

dramaturgs'network

Dramaturgs' Network NEWSLETTER Autumn/Winter Issue 2005

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Welcome to the autumn/winter issue of the Dramaturgs' Network's Newsletter!

This is the final issue we are editing together - John has been commissioned by Routledge to write two books on physical theatre and Katalin is taking her maternity leave. We have taken this opportunity to include a piece by each of us as a farewell contribution.

2006 will see a new editor of the newsletter to build on our work and develop it further. It would help if you could write to us and let us know what you liked in our newsletters and what would you like to read more about. Thank you.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank David Slattne for all his hard work and time (given free) giving technical help and support to the newsletter for the past 5 years.

We wish to say thank you to Hanna Slattne for her work in getting the newsletter to all our members and readers.

We also wish to say thank you to all our contributors who have given their time and energy to writing the articles we have had the pleasure of editing. Because this is the last issue we are editing together we decided to choose articles that summarise a dramaturg's experience. Frauke Franz, keynote speaker on the Dramaturgy Day at the Birmingham Rep: [gives a short summary of the conference](#). Martine Dennewald, dramaturg: [reflects on festival dramaturgy](#), based on her experiences in London and Budapest, with a particular emphasis on the discursive element of dramaturgical work. John Keefe, lecturer-dramaturg: [gives a dramaturgical view of the nature of collaboration and complicity in total theatre](#). Katalin Trencsényi, dramaturg: [gives a personal account of her five years' experience as a freelance dramaturg](#). We hope you enjoy reading these; as always any comments or feedback is welcome. We also welcome un-commissioned articles. Please send them to: newsletter@dramaturgy.co.uk You can also read this and previous issues of the Newsletter on: <http://www.dramaturgy.co.uk/happening/newsletter.html>

Enjoy the reading! Katalin Trencsényi and John Keefe
Editors

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Short Report on the Dramaturgy Day in Birmingham

by Frauke Franz, dramaturg

On the 3rd June 2005 The Birmingham Rep and the Arts Council of England invited the Dramaturgs' Network to contribute to a symposium with the purpose of discussing the state of dramaturgy in Britain today, with a particular emphasis on dramaturgy in 'new writing'. The Network's contributors were Frauke Franz, Duska Radosavljevic and Hanna Slättne.

The symposium was structured around three panels: The first panel started with a general look at what dramaturgy means and what role the dramaturg can play. The second looked into three case studies between writers and their respective dramaturgs/directors. The third put dramaturgy into the bigger pictures of British theatre history and the wider European context.

The day threw up some interesting questions not only about dramaturgy but also about theatre as a collaborative process. It became clear that when we talk about production of new writing, the issue of 'ownership' becomes very sensitive. There was an in depth discussion of the role of the director in this process and how a dramaturg could facilitate this process. It became clear that at the core of the discussion is the question of how we work collaboratively in theatre; and the Birmingham symposium was a great start of a discussion that we need to address if we want to explore new forms of theatre and theatre making.

The Arts Council will draw up a documentation of the day proceedings. There are two more symposiums planned: - Dramaturgy in Black and Asian theatre (at the Oval House in London) - Dramaturgy in Dance and Devised Theatre (at the Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne, tbc.)

For more information please contact the Arts Council of England.

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On Getting People to Engage A few thoughts on festival dramaturgy

by Martine Dennewald, dramaturg

"We have to find a way to continue talking [...]. We have to engage. [...] That's all theater is: who's in the room, whom you can interest in being in the room. And then extending the discussion." (Peter Sellars)

Six months ago, I left the United Kingdom to go to Hungary, where I was asked to curate and coordinate an international Visitors Programme for the Contemporary Drama Festival Budapest. The aim of this series of private events was "to offer a number of international guests the possibility to experience cultural life in Budapest from an insider's point of view [...]" (Kortárs Drámafesztivál 2005a). Forty visitors - theatre and festival directors, dramaturgs, critics and academics - were invited to take part in an exceptional cultural programme. Over the week-long festival period, they were introduced to the different arts in Hungary by some of the most outstanding experts in each field, and they had the opportunity to meet a considerable number of Hungarian artists in person. The intention was to lay "the foundation for future co-operations off the beaten tracks of mainstream cultural exchange" (Kortárs Drámafesztivál 2005b).

Some of my work in London had been with LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) on the LIFT 04: Enquiry, an exploration of the potentialities of theatre, with "What can theatre be?" and "When the play ends, what begins?" as two of its leading questions. My participation in this project, dealing with dramaturgy and documentation, led me to consider the question of how effectively discourse on contemporary theatre and its implications was facilitated during that season at LIFT (Dennewald 2004).

The Contemporary Drama Festival Budapest was created in 1997 as a biennial, week-long festival to provide an overview of new writing in Hungary and to promote Hungarian plays and playwrights; the addition of an international programme in 1999 simply meant that there would now be a two-way exchange of plays and productions. There are also a number of different side events during each edition of the festival, such as an off-programme of Hungarian theatre productions, rehearsed readings of international plays in Hungarian translations, drama translation workshops, conferences etc.

The creation of the international Visitors Programme in 2005 can be read as a shift in the festival's activities. The aim of promoting new writing (both international drama in Hungary and Hungarian drama abroad) is of course still paramount. In particular, the ultimate goal of selling Hungarian plays and productions to the festival's international guests is expressed with rather more emphasis than before. However, the intention of the programme as described in the first communication to potential guests was much broader; it was designed "to foster *an ongoing dialogue* between the festival's artists, theatre practitioners and journalists from abroad and the wider realm of Hungarian culture" (Kortárs Drámafesztivál 2005a, my emphasis).

Those who want to read more about the festival I would like to refer to Ian Herbert's evaluation of this year's Hungarian productions (Herbert 2005), and whoever is interested in Hungarian theatre and drama in more general terms to two of the Hungarian Theatre Institutes' publications in English (Fábri 2004, Müller and Lakos 2004).

