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Summer 2009

# Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 19, issue 2

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**Authors**

Art Borecca, Brian Quirt, D.J. Hopkins, Lauren Beck, Amy Jensen, Karen Jean Martinson, and Lisa Arnold

# Review

The Journal of Dramaturgy

Published by the  
Literary Managers and  
Dramaturgs of the Americas

Volume 19, Issue 2  
Summer 2009

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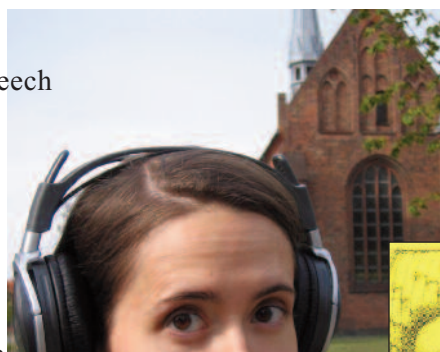
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## FOR THE RECORD...

The most recent incarnation of the LMDA Bibliography has been maintained by the redoubtable Geoff Proehl of the University of Puget Sound, with the able assistance of a number of his students. Geoff will continue to support the project, but the reins will be temporarily passed.

Art Horowitz of Pomona College's Department of Theatre and Dance will be editing the LMDA Bibliography between now and the 2010 LMDA conference. He would greatly appreciate that any and all recommendations for material to be included in the Bibliography be sent on to him at his email: <arthur.horowitz@pomona.edu>.

The LMDA Bibliography is a project of the University Caucus of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. This guide is available online at the LMDA web site, from within the University Caucus section.



**LITERARY MANAGERS  
& DRAMATURGS  
OF THE AMERICAS**

# An Introduction...

I am pleased to introduce you to the inaugural peer-review board of *Review*! The board includes representatives from the US and Canada and from a range of career positions — from grad students to established figures in the field.

## INAUGURAL PEER-REVIEW BOARD of *REVIEW*

Maria Beach, Oklahoma State U  
Louise Edwards, Northwestern U  
DD Kugler, Simon Fraser U  
John Lutterbie, Stony Brook U  
Shelley Orr, San Diego State U  
Geoff Proehl, U of Puget Sound  
Judith Rudakoff, York University  
Michele Volansky, Washington College

I have cc-ed President and Board chair on the charges and plans I have shared with the board; I would be happy to forward that same info to any interested board members.

Also note: *Review* is uncharacteristically flush with submissions following the DC conference: we have a full table of contents for the upcoming Fall 09 issue, and I am pleased to report that the Spring issue will be a special issue with the working title “Perspectives on African-American Dramaturgy.” LMDA board member Sydne Mahone has agreed to serve as guest editor of *Review*, and the members of her exciting panel at the DC conference have enthusiastically agreed to revisit their papers in full-length articles. Sydne will contribute an introduction (or possibly an afterword) as well.

‘d also like to thank Amy Jensen, Sydney Cheek O’Donnell, and Lauren Beck for their active participation in this volume of *Review*. I hope that their contributions will be ongoing.

So, things are busy at the offices of *Review*! Let’s keep it that way — don’t hesitate to send your ideas to me at the email below.

D.J.

<b><i>Review</i></b>	<b>Visit <i>Review</i> online: <a href="http://www.lmda.org">www.lmda.org</a></b>
Editor D.J. Hopkins, San Diego State University	<i>Review is published twice yearly by Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. Articles should conform to MLA format, but we are less picky essays, interviews, and other short-form submissions. Spelling differences between Canadian and US English will be preserved. As per the official name of our organization, “dramaturg” will be the default spelling of this contentious word, but we will preserve the spelling of any submitter who prefers “dramaturge.” The same will hold for “theatre” and “theater,” “colour” and “color;” “chesterfield” and “couch,” or “rubbish skip” and “garbage dumpster.”</i>
Associate Editor Sydney Cheek O’Donnell, University of Utah	
Editorial Associate Lauren Beck, San Diego State University	
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# RECOGNITION FOR *CITY OF WINE*

## Brian Quirt, recipient of the 2009 Elliott Hayes Award

INTRODUCED BY LMDA PRESIDENT SHELLEY ORR

It is my great pleasure to announce this year's Elliott Hayes award winner. The award is named to honor the memory of Elliott Hayes, who was the dramaturg and literary manager at The Stratford Festival and a dual citizen of Canada and the USA. The award recognizes excellence in dramaturgical work on a specific project; and projects may include, but are not limited to: productions, publications, season planning and implementation, educational programs or advocacy for the profession. Very often the award winner's project encompasses more than one of these categories, as indeed does this year's recipient.

The philosophical foundation of this award rests on the belief that creative inspiration accompanied by analysis and reflection is most likely to lead to productions and projects that fulfill the spiritual, social, and personal potential of the theatrical event and of the collaborators. The project on which this year's awardee worked certainly relied heavily on the creative inspiration, analysis, and reflection. And the awardee's contributions to the project went further; this dramaturg was an advocate, bringing together artists and institutions from across the country to participate during several phases of the project.

The statistics alone on this project are impressive. The following numbers are key: 1, 7, 8, 15, 100, 1000. Allow me to explain...

The project depends on:

- Over 1000 pages of script
- More than 100 actors
- A development process spanning 15 years
- Workshops and productions at 8 institutions (so far)
- Seven plays. Let me repeat: Seven plays.

But through it all, one dramaturg and one playwright worked on this incredible project.

You might think that the dramaturg is receiving this award because of these impressive, perhaps unprecedented, statistics of the project, but I beg to differ.

The awardee was chosen because the dramaturg's involvement in the project required not only highly skilled artistry, not just longstanding commitment, but *consummate advocacy* for the project. The dramaturg put together residencies and workshops on the plays, pulled together distant institutions to put on productions of each play, and put on a massive festival weekend during which all seven were performed. There were at least two points during this long collaboration at which the project might not have continued, but the dramaturg was undaunted. Innovative thinking about how to bring this huge project to fruition was a major part of the dramaturg's role here. I am pleased to announce this year's winner of the Elliott Hayes award: Brian Quirt, for his work on the truly inspiring *City of Wine*.

*Shelley Orr*



Brian Quirt with the Elliott Hayes award, Washington, DC.  
Photo: Cindy SoRelle.

# Brian Quirt's Elliott Hayes Acceptance Speech

Washington, D.C.

Watergate Restaurant

July 18, 2009

Thank you.

Those of you with long memories will note that I'm wearing black pants tonight. When I was fortunate enough to receive this award six years ago, just prior to the announcement in Chicago, DD Kugler helped me spill red wine on my spotless chinos. On the crotch. Of course, he didn't know I was about to make an acceptance speech. But I did. I frantically ran to the washroom, to no avail. Thankfully, with my shirt pulled out, you couldn't see the stain, crisis averted, and all went well. Thanks, DD, for a great story. But tonight I wasn't going to risk it.

If you were a Canadian high school student on a visit to D.C. with your history class, say twenty-five years ago, you'd stay just across the street from here at the Howard Johnson's. You'd buy underage booze at the Watergate liquor store, and drink rum and coke with stage hands from the Kennedy Centre at the Watergate bar, and you'd later, more than a little tipsy, go from room to room via the hotel balconies — which I don't recommend — and finally leave one of the students behind when heading home on the bus. Good Clean Fun. So it is great to be here and receive this award in such resonant surroundings.

Whenever I make a speech at LMDA, I think of former Board Chair Mark Bly and his remarkable commitment to having a perfect quotation for every occasion. That's not really my style, but here I always feel I, too, should have the ideal quote. If Mark were here in Washington, it would likely be James Adams or a Supreme Court justice. But I want to share this statement, in keeping with our international theme, from Wajdi Mouawad, a Lebanese writer/director/actor who grew up in Quebec, lives and works in France and is the current artistic director of French Theatre at Canada's National Arts Centre in Ottawa, another capital city. You should know him and his work.

