack of impact on cultural and political life in Australia—a challenging assessment from an artist who has so consistently and profoundly offered alternatives to the mainstream neo-conservative view. Reverend Dorothy Lee, a theologian and critic of religious fundamentalism spoke to the theme at the end of the second day. Dorothy's talk was wide-ranging and touched on several political aspects.

### SESSIONS OF THE THREE GROUPS

Each group was taken to a location on the University of Melbourne campus and asked to make their work in response to both the themes and their space. One group, led by Paul Monaghan, was taken to a small lecture theatre in the Anatomy Department. The Padjuet Theatre is like a

miniature Greek theatre for 25 observers, who sit in two tight semi-circles above, and looking down on, a dissection table. The space was equipped with a slide projector, CD player, and torchlight. A second group, led by Melanie Beddie, was taken to a 19th century memorial hall at the University. Fully restored, the hall has fine furnishings and many straight-back wooden chairs. Stained glass windows honouring those members of faculty who died in World War 1 are a dominating presence in the space. This room was equipped with a CD player and overhead projector. A third group, led by Peter Eckersall was taken to a 1960s style 'empty space' drama studio with a basic light and sound rig. Over two sessions, each group devised a short presentation that responded to the dramaturgical interventions of theme, space, objects (and their associated personal 'stories'), and design/technical elements and/or limitations. Mid-afternoon saw a round robin as groups traveled to each space and observed short presentations by each group.

These exercises were designed as practical experiments in dramaturgical research and development. As John Romeril notes in one of the annotator reports:

*Dramaturgies #3 had a strongly defined experiential emphasis. It insisted we adopt a 'learn by doing and observing approach. The convenors set problems. The participants sought to solve them 'on the floor, on their feet' in practical performable ways.*

We were looking for new possibilities in approaches to dramaturgy as well as positing a consciously experimental mode of working among the participants. These outcomes were evident in the quickly drawn works developed by each of the groups. People commented on the immense value of working in hybrid ways—crossing between tasks, sharing experiences, sources of material and modes of presentation. Tom Considine writes in an annotator's report:

*The struggle with modes of narrative will always be a recurring theme of these gatherings but the central roles of hybridity and intervention gave this conference a sense of expansion and renewal.*

Kevin Murray made a similar point:

*It was one of the most creatively enriching experiences of my life. Working closely with writers and theatre-makers made it possible to envisage new modes of production. It promises many interesting possibilities of cross-media collaboration.*

The importance of having space for conversations between artists, and the rarity of space for discussion in many production processes was also highlighted in this project. As Peter Hammond noted in his feedback: 'It is very seldom, if ever, that directors and other artists actually get the time to sit down together to discuss methods, meanings, non-meanings and chew the cud'. Interdisciplinary conversations about theatre processes and cultural ideas are a significant aspect of dramaturgical practice. Yet, the capacity for critical reflection and exchange of information in workshop environments seems to have been reduced, along with the space for experimentation. Perhaps the two dimensions of creativity go together. A frequent comment among participants was that the structures, times, and places that artists have for such creative dialogue have reduced. While information flows have increased exponentially, these are often structured and restrained by their modes of dissemination and are influenced by their instrumental function. Such information might be excessively bureaucratic or theoretical. More spaces need to be developed for theatre makers to nurture their own conversations in their own ways.

Debate and creative reflection need to be worked back into artistic processes, and we see these as a critical function of dramaturgy. One of the achievements of the *Dramaturgies #3* was the degree to which participants were reminded of the creative importance of this aspect of dramaturgy, and commented on its value. ■



Group warmup, gymnasium; *Dramaturgies #3*

Denise Damianos