What I would like to share are a few thoughts on festival dramaturgy, based on my experiences in London and Budapest, with a particular emphasis on the discursive element of dramaturgical work. I will concentrate on the effectiveness of existing circles of conversation, on the successes and failures of the organisational side of facilitating access to discourse rather than the receptive side.

The reasons why the discursive element is so important to me are twofold, one of them being connected to the purpose and thus the organisational nature of festivals as opposed to theatres, the other tied to the specific role of dramaturgs within theatre festivals as I perceive it. Festivals are, by definition, temporally and spatially condensed series of theatrical events designed to happen at regular intervals; the connection with the notion of celebration is obvious.

If one asks oneself what the advantages of such a condensation are, it immediately becomes clear that festivals live on the idea that individuals - artists, the audience, the media - will be able to gather here at a certain point in time. Even nowadays, the theatre is often referred to as a mirror image of the parliament, a place of assembly, of discussion and debate (Cormann 2002), and whether or not this actually applies does not at all lessen the impact of this *mythologie* (in the Barthesian sense). A festival can thus easily be considered an unusually high occurrence of circles of conversation related to a particular art form, and my personal experience suggests that this is indeed one of the main reasons why theatre professionals and audiences attend theatre festivals: they want to engage.

In other words, it is precisely in its discursive nature that a theatre festival differs from the ongoing activities of a theatre, or more accurately in the concentration and potential connections of discursive events, which is

mainly due to the celebratory nature of the festival, the predominance of professional interest among its audience and the scarcity of other cultural activities (e.g. at festivals in small towns during summer). It is interesting to note that LIFT, when it decided to embark on its Enquiry project in 2001, abolished every single criterion which could define it as a festival in conventional terms: it is now neither a temporally nor a spatially condensed series of events, and it does not happen at regular intervals. But at the same time, the discursive element is still vital: LIFT is conducting a 'public enquiry' into what theatre can be, with the explicit aim of encouraging discourse on contemporary theatre, its social implications and personal repercussions.

What follows from this premise is that the role of the festival dramaturg differs from that of the theatre dramaturg to the same degree as the respective discursive natures of theatre festivals and theatres vary. It is a difference that is often expressed through a negation: the festival dramaturg is *not* generally concerned with play development, historical and contextual research, or advising directors on the progression of their work. For the common perception is that the essence of a festival dramaturg's work is in preparing and making programming decisions together with the artistic director, a task which is of course just as predominant in a theatre dramaturg's occupation.

I would like to argue that festival dramaturgy can be defined in much broader terms, in terms precisely of the discursive nature of the event the festival dramaturg is in charge of. What he or she should be concerned with - over and above the programming decisions which are of course an important part of the job - is how to create new circles of conversation, and how to make existing ones more effective by creating the spaces and constellations for a public debate. This concept of festival dramaturgy is not intended as a surrogate for the communication, education and marketing departments of theatre festivals. It rather draws on these departments' work in order to achieve its goals, while at the same time setting the general aims the whole organisation is geared towards in discursive terms.

I would like to point out a few contentious issues more closely related to the Contemporary Drama Festival Budapest in order to illustrate these general reflections. (The absence of a person explicitly filling the role of a dramaturg at the festival should not distract from the fact that dramaturgy *as a function* will always be covered within the organisation.) My examples can be divided into two basic categories: questions regarding the dimensions of access to discourse, and questions of discourse genres. Michel Foucault's work on discourse as a practice defining its object certainly form the basis from which these thoughts operate (1972). But the task of accounting for the social dimension of specific discursive events has largely been assumed by what is known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and CDA's more straightforward conceptual tools are perhaps more appropriate here.

Following Van Dijk's four conditions of access to discourse (planning, setting, controlling and audience scope, 1996), I will consider just a few of the most striking particularities of the Contemporary Drama Festival Budapest 2005. The fact is, and this was often brought up during discussions between festival staff, that it had been difficult to find "proper" dramatic texts (as opposed to devised scripts) that met the festival's quality standards either as a play or as a production. This is of course not a surprise, seeing as international theatre has been in what may be termed its "post-dramatic" phase for a few decades now (Lehmann 1999), and that drama as a category of literary texts can easily be considered abolished, at least in theoretical terms.

The consequence of which was that from the six Hungarian productions on the main programme, only half were stagings of plays that had been written beforehand, while two were devised productions, and one used an epic poem as textual material. Among the productions on the international programme, arguably the most interesting (and probably the most successful in terms of criticism and audience acclaim) was a production which hardly used any

textual utterances at all.

This entirely predictable matter does not represent a problem in itself, for after all, the programme does reflect the state of Hungarian drama very accurately, e.g. the fact that in the most interesting theatrical events of the last few years, text is mainly seen as a material to be shaped by the director and his company of actors, musicians, etc.

Nevertheless, even a rough analysis of the conditions of access to discourse in this particular point reveals the questionable character of the procedure. For at no point is the paradox of a drama festival showing a large number of post-dramatic productions communicated to the public, and it is surprising that no reviews picked up on the subject. The programming dilemmas that stem from the festival's nature as an event concerned primarily with the dramatic text were simply not mentioned in public. The suggestion that one could turn the very controversiality of "drama" into the main feature of the festival was never realised. The possibility of giving a broader constituency access to the controversy by opening the debate to the public, e.g. by organising a round table discussion during the festival on the topic of post-dramatic theatre, or at least by communicating and reflecting on the issues the jury and festival team had been faced with, was never brought up at all.