Theatre as I see it is a place where we come together to listen to stories that exacerbate the burns, the wounds, the spitefulness and the cruelty we all carry, yet in a beautiful way. I believe profoundly that in times of crisis, theatre should reflect people's concerns, not dismiss them. Theatre is a meeting place where we can share the most dangerous things, namely, our fears and insecurities. It is a place where together we can challenge our assumptions and experience transformation and renewal. (Mouawad)

That's the theatre I want, as well, the theatre I work toward. And the theatre that I believe *City of Wine* strives to be.

I want us all to think about — to talk about — what we are doing to achieve the goals that Wajdi sets before us; what we have done and what we are doing next. I don't want to talk about not having enough time. I want to talk about how people are doing it anyway. Whatever *it* is.

*City of Wine* has become a life-long collaboration with a great writer. It has shaped my ideas about how to work as a dramaturg. It has supported my instinct that among the most crucial qualities of any dramaturg are faith and patience. And it has shaped what I believe are some of the critical ideas and issues facing us.

As we go forward, I want to talk about timidity — which is rampant in our theatre culture — and bravery. About dance and theatre. About race and culture. About confidence and apologies.

I was in Germany once with a group of Canadian dramaturgs and I noticed that we all — and I include myself in this — we kept apologizing about parts of our theatre culture... not enough resources, not enough this or that. It was very hard to stop, but we must. No more apologies.

So, more confidence and fewer apologies.

I hate talking about what we can't do. I hate talking about things we already know how to do. I don't want to talk about how we could change things; I want to talk about how we are changing things. About who is making waves and how they're doing it. Not why they're doing it, but how they're doing it.

Conferences — and speeches like this — are an opportunity to speak out loud some of the things we don't say ever, or at least often enough — or at least in daylight.

So I'll start with a few...

- I think some of our theatres should die; in fact, I think we should let them go.
- Our theatres are afraid, even terrified, of bold direction.
- We've abandoned our theatres as creative spaces; we've made them too expensive to actually work in.
- We often use economic hardship as an excuse for maintaining the



status quo, an excuse for not doing things differently, and a reason for not changing how we work, how we want to work.

- I dare you all, when you return to your theatres, to program a season entirely of work by women writers.
- “Core competence” is a really irritating phrase; so is “due diligence.” Let’s ban most of the so-called “business” words from our vocabulary, starting with “strategic planning,” “mission,” “mandate,” and “vision statement,” and replace them with words that speak to what we do and how we do it. They must address our own priorities and the premises under which we work.
- We do too much; quantity over quality is a disease we all suffer from.
- We ignore the aboriginal voice at our peril. If we’re committed, as many of us are, to cultural diversity — to working with South Asian artists, Chinese and Japanese artists, black and Latin American artists — to the many groups we try to collaborate with, to cultivate or promote or explore and work with, how can we ignore one of the richest groups of artists and stories on the continent? I’m speaking of myself here as well; we’ve done little with Native artists, perhaps because sub-consciously, Native Earth Performing Arts’s office is down the hall from us in Toronto, and so we just don’t have to. Not good enough. Last year’s collaboration with Native Voices at the San Diego conference was a great start... Let us continue.

I want to kill the culture of “we can’t do that” or “that’s too expensive” or “it will take too long” or (and I really hate this one) “that’s a luxury.” A three-week workshop isn’t a luxury; rehearsing in the theatre space isn’t a luxury. When I do those things, I design the process to match the needs of the show and am willing to pay what is necessary to make it happen the way it should happen.

Let’s say what we mean — what we want; as Wajdi says, challenge and dump our assumptions and move boldly forward with the plans we want to execute.

Asking questions, digging for the *how*, not being obsessed by the *why*, that’s what a dramaturg does: searches for ideas, explores how they are communicated theatrically, and designs the process by which those ideas and that communication are made.

Ideas. Communication. Process.

And faith.

Twelve years ago, Nightswimming commissioned a writer named Ned Dickens to write a “prequel” called *Jocasta* to his version of *Oedipus*, famously produced in Toronto by Die in Debt Theatre under the Gardiner Expressway, in a wonderful outdoor production directed by Sarah Stanley. Over the past decade (I’m now celebrating my fifteenth anniversary on this project with Ned), Nightswimming has commissioned five more plays in what has become Ned’s seven-play cycle, *City of Wine*.

*City of Wine* is absurd and far too big for Nightswimming: seven plays, 100-plus actors. So we partnered with the University of Alberta and Humber College and then with a major classical festival. We found the resources, over time — a long time — to commission Ned, hold workshops, set up early student productions, do public readings, all standard components of the dramaturgical process. We believed in Ned, that he has much to say to the world, and that he needs to write these large-scale, large-cast plays. And that he must do so.

Patience is a huge part of faith.

But the work, not surprisingly, was slow. Until about five years ago. When the major classical festival turned down the then-three-play project. That’s when we realized that in order to make this huge project happen, we had to make it bigger. So we assembled a partnership with theatre training programs across the country, from Memorial University in Newfoundland to Studio 58 and Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

Over the course of three years, those schools participated in the development and workshopping of the seven plays. In the third year, seven of the schools each produced one of the seven plays in their school seasons. Ned, Naomi Campbell (Nightswimming’s producer), and I traveled to the schools to lead more than thirty-five workshops and bring the 150-plus student actors, designers, and other artists into this epic world.

But even that wasn’t big enough. We realized that while it would be great for us to see all the school productions — in fact, the goal of all this was to design a dramaturgical machine, a structure, to finish the plays and test them on stage... for isn’t the point of any and all play development processes to give birth to the show? — but that it would be a shame to not then bring all the productions together so that everyone — students, faculty, and the public — could see the cycle in its entirety. And in fact, the dramaturgy of the cycle needed this.

So we — Naomi and I — designed the *City of Wine* Festival in May 2009, featuring two runs of the complete cycle: seven student productions at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. The festival was an astonishing experience, and for remarkable photos of the event, images from three years of workshops, rehearsal blogs and information on the schools and their productions, visit *City of Wine* on Facebook.

*City of Wine*, in so many ways, exemplifies what I’ve tried to do as a dramaturg over the past decade and a half:

- commit to projects I couldn’t do anywhere else.
- make partnerships with other companies a central part of the work.
- focus everything on developing the play.
- commission projects because of my faith in the writer’s dream.
- work on a national level.
- incorporate students as equals in the work while exposing them to play development practices.
- use each process to promote the work, the company, and, as we must, ourselves.
- look for rich ideas, search for the best ways to communicate those ideas, and design a unique process by which to explore, create, and refine each work.
- and to never say “No, we can’t do that.”

One of the words I struggle with is “community.” We use it all the time, in the theatre “community,” whatever that is. *City of Wine* wasn’t about community, though it does tell the story of a legendary city over seven generations. It’s about citizenship and leadership. But it did make a community. Over the past fifteen years, I calculate that more than one thousand artists, administrators, students, faculty, donors, sponsors, and volunteers have contributed to the creation of these seven plays. With many more to come. I’m now working toward professional productions of each of the plays, individually, sometimes in pairs or trios, at theatres across Canada, and, of course,

toward the professional premiere of the entire seven-play cycle itself.

To have made it this far, I must acknowledge a number of people and organizations. The institutions are those that have provided substantial funding to make the *City of Wine* happen: the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Metcalf Foundation, the National Arts Centre, the Luminato Festival, and Great West Life Insurance, which sponsored not the festival, but the three-year research-and-workshops phase that preceded it. And the people. It is a vast list that must include Sarah Stanley, DD Kugler (who was among the first to commit to the student project), and Marie Barlizo (our festival's intern dramaturg).

