

dramaturgs'network

Welcome to the summer issue of our newsletter.

CONTENTS:

- [Editor's Notes](#) by Katalin Trencsényi
- [Network News](#)
- [Structures in Devising](#) by Frauke Franz and Synne Behrndt
- [The Practice of a Dramaturg](#) in Germany by Elyssa Livergant

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the Summer Issue of the Dramaturgs' Network's Newsletter!
I am proud to join John Keefe as the Newsletter's new editor. (David Lane's new job at the Soho Theatre means he is too busy to continue being our editor. We thank him for his work so far and wish him all the best for his job.)
In the last 12 months the Network has focused on its aim of supporting its members and other professional dramaturgs through our continuous professional development. The first event was held at the BAC in the autumn, and it dealt with the dramaturg's work in the devising process, and our second was held in the spring and gave an insight into the work of a dramaturg in Germany. Both of these events were open to the public.
In this issue you can read two personal accounts from these events. Also you will find some more news about the Network. Please note the date of our dramaturgs' picnic in September. It would be great to see you there!
If you wish to comment on these articles or want to have a debate on other issues concerning dramaturgy, log on to our forum on:
www.dramaturgy.co.uk/forum and let us hear from you.
If you would like to contribute with an article to our Newsletter, please send it to: newsletter@dramaturgy.co.uk (If you are writing for us, please note that our article submitting deadline for our Autumn Issue is 5th October.)
Happy reading and enjoy the summer!

Katalin Trencsényi

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NEWS

NSDF

The Dramaturgs' Network took part in the National Student Drama Festival in April in Scarborough. Lyndsay Allison and Duska Radosavljevic held a workshop on devised theatre dramaturgy, and Hanna Slattne joined Tom Lishman, sound designer and engineer, holding a very successful workshop on the dramaturgy of sound. We enjoyed the atmosphere of the Festival and look forward to more workshops next year.

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Kings Cross Award 2004

The Dramaturgs' Network supported the Courtyard Theatre's new writing competition. Eleven of its members volunteered their time and work as script readers for the competition, and some of them took part in panel meetings. In her speech at the award ceremony (which was presented by Chris Smith MP) Hanna Slattne emphasised that dramaturgs can help in many ways to support new drama. This proved to be a successful collaboration.

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The dramaturgs' picnic

The Dramaturgs' Network is holding its annual dramaturgs' picnic on Sunday, 5th September at Kensington Park. We are going to stretch our blankets from 3.00 p.m. near Speke's Monument. Bring your blanket and your nibbles and join us there!

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Panel discussion on work practices

The Dramaturgs' Network (UK) and the Literary Managers And Dramaturgs Association (USA) is organising a panel discussion on our practice bringing together literary managers and dramaturgs from the UK and North America. The event will take place in October 2004 and if you are interested in being kept informed about it please send an e-mail to info@dramaturgy.co.uk and we will keep you posted.

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STRUCTURES IN DEVISING by Frauke Franz and Synne Behrndt

On the 18th October 2003 the Dramaturgs' Network held a Debate Forum on devised theatre dramaturgy at the BAC. The initial aims of the forum were to open up a debate about the need for a critical language (exemplified by dramaturgy) in making and evaluating devised performance in order to create stronger performance outcomes, and to discuss ways of working and approaches to collaboration and devising.

It was an open Forum exploring ways of working within devising framed by presentations of and discussion about collaborations between dramaturgs and directors. The real success and achievement of the (sold out!) event was that it created a platform for practitioners and audiences to discuss processes and practice.

After the introduction (held by Network members Frauke Franz and Synne Behrndt) the forum presented three very different case studies of companies and their way of devising.

Faster

The first project discussed was Faster by the company Filter. The speakers were director Guy Rattalack, writer Stephen Brown and dramaturg Kate McGrath.

This project had been developed over 3 stages in the past couple of years and dramaturg Kate McGrath was brought in initially as the project's producer and eventually as the dramaturg. This transition from, or blurred line between, the producer to dramaturg, was unique to the projects as in none of the other projects presented did the dramaturg take this double role. However, Kate McGrath's transition from producer to dramaturg led to questions about whether it is important at all to define roles so specifically in a devising process.

What seems unique to many devising processes is the nature of 'collaborative and collective effort' where people often take on a variety of roles and 'jobs' so is it also important to 'name' the roles in the process. This seemed to be one of Kate's challenges in the discussion.