This general tendency is prolonged from the planning dimension to the other categories of access to discourse. As concerns the setting, the lack of a festival centre or at least a festival office in downtown Budapest meant that there was simply no place people could turn to when they required information or felt like communicating their thoughts and feelings about the festival. There was of course the possibility of writing an email or calling up festival staff directly, but this does not in any way represent a public forum for debate and the exchange of ideas. The festival club at Merlin Theatre did not manage to fulfil the function of meeting point between artists, guests, festival staff and audiences, either, mainly due to scheduling and programming difficulties, the complete absence of clear communication to establish the venue as festival club, the considerable distance from the guests' hotel, second-rate food, and the fact that visiting companies preferred to stay at the venue where they had performed after the show.

With regards to the controlling dimension, it was clear throughout the festival that public discussion and debate were only encouraged in the most formal settings, where control over the discursive event unmistakably resided with the festival director herself or one of her substitutes. In Budapest, the number of such public events was small considering the amount of performances shown at the festival, and it is interesting to note that the two most substantial discussions on offer were organised at the request and by the initiative of other organisations. The Visitors Programme was an exception to this trend, in that it strove to leave the responsibility over the different discursive events to the participants (artists/experts and guests) to a significant extent. The consequence was that a number of conversations lacked guidance and consistency, which is certainly a case in point for a more thoughtful planning of these activities.

Finally, I would briefly like to consider the notion of discourse genres and its relevance for theatre festivals as discursive events. Maingueneau makes a fundamental distinction between two genres of discourse: in *instituted genres*, "roles played by [...] participants are set a priori and, as a rule, remain stable during the process of communication" (2002:320f.), while *conversational genres* are "not closely related to institutions, roles or stable scripts; [...] their frame is constantly evolving during interactions." It has become clear from the above that most of the events at the Contemporary Drama Festival Budapest (performances and post-show talks) belong to a highly instituted genre of discourse, and that in fact little effort was made to encourage more conversational genres, with the exception of the Visitors Programme's activities.

The question to ask here is of course whether public discourse is

facilitated more effectively by conversational than by instituted genres of discourse, and I have already pointed out that many discussions on the Visitors Programme suffered from insufficient focus and structuring - they were in fact too conversational. My analysis of the LIFT 04: Enquiry has shown that by and large, the more public the discourse aims to be, the more instituted it is, while private situations favour conversational genres. At the same time, conversational genres appear to encourage sincerity and intensity of personal engagement to a higher degree than instituted genres of discourse (Dennewald 2004).

I would like to argue that ideally, festival dramaturgy consists in combining the openness and flexibility of the conversational genre with the accessibility and publicness of the instituted, and some of the most interesting events both in London and Budapest have indeed been successful in this respect. But instead of being conceptual and organisational coincidences, these events need to be carefully designed, and I have pointed out some of the conditions of access to discourse that can be helpful in this respect.

These are the dimensions we must look towards if we are interested in getting people to engage. And then extend the discussion.

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Analysis
(London: Routledge)

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Two forms of collaboration and complicity in total theatre and playing Beckett; a dramaturgs view.

by John Keefe

Introduction All theatre is a collaboration: between the actors, and between the actors and non-acting contributors; together these make a '*mise-en-scène*' with which the spectator collaborates. All theatre is a complicity or a pact of knowing acceptance: between the actors who accept the fiction and figures they present as 'real' and behave as if these are 'real'; between the real fictional world created (the '*mise-en-scène*') and the spectator who accepts that fiction as a real representative of their world whilst knowing it is a fiction. The spectator is always reading the '*mise-en-scène*' to a lesser or greater degree but I do not accept they are always constructing an image; rather it is a question of how complete is the image presented. The more complete the image the less work the spectator has to do; at its worst a form of infantilising the spectator.

I wish to examine and contrast two particular forms of collaboration-complicity; between that demanded by the unsustainable ideology of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' with its attempt to construct and give a complete image which subsumes the spectator (as an ideal), and that of Beckett's '*mise-en-scène*' which rests on his performance dramaturgy that both shows us the world of the play yet keeps us slightly detached from that world as we laugh and cry at what we recognize in ourselves. Where we do have to play our part in the play, in constructing our image and experience of the human condition from the images presented to and confronting us.

To suggest, as I am, that Beckett represents a model more truthful to the human experience, means relocating his work in that amorphous area we call 'total theatre', arguing his importance as a key but overlooked practitioner in a form not associated with him but which is fundamental to his performance dramaturgy. This represents a rejection of the Romantic 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (here, a sublimation of the parts into the whole) in favour of a 'gestual *mise-en-scène*' that is spiritual, corporeal, liminal; a dialectic of tension and harmony between body-voice-sound-space.

My aim is to outline the terms 'Gesamtkunstwerk' and 'total theatre' and to argue the distinction that must be drawn between these. By doing so I aim to make some observations regarding our approach to Beckett's performance dramaturgy and the resultant collaboration-complicity it rests on and demands. If a certain degree of provocation is felt here then I hope that is merely seen as a means to the end of re-looking at Beckett. I spend some time discussing the concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' and playing with the term 'R(r)omanticism' as a means of establishing the ongoing (arguably insidious and distorting) influence of Romanticism and neo-romanticism in modern art. When mixed with the continuing domination of realism-naturalism, this hybrid forms the backdrop to the alternative collaboration based on challenge and confrontation with which the spectator engages that Beckett (and others) offer. Thus, I feel certain formal terms are necessary to capture the full sense of the observations being made but I hope these are given sufficient explanation and exposition to allow access to the levels of meaning intended. Some ideas are only touched on but in ways I hope both make sense and serve to open up further lines of discussion.