But those that spring first and foremost to my mind are three. Ned, playwright and nominator. A remarkable man and a great writer. Naomi Campbell, whose insights and skills as a theatre artist encompass both producing and dramaturgy and so much in between. And Nancy Webster, my partner, my community. Who has been living with *City of Wine* almost as long as we've been married. She's convinced me, always, that it can be done.

Don't think big. Think huge. Our world despises big. It ignores big. It wants to bring big down to size. Our world loves huge, as a recent funeral and the plans of a president whose name begins with O remind us.

Theatre should reflect people's concerns, not dismiss them. Theatre is a meeting place where we can share the most dangerous things, namely, our fears and insecurities. It is a place where together we can challenge our assumptions and experience transformation and renewal. (Mouawad)

That's huge. Reach for it.

Thank you. For this award. For everything.

*Copyright, Brian Quirt, July 20, 2009*

**Brian Quirt is Artistic Director of Nightswimming (Toronto) and Past President of LMDA.**

#### SOURCE

Mouawad, Wajdi. "About The National Arts Centre (NAC) French Theatre." <http://www.nac-cna.ca/en/theatre/francais/about/>

#### For more about the *City of Wine* project:

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5051169557&ref=ts>

Blog

<http://cityofwine.wordpress.com/>

Nightswimming

<http://www.nightswimmingtheatre.com>

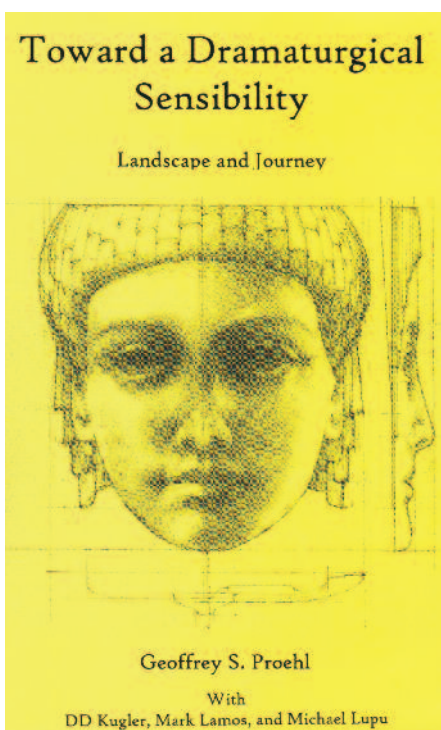


# BEING DRAMATURGICAL

A conversation about Geoff Proehl's new book  
*Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility*

by **D.J. Hopkins and Lauren Beck**

with **Geoff Proehl**



Proehl, Geoff. *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey*. With DD Kugler, Mark Lamos, and Michael Lupu. Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2008. Hardback, \$55.00 US.

**D.J. HOPKINS:** I saw Geoff Proehl over spring break, when we were both in Louisville, Kentucky for the Humana Festival and some LMDA meetings. As we walked down the street to get coffee, Geoff asked how fatherhood was treating me — my son was four months old at the time. I recall giving a response that mentioned stress and love, happiness and worry. Geoff replied — and this I remember much more clearly than what I'd said: “Parenthood really is a great gift of vulnerability.” What struck me in this statement was its accuracy — Geoff articulated the sensation that I felt continually in my constant concern for our newborn — and equally Geoff's own distinctive capacity to see this vulnerability as a “gift.”

I begin with this anecdote because it seems to offer a particularly Proehlian perspective. Early in *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility*, Proehl spells out a few of what he feels are the key features of the dramaturg's perspective on theatre-making. Vulnerability is foremost among them. This strategic vulnerability is certainly in contrast with my approach to production — which I might call *defensive* in comparison with Proehl's “vulnerable” approach (see 68–70).<sup>1</sup>

And the other reason to begin with such an anecdote has to do with the personal: affect is an important motivator for Proehl. Affect, emotion, and personal attachment inform the characters from Chekhov and Shakespeare that serve as dramatic examples in this book; and it seems to me that Proehl is arguing that these same impulses serve a dramaturg as well.

**LAUREN BECK:** Before I had my own copy of the book, you let me glance through yours. Since I only had a few minutes, I went to the index to scan for something that would be of particular interest to me. The word “Dionysian” jumped out (I was writing about the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy in your class at the time). As I read pages 71 through 76, I clearly saw the Apollonian dramaturg that I felt I was expected to be and the Dionysian dramaturg that I was secreting away.

D.J Hopkins (MFA, PhD UC San Diego) is an Associate Professor, Head of Theatre Studies, and Director of the MA Program in Theatre Arts at San Diego State. His book *City / Stage / Globe: Performance and Space in Shakespeare's London* (2008) is available from Routledge. He is co-editor of *Performance and the City* (Spring 2009), an essay collection published by Palgrave. As dramaturg, he is collaborating with choreographers Joe Alter and Liam Clancy.

Lauren Beck is an MA candidate in Theatre Arts at San Diego State and the Editorial Associate for *Review*. She recently served as dramaturg for the SDSU production of Charles Mee's *Hotel Cassiopeia* (visit her blog at <<http://hotelcassiopeia.blogspot.com>>). She is the literary manager for San Diego Asian American Repertory Theatre and is organizing a festival of new plays.

Earlier in the book, Proehl quotes Felicia Hardison in describing the expectations that are often placed on dramaturgs: to track down historical facts, to gather scholarly information, and to otherwise “know” things (60-1). I’ve certainly felt this pressure in my short dramaturgical career. Usually when a question comes up in rehearsal or a production meeting (this could be an obscure historical fact such as “How many days was the artist Joseph Cornell absent from the first grade?” or some specific bit of technical knowledge such as “How is a pipe bomb made?”), I find that all eyes point to me. I feel myself trying to anticipate any possible question that the director, designers, or actors might ask so that whenever they turn to me I have the answer. I always feel a deep shame when I have to say things like, “I don’t know,” or, “I’ll look that up when I get the chance.” I imagine them thinking, “Um... aren’t you the dramaturg? What have you been doing with your time?” However, I also realize that having an encyclopedic knowledge of all subjects in no way makes one a good dramaturg, and by memorizing facts I’m not making the best use of my time.

Proehl doesn’t discount the value of research or of embracing one’s Apollonian side, but he does argue — as you say, D.J. — that a dramaturg should access her or his emotions, to “drop down” in order to access guttural reactions to the play as well as cerebral reactions (76). I find that one of my favorite things about being a dramaturg is the ability to blend my scholarly and artistic sides. I just need to allow myself to “drop down” a little more.

DJH. Yes, that’s a good point to emphasize. One of the features of Proehl’s “sensitivity” that I find intriguing and productive is this exchange between the intellectual and the “dropping down.” “Pleasure” is another of the key concepts that Proehl uses to interrogate dramaturgical work, and he links it to the perspective that you’re talking about. Pleasure, seduction, joy, love, even chaos — these personal, affective, Dionysian terms populate the book. But, flying in the face of a lot of conventional thinking, especially among American artists, Proehl consistently asserts the mutuality of pleasure and the intellectual. Proehl’s list of the elements of a Dionysian sensitivity includes “associative thinking” along with “physicality, dance, music, and soul” (71).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the idea of the Dionysian is introduced in describing a “principal pleasure for dramaturgs”: “being asked to think improvisationally in a room filled with bright and talented people” (70). A critically important concept for Proehl’s sensitivity is that intellectual and sensual experiences are not mutually exclusive, a concept emphasized in what I feel is a key passage in the text: “I am arguing here [...] for the recognition of those points where the work of the artist and the work of the scholar overlap: recognizing the encounter with art as a form of learning; acknowledging the artfulness inherent in research” (79).

