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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

DISSECTING DRAMATURGICAL BODIES:

Self, Sensibility, and Gaze in Contemporary Dramaturgy

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Patrick Denney

This thesis of Patrick Denney is Approved by:

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ABSTRACT:

DISSECTING DRAMATURGICAL BODIES:

Self, Sensibility, and Gaze in Contemporary Dramaturgy

By

Patrick Denney

Dramaturgy is an art form that is still, after decades of existence in the American theater, misunderstood, and often feared, by many theater artists. From quasi-realistic portrayals of TV Shows such as SMASH, to the pulpy B-movie depiction of *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, dramaturgs are often portrayed with at least a sense of distrust, if not outright antagonism. Why is this?

In this thesis, I will draw connections between contemporary dramaturgical practices and theory, with analysis nineteenth century medicine, chiefly Michel Foucault's idea of the "medical gaze," the revolutionary way of seeing a diseased body that helped facilitate the creation of modern medicine in the 19th century. Inspired by this concept, I put forward a theory of the dramaturgical gaze, a tool for consolidating and illuminating the process by which a dramaturg engages with a script, and the larger process of rehearsal.

I will also examine Derrida's analysis of the Pharmakos and Pharmakon, a pair of words that can mean either Poison or medicine. Examining this spectrum, I explore the corrupted nature of dramatic texts, and the ways that the dramaturg helps to recognize and treat the corruption. I also engage in an analysis of the Apollonian and Dionysian ways of approaching the role of the dramaturg. Into all of this, I insert an analysis about my work as a dramaturg on two recent productions, California Shakespeare Theater's production of Charles Ludlam's *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, and Gerald Casel's dance piece *Splinters in Our Ankles*.

To Jenny Lawson: for teaching me to write.

To Max Denney: for (almost) always answering the phone.

To Grace Denney: for cheap soft serve in New York City.

To Sally Kramer: for her ceaseless love, and some critical twenty dollar bills.

To Chuck Lawson: for Woolly, and a look at what theatre can be.

To Charlie Denney: for the meditation of cycling.

To Jerry Denney: For the love of history.

To Lucy Denney: For her passion.

To Carol Cadby: who taught me to love theat(er/re)

To Michael Chemers: who taught me the meaning of dramaturgy.

To Philippa Kelly: who deepened my understanding.

To Gerald Casel: who helped me put it in Practice.

To every friend: for asking “what’s a dramaturg?”

To Slug Ultimate: for keeping me sane.

To my graduate class: for keeping me insane.

To all of you: thank you!

This is for you

“Killing” Theater: A Survey of Popular Depictions of Dramaturgy

From the moment a dramaturg enters a rehearsal space, their very body is suspect. For some theater artists, the suspicion comes from unfamiliarity. They have never worked with a dramaturg before, and immediately question the right of this foreign body to enter the highly charged space of the rehearsal room. Still others will already have a prejudice against the profession. They might have had a bad experience with a dramaturg in the past and question the need for what seemed an unnecessary, even redundant position. Certainly popular culture and the theatrical landscape are riddled with these horror stories. From the tumultuous controversy surrounding Lynn Thomson’s 1998 case against the Jonathan Larson estate over authorship rights for *RENT*¹, to the portrayal of a dramaturg by the actor Daniel Sunjata on NBC’s recent show *SMASH*. For the millions of people who watched the show, this was likely their first introduction to the work of a dramaturg; however, much of Sunjata’s arc on the show was concerned with the fact that the two “real” writers on the show did not trust him, and dramaturgy as a whole. Another troubling element of this portrayal is the rigidity with which the series defines dramaturgy. In the episode entitled “The Dramaturg,” he is referred to constantly as a “script doctor” and the two “authentic” writers, Tom and Julia, tell horror stories of colleagues who had been burned by dramaturgs in the past.² While this is certainly an element of the dramaturgical process, it is by no means the only one. What draws me to dramaturgy is the fact that it resists definition; the nebulous nature of the field allows for the constant shifting of identity, a wide pool of knowledge collected in one body that is referenced, utilized, and regretfully, ignored.

More sensational, if not more accurate, is the portrayal of dramaturgy in a 2011 episode of *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*. In the episode, entitled “Icarus,” a famous television actor dies during a

¹ Michael Chemers, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 131-33.

² *Smash*. “The Dramaturg.” Directed by Larry Shaw and written by Brian Goluboff. First Broadcast February 19th, 2013 by NBC.

performance of a new musical.³ One of the first people the detectives interview is Roger Porter, who after being wrongfully introduced as the director's assistant, informs them that he is, in fact, a "dramaturg."⁴ "Drama-what?" the detectives ask in a bemused tone, dripping with condescension. Porter goes on to explain, fairly accurately, some of the tasks that he performs in the process of working on the play. This dramaturgical after-school special is soon discarded though, and Porter is portrayed as little more than an assistant carting around the drunken, Julie Taymor-esque director of the play. The most interesting part of the story comes at the end, when Porter, working in tandem with the producer, is revealed to be the murderer. The devilish pair decided to kill the star in order to re-coup their investment through an insurance policy. In the end they are both arrested, and a final barb is thrown about Porter attending the Yale School of Drama.

Another example comes in a recent episode of the popular radio program *Studio 360*. During a segment entitled "How to Build the Perfect Musical," host Kurt Andersen conducted an interview with veteran Broadway producer Jack Vietrel about his career in the theater. After discussing his beginnings as a theater critic in Los Angeles, Anderson moved on to the next portion of Vietrel's career:

KURT ANDERSEN: And then your next job was as the dramaturge at the Mark Taper Forum, also in LA? By the way, Am I supposed to say turge or turg?
JACK VIERTEL: We said turg at the Mark Taper. You can say turge, but, you know, we also spelled it without an e at the end.
KURT ANDERSEN: yeah, oh, Dramaturg, or Dramaturge is one of those words that we people who aren't in the theater, "oh yeah, we, we, yeah, fine, okay... I get that," but ninety-eight percent of civilians don't know what that means. What does it mean?
JACK VIERTEL: It doesn't mean anything as it turns out. It's a German word that I think in Europe has a definite meaning, although I couldn't tell you precisely what it is.⁵

This is certainly an inflammatory definition of production dramaturgy, at least if you are one of the 12,000 people, roughly two percent of the show's weekly audience, who had any inclination of

³ *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*. "Icarus." Directed by Frank Prinzi and written by Julie Martin. first broadcast June 19th, 2011 by USA Network

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Studio 360*. "How to Build the Perfect Musical." Hosted by Kurt Anderse. Presented by NPR, April 27, 2016.

dramaturgical practice entails. It further reinforces the notion that dramaturg is a figure who is not valued, a blemish that does not belong in the landscape of American theater. While Viertel's definition can be read as indicative of his times, it is jarring to see a man who has helped produce such groundbreaking works as *Angels in America* and several plays by August Wilson, would take such a cavalier stance on dramaturgy.⁶ However, as the interview goes on, Viertel provides a very compelling definition of dramaturgy, whether he is aware of it or not:

JACK VIERTTEL: at the Mark Taper... I ghost wrote program notes, I did research when we did plays, put up pictures on the rehearsal room wall of what Hedda Gabler's life was likely to have really been like in 1890... whenever it was, and I worked with playwrights on emerging work, uh, trying to help them sort out things that still needed sorting out, which was really the part of it which was most useful to me.⁷

This is not "nothing." Viertel, although demonstrating a slightly antiquated model dramaturgical practice, shows that he does have a definition of dramaturgy. Rather than simply spouting off some maxim or metaphor ("The dramaturg is like..."), he economically defines dramaturgy by his actions, and through this, illuminates what could be the only progressive definition of dramaturgy presented to a popular audience.