The misguided paths of R(r)omanticism

This paper draws on two previous papers given on Edward Gordon Craig and Samuel Beckett where I, as a theatre scientist, readily admitted to being seduced by Craig's ideal of a performance text that speaks at many

levels; at its purest centred on the dynamic still figure in bare metaphoric space. I still remain open to the resonant radicalism at the heart of this image, especially given its centrality to the styles of total theatre and performance with which we work. But as a theatre scientist who uses the methods of the dialectics of *Verfremdung*, I find this notion is both a chimera and dangerous as an ideal in certain guises. This is the GESAMTKUNSTWERK, graphically here in capitals to represent the Ideal it is evoking and yearning for. Pavis introduces the term from Wagner's coinage circa 1850 (see 1) and translates it as 'the global or whole work of art' (Pavis 1998: 159) but in his entry also, confusingly, calls it 'total theatre'; confusingly because I believe these to be different things, the issue I shall return to below. As an Ideal of art, Wagner's theatre, like that of Craig, Artaud, Beck and many others is predicated on a theatrical nihilism:

[Craig's] theatre could not be realised until the great incubus of the present theatre is destroyed leaving clear space (Duncan, 1911, quoted in Innes 1983: 4)

The roots of this nihilism lie in a cultural atavism; what I have titled the misguided paths of R(r)omanticism (the small 'r' denoting the later manifestations of the concept). Whilst radicalising art it also rejects a perceived debased modern culture in favour of a seeming alternative; a reunification that the mediated and romanticised pre-modern represents. But this reunification is merely an 'imago' of the pre-modern constructed from 18/19/20th-century material and ideologies. The 'new' discovery of Nature, the revealing of buried cave paintings, the discovery and display of non-European or Paleolithic art forms, objects, and cultures; these came to represent an existential 'other' characterized by two key terms: the 'Aufbruch'-'Ausbruch' (spiritual or existential breaking away from the everyday) and the 'Sehnsucht' (a yearning for the unattainable ideal). This 'other' is the grail of the undivided existence that is both the source and misguided path of R(r)omanticism.

The false premise

This existence characterized by the 'Aufbruch'-'Ausbruch' and 'Sehnsucht' is simply no longer possible in what Eliade characterizes as 'living in a desacralized cosmos' (Eliade 1959: 17). The return to "clear space" demanded by R(r)omanticism requires a return to what (again following Eliade), I would characterise as 'a cosmic mode of existence in symbiosis', which I here define as a society-culture which does not attempt to systematically refashion Nature but lives in a sacralised relationship with Nature according to perpetuated customs, totems, taboos and conventions. A return to this is simply not possible except as R(r)omantic mythic which is a false premise. (As an aside, it is the excluding from this symbiosis that is the ultimate social sanction, and the breaking or loss of this symbiosis that we mythologise as The Fall; the mythic of a pre-lapsarian existence.) The GESAMTKUNSTWERK or "whole work" can only exist in such a pre-lapsarian, sacralised culture.

The whole object

Such a 'whole work' as object or artifact is exemplified by the Paleolithic axe head; a total object whereby the functional axe (survival) is at the same time an object of magic (liminal) is at the same time an object of beauty (aesthetic). An object that represents physical and spiritual survival, where the corporeal and the metaphysical are all part of the one reality. Any phenomenon of this kind can only exist in this way in an unbifurcated or undivided cosmic society and culture (Eliade) which is not alienated in its view of itself from Nature; where the greatest existential fear is to become 'outcast', made 'other' and thus living in a world of existential chaos. In the light of the theme of collaboration such a theatre work demands not collaboration by the audience but a state of immersion and submission. How often have we heard of the desire to become lost in the work of art- my point is that such an immersion is in fact a desire to return to the state of existence outlined above. Because of this demand and desire to become

'lost' the act of collaboration is made void and thus it cannot be theatre, which demands and is defined by the presence of the signifying actor, the reading audience and a non-Platonic/non-Hegelian dialectic between the two which is a collaborative contract. It is a false premise because of the nature of theatrical looking; a state that rests on the suspension of disbelief by the spectator, and on a form of psychical distance. In other words it is a dramaturgical complicity by which the spectator knows he/she is looking at a fiction but which is accepted as a real event depicting a recognisable and identifiable reality. We move in and out of a certain psychical state but never forget that it is a fiction we are watching. Thus theatre is a complicity predicated on knowingness. The GESAMTKUNSTWERK seeks to invoke a psychical state where that knowingness is overturned and the spectators give themselves up to and into the vision; theatre is no longer theatre but becomes ritual. It is not a knowing complicity between equal agents but a vision that the spectator is required to give themselves up to. The GESAMTKUNSTWERK is simply an ideal of its era located in specific political and cultural circumstances. But it has become a theatrical chimera chased in many ways; as Artaud's 'ritual theatre' or Beck's 'transcendent ritual' or Craig's 'state beyond theatre' or Miskin's 'ontological street theatre' (see Keefe: 2002; 2003). What I would see as a neo-romantic style where staging is often a triumph of form over content, of conception over execution. There are other possibilities.

So not 'Gesamtkunstwerk' but forms of 'total theatre'

I believe we have to look to Beckett, Brecht and others to give us an understanding of such alternatives, as opposition to the false Ideal, as a statement of political intent. Again I start from Pavis where these entries do provide a useful grounding for my observations. Schlemmer in 1925:

total theatre must be an artistic creation, an organic set of bundles of relationships between light, space, surface, movement, sound, and human being (Schlemmer 1925, quoted in Pavis, 1998: 405)

To Pavis's entry I would add Benjamin:

the following relationships are dialectical: that of the gesture to the situation and vice versa; that of the actor to the character represented and vice versa; that of the attitude of the actor, as determined by the authority of the text, to the critical attitude of the audience and vice versa; that of the specific action represented to the action implied in any theatrical representation (Benjamin 1973: 25)

I want to suggest that this points us to 'total theatre' as the opposite of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Just as we are still caught in the mistranslation and misuse of 'Verfremdung' as 'alienation' so we should not allow the mistranslation of 'Gesamtkunstwerk' as 'total theatre', but talk of this, as Pavis first suggests, as the 'global or whole work of art'. Rather than a synthesized dialectic of parts we have a dialectic of autonomous parts in what Aristotle calls a 'harmonious whole'. Meyerhold in 1907:

Words alone cannot say everything. Hence there must be a pattern of movement on the stage to transform the spectator into a vigilant observer. Words catch the ear, plasticity the eye. Each are subordinated to their own separate rhythms and the two do not necessarily coincide (Meyerhold 1969: 56)

At the centre of such a dramaturgy are two key elements or concepts, and here I again follow but also develop Pavis:

- '*gestuality*': the relationship of one body and mind to each other; to another's body and mind; to its and their milieu or environment.
- '*mise-en-scène*': the totality of everything in the frame (including the effects of the frame itself) in a harmony, whether coinciding or not.