The importance of this synthesis of art and scholarship is modeled in one of the few negative examples in the book: Proehl’s discussion of Robert Lepage’s work on Shakespeare. In Lise Ann Johnson’s interview with Lepage in the second volume of *The Production Notebooks*, the Quebecois auteur contrasts the act of consulting dramaturgs with spontaneous, authentic, artistic creativity. Proehl critiques Lepage’s “declaration that “*dreams* [belong] on one side of the room and *dramaturgs* on the other” (82, italics in original). Proehl concludes, that while Lepage may not have worked with a

dramaturg on this project, “Lepage’s dream workshop was a form of dramaturgy,” deflating the false binary that Lepage had created. Asserting the Dionysian role that dramaturgs can play is an important rebuttal to the preconception “that we — Lepage, myself, and others — so often and so easily create” that the dramaturg is exclusively Apollonian (83). Proehl’s point is that dramaturgs may often reinforce the very “Apollonian functions” that we so often must work to “dislodge” (17) if we’re to stay on the side of the rehearsal room that has the dreams in it.

An important corollary to the Lepage example: Proehl places an emphasis in this book on “dramaturgy as pattern” over “dramaturgy as role” (87); or, as the title suggests, an interest in a dramaturgical sensibility over an interest in dramaturgs. The silver bullet that deflates Lepage’s pompous, exclusionary pronouncement is simply to point out that Lepage himself was practicing dramaturgy in the very workshop that he bragged was free of dramaturgs. While this book certainly advocates for dramaturgs and the work that dramaturgs do, Proehl does not regard the “bundle of tendencies” that constitutes a dramaturgical sensibility (17) as something that is exclusive to those who take on the title “dramaturg.”

LB. Yes, and Proehl’s book explores rather than defines what a “dramaturgical sensibility” is. He begins the chapter titled “Pattern” by sharing his realization that the meaning of dramaturgy, rather than centering on research or the label of “dramaturg,” lies in “a close reading of the musical interplay among the parts of a play and the whole it becomes when staged” (87). Proehl then spends the chapter describing the dramaturgical processes as laid out in the writings of Elinor Fuchs, DD Kugler, Lee Devin, Julian Olf, David Ball, Michael Lupu, and Proehl himself — showing the variety of approaches that artists use to make sense of theatrical texts. As a new dramaturg, I found myself devouring this book in search of answers to my own questions about the practice of dramaturgy. The varied approaches described in this chapter are helping me identify my own style of exploring a text as well as suggesting possible directions for expanding my approach. And it seems that I am not alone in this process, even among experienced dramaturgs. As Proehl says, “it may be that as a discipline, we are simply taking our time, circling a perimeter that will take us not toward any single place, but into this galaxy of particles that make up a play, knowing more, even if it means knowing less” (88). Although Proehl does not advocate a limited view of the practice of dramaturgy, he does not believe that dramaturgs should make up their own processes “from scratch” (119). It is through observation, reflection, testing, and reworking that Proehl sees the practice of dramaturgy progressing. It is for this purpose that Proehl shares the second half of his book, a case study surrounding his work on *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Guthrie in 2001–2002.

DJH. The second half of the book is the “practice” component to the “theory” of the first part a structure not unlike that of Andrew James Hartley’s *The Shakespearean Dramaturg* (reviewed by Debra Cardona and Kate Farrington in *Review* 17.2). The second half of the book is a kind of production notebook, recounting Proehl’s experience working as dramaturg on a production of one of Shakespeare’s more difficult plays at one of the United States’ most celebrated regional theatres. I love the “double perspective” that Proehl describes, positioning himself as a “middle-aged rookie”: a professor

of dramaturgy working for the first time as a dramaturg at a major regional theatre (118). Proehl describes a phenomenon that will be familiar to any dramaturg, and most theatre practitioners: relationship building. In the blind-date collaborations of most regional theatre work, the dramaturg often finds her- or himself “situated in the tension between stepping forward with a thought and stepping back in silence,” as Proehl neatly puts it (145). More often than not, Proehl errs on the side of silence. As he explains, this production experience was not an exceptional one. “Indeed,” Proehl clarifies, “its value may lie in part in its ordinariness” (118). Proehl describes himself here as shy, and as he recounts his experience, he often doesn’t recognize the right time to speak up until after that time has passed. Of course, these missed opportunities are not simply recorded, but analyzed: Proehl discusses and metaphorizes his experience, missed connections included, so that the reader can better understand how both insights and missteps occurred.

Throughout, Proehl is modest to a fault. Indeed, if I were to find any fault in *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility*, it is in Proehl’s modesty. He’s so self-effacing that at times he effectively effaces himself as author of this very book. Example: “If there are useful insights in what follows, they come most fundamentally not from me but from the work of Mark Lamos, the actors who worked with him, and the shows several designers, particularly Ming Cho Lee and Jane Greenwood. What follows is a gloss on their work” (120). Having read what follows, it is clearly not simply a gloss on others’ work, but a valuable demonstration of one dramaturg’s creative research and insight. Acknowledging collaboration is one thing — and Proehl admirably acknowledges the contributions of interns, archivists, and the Guthrie’s überdramaturg Michael Lupu — but Proehl studiously, perhaps strategically, avoids the impulse to say “I did this.” I was reminded of the Bob Dylan biopic *I’m Not There*, in which a half-dozen different actors play the character of Dylan, disrupting and dispersing his identity. Admittedly, Proehl’s narrative moves forward with a sense of first-person continuity, but his impulse to dispel any aura of authorship is, I think, indicative of his own dramaturgical sensibility.

LB: I rather liked Proehl’s abundance of modesty and self-effacement... Sometimes, when I am with other theatre practitioners, I feel the need to feign a self-confidence that I do not possess, as if to do otherwise would be to admit inadequacy. But Proehl legitimizes feelings of shyness, timidity, and confusion. After all, dramaturgy is hard! Proehl portrays just how difficult it is to be an excellent dramaturg. Besides intelligence and creativity, the job takes vast quantities of tact, and hours and hours spent relationship-building, skills that many intelligent and creative people must spend time developing.

Another benefit of Proehl’s modesty and openness is his willingness to share his choppy, fairly unedited notes that document his thought process. Another author, perhaps, would have edited these notes into a more polished, finished product, erasing that very train of thought that fomented new ideas that helped form the production. It is both helpful and encouraging to early career and student dramaturgs to see Proehl’s journey — including his fumbblings and successes.

Part II was a fascinating study of *Antony and Cleopatra*, a play about which I know little. While Proehl demonstrates the work that he did

to fulfill the needs of the director, he also shows how important (and fun) it is for dramaturgs to follow their own pursuits in line with their strengths and interests. For example, after the director mentioned in an email that he was interested in the Christian imagery in the text, Proehl, having a vast amount of Biblical knowledge and interest in the subject, made this topic one of his major areas of research (124). This freedom to explore areas of interest that may or may not prove particularly useful can fuel dramaturgical creativity and can lead to fruitful discussions and new directions for a production. Each production of a play such as *Antony and Cleopatra* will have a unique interpretation, a new focus, and a different way of seeing a classic work. It is because of this freedom of interpretation and focus that Proehl notes that dramaturgs need not “cover every possible resource”; the primary goal of their “dramaturgical exploration is to discover and release creative and imaginative energy” (181).

On my first read through *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility*, I found myself searching for the right way to be a dramaturg. I looked for (and for the most part found) various tasks to do and documents to create to prove to others and to feel for myself that I was doing my job. However, on my second reading, I found myself lingering on some of Proehl’s anecdotes, such as his description of himself as a boy reading the basketball manual. On my second reading, I was looking for myself in the book. Rather than trying to find the “how to” of being a dramaturg, I was looking for what kind of dramaturg I am. In this way, I found the book to be inspiring and encouraging. Through the descriptions of various dramaturgical approaches as well as a production experience of one dramaturg, I have begun to discover my own dramaturgical sensibility.