What does this short survey of dramaturgy in popular culture tell us? If we were to assume the role of an average viewer, we would learn that dramaturgs are deceitful, manipulative con-artists with only their own interests at heart. They "kill" theater, quite literally in Porter's case. What about dramaturgy allows these figures to be characterized so inaccurately? To me, it seems to be the very thing that entices real world dramaturgs to the profession: Fluidity. Etymologically, *dramaturgy* is a term trying to re-define itself against a very ancient concept. Dramaturgs cannot exist without dramaturgy, but dramaturgy exists, has always existed, without anyone formally identified as a dramaturg present.

⁶ Viertel would have been working as a dramaturg in the 1980's, a period in the American theater when the production dramaturg was first beginning to emigrate from Europe.

⁷ "How to Build"

Perhaps the dramaturg's purpose is simply to, with their presence, call attention to the structure and analysis of a piece of theater. This certainly seems in line with Geoff Proehl's thinking. In his essay, "Dramaturgy and Silence," he writes that, "the central significance of having someone called a dramaturg work on a production is that attaching this name to a living presence encourages everyone involved in a production to attend more carefully to what is ever present but often under examined: the inner workings of a play."⁸ This suggests a certain degree of mysticism that enshrouds the profession. Could the dramaturg just sit there, as Proehl describes, and say nothing for an entire rehearsal, and still contribute? If someone sat a dummy in a chair with a sign hung around his neck emblazoned with the word "dramaturg," would this serve the same purpose? No, well, unless they are the kind of meat puppet suggested by *Law and Order*, being manipulated by some outside forces, such as producers, without any real artistic vision.

In his foreword to Katalin Trencsényi's *Dramaturgy in the Making*, Proehl illuminates the current landscape of dramaturgical scholarship, "for many the founding question of dramaturgy 101- 'what is dramaturgy?'- is no longer the central challenge for the field."⁹ However, how can we move on as an art form, if this central question is, in the public eye, still unanswered? Contemporary dramaturgical theory may have moved beyond the question of "what is dramaturgy?" But for most of the public, and even many in the American professional theater, there is a great lack of trust, perhaps even a fear, of the dramaturg. Later on in the introduction, Proehl articulates a new way of understanding the often nebulous role of the dramaturg. Inspired by the works of acting theorists such as William Ball and Sanford Meisner, and their ideas that actors must exist within a "reality of doing" asking every actor, "what are they trying to do?" Proehl places this level of activity on the act of production dramaturgy,

⁸ Geoff Proehl, "Dramaturgy and Silence." *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 1 (2003): 25-33.

⁹ Geoff, Proehl. "The Roles We Play," foreword to *Dramaturgy in the Making: A User's Guide for Theatre Practitioners* by Katalin Trencsényi, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), xi.

which creates what he calls a “landscape of doing.” “We see before us,” Proehl says, “not just one plot or even plot itself, but a field of positions, moves, gestures, states of being- in and around the acts of performance.”¹⁰ This idea of a “landscape of doing” perfectly illustrates the kinetic nature of dramaturgy. Like an electron, where the very process of observation alters its path and presence, so too does any attempt to fix a rigid definition onto the field, only prevent any true understanding. But within the landscape of doing, we recognize that even when the dramaturg is a static force, a silent figure behind a table in the rehearsal room, watching with eyes fixed on the action, the dramaturg is still in motion. They are masses of potential energy, built up over the course of months and months of production research and conversation with the creative team. Perhaps this speaks to our necessity within rehearsal. Dramaturgs bring to the process a sort of dynamism, brought about by the movement from one role to the next. They provide the combusting spark for the process, pushing pistons up and down, allowing a production to move towards a successful final product.

Brecht’s Electrons: Positioning the Dramaturg in *the Messingkauf Dialogues* and Beyond

In *the Messingkauf Dialogues*, Brecht’s sprawling explanation of his theories and practices rendered as a platonic dialogue, he borrows concepts from contemporary science, such as the cutting-edge conception of electrons borrowed from Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, to help explain some of the nuances of his dramaturgical theory. “The physicists tell us,” says the Philosopher, the theoretical mouth piece in the dialogue, “that in the course of their investigations into the very smallest particles of matter, they suddenly started to suspect that the process of investigation alters what is being investigated.”¹¹ He continues, “the movements they observe under the microscope are supplemented by movements caused by the microscope. At the same time, the instruments are probably being altered

¹⁰ Ibid, xiii.

¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, “The Messingkauf Dialogue,” in *Brecht on Performance*, trans. Romy Fursland, Steve Giles, and John Willet (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 51.

too, by the objects they are focused on.”¹² He expands this observation to a theatrical context with the final sentence. “if that’s what happens when instruments do the observing, what happens when it’s human beings doing it?”¹³ This question that Brecht raises, about the issue of how the behavior of those engaged in the creative process is altered by conscious observation, is central to the understanding of dramaturgical practice within the rehearsal room. Perhaps this positioning of the dramaturg, as the powerful observer, whose skill set and observational powers are so great that they can potentially alter the whole trajectory of a production, also stands as a locus of fear, a wellspring for the discontent and ultimately distrust, which still lingers, despite the advances in dramaturgy that have been made in the American theater the formal introduction of production dramaturgy in the nineteen seventies.

In *Messingkauf*, Brecht brings an actor, a philosopher and a dramaturg, with interjections from an actress and a stagehand, into what we might recognize today as a sort of post-show discussion. However, from the descriptions of the characters, Brecht is defining the dramaturg in a way that will create the next half century of discontent. Brecht describes the dramaturg as someone who, “puts himself at the Philosopher’s disposal, and promises to apply his knowledge and abilities into the *thaëter*. He hopes the theater will get a new lease on life.”¹⁴ In the dialogue, *thaëter* is the term arrived at by the philosopher, somewhat jokingly, for the new style of performance that he is, through the help of the actor and dramaturg, endeavoring to create. In the Philosopher’s mind, this new style would take an almost scientific approach to creating theater. When asked by the dramaturg about the purpose of the style, the Philosopher responds that, “[he] thought we might use your imitations for perfectly practical ends, simply in order to find out the best way to behave. You see, we could make them into something like physics... and so work out a technology.”¹⁵ With science in hand, The Philosopher envisions theater

¹² Ibid, 51.

¹³ Ibid, 51.