Thus I suggest we look for a Beckettian *gestuality* and a Beckettian *mise-en-scène* to distinguish Beckett's performance dramaturgy, drawing on the principles of physical and movement theatre mixed with a political humanism. This is a particular form of collaboration, one based on the spectator having a cool detachment whilst engaged in an intense emotional recognition of the human condition. This becomes a complicity between consenting, aware adults.

Beckett's total theatre

From the perspective not only of an academic but equally of a theatre-maker and performance dramaturg, I begin to characterise Beckett's total theatre as follows. In the beginning is not the word for Beckett but the potential word from a non-speaking (but not silent) still, plastic figure in metaphorical space; potential because we recognise the figure as human whatever its condition and thus as a sentient speaking being i.e. human. Once speech begins the words not only have semantic meaning but also other connotative significance derived from the plastic (silent or not silent) space around the words and the figure(s).

Beckett insists on the equality of word-sound-body-space, **not** word over plasticity or movement over word; these must always be acting on each other and all having a physical quality. Thus the physical act of speaking or sounding as well as of movement, or the physical act of not speaking or sounding and of stillness, or speaking or sounding and stillness, or not speaking or sounding and movement, within plastic space. Not only the performative word but also the performative body and space as complete composite image, as total theatre; Beckett's own version of the "dynamic still figure in bare metaphoric space". Thus the body and the space it inhabits must be formed (out of the evidence of the play text) within the performance space before utterance begins. This becomes Beckett's own form of Decroux's dictum, 'to be onstage you must have something to say' (Dennis 1995: 7). For Beckett everything onstage is a deliberately placed signifier speaking to the complicit, reading spectator saying.....

Beckett's particular performance dramaturgy demands to be released through the principles of total theatre we normally associate with Meyerhold, Decroux, Lecoq and others, as a complex plasticity of word-sound-body-space. Thus Beckett's very particular liminality evoked by such a gestual *mise-en-scène*; where both figures and spectators are taken to their respective points of spiritual and corporeal threshold: the figure fixed at that point as delineated in the play text, the spectator standing on that threshold as they read the figure at that point from their own existential condition.

The spectator is both at a point of distance recognizing the theatrical nature of the image and at a point of collaboration as the reader of that total image recognizing it as a statement about his or her own existential fragility. This is not a metaphysical threshold as the 'Aufbruch'-'Ausbruch' or 'Sehnsucht', implying an escape from the human condition, but a threshold of humanist, spiritual awareness that is a confronting of that condition. A collaboration of recognition and confrontation of despair.

....one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (Calmer)
They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.
(He jerks the rope)
On. (Beckett 1956: 89)

The human figure not as the Romantic 'Übermensch',

[...] great historical men, whose own particular aims involve those larger issues which are the will of the world-spirit (Hegel 1956: 30) (see 2)

(Hegel of course represents one of the great statements of the demands of the GESAMTKUNSTWERK as a 'giving up to').

Not as a sentimentalised hero but the 'Untermensch', the everyman or

everywoman who is heroic simply by living; by accepting in a non-fatalistic manner that life is death and is to be lived for itself in the face of death. Hence Beckett's profound demand and exhortation that we go "On".

In this, Beckett's total theatre is a provoking and evocative mix of the modern and pre-modern sensibility; I suggest a number of images in the end notes which represent and evoke this intertwining taken both from Beckett's stage work and other artists.

Images of the angst of the modern presented through a sensibility of the pre-modern; the unglossed condition of the transience and fragility of life presented as a modern alienation from identity and self-biography yet with the inherent paradox of self-awareness that is medieval in its brutal reality. Images that are not given to us, that do not infantilise us but which we have to work at to become complicit with.

Through the very order and rigour of his dramaturgy Beckett opens the threshold of a gaze or a glimpse of the immanence of the chaos beyond; that laps always at the edge of order. Complex, plastic images of loss, reflecting the resonances and echoes of a non-romanticised pre-modern sensibility presented with the rigour of the Enlightenment, the modernist project. Images that are liminal, which represents the anger, brittleness, multilayered fragility of Beckett's worlds, our worlds.

Beckett's unique mixing of pre-modern and modern sensibility is also found in the liminality of intensive reading and extensive reading. The continual repeating of passages of word or movement (both gestural and walking patterns) is resonant of the pre-modern emphasis on immersed knowledge of a limited number of books or existential patterns set against the modern trend of extensive newness and novelty as an escape from such repetition. Beckett's figures and spectators are caught between the comfort of repetition and the hell of life cycles these patterns give glimpses of:

You say we have to come back tomorrow
Yes. (Beckett 1956: 14)

fuck life
stop her eyes
rock her off
rock her off. (Beckett 1984: 282)

Will you never have done? (Pause) Will you never have
done... revolving it all? (Beckett 1984: 240)

This is Beckett's divine comedy of existence as total theatre. A total theatre which provokes, confronts the spectator yet draws him or her into a complicity of recognition of the simple humanity portrayed and evoked. It is to preserve the uniqueness of this image and insight that Beckett so fiercely defends his play text; his defence against the misguided paths of R(r)omanticism. However, this leaves me with an ambiguity of feeling where I own up to a great ambivalence regarding the inalterability of the Beckett play text. Their integrity is their strength but also their weakness; if we follow the textual demands to the apparent letter we would see the same play each time merely with different actors. I'm not sure I see the point of such dramaturgical clones except as displays of actorly skills. But of course if we read the play text carefully we see an ordered mix of explicit directions to be followed and points of openness to be interpreted. In this sense the plays are both constructions of a Beckettian '*mise-en-scène*' (a total theatre with a deliberate incompleteness) and are to be constructed by the spectator as a collaboration of detached recognition and intense understanding.