DJH: I think that’s a great perspective. As Geoff makes quite clear, his goal in Part II is not to astonish anyone with an unprecedented project, but to share the insights that he derived from work on a conventional, recognizable production. And the result is not the manual for every dramaturg’s practice, but a primer on the state of being dramaturgical.

## NOTES

1. Although I understand the structural value of the opposition “vulnerable” / “defensive,” I want to go on the record that I don’t think your research is defensive. If you need an oppositional term, I’d say “aggressive” or “assured” or “assertive” or “proactive” or “bold” or “exuberant.” My only quibble in the book was around ideas of authorship, but fundamentally, I find your work, like Brian’s, a model for us all of ways in which research is being recuperated. I should have said that more clearly in the book, I guess. I do note there that I admire the way you “riff.” I think there is a difference in styles, but I would not use the term “defensive” [Geoff Proehl, email to Hopkins and Beck in response to an early draft of this review].

2. I think it’s important to acknowledge around Dionysus / Apollo — especially since you go into depth on it — that I’m building on Jayme Koszyn’s, for me, ground-breaking essay, “The Dramaturg and the Irrational,” published in *Dramaturgy and American Theater* [Geoff Proehl, email to Hopkins and Beck].



# DISPATCHES FROM EUROPE

## Notes on European Theatre

by Fulbright Grantee Amy Jensen

### **Beyond *Hamlet*: Three Theatre Developments in Denmark**

Not to dishonor the noble Dane, but theatre in Denmark is far from a simply long string of Hamlet productions. Danish playwrights on any given season could include Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) and Kaj Munk (1898-1944), or contemporary writers Line Knutzon and Astrid Saalbach. The vibrant dance theatre scene includes choreographers like Palle Grandhoj, Tim Rushton, and Thomas Eisenhard. The impressive Royal Danish Playhouse opened in just February 2008. Ensemble companies Odin Teatret, Hotel Pro Forma, Gruppe 38, and Theatre Møllen create compelling productions that travel worldwide. And outstanding children's theatre companies, like Gruppe 38 and Møllen, take part in an annual children's theatre festival in Denmark, which, with over 100 children's theatre companies, is the largest festival of its kind in the world.

In the midst of all of this theatrical activity, Danes have taken three concepts and forms that sound innocuous, perhaps even tired, and given them different dimensions than what one might expect from theatre concerts, audio theatre, and dinner theatre.

Martin McDonagh has said that he wants his theatre to create the feeling audiences get in a great rock concert. For the past fifteen years, Danes have literally put the rock concert into the theatre by way of the *teaterkoncert*. In the theatre concert, individual songs are connected more by a concept than a story. The instrumentation of classic songs is often drastically altered, and the overall look for the show is radically different from that associated with the band. The first theatre concert in 1994, *Gasolin'* — *en teaterkoncert*, could easily have drawn the larger-than-life personalities behind the iconic Danish band Gasoline. But with their penchant for Dadaism, the theatre company Dr. Dante was hardly inclined to create a Gasoline bi-play, and audiences rewarded their audacity rather than crying treason. In Aalborg Theater's piece on Lars Lilholt, a famous rock anthem was slowed down and sung by a choir. The Beach Boys theatre concert at Aarhus Theatre was set in, of all things, the Wild West. The form of the theatre concert has also been used to create original work. Aarhus Theatre resident playwright Christian Lolliker wrote *Kødkarrusellen*, a piece dealing with prostitution, as a theater concert. Lolliker has said that the theater concert's scenic expression, use of music, and ability to draw from cabaret and the grotesque appeals to him as a playwright. And, like McDonagh, he wanted his audience to have the same feeling they get at a good rock concert.



The author, taking part in Teater Katapult's Audiomove performance *Gama — På sporet af ukendt land* (*Gama — tracking down unknown territory*) by Bjørn Rasmussen in Horsens, Denmark.

Photo: Amy Jensen

Audio theatre supposedly became irrelevant decades ago, but Katapult Theatre's *AudioMove* Theatre turns the genre into a city- and site-specific, outdoor treasure hunt. Audiences move from location to location gaining clues in what is either a mystery or a psychological thriller. Often starting at a tourism office, audience members put on a headset connected to a telephone, push play, and the play begins. At the end of the scene the audience member has to find and photograph a Semacode, which resembles a bar code, in order get directions to the next location. In this way, linearity is ensured. For a period of time, the theatre staged the piece live as well, having characters meet the audience at certain points on their journey. However, for the majority of audience members, the only interaction with live people are locals waving you towards the next clue. The concept has proven popular, particularly with tourist boards, as Katapult's pieces draw on local history and incorporate tourist sites.

I generally equate dinner theatre with tired musicals, but Madeleine's Madteater offers a unique performance meant to be a sensorial experience that reawakens the audience's sense of taste over the course of a seven- or eight-course meal. The pieces are conceptually driven events. *Panem et Circenses Tour* was based on a story of wind, rain, growth, herring (a staple in Denmark), hermeneutics, and oil. Its current performance is *KROPumulig* (a piece about food in the body and the body in food), which focuses on the space between you and your food. The ritual element of eating also plays part of the evening, and audiences can stay for an hour after the performance ends, savoring the last dish with coffee and, yes, Madeleines. At 1250 Danish kroner (roughly \$230) a ticket, it's not an everyday — or even an everyman — performance. Not every customer has liked the experimental performance or the food. But for the large part, people come away feeling the event was unique, delicious, and entirely fascinating.

## SOURCES AND LINKS

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCS5TsqeKjQ>

<http://www.katapult.dk/Hikuinsblodhaevn.asp>

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<http://www.madeleines.dk/index.php?id=25> and at

<http://gladmatavis.no/filmer/2008/07/23/madeleines-madteater/>

Interview with Christian Lolliker in *Kødarrusellen* program, Aarhus Teater, 2009.

Amy Jensen assists LMDA Regional VPs as Vice-President of Regional Activity. She has recently returned from Denmark where she studied the dramaturgy and theatricality of Danish children's theatre through the Fulbright program. She was a Literary Fellow at Geva Theatre Center (Rochester, NY) and is currently an MFA candidate in Dramaturgy at Stony Brook University



Madeleine's Madteater performing *Ca. Cirkus*. Photo: Annick Boel.

## The Alexandrinsky and Renaissancing the Cultural Theatre Medium

Stepping into the Russian Drama Museum of the Alexandrinsky Theatre, you travel back in time, not only through Russian history — to the Boyars, the Emperors, and the Soviet — but the theatre’s. Over its impressive 253 years, the Alexandrinsky has staged legendary performances with some of the greatest names in Russian theatre. Even the theatre’s seemingly mundane spaces are part of its legacy. The lobby is the setting of Gogol’s work “After the Play.” That nice bench in an office off the auditorium? Chekhov sat there.

But the Alexandrinsky Theatre is not about to rest on its laurels. In fact, it is aiming at no less than a renaissance. Among the variety of steps being taken towards this goal, the program “Formation of the Youth Audience and Cultural Theater Medium” is of particular interest. In attempting to make theatre and theatre sales more inviting to younger audiences, theatre staff have taken a direct approach: youth to youth. From each local university and college they have sought out theatre and student organizations, which are invited to the theatre. Then select students become official representatives of the theatre. They promote Alexandrinsky plays to friends and fellow classmates, and even sell tickets off-site. Savings are also progressive: the more theatre students attend, the greater the discount. Since instituting the program two years ago, youth attendance has grown significantly and is now almost 80% of the audience.