¹⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹⁵ Ibid, 17.

as a laboratory space for modeling behavior, for emulating and illuminating best and worst practices, respectively. This conception of theater sounds almost Aristotelian in a way. The Dramaturg certainly thinks so, summarizing Aristotle's views on tragedy as, "a matter of imitating those real-life incidents of yours, and the imitations are supposed to have particular effects on the soul."¹⁶

It is, however, important to remember that Brecht has a fundamentally antagonistic relationship with Aristotle. In his essay, "Theater for Pleasure or Theater for instruction," Brecht illuminates the important distinction between his epic theater and the theater of Aristotle. In the Aristotelian, or "dramatic" model:

The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too-Just like me-It's only natural-It'll never change-The sufferings of this man appalls me, because they are inescapable-That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world-I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.¹⁷

In contrast, Brecht's ideal spectator says:

I'd never have thought it-That's not the way-That's extraordinary, hardly believable-It's got to stop-The sufferings of this man appalls me, because they are unnecessary-That's great art; nothing obvious in it-I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.¹⁸

Brecht attacks Aristotle because of the inevitability, the fixed fate, that his dramatic model suggests. To Brecht, the cathartic experience central to Aristotelian drama, "I weep when they weep," prevents the level of critical engagement that is necessary for the full appreciation of the Epic theater. Brecht also summarizes this uneasiness in a passage of *Messingkauf*. After the group dissects a recent, sub-par theatrical experience had by the Philosopher, the following exchange occurs between the Dramaturg and the Philosopher:

THE PHILOSOPHER: Well, isn't it a bit frightening to think that the better you act, the harder it is to satisfy me? It sounds like a hopeless situation.

¹⁶ Ibid, 17-18.

¹⁷ Bertolt Brecht, "Theater for Pleasure or Theater for instruction," in *Brecht on Theatre*, translated by John Willett, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 71.

¹⁸ Ibid, 71.

THE DRAMATURG to the Actor: Stop tapping him patronizingly on his knee. I've seen people disagree with even the most reasonable arguments just for that.

THE PHILOSOPHER: It's true, you are quite a tyrannical person. I feel tyrannized by you constantly when you're on stage, too. I'm always supposed to do what you want. Without getting any time to think about whether I do want what you want.

Another element of this "*thaëterical*" dramaturgy, is that it is a highly collaborative practice. This is best illustrated by the relationship between the characters of the Philosopher and the Dramaturg. While the character description clearly puts the dramaturg as a subordinate to the Philosopher, it is important to recognize that the philosopher models certain behaviors that we would recognize time, as the territory of the dramaturg. These behaviors are clearly expressed in the following section of dialogue between all of the participants:

THE PHILOSOPHER: I also see things that I do feel are portrayed correctly. I think the trouble is that I find it impossible to distinguish right from wrong with you. I haven't given you a full account of myself yet. I have another passion besides curiosity, you see: it's argumentativeness. I like to carefully examine everything I see and get my two bits in, as they say. I take great pleasure in doubting things. As poor people do their pennies, so I turn what people do and say over and over in the palm of my hand. And I don't think you people leave any room for my doubts, that's the issue.

THE ACTOR: Aha, a critic!

THE PHILOSOPHER: Hm. Have I touched a nerve?

THE DRAMATURG: got nothing against intelligent criticism. We don't get enough of it.¹⁹

Is this not a representation of the foundational dramaturgical impulse: to question? If it is, why does it come from the Philosopher and not the dramaturg? The Philosopher's sentiment seems as if it almost could have been lifted out of the pages of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, and yet it the dramaturg is not given the privilege to define themselves as the sort of resident critic that originated with Lessing. I think it is important to recognize and celebrate, not the verbatim portrayal of an idealized dramaturg within the text, but the rich landscape of dramaturgy that is presented. It is important to the highly

¹⁹ *Messingkauf*, 20.

collaborative nature of Brecht's working style. The dramaturgy of a project was not simply left up to one dramaturg, but often a whole team, or in the case of Brecht, a group of largely uncredited women. Perhaps this explains why two other prominent elements of Brecht's persona, the playwright and the director, are left out of the discussion. Dramaturg Katherine Profeta suggests that the director, "would be too close to the practical mechanics of the rehearsal room, and [Brecht] chose the dramaturg to more evocatively represent someone poised on a threshold moving between ideas and action."²⁰ Movement is key here. Through the constant adjustment of lenses, the switching of points of focus, the oscillation of distance, the dramaturgical "landscape of doing" is created. If dramaturgy is always in motion, then of course it cannot rest with just one person. Like a child stuck behind a desk on a beautiful, spring day, it's restless. A fidgeting, vibrating ball of energy that refuses sit still. Perhaps this restlessness explains the Philosopher's "uneasiness" in theaters.

In her book, *Dramaturgy in Motion*, Profeta also defines dramaturgy by this restless nature. Although she never gives a formal definition, she "[contends] that the role of the dramaturg, if it can be defined at all, can only be as a quality of motion, which oscillates, claiming an indeterminate zone between theory and practice, inside and outside, word and movement, question and answer."²¹ This hyperactivity illuminates a crossroads in contemporary dramaturgy. Although strict, Brechtian dramaturgy, with its devotion to concept and theory, has been transformed since *Messingkauf*, dramaturgy itself still toes the line between science and superstition. Katalin Trencsényi even posits that it is from the Brechtian model that the fear of dramaturgs emerged. "In certain receptions of this Theory," she says, "the concept of Brechtian theatre was turned into its own caricature, and the dramaturg became synonymous with 'ideological police (or even infernal infiltrator).'"²² In this

²⁰ Katherine Profeta, *Dramaturgy in motion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015) 6.

²¹ Ibid, xvii.

²² Katalin Trencsényi, *Dramaturgy in the Making: A User's Guide for Theatre Practitioners*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 121.

constricting model, the dramaturg is not regarded as a full member of the creative team, but a strange, omnipresent force that prevents any deviation from the “concept.” Hopped up on a heady dose of Marxist ideology, the dramaturg leads the charge in, “dissecting and distorting classics and using them for one end- without realizing that it is the function of adaptation that is dramaturgical in Brecht’s work.”²³ Trencsényi’s analysis suggest several important ideas. On the one hand, she illuminates what could be the key to understanding the dramaturg as “killer of theater,” Literal or otherwise. In this fundamental misconception the dramaturg, their unwillingness to examine the piece from multiple perspectives, to move between identities, the dramaturg almost stalls the process. They become not a catalyst for growth, but an impediment, a force that prevents the production from reaching its full potential. The language that Trencsényi uses is also of some importance. If we think about the landscape of doing created for this misplaced dramaturg, it is highly medicalized. The dramaturg “dissects” the dramaturgical body of a play. They are also the “infernal infiltrator,” a pernicious germ or infection that cannot has yet to be eradicated.

Doctor to Dramaturg, and Back Again: Defining the Dramaturgical Gaze

What is the dramaturgical body though? In one sense, a script could be perceived as a dramaturgical body, a living, breathing entity from which performance springs. Director and Dramaturg Eugenio Barba certainly presents it as such. According to Barba, “It was the biologist’s way of thinking which helped me to understand my own work.”²⁴ He goes on to use biological and bodily analogies to describe his process of analyzing a script. Barba describes a three tiered system in his understanding, dramatic structure consists of:

“1. The Level of *organic* or *dynamic* dramaturgy- this is the elementary level, and concerns the way of composing and interweaving dynamisms, the rhythms and vocal actions of the actors in order to stimulate sensorially the attention of spectators

²³ Ibid, 121.

²⁴ Eugenio Barba. *On Dramaturgy and Directing: Burning Down the House*, translated by Judy Barba, (New York: Routledge Press, 2010), 9.

2. the level of *Narrative* dramaturgy- the intertwining of events which orientate the spectators about the meaning, or various meanings, of the performance.