So I suggest we need to distinguish between the play text to be followed and the performance text to be realised through the principles of total theatre.

The role of the performance dramaturg is to simply to collaborate on this realization, using their skills as theatre scientist within the creative ensemble yet sitting between the performance text and the audience.

Play

In 2003 I created a production of *Play* with 3 theatre students.
 We performed the play as written but not as directed.
 We kept the words; we had 2 women and 1 man.
 We had neither resources for creating urns nor any theatre lighting.
 We had an interesting performance space to use.
 The audience were seated in a fragmented pattern through which the actors moved giving a variety and fragmentation of sightlines, demanding a particular form of complicity.
 So I kept the words and the three figures but restaged the performance text, replacing the plasticity of the tableau with a plasticity of movement in space derived from the movement principles of Pina Bausch.
 We had no sound except that made by the actors' voices and bodies, the space, the audience. This speaking movement was played around and between the seated audience.
 The spectator saw a construction but was complicit in reading and understanding that construction as they constructed their own images from that which is incomplete; what is not said or shown.
 We played with *Play*.
 I believe we created a performance text through a staging that recast Beckett's '*gestuality*' and '*mise-en-scène*' as a piece of Beckettian total theatre.

Notes

- 1 The concept is referred to by Wagner in his "Artwork of the Future" (1849), and "Opera and Drama" (1851).
- 2 Hegel also talks of the 'agents of the world-spirit' in section 33 of this work.

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Who's afraid of ... the dramaturg?

Some thoughts after five years as a freelance dramaturg

By Katalin Trencsényi, dramaturg

It has been five years since I received my degree (MA) in Dramaturgy at the Academy of Drama and Film in Budapest. When the Dean of the School presented me with my diploma in the packed theatre of the university, he shook my hand and said: "Welcome, back!" What he meant was that I had literally just returned from my two-years' theatre traineeship in Britain.

After the ceremony, myself and my dramaturgy class (there were eight of us) had our picture taken on a cart in the school yard (to be framed and hung on the school's wall of fame) before we all dispersed to start our professional career. Sitting cheerfully on "Thespis' cart" as we called that decrepit old prop that summer afternoon, little did I know that cart had a symbolic meaning for my future: further travelling between Budapest and London, until a year later I'd move to Britain and continue my career there as a dramaturg.

Five years have passed since then, all spent working in my profession (one year in Hungary and four in Britain) - enough time to look back and summarise my experience as a freelance dramaturg before moving to the next chapter of my career.

Being a freelancer

It has been five challenging years full of joy and hardship! First of all, I am glad that I can do what I want: working in a profession, which is more than "only a job" for me - it's a lifetime passion and vocation.

As a freelance dramaturg I enjoy my freedom of choice: that I can decide my working schedule (so I even had the luxury of having my own weekly/fortnightly research days for my own development at the wonderful

British Library), and I have the possibility to choose with whom I want to work, which projects I am taking on. Though there is a price for my freedom: unpredictability of life and income.

As a freelancer I had the chance to work for several different theatre companies, and on many different projects, and this was an excellent opportunity to gain a solid knowledge about the theatre scene in Britain. It gave me a good insight into the contemporary theatre scene: I could meet (and work with) different practitioners and learn about differences and similarities between ways of thinking and work processes in different theatres. Working for the National Theatre was different from working for a small dance company with people with learning difficulties or doing a children's show for a rural touring company. I feel this was a great advantage. This freedom also gave me more time to experiment with different dramaturgical jobs in the theatre (from running a new drama competition through a variety of play developments to educational projects) and establish a better idea about my interests and knowledge. This also taught me the different kinds of work and involvement needed from a dramaturg in different projects, which was a useful lesson.

Production Dramaturgy (in text based theatre)

'My experience of floor dramaturgy is that from the point of view of approaching a play most directors can be roughly divided into two groups: those who come from an acting background and those who come from an academic background. In approaching the play they both have different starting points. Lets call the former group's method *approaching from acting* and the latter's *approaching from analysis*.

The former group of directors - in my experience - don't start from a strong idea or a vision. They read the play and are strongly affected by it, they sense what it's about and the work in the rehearsal room for them is a journey of trial and error until they find the final shape of the production. These directors don't spend much time around the table analysing the play, the initial discussion about the play is soon followed by practical exercises and blocking. These directors prefer to put the play on its feet as soon as possible, because they need to see it in order to be able to decide what will work and what won't. They are very good at picking up ideas from the floor and giving actors a further push if needed.

The pitfall in working this way can sometimes be inconsistency. When there is no core idea or basic analysis of the play there can be too many different ideas to choose from. Consequently it can sometimes be difficult to find a clear direction for the play, and can sometimes make the director hesitant about making decisions.

The dramaturg's help is usually welcomed whether it is contextual, or just moral support during a difficult decision. However, some of the things that a dramaturg can offer (questioning, detailed analysing etc.) can sometimes irritate the director who feels he/she needs "to paint with broad brushstrokes" first.

The other type of directors' approach comes from a very detailed analysis of the play or a very strong idea or vision. To support this, prior to the rehearsal, they have usually done extensive research. In the rehearsal room a considerable amount of time is spent analysing the play or 'actioning' the play, so the actors understand each line and know what to do with them. This can be very time-consuming, though usually the analysis of one scene is followed by floor work on that scene and other exercises/practical work.