This project was unique in the sense that Filter as a company consists of some actors and musicians who are playing and sampling live on stage. For their project Faster they decided to initially bring on board an outside director and writer. During the development process three different writers worked on the project. Kate, the dramaturg and Stephen, the final writer came to the project at the same time.

The challenge here for the dramaturg was also an issue of creative ownership of the project. Essentially you had a devising company who have spent a good part of 1.5 years developing a story and characters. There was an outside director, Guy who had his own set of ideas and finally a writer, who brought some new ideas into the process.

Guy Rattalack and Stephen Brown described the role of the dramaturg in this project to be that of keeping the project on track and focussed, making sure that director and writer were "working on the same project", i.e. ensure that there was a consensus about the direction and concept of the performance.

Both Guy Rattalack and Stephen Brown felt that there was a need for someone who had a "big enough brain" to keep track of the different 'threads' of the project in order for the project to come together in the end. And Guy and Stephen reiterated that they found that this seemed to be a much-valued task of the dramaturg. The discussions here revolved around the need for 'someone' with a 'glorified' overview in a devising process due to the ever changing nature of such a process, who is also someone who can tie together the

different elements in the process, both in terms of material, but also mediate between people working on the project.

No, It Was You

'The ability to keep the project together and allow the director to focus on details' was also a theme in the second presentation by director Boz Temple-Morris (Fake Productions) and dramaturg Frauke Franz. They spoke about their work on the show No, It Was You. As opposed to Filter's collaboration with Kate McGrath, where Kate gradually became the dramaturg of the production, Frauke Franz was from the outset defined as the project's dramaturg and worked closely with the director to formulate and devise the initial performance concept.

In this process the role of the dramaturg becomes more complex. Essentially there are two parts, which in a way involved different tasks. At the beginning the director and the dramaturg did a long process of research, collating ideas and source material. These were then communicated to the set designer, lighting designer, writer/poet, costume designer and composer. It is central to the work of Fake that each artist involved initially reacts freely to the source material. So in a way there is no set philosophy that is created and the artists react to the director's vision but the different ideas and reactions from the artists build the foundation of an ever-changing philosophy.

In the rehearsal process, which in this particular process was only three and a half weeks, it was crucial to have someone coming in from time to time instead of being there every day, overlooking the overall arc of the piece and therefore allowing the director to concentrate on detail.

Lux

The third project Lux was still in the early stages of preparation at the time of the Forum and the discussion between David Harradine (director) and Synne Behrndt (dramaturg) focused on how one begins a collaborative project and what one expects from each other as director and dramaturg. Director David Harradine explained that he had invited Synne Behrndt into the collaboration due to his curiosity about having someone with a different perspective as part of the working process.

During this discussion, issues like the dramaturg as a creative collaborator with analytic input, which can push the process in interesting directions was brought up. A recurrent theme in this discussion was that the dramaturg should

not just be used as an 'ambulance/emergency' service that is wheeled in at the last minute to 'pick up the pieces', but should be integrated from the beginning.

We found that it might be interesting to go even further and to set up 'surgery-type' collaborations where practitioners who are in the middle of a process collaborate with dramaturgs for a week (or more). This could then frame stimulating debates and discussions about analysis, structure and dramaturgy in devising.

The Debate and Content

From the outset the audience was invited to partake in the discussion and subsequently a lively debate was provoked, which in our estimation could have continued well past the 3 hours the forum was scheduled for.

The discussion moved quickly into discussing different devising methods and some confusion about the dramaturg's role occurred. This was caused by a few audience members feeling they needed more introduction to dramaturgy and the work of a dramaturg if the debate was to be about this.

The debate also centred around the issue that companies often have very little time to devise and rehearse performances and that there often was a need for a critical dialogue between them and an 'outside eye'. This seem to correspond with comments made by playwright Mark Ravenhill in a recent lecture at Queen Mary's University, London where he expressed a desire for a theatre which was exploratory and experimental, but that time constraints often made this impossible. The question is then, how can a dramaturgical vocabulary enable an exploratory process when time and means are short and limited.

The future

It became clear that a forum of this type would be a good and helpful initiative and could with great success be incorporated into festivals, performance showings or even form part of symposia or other. It was felt that amongst some practitioners in the audience, there was a curiosity towards the collaboration between dramaturgs and directors and that workshops and meetings between these could be an interesting way to move a debate about devising forwards.