3. the level of *evocative* dramaturgy- the faculty of the performance to produce an intimate resonance within the spectator. It is this dramaturgy that which distills or captures the performances unintentional and concealed meaning, specific for each spectator.²⁵

In Barba's dramaturgy, layer upon layer of organic systems work alongside one another to keep an organism, the performance, functioning. With this analogy and the previous ones, the dramaturg almost does become a medical figure, a person with a deep knowledge of anatomy and nosology, who is brought in when a body is corrupted by "disease", a corporeal disturbance that is preventing a play from functioning at its full potential.

This link between dramaturgy and medicine might seem a bit forced, but it is important to remember to remember that many important figures throughout theatrical history have been aligned with medicine, especially the prominent figures of the early natural/realist movement. This includes figures such as Henrik Ibsen, who spent years training to be a pharmacist, only to fail, August Strindberg, who also dropped out of medical school, Anton Chekhov, who never stopped practicing medicine even when his career began to take off.²⁶ Even Brecht served as an ambulance driver and hospital orderly during the first world war, in addition to attending medical school. Other theatrical/medical figures include G.E Lessing, and, of course, Aristotle.

Another link between the two fields comes through the examination of the nature of fear still present at a gut level towards both professions. There is a similarity in the fear that surrounds a trip to the doctor's office and the presence of a dramaturg. While both the doctor and the dramaturg can be forces for good, more often than not it is only the negative aspects the stick in the minds of the people on the receiving end of their services. A child, does not remember the relative joy that comes with the

²⁵ Ibid, 10.

²⁶ Stranton Garner Jr., "Physiologies of the Modern: Zola, Experimental Medicine, and the Naturalist Stage," *Modern Drama*, vol.43, issue 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 537.

fact that, because of a series of vaccines, you were spared such maladies as rubella or measles. No, they only remember the various forms of pain that accompanied that experience. The maddening pain of the waiting room, the intensification of that pain after you are called back, weighed and measured, and then, finally, there is the sharp shock of the injection. These memories create a subconscious, gut instinct fear of the doctor. Perhaps this gut fear also exists for the dramaturg. Like the characters on *SMASH*, the second the word “dramaturg” is mentioned, they shut down, spitting out a verbal minefield of harsh words and horror stories through which a dramaturg hesitate to tread.

As these professional overlaps suggest, theater and medicine share quite a bit of commonality, particularly in the 19th century, when both fields were beginning to find their modern identities. For medicine, this shift began to emerge in the first decades of the century, but really intensified in second half. The period saw incredible advancements in medical technology and the understanding of disease and the body such as anesthesia, germ theory, hygienic practices, and anti-septic protocols. Despite all this, the popular perception of medicine and surgery was still plagued with grisly ideas of doctors as violent butchers, senselessly hacking at patients in what seemed to be an arbitrary style. They were feared and despised, and even though the contemporary methods and techniques of the doctor were completely alienated from these old practices, they could not shake this baggage. So how do they overcome this? French philosopher Michel Foucault put forward the idea in his book *Birth of the Clinic* that in order to institutionalize and codify medical knowledge, doctors created the concept of the medical gaze. This idea allowed medical practitioners to separate the body of patients from the diseases and maladies they are trying to treat. The subjective nature of humanity is bleached away by the objectivity of science. Medicine becomes a science and can now be absorbed into a society that reveled in prolific period of scientific discovery. The gaze allows for the creation of the modern reverence that we hold for the medical profession.

For Foucault, the medical gaze is the tool with which 19th century medical practitioners to be able to separate the human body from the disease itself. This allows the patient, burdened with the baggage of their lives and loved one, to be removed. Subjectivity goes through a phase shift and becomes objectivity. The doctor no longer sees the patient, but the disease, and under the harsh light of the operating theater, they can treat and remove the malady. This type of observation seems almost as if it was tailor made for the new, scientific *thaëter*, a practical tool for the expression of dramaturgical knowledge within the context of the rehearsal process, creating what we might define as the dramaturgical gaze. Early on in his analysis, Foucault defines the perception of disease in two dimensional terms, describing it as a “flat projection” or a “portrait within a frame.”²⁷ This provides another point of translation for the dramaturgical gaze, adding the Foucault’s two dimensions a third dimension of phenomenological performance. Dramaturg Michael Chemers emphasizes this in his book *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook to Dramaturgy*, stating that a play script is, “not a work of art. It is rather a blueprint; a plan, or if you are of a more devious frame of mind, a plot for creating a work of art.”²⁸ A script is just words on a page, a lifeless corpse, if not enlivened by performance. The Dramaturgical Gaze, then, could be a tool for adding this missing dimension. A dramaturg, as an advocate for the both the play script and the audience, must incorporate the phenomenological leap of translating every scene from the page to a physical moment on stage, into their understanding of the play. In diagnostic terms, we see Foucault’s projection transformed into something akin to projection mapping, the molding and shaping of a projected image to conform to a three dimensional object.

However, we must approach this link between Foucault’s medical gaze and the dramaturgical gaze, at least initially, with some trepidation. If we explore Foucault a bit more deeply, we find that a full

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated by A.M Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon books, 1994), 8.

²⁸ *Ghost Light*, 8.

embrace of his concept might, like a misunderstanding of Brecht, only do more harm to dramaturgy. Foucault, in the eyes of many critics, viewed the creation of this gaze within a clinical context as a hegemonic tool, which greatly imbalanced the relationship between the doctor and the patient. In this interpretation, the gaze becomes a tool for surveillance and control. According to theater historian Stanton Garner Jr. though, this view can be traced to a mistranslation of Foucault's "*le regard*" into the English "gaze."²⁹ For Garner, this translation gives Foucault's concept, "a continuous, vaguely disembodied perceptual state instead of the more nuanced, embodied field of encounters evident in Foucault's early discussions of medicine."³⁰ This flexibility is evident throughout Foucault's discourse. He describes the medical gaze in the period as something that was, "not bound by the narrow grid of structure (form, arrangement, number, size), but could and should grasp colors, variations, tiny anomalies, always receptive to the deviant."³¹ Is this not dramaturgical in a way? A highly nuanced reading of a body, dramatic or otherwise, that is beyond a traditional set of skills. Foucault goes on to further invoke other concepts that could be perceived as dramaturgical. Later on in *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault defines a paradoxical quality of the medical gaze. The gaze has the ability to, "*Hear a language as soon as it perceives a spectacle.*"³² This quality suggests to me the ability invoked by Chemers earlier to perceive the performative nature of a piece of theater, even when it is simply words on the page. It evokes the ability, fine-tuned in dramaturgs, to de-code and analyze the dense sign-systems presented upon the stage, and to assist others in doing the same. While this conception of Foucault's medical gaze might fly in the face of accepted scholarship, Garner Jr. stands by this interpretation. "This totalizing model," the "all-seeing eye" interpretation of the gaze, "proves particularly resistant to the study of drama and theatre, which

²⁹ Stanton Garner Jr., "Is There a Doctor in the House? Medicine and the Making of Modern Drama," *Modern Drama*, vol. 51, issue 3, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 322.

³⁰ Ibid, 322-23.

³¹ *Birth of the Clinic*, 89.

³² Ibid, 108.

employ ‘multiple and intersecting observations’ in decidedly non-totalizing ways.”³³ If we are going to adapt the concept for a theatrical environment, if, like Foucault, we are going to use the dramaturgical gaze to create a new status for the dramaturg, then we must open ourselves to broader understanding of *le regard*, instead of the gaze.