The dramaturg's help here is usually welcomed, though his/her responsibilities might sometimes overlap with the director's; like editing, cutting or rewriting the text - shaping it to the core idea of the director. However, because during the rehearsal process the director focuses on the "how" (i.e.: how will the actors achieve the desired expressions, interpersonal relationships) and I as a dramaturg focus on the "what" (i.e.:

what does it mean for the audience) our roles are different.

The big question is where and how can a dramaturg contribute to these different processes? In my experience working with a director whose method is "approaching from acting" requires lots of research from the dramaturg, and often the research material is well received by the director. The dramaturg is usually needed for making or checking cuts, and sometimes (before the rehearsals start) can act as a "soundingboard" for the director while the director forms his/her opinion on the play. The director also enjoys the moral support (in the rehearsal room) he/she can get from a dramaturg especially in the case of debates, dilemmas or difficult decisions. It is usually appreciated if the dramaturg is trying to help to keep the play 'on track' (however strong or vague that track is). There is very little room for the dramaturg's help with the analysis of the play. In fact, given the short time allocated for rehearsals this is often seen by the company as impractical.

It may be only coincidental, but in my experience of working with this method there is often a crisis when the company first gets to the end of the play: the last scene (or the conclusion of the play) usually doesn't make sense! This is the time when a dramaturg gets urgent phone calls to come in and solve the crisis. (If there's no dramaturg involved, this is the time when a play suffers all sorts of panic-stricken rewrites and cuts.)

Why does this happen? I think this is the time when the un-interpreted play "fights back". Those obscure sentences, which were not tackled earlier in the rehearsal process, add up to a final confusion where somehow things don't really make sense in the final scene. This is the time when panic sets in, the company hastily tries to re-cut, re-edit or rewrite the scene and calls for the dramaturg.

The resolution of this crisis depends a lot on when in the rehearsal process it takes place. A day before the premiere, the dramaturg's job will be merely "fire extinguishing". Two weeks before it the dramaturg may be able to offer a deeper solution.

Working with the analytic type of director, the dramaturg's work is slightly different. In this case the director shares more responsibilities with the dramaturg, and if there's a good working relationship between them this 'double act' can prove very useful and fruitful. It gives both of them more time to go into details during the work. When the run-throughs start, it gives the dramaturg enough time and space to deal with the 'performance text' as well, since the thorough work on the 'play text' has been completed by then. The only hardship of this kind of work is that it can be very time consuming for the company (and not all actors are used to it), so very thorough planning and time-keeping are needed in order to finish all the work; but it is possible. I find this kind of dramaturgy more 'adult' - in that I can go beyond the mere basics. It also expands my knowledge hugely and makes me 'grow' as a dramaturg.

Working with a director who has never worked with a dramaturg before

I cannot write about what it is like working with a director who doesn't want to work with a dramaturg or doesn't like dramaturgs. Because in general, they don't work with a dramaturg! But working with a director who has never worked with a dramaturg before involves new tasks for me as a dramaturg.

The good thing is that there is an initial trust and curiosity on the director's side at the beginning - and that's what I build on. First of all, during my work I am not only working as a dramaturg for this director, but I am also teaching him/her how to work with me. This is a mutual process - we are establishing a working relationship.

In Hungary some directors and dramaturgs are almost inseparable. They

work with each other on production after production. So, they know each other's way of thinking and have a long established working process based on mutual trust. Each subsequent production can only benefit from this chemistry. I'd like to see this happen in Britain. Maybe it would dispel the fear of some directors...

Usually, well before we start working together, I explain to the director what I can offer as a dramaturg and let him/her decide what it is from this range of skills he/she would like to utilise. Then we agree on the way we are going to work together and communicate - but accept that in practice this might change. Therefore we make sure that during our working process we have enough time for feedback - where I learn from the director what kind of help works for him/her, what is it he/she found useful and what is it he/she does not want me to do.

The main thing, I find, is to keep the initial trust and build on it. I am there to *support the director*; if he/she does not feel this, I am not doing my job well. Yes, there might be times when this support can prove tricky. For example if there's a hidden or open conflict growing between the director and the company, or between the director and the playwright. Then I need to remind myself that my other important task is to *support the production*, and try to use all my diplomatic skills in order to do this.

My experience in working with a director who has never used a dramaturg before is that it's easier to make him/her understand about my "literary dramaturgy" work than about my "floor dramaturgy". Perhaps because this is the "terra nova" of dramaturgy here, as it's something literary managers don't do. Unless it is experienced during the rehearsal it is difficult to explain in what way my floor dramaturgical work differs from an assistant director's (I won't dwell on this here, but only state that there is a BIG difference), and what is that extra element I can add to the production, without taking over the director's chair. What helps me is when I can demonstrate this during our work together. In order to do that, I need space from the director for my work and for my opinions.

Unfortunately I don't always get this, often because the director has an established way of working and is not always clear about the extent to which I can help in the rehearsal room. Sometimes I leave a production with the feeling that if we would now start working on a production together, the director would have a better idea of what I can offer and use me in a more useful way. That's why I support continuous working relationships between directors and dramaturgs because this can deepen our work, which can only benefit the production in the long run.

Working with a playwright

As a person who has written plays herself, I know how important it is to have honest and constructive feedback on my writing.

Maybe I was lucky, but I found that playwrights like working with a dramaturg, if his/her help is professional. I found these relationships more easily established than relationships with directors. Somehow I found that British playwrights were more open to working with a dramaturg - unfortunately I cannot always say the same about Hungarian playwrights! (Whereas for a director working with a dramaturg is much more established in Hungary. How interesting!)

There are two main rules I apply when I work with a playwright:

- 1, The rule of sensitivity.
- 2, The rule of authorship.

First of all, it is never easy being criticised. I only need to remind myself of how I take criticism, in order to make sure that I don't hurt the playwright with a harsh judgement. It doesn't mean that I have to be dishonest and praise everything, but I try to frame my criticism in a positive

way. Whenever possible I offer encouragement, and try to show a range of solutions to a problem.