The program also “aims to direct students’ creative activity towards studying the theater culture.” During March-April 2009, the theatre exhibited select student design models and costume sketches from the State Academy Theater Institute. And in May the theatre hosted an inter-university business competition in which different students competed for the best PR campaign for a play in the Alexandrinsky’s repertoire. Twice a month, students from journalism and humanities departments come to discuss new productions not just at the Alexandrinsky but throughout St. Petersburg. Led by Alexander Chepurov, Head of the Creative and Research Department and a Professor of the Theater Academy, the gatherings focus on theory and skills of literary analysis. Students have the opportunity to submit their criticism to be published in the theatre’s newspaper, *The Empire of Drama*.

The Empire of Drama? In post-Communist Russia? Although its rhetoric may seem rooted in the past, the Alexandrinsky theatre promises to be a theatre to look towards as its staff and artists envision and work towards its future.

### SOURCES

[http://en.alexandrinsky.ru/articles/fund/for\\_patrons](http://en.alexandrinsky.ru/articles/fund/for_patrons)



Costumes from Meyerhold’s February 25, 1917 production of Lermontov’s *The Masquerade* in the Russian Drama Museum.  
Photo: Amy Jensen



# The Acting and Dramaturgy of Odin Teatret

*The Paper Canoe. A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology. Land of Ashes and Diamonds. The Floating Islands and Beyond the Floating Islands.* Book after book after article after essay, Eugenio Barba has written extensively on acting theory, focusing particularly on his company, Odin Teatret, which is based in Hostelbro, Denmark.

In the shadow of Barba's prolific publishing on acting, scholars and artists may not be aware they can access Odin Teatret actors' perspectives. In *The Actor's Way*, Erik Exe Christoffersen has crafted a compelling history of the company's process, based on extensive interviews with company members. And in a series of performances that are more like living essays, actors Iben Nagel Rasumussen, Julia Varley, Roberta Carreri, and Torgeir Wethal both discuss and present their acting process and theories. These "work-demonstrations" are filmed and are available through the online Odin Teatret bookshop. The text of Carreri's work demonstration, along with essays by Varley, are featured in *Odin Teatret 2000*. This illuminating compilation of essays is the result of an interdisciplinary course at Aarhus University focusing on Odin Teatret. And continued research on the historical, present, and future perspectives on Odin Teatret and the "theatre laboratory tradition" are being conducted at the Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies (CTLS), a joint collaboration between the company and Aarhus University's Department of Dramaturgy.

In addition to these resources on the company, dramaturgs have reason to be interested in one more: *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House*. This new book will be available from Routledge this October. Barba's philosophy of dramaturgy (see "The Deep Order Called Turbulence: The Three Faces of Dramaturgy" in *TDR* 44.4 (Winter 2000): 56-66) should interest many LMDA members, and I hope to see a dramaturg's response to this book, Barba's "dramaturgy of dramaturgies," in an upcoming issue of *Review*.

## SOURCES AND LINKS

[www.odinteatret.dk](http://www.odinteatret.dk)

[www.odinteatret.dk/CTLS\\_web/presentation%20ramme3.htm](http://www.odinteatret.dk/CTLS_web/presentation%20ramme3.htm)  
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The view outside Odin Teatret, Hostelbro, Denmark  
Photo: Amy Jensen

# DRAMATURGS LIKE TO TALK

## *A Production Dramaturg and an Installation Dramaturg Discuss Their Approaches to Making Art*

**By Lisa Arnold and Karen Jean Martinson**

Karen Jean Martinson is a theatre scholar, dramaturg, director, and sometimes puppeteer who currently freelances in the Los Angeles area. Martinson was awarded her PhD in Theatre History, Literature, and Critical Theory from the University of Minnesota in 2008. Through her academic research, teaching, and artistic work, she explores contentious issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality within US consumer culture, utilizing theatre as the means through which greater social, political, and cultural insight can be perceived, expressed, debated, and enacted.

Lisa Arnold creates youth-oriented and intergenerational community projects integrating poetry, storytelling, and mosaic mural-making. She is an independent educator, dramaturg, thinker, artist-in-residence, and maker of things. She did her doctoral studies in Theatre, Art, and Social Change at the University of Minnesota. She has taught at U of M as well as several other colleges and universities. Her work has been seen at: MU Museum, Eindhoven, Holland; Minnesota Museum of American Art; North Dakota Museum of Art; the National Black History Theatre, Harlem, NY; Brigham Young University; Knox College; and Chicago State University. For the past ten years, Lisa has served as dramaturg and artist-in-residence for theatre e3 in Minneapolis.

*It is a given that dramaturgs like to talk. Dialogue and discussion, for dramaturgs, exist as a methodologies, modes of inquiry, the means of testing and refining hypotheses and theories. As Geoff Proehl writes in his recently published book *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey* [reviewed elsewhere in this issue of Review], “A commitment to conversation as a way of knowing and being known – in the midst of limitation – is central to a dramaturgical sensibility” (46). So there it is: we talk a lot, and our favorite subject seems to be dramaturgy. However, as my colleague Lisa Arnold and I discovered, we often shorthand the specifics. Following Proehl’s cue, Lisa and I ventured into a conversation regarding our specific dramaturgical sensibilities. Lisa and I have worked on many projects together, she as an installation dramaturg and I as a production dramaturg. Although we are close collaborators as well as dear friends, we realized that neither of us knew — in that deeply intimate and yet ultimately impossible way that Proehl describes — how it was that we practiced dramaturgy. And without knowing the how, it seemed as if we could not know the why.*

**LISA ARNOLD:** How do you approach a production/text?

**KAREN JEAN MARTINSON:** I begin by reading it several times. During my first read, I really try to just get an impression, a general feel. Though such a read should be simple, it’s actually very difficult for me — my dramaturg instincts want always to start thinking about research possibilities, concepts and themes, and so on. I have to really keep in mind that I am reading this as if I were in the audience at a staged reading, without the text in front of me. What sticks with me? What intrigues me? What sorts of random associations leap to mind? I want to keep that first impression present. I try to be as free as possible, making notes to myself without trying to “crack” the text. I usually give myself at least a day to just let things simmer. If I write or discuss the play at all during this time, I try to do so without referring back to the text. This first moment is all about affect — how does the play impact me on an emotional, impressionistic level?

After this important first step, I return to the text again and again, each time reading it with different themes in mind. For example, I might track concepts through the structure of the text, mark things for research, circle difficult words and concepts, make notes on allusions, track symbols, and so on. In the initial stages, I probably read the text ten times or more. It's important that I know the text backwards and forwards: I need to know where a line in the first scene pops up again, when an important bit of dialogue lays out a major theme, where a character is truthful or revealing or deceptive – all of these things.

Only after all of this do I begin my research, and I let that research follow whatever path it needs to. For example, when I dramaturged *Arcadia* [a production on which Lisa and Karen recently collaborated], I read up on chaos mathematics, gardening in the historical bridge between the Classic and Romantic eras, steam power, Lord Byron, concepts of time and temporality, hermits, Euclidian mathematics, the scholar/tutor relationship, women's roles in the English countryside, and more, including articles on Tom Stoppard and past productions of the play. I try not to limit this research, but rather to go as big as it can be. Even if 90% of the research gets thrown out, it helps that I know it. Then, after long and involved talks with the director, we together hammer out a concept that we both feel is deserving of the text. I put together the dramaturgical packet with that concept in mind. I try to tailor the information I have to fit the concept — to write essays that frame the information I have in a way that relates to the staging we envision.

LA: I bet our research varies quite a bit. When I dramaturged *Arcadia*, I researched chaos theory too, but focused mostly on the dice game. Did you come across that? I threw the dice to determine how to set up the maze the audience would walk through on the way to their seats.



Detail of an installation designed by Lisa Arnold.