There is also another link between the late 19th century medical practices and dramaturgy. This link comes in the form of what we might describe as the “diagnostic gaze,” which emerged in the period as a way for audiences to analyze and appreciate the emerging forms of naturalism and realism. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr writes that this new interest for science in the period, spurred by evolutionary theory, “taught people to ‘gaze’ at [the body] in ways that at once anatomized it but also made it an object of spectatorship and performance.”³⁴ The modernizing language of the medical profession seeped into the realm of performance through several different channels. One of these entry points was the freak show. In his book *Staging Stigma*, Michael Chemers emphasizes this idea, pointing out that figures such as P.T. Barnum used, “the rhetoric of natural history... to incorporate the exhibitions of ‘human curiosities.’”³⁵ Both of these quotes suggest the implementation of what we could define as medical dramaturgy. Whether or not they were actually associated with public performance, as in the highly publicized autopsy of Joice Heth, the supposed 161-year-old nursemaid of George Washington, the medical discourse was changing helping to inform and mediate the ways in which contemporary audiences analyzed and appreciated live performance.³⁶

Taking this a step further, Shepherd-Barr points out that at the heart of the connection between medicine and performance is the idea of penetration thorough dissection. Through the “the revelation of

³³ “Is There a Doctor in the House,” 323

³⁴ Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, “The Diagnostic Gaze: Nineteenth Century Contexts for Medicine and Performance,” *Performance and the Medical Body*, eds. Alex Mermikides, Gianna Bouchard, and Nicola Shaughnessy (New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama 2016), 37.

³⁵ Michael Chemers, *Staging Stigma: A Critical Examination of the American Freak Show* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008,) 67.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 68.

what lies beneath the skin,” aided by tools such as anesthesia and x-rays, medical practitioners were able to study the inner workings with greater depth and clarity than ever before.³⁷ It seems only natural that early champions of the naturalist movement such as Emile Zola would take up scientific, particularly biological, metaphors when describing their new theater. In his preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola points out that in his eyes, “Drama is dying of natural causes. It’s dying of extravagance, lies, and platitudes.”³⁸ Railing against the shortcoming of romantic melodrama and bombast, Zola sees the dramatic body of his time as a dead one, killed by its own characteristics. What is needed then to advance the art form? Perhaps an autopsy. In his essay *Naturalism in Theater*, Zola positions his theater as an “an organism in need of dissection.”³⁹ Naturalism should then, in the estimation of Zola, train its participants and audiences alike in these diagnostic skills. The dramaturgical characteristics of the Zola’s naturalism are enforced by Shepherd-Barr’s reading. “Zola” she writes, “[moves] freely between the perspective of both doctor and patient, conceptualizing theatre as performing both roles.”⁴⁰ As has been suggested, the fluidity of perspective is one of the defining features of dramaturgical theory and practice, and with his essay, particularly for his preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, we can almost view them as program notes, giving the audience key information and aiding in the establishment of a framework to understand and appreciate the piece.

As dramaturgs, however, we must avoid the complete indulgence of our academic instincts. In the analysis of dramaturgical practice in relationship Nietzsche’s conception of Apollo and Dionysius in her essay, “The Dramaturg and the Irrational,” Dramaturg Jayme Koszyn gets to the heart of this tension, writing that, “dramaturgs have overdeveloped their Apollonian muscles, often relegating themselves to

³⁷ *Diagnostic Gaze*, 40.

³⁸ Emile Zola, *Preface to Thérèse Raquin*, trans. James Bierman, 2.

³⁹ Emile Zola, “Naturalism in Theater,” trans. A. Bermel, in W. B. Worthen (ed), *Modern Drama: Plays/Criticism/Theory*, (Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publisher 1995,) 1184.

⁴⁰ *Diagnostic gaze*, 42.

the intellectual and the rational.”⁴¹ While I have drawn parallels between Foucault’s concept of the medical gaze and dramaturgy, I recognize that this link, rather than cleanly resolving some of the core issues of the field, could be seen as re-enforcing another misconception about the profession. Foucault centered his analysis on the *Clinique*, which roughly translates to teaching hospital, a space that is not necessarily open to the public. Shepherd-Barr confirms this, writing that, “The closed world of medical schools seemed to resist any incursion from performance.”⁴² This level of distance, a removal for the “real” world of theatrical practice, has been another wellspring for the misconception of the dramaturg. In this misconception, the dramaturg is too closely aligned with the position of a researcher, chained to a desk in a dark corner of the library, content, in the words of DJ Hopkins, to endure the, “thankless hours of bookish drudgery spent in the library, sifting through antique reference texts and decades of critical essays for “relevant” information.”⁴³ While production research is an important part of dramaturgical process, it is not the sole polemic for the field. Geoff Proehl pinpoints the anxieties that surround this identity. “A first generation of production dramaturgs in the United States” Proehl writes, “embraced research assignments; this was for them, a way into the work of rehearsal.”⁴⁴ For that first generation of American dramaturgs, working in the nineteen seventies and early eighties, this was all they had. To them, it was quite literally a foot in the rehearsal room door. Pushing back against this first wave, the second generation rebelled against this idea of the dramaturg, shunning the idea of the dramaturgs as, “hapless fact-bound, unimaginative nerds,” and embracing a more *creative* role in the process.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Jayme Koszyn, “the Dramaturg and the Irrational,” *Dramaturgy in American Theater* eds. Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl, and Michael Lupu (Orlando: Harcourt Brace University Publishing 1997), 276.

⁴² The Diagnostic Gaze, 37

⁴³ DJ Hopkins. “Research, Counter-text, Performance: Reconsidering the (Textual) Authority of the Dramaturg,” *Theatre Topics*, Vol. 13, issue 1, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins university Press 2003), 3.

⁴⁴ Geoff, Proehl. *Towards a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey*, (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2008), 64.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 66.

While this tension over the task of research has helped to advance the role of the dramaturg, perhaps, like the field itself, a less constrictive definition will help diminish the anxiety contained in the term. Profeta suggests such a definition, defining dramaturgical research within two distinct registers. In the first register, research is perceived as a verb, “the action of re-tracing steps, and the aim is to organize that existing information according to already established means of understanding.”⁴⁶ This definition is in harmony with the idea of the dramaturg as “research nerd,” although it also suggests that research has a far greater level of activity than simply the “drudgery” and “sifting” that figures like Hopkins have attached to stigmatized figure of the researcher. However, once the organization is complete, research shifts from a verb to a noun, the travelogue of your journey. In the second register, Profeta describes the task of the researcher as, “[directing] human awareness to new ways of looking, thereby creating something that did not previously exist. It is generative; through reflection it creates knowledge and meaning where there was none.”⁴⁷ In This second register, research as a noun is present in two different senses. In line with the first register, the collated record of exploration exists as the object of reflection from which new ideas spring. However, research as a noun also defines the record of the journey, a detailed accounting of the connections, contradictions, and limitations arrived at in your process.

One popular way to contain and classify dramaturgical research is through the casebook. I will be very upfront in saying that this thesis is not centered, as previous works have been, on the framing and contextualization of a traditional casebook. A casebook in the words of Michael Chemers is:

a document that contains everything that happened in the process and a lot of information on things that didn't happen... it is the record of the event and includes a summation of the projects' goals, hopes and dreams, successes and failures, and overall worth.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Dramaturgy in Motion*, 62.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 63.