This takes me to my second rule. It's not me who is writing the play but the playwright. I can help him/her with criticism, suggestions, exercises, research, and days of play development with actors etc., but ultimately the decisions have to be his/hers. I avoid rewriting the play myself - I just point out places where I feel rewriting needs to be done and explain my opinion; or suggest cuts or changes which are then up to the playwright to take on board if he/she decides.

When we start working together I draw the playwright's attention to this latter rule of mine to make sure that he/she will feel at ease working with me. Obviously, this requires that I truly understand what the play is about, and what his/her intentions are. So during our first meeting I mostly ask questions and try to familiarise myself with the playwright's thought process. This is very important because it helps to free me from other influences and pressures (from the theatre etc), which may mean I can't give the unbiased support and advice necessary.

This way of starting our work together can help us through that very difficult first stage before I gain the playwright's trust. I don't blame him/her for not trusting me immediately. A play is a very personal thing - it is difficult to step back from it and hear criticism objectively. So I respect any playwright who can do that.

It is even harder when it's a new play. A new play is a very sensitive thing - it is untested. So, all our opinions about whether it will work or not are equally untested. That's why I prefer it when a script development can conclude with some practical exercises based on the script, and perhaps lead up to a reading in order to see and hear how it would work. I enjoy these development workshops with actors and the playwright in the rehearsal room. If it is appropriately done, it can help the play and the playwright a lot. There is nothing better for me than to see a play working on stage and a happy and inspired playwright making notes during the trial reading.

In fact, one of the drawbacks of being a freelance dramaturg is, that after the project has ended I have no means of helping the playwright further. In the case of new writers especially, there is a need for further support. Often, even after the project has ended, they redevelop the work, or have a new play, or have questions about the industry they'd like to discuss with a dramaturg who knows their work. These are the times when I wish I had a department behind me to support and nurture these talents, or take these projects further, but as a freelancer there comes a time when I must leave them.

I wish there was some kind of link or network through which we freelancers could meet with Literary Managers/Dramaturgs working full time for a theatre, and feed in our information and findings, and thus not allow these talents to be lost. I guess, in this respect, we freelancers could have the same function that fringe theatres (should) have: being the outpost of new drama and feeding in our findings to these literary departments' work.

Work on translations

This is another tricky area! This subject alone could fill another article, so I'm not going to go into too much detail. Briefly, I want to mention the latest trend where, in order to achieve a translation of a foreign play, theatres use a literal translator and a playwright. The literal translator translates the play from its original language but keeps it in a "raw" state. Then the work is given to a playwright (who usually doesn't speak that language) to "tweak it". I don't want to get into the debate about whether it is good or bad practise (I've seen examples of both), nor talk about the difference between translation, adaptation and version of a play.

I would just like to draw attention to one thing: if a theatre chooses to

work with a playwright **and** a literal translator, more communication needs to be established by the theatre between the literal translator and the playwright throughout the whole process, and further more, several check-points need to be built into the process to make sure that the outcome of the work won't be different from the original. This latter vigorous editorial/expert work is something a dramaturg could do (provided he/she speaks both of those languages and knows both cultures). This perhaps could guarantee the quality and the authenticity of these kinds of translations, and be a new field where the dramaturg's knowledge could be well used.

Oh, and one more thing! Theatres should remember all these people's work later when producing programmes, leaflets and other publicity material! They all need to be properly credited. But this applies to other kinds of work as well. Somehow the dramaturg's work doesn't always seem to be credited, which is more than negligent, it is shameful!

Running a new drama competition

Maybe I shouldn't say this, and perhaps I'm destroying my own further work possibilities, but I don't think a freelance dramaturg should be employed to run a new drama competition. Not because we are not able to do this, but because I believe that these are long term projects which shouldn't end after a couple of months. So, I would say to artistic directors: if you want us to run these kinds of projects, please employ the dramaturg on a part-time basis at the very least!

You wouldn't want to eat out in a restaurant where the chef is a freelancer who whizzes in every evening with his trolley containing his home chopped vegetables and kitchen utensils brought from home! So why wouldn't you commit yourself to employing a dramaturg on a long-term basis to develop new drama for your theatre?

Recently I had the pleasure of running a new drama competition from the office floor of a fringe theatre - they couldn't even provide me with a desk! When my contract ended 5 months later, it was hard to leave behind the half-finished development projects of the runners-up and the work with our commissioned playwright, which had just started - I felt it was such a waste! (Later I was called back to finish the play developments, but by then the commissioned playwright hadn't received enough support and the play "went astray" - the theatre felt it had wasted its money, the playwright felt frustrated, and this all could have been avoided.) I don't want to blame the theatre: they could hardly afford to run the competition let alone employ a part-time dramaturg, but they felt they had a mission to find and develop new talent. Unfortunately because of the corners cut, I felt this mission did as much harm as good.

But the picture is wider: I cannot leave unmentioned the current system of funding theatres. I find the amount of people in theatres required to work for free, or far less than the Equity minimum, completely unacceptable. I cannot think of any other profession where so much risk taking, volunteering and sacrifice would be required and it doesn't get either valued or properly paid for!

I also find it problematic that because of the financial unpredictability, theatres cannot really nurture long-term plans. I am convinced that for truly innovative ideas and new visions to flourish, a theatre needs several years of predictable, solid funding; as introducing, and developing new concepts requires time.

But this would take us to the government's overview of the place of theatres in our society (and the definition of art), which would be beyond the remit of this article. Let us just establish that there are certain dramaturgical jobs, which cannot be properly done on a freelance basis.

How far are we from theatres employing full-time dramaturgs? I'd like to believe that this is going to happen in the not so distant future. Meanwhile,

we freelancers remain on Thespis's cart and like a touring company go from place to place offering our skills and knowledge...

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