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THE PRACTICE OF A DRAMATURG IN GERMANY by Elyssa Livergant

On 14 May 2004 the Dramaturg's Network hosted Anneli Klostermeier, a dramaturg from Germany. This occasion was part of the ongoing professional development activities held by the network. Anneli reflected on her practice as a dramaturg working in regional theatre in Germany and shared her ideas about the role of the dramaturg. Her lecture was followed by Q & A and discussion.

Owing to technical difficulties there is no transcript of this event. However, as a participant I made some notes which I thought might be of interest; these give insight into Anneli Klostermeier's work, opinions and a different cultural perspective of theatre production.

Anneli on German theatre production:

German theatre production is hierarchical. There is an external hierarchy between different theatres and the public, and there is an internal hierarchy within each particular theatre.

The dramaturg is attached to the theatre and is answerable to the intendant (general manager). There are several dramaturgs engaged to a theatre (assistant dramaturgs, production dramaturgs, house dramaturgs and a chief dramaturg).

A dramaturg's working relationship is dependent on making alliances.

The Chief Dramaturg is responsible for the whole theatre and its programme. He/She comes into rehearsal in the second week, if lucky, but usually attends the last 3 rehearsals only. This situation means their input into a specific production is very minimal.

The production/ floor dramaturg is assigned to a show and has several responsibilities to that show. He/she attends all rehearsals, supports the director, provides support material, and reports the progress of the production to theatre.

In this production culture, directors are 'guests' of the theatre. Actors are like family and are attached to a theatre for a season (often more than one season). Below is a diagram illustrating the internal structure of a theatre in Germany.

Intendant (General Manager)

Oberspielleiter/Schauspieldirektor (Artistic Director)

Dramaturgen (Dramaturgs)

Schauspieler (Director)

All materials - promotional, contextual, author background - that circulate to everyone (press, audience and creative team) come from the dramaturg. Theatres often have a pre-opening event, which is the dramaturg's responsibility. This is an occasion for audiences to learn about the piece and the production.

Another 'baby' of the dramaturg is the programme - which is often where dramaturgs get to be 'creative' and make their mark. Programmes hold a coveted place in German theatres and are sometimes as much a talking point as the production itself.

Being a dramaturg

The dramaturg is a bridge between the director and the theatre. She/he provides mediation between the director and the company.

The dramaturg is always looking for a home and lacking a product.

S/he should serve the production but often one feels one is serving the director.

Is often met with suspicion - what are they good at exactly? Experts? What is their terrain? The dramaturg has power to give you (a director or actor) a job. Many dramaturgs spearhead late night events that put them out there as performers/ presenters - 'at risk' - as a way of proving their mettle, garnering respect and trust of their peers.

The dramaturg's relationship to a production

Key is maintaining distance - 'a friendly stranger'.

Easier to work with a more experienced director. Weak or new directors tend to rely too much on the dramaturg's opinion.

The dramaturg is not the same as an assistant director because they have a different focus in their approach to a production. Attention to rhythm and meaning of the whole and a distance to notice the small daily compromises. How far has the production moved from its original objectives or intent?

I found Anneli's reflections on being a dramaturg in Germany insightful. I left wondering if the dramaturg's lack of concrete product or territory against the

backdrop of demands for practitioners to point to their contribution (for jobs, funding, reviews) helps to foster the suspicion Anneli mentioned. Interestingly, she points to the programme and information days as the dramaturg's 'baby', an outcome that is easily defined.

Reflecting back on the day I notice an absence. The writer's voice in German theatre is remarkable for not being heard, and it seems innovation falls to the director. I wonder how this impacts the contemporary canon of German theatre?

I look forward to more of these events, where theatre makers from a variety of contexts can contribute their thoughts and practices to develop and deepen my understanding of theatre.

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The Dramaturgs' Network is an organisation of professional dramaturgs and literary managers. Its aim is:

- 1, To promote dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in British theatre and performance arts through practical means.*
- 2, To create a nation-wide network for practicing dramaturgs and a forum for support, shared ideas, knowledge and resources.*

To find out more please visit www.dramaturgy.co.uk

If you would prefer not to receive any further newsletters or mailings from the Dramaturgs' Network please e-mail us on info@dramaturgy.co.uk