⁴⁸ *Ghost Light*, 179.

Chemers goes on to say that the casebook is an important tool for dramaturgs, a “humble” channel of communication between dramaturgs. To Chemers, the casebook is almost a professional courtesy for future dramaturgs who might look to your work for inspiration, a first register archive that provides a vivid window into what your process was like. However, casebooks are not without their flaws. Profeta discusses the double edged nature of the casebook. “The casebook” she writes, “is in danger of figuring the dramaturg as someone who has done all that troublesome work in advance, on behalf of everyone else, and then turns to assume an instructional role towards other collaborators.”⁴⁹ This perception contains elements of both Brechtian “concept police” and the first wave researcher. She goes on to quote Mark Bly, who warns that that casebook should be, “a tool for exploration rather than prescriptive, formulistic guide.”⁵⁰ One of the originators and architects of the contemporary casebook, even Bly recognizes that the casebook should not stand in the way of the dramaturg’s process.

Perhaps the ideal relationship between research and dramaturgy is found in this phase shift from one type of research to the other. The dramaturg becomes the facilitator of the reaction, catalyzing the movement of research between registers. Proehl describes this dramaturgical reaction beautifully. “A principle pleasure for dramaturgs,” he writes, “is being asked to think improvisationally in a room full of with bright and talented people.”⁵¹ In this exchange we see the transformation of first register research, the pre-production work, into the second, produced through the body of the dramaturg. Like a jazz musician, the dramaturg takes the archive of materials surrounding a piece, its structure and performance history, embodies this archive and then proceeded to riff on it. They follow chord changes, allowing others to take their solos, waiting for the right moment to explode from relative silence that exists in the harmony of the ensemble, and push the piece in new directions. The dramaturg

⁴⁹ *Dramaturgy in Motion*, 69.

⁵⁰ Mark Bly. “Bristling with Multiple Possibilities,” *Dramaturgy in American Theater* eds. Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl, and Michael Lupu (Orlando: Harcourt Brace University Publishing 1997), 50.

⁵¹ *Dramaturgical Sensibility*, 70.

becomes, in the environment of rehearsal, what Maaïke Bleeker calls an “active mirror,” a dynamic, reflective surface “presenting a reflexive response to my partner in dialogue, reflecting back in a way that is both analytical and creative.”⁵² Continuing on this the model, Bleeker articulates that, “the question of concepts is not about what they mean or prescribe, but rather it is about how they might be used as a working hypothesis.”⁵³ The dramaturg is, in Bleeker’s model, is constantly reflecting the process back onto itself in new and different ways. Perhaps this distortion, for want of a better word, resulted from the shifts in perspective that define the dramaturg.

I had to grapple with issues surrounding research and the casebook in my work with Philippa Kelly on the 2015 production *The Mystery of Irma Vep* at the California Shakespeare Theater. For *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, I served as the associate dramaturg, working as a member of the dramaturgical team alongside resident dramaturg Philippa Kelly. Since the bulk of pre-production work had been done already, I was tasked with attending rehearsals and answering any questions that came up during the process. With all this in mind, I attended the first rehearsal. Before the first read through was even over, the director, Jonathan Moscone, had started asking me questions about the scope of time within the play. I instantly found my thoughts turned away from what was going on around me, the read through and all the mysticism and politics wrapped up in it, and started jumping around in my script, searching for answers to his questions within the text. Soon after that, Jon asked about the significance of a vase of flowers that rests upon the mantle in several scenes, and I dug even deeper into the hole. I spent that evening researching how the characters in Ludlam’s ridiculous piece about an Edwardian manor plagued by a series of monsters, would have travelled in the second act, to Egypt. After a couple days of compiling, I emailed the director with my findings, but I never received a response.

⁵² Maaïke Bleeker, “Dramaturgy as a Mode of Looking,” *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 13, issue 2 (New York: Routledge Press 2001), 169.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 169.

As rehearsals got underway, I noticed the highly choreographed nature of the rehearsal room. On one side of the room sat the stage management staff, consisting of a stage manager and her assistant, as well as two stage management interns. On the other side of room was the artistic staff, consisting of the director, his assistant, and myself. For the first weeks of rehearsal, I felt a bit out of place. I wasn't part of the internship program, like the stage management interns who had been present for the entirety of the season. But at the same time, I never felt like a full member of the creative team, separated by both my age and experience level. Like dramaturgy itself, I felt betwixt and between, caught in an awkward state of career adolescence where I could not find a clear identity to cling to. In a typical rehearsal, I would generally answer a couple questions, mainly about the etymology of specific words or the literary references that pepper Ludlam's play, but mostly I would just sit and observe the process. Since the play had a cast of two actors, and both actors had fairly close personal and professional ties to the director, rehearsals were often intense, intimate affairs. My attempts to dissect and understand the play, using a skill set that we might now understand through the dramaturgical gaze, had not worked precisely how they wanted to, and as rehearsal progressed I felt a bit lost.

Pharmaturg to Dramaturg: Pharmakos and Dionysian Dramaturgy

In "The Dramaturg and the Irrational," Koszyn defines the Apollonian dramaturg as, "the light shedder and answerer," who, "emphasize recognizable forms, trace signposts along an often linear path, grasp what is tangible, intellectual, and knowable."⁵⁴ When faced with a challenge in the rehearsal, an uncertainty of direction, the Apollonian dramaturg will, "tend to have a vivid, prescriptive map in their heads of the landscape."⁵⁵ If we consider this definition within the context of Proehl's landscape of doing, then the Apollonian dramaturg is a figure with a tremendous economy in their actions. Playwright Sarah Ruhl describes this sort of dramaturg in her essay, "A Love Note to Dramaturgs." In it, Ruhl

⁵⁴ "the Dramaturg and the Irrational," 277.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 277

describes the nuances of her relationships with dramaturgs, clearly stating their necessity. “We need you to sit next to us during the first preview” she writes, “and give us two or three notes that are easily accomplished when we want to leave the theater forever and take up marine biology or nursing or any profession that doesn’t involve public humiliation.”⁵⁶ The behavior described in this quote, the calculated curation of a few choice words, spoken with a clear outcome in mind, can be easily attributed to the Apollonian. This conception seems almost tailor made for the rational, medicalized model of dramaturgy that I have previously discussed.

However, dramaturgy cannot be practiced with only one perspective. Even Ruhl recognizes the necessity of a multiplicity of identities. In her experience, the best dramaturgs are, “midwives, therapists, magicians, mothers, Rabbinical scholars, Socratic interlocutors, comrades-in-arm, comedians, and friends.”⁵⁷ We must not singingly embrace the Apollonian side of dramaturgy. Instead we must give equal weight, and greater emphasis to what Koszyn defines as Dionysian dramaturgy. For Koszyn, to be a Dionysian dramaturg, “is to relinquish control, it is to hurl oneself heartlong into strangeness.”⁵⁸ In this embrace of strangeness, the Dionysian recognizes an inevitable part of any rehearsal process: that it will, at some point, fall apart. While this situation might frustrate the Apollonian, with his “prescriptive map” of the process, the Dionysian dives headlong into these uncharted waters. They are willing to accept injury and revel in the search for knowledge that comes from both failure and success, reveling in the physicality of journey, or as Koszyn puts it:

The Dionysian dramaturg intuits that within the chaos a deeper order can emerge, an organizing principle that gloriously transcends standard notions of structure, whether it be the structure of a play or rehearsal process. Above all, to be Dionysian is to succumb to the body through dance, the spirit through music.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Sarah Ruhl. *100 essays I don't have time to write: On Umbrellas and Sword Fights, Parades and Dogs, Fire Alarms, Children, and Theater* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2014), 175.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 176

⁵⁸ “the Dramaturg and the Irrational,” 277.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 277.S

Koszyn illuminates a fundamental truth in dramaturgy. Although we should keep in mind that Koszyn is very much part of Proehl's second wave of dramaturgs, with their rejection of the "researcher" role, she along with Proehl, injects a degree of mysticism into dramaturgical practice. This mysticism could go a long way in the process of mainstreaming of dramaturgy, if used properly.

