Explore the wider contexts and make a comparative study of dramaturgy, promote these models of dramaturgical practice in and as a basis for—making innovative dramaturgs and dramaturges. 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 and how that elusive word 'dramaturgy' might be defined, what role 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 how that elusive word 'dramaturgy' might be defined, what role 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.

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 Australia and as a basis for—making innovative dramaturgs and dramaturges. 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.

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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 and, in and through, performance has generated a need for a new kind of dramaturgy which responds to the postmodern 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 lies, 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 using the body, 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 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 Interventist, 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 panel of theatre company artistic directors considered questions regarding the potentially important role of the dramaturg in the artistic life of a theatre company. We 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.

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, p.76).

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 the 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.

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, p.75).

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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 experiences and a ‘dramaturgy of changing states when the entirety of what we show manages to evoke something different’ (Barba, 2000, p56). Taking this idea further, it is interesting to think about dramaturgy as a process of being unedited 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 wilful 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 form. We should not be trying to keep alive the collapse of representation in the avant-garde notion of performance as a ritualistic 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 alienity. It is a memory of possibilities, of traces of creative processes that arise and are potential. While dramaturgy must work in response to the demands of production, we may be able to explore a creative tension with those same production regimes. The question we might ask ourselves then, is how can dramaturgy offer the sense of refusal and resistance to closure so as an effect of theatre of changing states?

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 unimaginaire. Dramaturgy is a process that might describe this transformation in 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 dramaturgy works 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 tends to be 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 dramaturg 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 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 production—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 another 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, event, action, to understand the principles involved in the text. And in the fifth century BC, before Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, theatrical (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 tragician was a playwright 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; the audience clearly and deeply reflected on and debated—obliquely in the case of tragedy, more directly in the case of comedy—social, ideological, religious and metaphysical aspects 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 1983 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 dramaturge-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 concatenation (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, sensual 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 intertwining 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's 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', 'action' understood 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 ideas and beliefs, informing and forcing the spectators on the meaning of what they are watching and the dramatic 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. The dramaturgy of a theatrical work might be described by reference to actions, as activity, as selection, construction and framing. I am consciously opening up the range of tasks that a person oversees 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 dramaturg? 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.

REFERENCES


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-serv ing 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 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 drama turg 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 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 those 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 ability to ‘be there and go around’ which she came across when studying the martial art, Aikido.

Simply translated urimi means ‘to enter’ but it can also be translated ‘choose death’. When attacked, you always have two options: to enter, urimi, or to go around, uke. 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 urimi, or going around. Patience and flexibility is an art. There is a time for urimi, going around and there is a time for urimi, 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 need 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 vitalise and enhance their work I believe that dramaturgs could profitably play a more proactive role, not just 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.
Romeo Castellucci (writer & director, Genesi) and David Pledger (writer & director, K) were interviewed in the week prior to the forum. Castellucci’s response to the notion of cultural intervention 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 pizza. 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 world 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 tear-gas, about blood of my friends,屠杀...and I feel like someone who is provoked, someone who is acted upon’.

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 for shape the production as a whole. The company’s work is built around ‘the idea of the body as the agent of desire 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-terror 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 that, 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 Artist as Agent Provocateur and Interior Sites Project, held in partnership with the 2002 National Women’s Conference. We had interviewed Castellucci as the work 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 pizza. 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 world 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.

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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 for shape the production as a whole. The company’s work is built around ‘the idea of the body as the agent of desire 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-terror 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 that, 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 Artist as Agent Provocateur and Interior Sites Project, held in partnership with the 2002 National Women’s Conference. We had interviewed Castellucci as the work 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 pizza. 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 world 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 tear-
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 demystifies 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 as action, Angela Campbell; sensibility. For Barba artistic discipline, and therefore an object or a skill, he said, it’s an attitude, a process, an action or effect; not only text and actors but also sound recording. But as strong and rich as the weave is, it matters that it is ‘not the sound you want but the feeling you want to achieve...If you want to fetishise the text you don’t bring into play a stage prior to the usual notion of creative starting point: For Stoller and Marriquegui, dramaturgy is about the process of negotiation with Indigenous people who do not readily give out their knowledge’. Therefore casting is ‘a major dramatical 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 drama-turgy’. Swain detailed the administrative role 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 stuck’, and using the South African Truth in Reconciliation Report’s approach, ‘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 frequent 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 director’s 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 ‘step back from himself’. When working for NYID (Not Yet It’s Difficult), his aim is to create an acoustic set settling 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 if 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. Laurence Harvey reinforced the notion of the text as a living organism 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 brought into play a stage prior to the usual notion of creative starting point: For Stoller and Marriquegui, dramaturgy is about the process of negotiation with Indigenous people who do not readily give out their knowledge’. Therefore casting is ‘a major dramatical 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 drama-turgy’. Swain detailed the administrative role 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 stuck’, and using the South African Truth in Reconciliation Report’s approach, ‘how we want space to move’.

STRUCTURE & SELF-DRAMATURGY

On the second day of the conference, in a session titled ‘Dramaturgy, Text and Structure’, Yoni Prior...
spoken about the experience of being part of Gilgal 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 experience of having to divide and fracture between the drama and the other elements of production, making it clear that the dramaturgy was just an idea; it’s a whole visceral lifestyle...to be subjective belief in yourself...That level of commitment thought that perhaps it was time for him to buy himself a particular kind of self-dramaturgy and the passing of recent and forthcoming plays (some fine examples of Romeril’s turn (relish it in its entirety online) entailed blow against anti-intellectualism’ and our research, a constant preoccupation with structure, ‘a modern performers who are often in extreme states. She surmised that the essence 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 Gilgal Theatre allowed space for self and 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, saying how much the model of teaching and dealing with multi-tasking modern performers who are often in extreme states. She sees herself as adapting choreographic techniques for use with text, looking for musicality, for patterns, listing for the sounds that come out of the body in extremis. She surmised that the role of the dramaturg 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 Gilgal Theatre allowed space for self and 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’. PROLOGUE

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 had certainly been asserted as well as the dramaturgical ‘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 prase and the responsibility for failure, would be discussed another time.

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

Keith Gallaich and Virginia Baxter were guests of Dramaturgies #2.

THE CURATOR AS DRAETURGY

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 with asides 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’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), Audrey Mellor put the current dramaturgical situation in a fascinating 30-year Australian perspective. She described another time.

Dramaturgies #2, a workshop lasting just over three days, was a practical exploration of dramaturgy as 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 ‘Of Hope and Dread’ through a range of intellectual, spatial, visual, sound and personal dimensions. Aesthetic mediums of theatre production: foreground 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, a group warm-up the following 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 representa-
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 work-shop, 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 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 refer to 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 unchains 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 ideas 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 critical function of dramaturgy. One of the achievements of the workshop.

**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 Padjeu 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 Bedlin, was taken to a 20th-century memorial hall at the University. Fully restored, the hall has fine furnishings and many straight-backed 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 developed a short presentation that responded to the dramaturgical interventions of theme, space, objects (and their associated personal stories), and designtechnical 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.

We were looking for new possibilities in approaches to dramaturgy as well as posing a consciously experimental mode of working among the participants. These outcomes were evident in the clearly 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 Condon 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 for 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 may be overly 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.