Photo: Lisa Arnold

KJM: Funny, I actually don't remember that at all. And since I lost all of my dramaturgical materials when my hard drive crashed last year, I can't even find it and bluff my way through remembering it. As an aside, I have to say that losing all of my files was sort of traumatic — a loss I had to revisit when we began this conversation. I had nothing to refer back to besides the text itself and the random notes I scribbled in the margins. But I took comfort in Septimus's line: "You should no more grieve for the rest than for a buckle lost from your first shoe, or for your lesson book which will be lost when you are old. We shed as we pick up [...] and what we let fall will be picked up by those behind" (38). Somewhere in my brain and in the memories of those involved in that production, my dramaturgical materials exist.

So, that was a long-winded way of saying no, I don't at all recall the dice game, even though *Chaos* was like a bible for me during the research phase (I read it a few times and it completely occupied my mind for a stretch — so much so that I almost proselytized on its behalf, convincing several of my friends to read it). It's interesting the way research can vary like that, depending on your focus. You and I read the same book at the same time for the same production and walk away with completely different memories of it. It also reveals to me that, though I always say (and believe) that I try to let myself go as wide as I can in my production dramaturgy research, I also relate that research back to the text — perhaps more directly than I realized. For example, in my read of *Chaos*, I did a lot of research on the specific mathematics discussed in the play; the details of the Covey set, the particular examples Stoppard pulled from [James] Gleick, etc. It was important to me that the actors knew, at least on a basic level, what they were talking about when they spoke these lines. I also researched how Stoppard used chaos mathematics as a dramaturgical structure within the play — the repetition of lines, the overlapping patterns between the two time periods, the fact that the macro is reflected in the micro and vice versa. This was certainly important for me to know and to share with the director as we developed the concept; moreover it was necessary to pass this on to the actors so that they could really understand what we were striving for in our production.

So tell me about the dice game and how you used that in your installation.

LA: Associations are funny. All the while I was reading *Arcadia* and thinking about chaos theory, I couldn't help but be reminded of John Guare's play *Six Degrees of Separation*. In it, the Kittredges talk about a Kandinsky painting that is two-sided, with one side representing chaos and the other side representing control. The chaos side has a bunch of circles that intertwine and overlap and seemingly move in multiple directions so I really wanted to play with those orbs. I ended up creating a zillion multi-colored circles on fishline to be suspended from the ceiling, through which audience members would have to navigate on their way to the theatre. One of the main ideas of chaos theory, however, is that chaos isn't so random and that order exists within chaos. The dice game demonstrates this idea, in a slower way than does many computer generated images I'm sure you saw in your own research. My idea for the installation was to throw color-coded dice that dictated where each orb was to be hung from the ceiling. This harkens back to Joseph Ford's idea about the cosmos that is quoted in *Chaos*: "God plays dice with the universe, but



they're loaded dice. And the main objective of physics now is to find out by what rules were they loaded and how can we use them for our own ends" (314). On the wall I hung my dramaturgy notes, which talked about these ideas and how the installation came to be chaotically ordered in a randomly controlled way.

KJM: I remember your circles! We were at a coffee shop on the West Bank [on the University of Minnesota campus]. I remember you had prepared a few circles for our meeting and laid out the conceptual framework for your installation. That I recall this, but not the dice game example you based it on speaks to why your installations are successful: they make a theoretical concept visual and embodied. How do you, as a visual artist and a visual thinker, take a bit of research related to a text and translate it into an installation? What's your process?

LA: I like coming to a text cold. I don't want to hear what the director thinks of it, what her/his concept is or any of her/his aesthetic aspirations for it. I, too, read the piece many times, noticing what pops out at me, looking for repetitions, patterns, absences. I copy down lines of text that I like and compelling visual language. I take a lot of notes about the associations I make with the text: visual, linguistic, political, personal, aural... I'm really open to this part of the process. It's all about possibility, given the limitations of the text. I try to read the play with all my senses too, looking for texture and sounds to inform my aesthetic choices. The other thing I really respond to in the text is space. It's fun trying to figure out how the audience needs to move into the theatre and what they'll encounter along the way. Once I've taken these notes, I see what I have, what I want to emphasize, research further, what gets thrown out. From this process, I start to get ideas about how I might physicalize my ideas. At this point, I want to meet with the director, hear her/his ideas, share mine and see where there are crossovers, questions, opportunities to inform...

KJM: It's striking how, for both of us, time alone with the text is so crucial. Part of what I love about theatre is its communal aspect — the exchanges that occur in all phases of production — but I really need and value a sort of intimate moment with the text. I suppose I need to know what most touches me if I am to attempt to create an impactful piece of art for an audience.

LA: I am an introvert, and sometimes theatre work is too touchy-feely for me and doesn't move at the pace I want it to, so I love being able to work rather tangentially to the production. This way, I can play with, jump into, languish in the text and indulge my associations as much as I like. That said, I do want the dramaturgical installation to be directly related to the production. And I do enjoy, want, and need the communal part of theatre, too (maybe just at an arm's length), so it is important to me that the cast and/or crew is involved in the installation as well. I like it best when individuals in the production contribute something to the installation in a visual or tactile way, which in turn, I believe, helps actors, et al., think about and enter the play in a different way. For *The Vagina Monologues*, for example, I asked everyone involved to create a visual representation of their vaginas. It was great — pillows, boxes, dresses, hats, photographs, a bike seat knitted into a frame — the installation was so much richer with so many voices (and vaginas) represented. Like you, I want to know what most touches me about the text to help me

create an impactful piece, and then seeing how others respond through art-making and rehearsals keeps me readdressing and refining my ideas.

KJM: I was the proud knitter of the bike-saddle vagina! I do like that your installations usually incorporate something personal from the actors and artistic team. By including these individual contributions, your installations not only reflect on the theme and ideas of the production, but also they comment on the theatrical imperative. That is, your installations remind the audience that there are a lot of people behind a production, people who dedicated their time and energy and thought to this production, people who for whatever reason *need* to be involved in theatre at this moment.

I notice that in a general sense, our process begins much the same — time alone for the encounter; the noting of repetitions, themes, patterns, absences; openness to the text and a belief in the serendipitous path it can lead us down. We both describe dramaturgy in very personal terms, and I think that our personalities are very much reflected in the different work that we do. That is to say, we in fact share a similar dramaturgical sensibility, but the specific practice of our dramaturgy is unique and individual. My dramaturgy does seem to come back to words; yours moves into space and embodiment.

It strikes me that your installations build a bridge between ways of knowing a play and the people involved; they give the audience a deeper, experiential understanding of a production and the individuals who helped to shape it. I offer a similar bridge through the preparation of my dramaturgical materials. Of course, there is a practical element to dramaturgical writing. I want to give the audience a context, a means of grasping the complexity of the issues and concepts we explore in the production. I want to provide to audience members some touchstones so that they can understand better what we are saying in the production (and how we are saying it). But there's something beyond explanation and dialogue with the audience. The dramaturgical essays I write for audience members are in some ways my attempts to offer the audience a peek into what we uncovered in the rehearsal period; they are a way of honoring the work that we do in that rehearsal space and the insights that come out of it. Perhaps that's why I need to be there in rehearsal each night.

My dramaturgical writing also reflects my way of learning through theatre: dramaturgy for me is a process, the moving through a personal encounter with the words of a play to the communal, active, embodied space of rehearsal and then back to words, theories, and ideas.

LA: It's interesting to hear you talk about the dependency and trust you have, and need to have with the players to be an in-rehearsal dramaturg. I think it's this messy part of theatre that I'm not good at and don't enjoy.

KJM: I do feel compelled to be in rehearsals every night, partly because I don't like to miss those exceptional, rare, and magical moments that are uncovered there, and partly because I don't feel that I can do my work as a dramaturg if I am not that involved in the process. That was one of the biggest challenges with *Arcadia*, actually — because we were doing "remote" dramaturgy. [Lisa and Karen were both in Minneapolis, working on a show at Knox College in Galesburg, IL] I felt disconnected from the actual production. I was really excited about the pre-production work and really enjoyed



Anjaliika Kapur as Gus, Evan Sawdey as Noakes in the Knox College production of *Arcadia*.