While this embrace of a more holistic dramaturgical practice might fly in the face of the Apollonian "dramaturg as doctor," there is a wonderful liminality between these two polarizing identities, a blurred border where dramaturgical best practices can be observed and adopted. The tools that allow us to examine this overlap are to the ideas of *Pharmakon* and *Pharmakos*. In terms of *Pharmakon*, one of the most interesting elements of the term is the duality of its definition. In translation, *Pharmakon* can be understood upon a spectrum, ranging from medicine at one end, to poison at the other. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida seized upon this term in his analysis of Plato's *Phaedrus* in his own work *Dissemination*. In that essay, Derrida makes the case that writing, particularly performative writing, can be read as a drug. He describes it as "a dangerous supplement that breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it yet *at once* let's itself be breached, roughed up, fulfilled, and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present increases itself in act of disappearing."⁶⁰ Prior to this, Derrida has interpreted writing as tool by which weakens the memory, a poison, but also a tonic that treats the symptoms of this decay, creating a bold strokes record that captures the bullet points of any particular moment.

In terms of performative writing, Derrida reinforces this connection, the poisonous nature of the written *Pharmakon*, by illuminating the connection between the *pharmakon* and *mimesis*. While discussing a work of the work of art as phantasm, the "copy of a copy," Derrida points to the politics of

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1981), 110.

memetic re-production, the tensions that are dredged up in the process of translating oral speech into the written word:

he who writes with the alphabet no longer even imitates. No doubt because he also, in a sense, imitates perfectly. He has a better chance at reproducing the voice, because phonetic writing decomposes it better and transforms it into the abstract, spatial elements. This *de-composition* of the voice is here both what best conserves it and what best corrupts it.⁶¹

Once it hits the page, the voice is dead, *de-composing* before our very eyes. The issues of writing that Derrida describes perfectly encapsulate the process of working with a play text, but in reverse. If we view writing as system for capturing the spoken word, then text based theater is the reversal of the system, the re-animation of the voice as it passes from words on the page to voice on stage. But because these words have been captured on the page first, they have been corrupted. A play script is only the best imitation of the playwrights understanding of a story. Theater is built around this corruption though. That is why we can watch *A Midsummer Night's Dream* again and again, and it will always be different. Theater brings phenomenon and spectacle to writing, the "third dimension" needed for true understanding and appreciation and as we have seen, the dramaturgical gaze can provide this missing piece. The dramaturg can provide a treatment for the corruption but not a cure. Through a knowledge of production history and a navigation of research, the dramaturg can create yet another phantasm, a way of examining a performance that acknowledges the corruption and through close study and observation, as able to either masque it, if only for a little while.

The corruption still exists though. What does this mean for performance than? If we can view a piece of writing in this manner, as a corruptive drug, how can we interpret this in an artistic medium like theater, where a script is infected from the moment the playwright sets it down onto the page? The answer to this is Pharmakos. This term, not to be confused with Pharmakon, refers to a highly ritualized practice

⁶¹ Ibid, 139.

within ancient Greek society. In times of hardship like plagues and famine, a single representative, often marked by otherness in some way (deformity, social class, gender) and they were, through highly stylized ritual, purged from the city and in some instances, killed.⁶² This purge supposedly cleansed the city of its maladies, allowing it to recover and thrive. This of course, sounds very similar to the Aristotelian idea of Catharsis. However, that idea is staunchly rooted in the experience of the audience. Pharmakos, on the other hand, is focused chiefly upon the performance. The performance of the text, the translation of this static entity into a dynamic, organic creature, removes the infection. The dramaturg, as the chief advocate for the script within a rehearsal process, can be seen of as the facilitator of this process, guiding the patient, the collective being that is a piece of theater, through the process of purging and ultimately into a healthy, vibrant life.

This idea of the Pharmakos is highly evocative of the process of surrogation as defined by theater historian Joseph Roach. In his landmark book *Cities of the Dead*, Roach discusses how the process of surrogation occurs when there is a loss, corporeal or cultural, within a community.⁶³ Into this void steps the surrogate. For a variety of reasons from deep seated prejudice, to a perceived lacking or abundance of certain skill sets, to a level of uncanniness, the surrogate “tends to disturb the complacency of all thoughtful incumbents, may provoke many unbidden emotions ranging from mildly incontinent sentimentalism to raging paranoia.”⁶⁴ In attempting to enter into the pre-fabricated cultural landscape, the surrogate sticks out like a sore thumb. They stand as both as both link to the past, and a beacon of the future. It seems only natural that a society would not know how to reconcile the mass of contradictions and incongruities swirling around one body. The solution to this issue, according to Roach, is for the community to engage in, “public enactments of forgetting, either to blur the obvious

⁶² Todd Compton. *Victim of The Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History*, accessed on 5/9/2016, <http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/4912>

⁶³ Joseph, Roach. *Cities of the Dead*, (New York: Columbia University Press 1996), 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or, more desperately, to exaggerate them in order to mystify a previous Golden Age, now lapsed.”⁶⁵ A simulacrum is created, willed into being and endowed with life, in order to move forward.

This idea of public acts of forgetting, or as Roach later characterizes it, “sacrificial substitution,” resonates with me as dramaturg. The point of resonance is that it provides an intriguing context to quote that has always intrigued me about dramaturgy. In the opening lines of *Ghost Light*, Chemers quotes Dramaturg Mark Bly during a talk-back:

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What did you, as dramaturg, actually *do* for this production? What appeared on stage that is a result of what you did?

MARK BLY: I can’t point to anything specifically, but if you took a knife to this play, it would bleed me.⁶⁶

With this quote, Bly seems to be defining production dramaturgy in a way that is eerily similar to Roach’s idea of sacrificial substitution. Bly illuminates what can be one of the most frustrating caveat to the dramaturgs practice: that our work is incredibly hard to quantify. Any member of the design team could easily point to their contribution, so too can the actor or the director. But what does the dramaturg have to show for their tireless effort during all the many weeks of rehearsal? Perhaps they could fish a crumpled program from the aisle, and point to a page or two of program notes. Or perhaps they could lead this “audience member” out into the lobby and proudly showcase their lobby display. But by the simple act of leaving the theater, exiting that highly charged space, a slight physical separation is transformed into a massive mental break. The dramaturg, and their effort is something that is meant to be left on the floor, or worse, belongs “outside” of the theater.