Photo: Peter Bailley, Knox College.

delving into the text and working to mold the production concept, but since I was only in Illinois for auditions and the first week of rehearsal, I feel a big hole in my experience with that play. I feel like I only know it from one angle, and thus my understanding of it is incomplete. Funny that the stereotype is that dramaturgs are the book-worms who would rather be stowed away in a library corner than with the other artists — I need that time in rehearsals (as well as in the library) to fully process a production.

LA: Poor you! I can see how you must have felt disconnected working on *Arcadia* from Minneapolis. I felt free! At the same time though, I have to say that it was my least performative installation and the most removed from the cast and crew, so I don't feel a lot of warmth about that work or success either. I think the work I did was visually and intellectually interesting, helped the audience think about major themes in the show, and was well-received, but in the end it feels hollow. I guess I like working alone, but next to not far from.

KJM: How often do you go to rehearsals? How do you interact with the actors and the other artistic team members in rehearsal?

LA: Depending on the show and how well I know a director's work, I think I typically attend one rehearsal a week (or five over a five-week rehearsal period). I want to attend a rehearsal early on to introduce the project and involve the actors and other team members in the installation. As I said, I like it when the creative team contributes. I think it gives them an opportunity to engage with the production in another creative way and might give them an unexpected entry to their performance or design. It's also important that I see how the director is staging the piece early on so I make choices that work in conjunction with the world she's creating. I like to be inspired by stage pictures, movement, the strengths of the actors. I want to make sure that the installation directly relates to the world of the play in

terms of aesthetics and concept. At the same time, though, I feel a lot of freedom to create the world necessary to ask the questions I want people to ask themselves.

KJM: Another reason I feel it's necessary to be in rehearsal is that the production dramaturg has to be very allied with the concept, yet watch the show from the perspective of the audience to ensure that the concept is actually being manifested through the staging. I think that's one of the most important tasks a dramaturg fulfills.

LA: Yes, in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Jill Dolan talks about how the dramaturg has to keep changing seats (literally and metaphorically) to see the show from the perspective of the audience.

KJM: I feel that actors and, at times, directors — because they are so close to the work — assume that because they understand the concept, the audience must also understand it, too, forgetting that the audience does not have the benefit of the weeks of pre-production and rehearsal to draw knowledge from. They only have the staging. Thus, a special skill a dramaturg must have is the ability to know the text and the concept deeply and intimately while still being able to look at the staging with fresh eyes. The dramaturg has to be able to pinpoint which moments are clear and which moments are muddy from a conceptual standpoint. So again, it is about a very specific communication. I find the multiple communications of dramaturgy to be incredibly compelling and incredibly meaningful.

What is it about theatre and dramaturgy that compels you? What makes you work in this field rather than as an artist in a gallery setting?

LA: Words. I miss language when I'm away too long. I love the limitations of the text, the director, the physical space I'm working with. I like the analytical puzzle of it all, following all the "if / then" trails. Plus, I like combining performance and installation. It's more difficult and demanding to do that in a gallery.

Another reason I like installation dramaturgy is that it reveals the importance of visual / installation art and the role it can play in helping further the concept and educating the audience. I trust that the audience is open to experiencing the ideas of the production through an involvement with the installation.

What assumptions do you make about the work, your work, the director, the aesthetics, audience?

KJM: The biggest assumption I make is that the audience is smart enough to get a complex concept without laying it out for them in didactic terms. I think that audiences like to be challenged, like to engage with serious and important issues, and like to do some work. We don't have to give them the dumbed-down version of life and we don't have to pretend that everything is wonderful when it is not.

LA: Yes, I hate being insulted by a performance. Make me think!

KJM: In a similar vein, I also assume that people are more okay with a bit of mystery. I like a lot of contradiction in my theatre — things are hardly clear-cut in life and I like to embrace ambiguity in the staging. For this reason, I like a text that I have to decode and a production concept that is expansive. I've realized, however, that this is a really tricky line to walk. The problem is that too much ambiguity makes for an unclear production, and I definitely don't want my





Sylvie Davidson as Thomasina in the Knox College production of *Arcadia*.

Photo: Peter Bailley, Knox College.

audience to walk away not knowing what the hell we are trying to say. I want them to be challenged, and to question, and to say “Wow! I hadn’t thought about that!” But I don’t want them to say, “Huh?” So we have to be clear that we are being ambiguous, if that makes sense. We have to give the audience enough confidence in our handling of complexity that they trust that we have a viewpoint, even as we are interrogating that viewpoint. I think this is the most important aspect of my dramaturgical writing. That I give them enough information to go with us on the journey we’ve created for them.

An assumption I make about the text is that there is always room for questioning. I don’t think that every word laid out by a playwright is somehow a divine gift of the muses. There are flaws, and we should address them. There is also, hopefully, genius in the text, and we should delve those moments of insight as well. I guess I also assume that playwrights are thoughtful, that they layer meaning into their words, and that the more deeply you interrogate the text, the more you can get at it. That’s why research is so important to me. Trying to track down all the allusions and references they make can only lead you to a more sophisticated understanding of the text.

Aesthetically, I assume that movement plays a huge role in storytelling. Any production — even the most realistic of realisms — deserves compelling stage pictures, interesting physical relationships, gestures, and variation in tempo, plane, and level. Period. Nobody ever needs to stand in a straight line and just say lines.

LA: I appreciate your dramaturgical approach so much. No wonder I enjoy working with you and seeing your work! These are my concerns when I go to the theatre but they’re usually out of my realm when I’m operating as a dramaturg. I don’t have a lot to do with shaping the performance, unless it concerns the pre-show, intermission, or post-show. I’m more involved in responding to the performance and helping the audience engage with it.

KJM: So what are your assumptions and goals in creating an installation?

LA: I try to provide ways into the performance from many different points. I’m more interested in asking questions and encouraging dialogue than being didactic. I want the audience to ask — and I assume the audience wants to ask questions — Why? What can be done? What can I do? In the Introduction to *Suburbia*, Eric Bogosian says, “This is the fundamental question of the theater: ‘If this had happened to you, what would you have done?’” (4). I want my audience members to ask this of themselves.

I see it as my job to localize and personalize the issues in the play so the audience member has a hard time seeing themselves as separate from the concerns on stage. At the same time, I want people to see that their actions have repercussions on local and global levels, so I try to globalize the issues as well. I think that movement between seeing oneself as the center and on the periphery is important. Toward this end, I like taking lines of dialogue and using them out of context. I want audience members to question and consider those statements: Are they true? For whom? In what circumstances? When audience members hear these lines again on stage and in context, they’ll hopefully think about these questions again in different ways.

I want to create something meaningful and visually interesting. In order to effect social change, it’s important to localize the issues in a production and get audience members to see their role in, and their responsibility for, the issues addressed on stage. This is important to me. I want to jar people out of their complacency. I’m so seldom surprised at the theatre any more. I want to feel uncomfortable and out of sorts. I expect the unexpected, damn it! I want involve the viewer in the meaning-making process from the start, activate them, ya know? I want them to rush to the box office after the show and get tickets for the following night so they can reconsider everything again. This is what I want and if it is true that you have to give to get, I’m doing my darndest.

KJM: Agreed. Let’s try to do our darndest together on a show again sometime soon, hey?

LA: Definitely. This conversation has been invigorating — making me want to do more work — as well as like a fond memory — reminding me why I like working with you and other similarly-minded people I’ve found throughout my life.

KJM: And maybe that’s another dramaturgical sensibility. Dramaturgs are often positioned as the great collaborators of an already collaborative field. Maybe we are also the collectors. We collect our memories, our colleagues, our inspirations and keep them close at hand, ready to use in our next great conversation.

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