What Bly’s comment adds to the landscape of doing that is contemporary dramaturgy is an important verb: sacrifice. The dramaturg, at its current evolutionary point, exists as both the Pharmakon

⁶⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁶ *Ghost Light*, 3.

and the Pharmakos within the theater. For some, we are a lingering poison that cannot be purged from the theatrical body. Still others see us as some sort of a healing salve, our application helping to heal wounds and cure any existing maladies. However, salve is not the right word. It is far too visible. No, perhaps we are a powerful pill that is absorbed into the body. Perhaps the best practice for dramaturgy lays in a sort of dramaturgical transubstantiation, the symbolic transformation of physical body and body of work, the archive of the dramaturg's contribution, into the dramaturgical body of the play itself. This could be the source for Bly's blood. Rather than being swept up in the clouds of ego and emotion that enshroud more public figures such as the actor, the dramaturg embraces humility. That humility stems from the acceptance that our work is vital and necessary, if not always visible.

As rehearsals progressed I began to feel more and more comfortable, keying in to the specific language of the rehearsal room, punctuating my silences with jokes and pleasantries. While my comfort level in the room increased, I still did not feel as if my presence was really making a difference on the process. However, about half way through, Philippa began telling me how thrilled both the actors and the directors were with my work. At the time I accepted the compliment, but I was fairly puzzled by it. What was I doing to contribute to the process that was making such an impact? In hindsight, I see several forces at work. On one hand, I was, to an extent, the powerful silent figure described by Proehl, my physical presence illuminating the dramaturgy of the piece. However, I think an equally, if not more, powerful interpretation of my practice was that I was a non-polarizing figure, a constant, inert presence that could always be counted on to relax tensions. This phenomenon is not unique to my situation though. Dramaturg Júlia Ungár notes a similar relationship in her work with director Sándor Zsóstér:

For some reason Sándor finds it reassuring if I'm in the rehearsal room. Maybe I don't say a word but my presence has a positive effect on him. He looks calmer, more patient and even more secure at that time. And the actors... said the same, that it felt good for them to have somebody sitting there paying attention to them.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Dramaturgy in the Making*, 154.

Ungár goes on to caution that this is not a universal quality of the dramaturg. “This is not something concrete and I’m not sure it is the dramaturg’s job,” she warns, “I think it depends on the dramaturg’s personality.”⁶⁸ this je-ne-sais-quoi, exhibited by both myself and Ungár, speaks to the power of dramaturgical presence and illuminates the humanity of Proehl’s dramaturgy. Rather than the lifeless mannequin I jokingly suggested earlier, the dramaturg not only draws attention to dramaturgical structures, but also seems to remind those involved of their humanity, that even at the darkest times there will someday be an audience that will (hopefully) make this entire process worth it. This presence was so valuable to the process of *Irma Vep* that Jon even requested that I attend tech rehearsals.

As part of my work as associate dramaturg, I also gave a series of pre-show talks about *Irma Vep* as part of Cal Shake’s Grove Talks program. While I was only one member of a group of rotating presenters, I was the speaker with the deepest understanding of the play, as well as the rehearsal process. This provided me with an entirely different perspective from the rest of the group. By the time series of talks began, I had already undergone the ritual surrogacy of dramaturgical transubstantiation, or so I thought. With these grove talks, I found myself taking audiences on a journey through the life and world of Charles Ludlam and his most famous piece, *The Mystery of Irma Vep*. This seemed to be a compelling journey, and one audience member even came up after the talk to tell me that my presentation had, at points, almost moved her tears. Inevitably though, a bell rang. The doors to the theater opened and the people trickled out of grove, and it was just me. I had, for the briefest moment, assumed the body of the production, the spirit of Ludlam and his play, and introduced this creature to the audience. And now I had passed away. Perhaps passed along is a better term. The show had left my body and found its way on to a more formal stage. To continue the biblical metaphor, this is resurrection, the return of this thought dead figure to prophesize before a group of people about what is has happened and what is to come. Koszyn points out that “the Dionysian state is also a dream state-

⁶⁸ Ibid, 155.

not a Freudian dream state with its recognizable iconography, but of that dreams that defy interpretation.”⁶⁹ Although in Nietzsche’s understanding Apollo is the figure aligned with dreams, he is a guide, Dionysius is a state, a physical presence that is meant to be passed through and interacted with. Presence is the key, though, and I believe it was the strongest contribution I made to the success of *Irma Vep*.

Chemers articulates this complex emotion with which the dramaturg grapples with a simple elegance. In the very first step of his “twelve step” system for play analysis, he reminds you, the dramaturg, that before they can even start your analysis, you have to “admit that you don’t know everything.”⁷⁰ You have to accept that no matter how much research, both inside and outside of the rehearsal room, you do it will never give provide a definitive understanding of a play. This may upon first glance appear profoundly frustrating. The dramaturg is not an all knowing doctor, nor a divine mystic, they are Sisyphus, forced to find fleeting pleasure in the process of grappling with a massive impediment, only to never truly reach a peak. However, as Albert Camus reminds us, “struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”⁷¹ Chemers alludes to this happiness as stating that, “though it may be nothing more than a quick flash of ‘I get it’ that passes between audience and performance, it is the experience we seek in the theater and one of those moments that make life worth living.”⁷²

One must imagine the dramaturg happy too. But what if this kind of sustained dramaturgical presence is not as pronounced in the rehearsal process? This was the situation that I encountered in my work as production dramaturg for both iterations of Gerald Casel’s *Splinters in Our Ankles*, the first at UC Santa Cruz, and the second at ODC. Inspired by the colonial history of the Tinikling, the national dance of

⁶⁹ “Dramaturg and the irrational,” 277.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 70.

⁷¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated by Justin O’Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 91.

⁷² *Ghost Light*, 71

the Philippines and its transformation from an oppressive punishment to a spirited protest, and finally to commoditized cultural product. Not unlike my work on *Irma Vep*, when I entered the project, much of the pre-production work had already been conducted by Gerald. He had also begun crafting the second half of the piece with members of his company, GeraldCaseIDance. I was also working with dance for the first time, having discovered after a quick google search that there was indeed a branch in the field known as dance dramaturgy. I would be the first to admit that my formal dance training was... limited. I had taken an introductory level dance studio with Gerald, which was how I was first introduced to project, and I had a pretty solid understanding of movement techniques such as Anne Bogart's Viewpoints, but beyond that I was venturing into new territory. Like *Irma Vep*, I felt a gap between myself and the dancers. Since a shared physical and visual language is so important in the creation of a dance piece, I felt at a fundamental level that I lacked ability to fully articulate my thoughts in a way that would resonate with the both Gerald and the dancers.

However, since he was working with a dramaturg for the first time, Gerald was also treading into unfamiliar terrain. Inspired by the presence of a dramaturg, Gerald really wanted to engage with texts in the first part of the piece, which was choreographed in collaboration with a group of undergraduate dancers at UC Santa Cruz. In this spirit, I conducted a series of writing workshops with the dancers. The first exercise was about working for a lack of knowledge, I had the dancers make a list of five to ten subjects that they knew nothing about. When they were finished they shared their lists with the group, and then we decided on topic, taken from one of the lists, to explore further in a free write. They chose to write about gluten, and generated a rich assortment of texts. Although none these ultimately made it into the show, this exercise provides a crucial jumping off point for the future text work for the project. Our next experiment, we decided to adapt Filipino folk tales and myths. This experiment ultimately bore fruit with one of the adaptations, a PSA about earthquake safety and a magic pebble, would ultimately become bookends, appearing at the start and the end the piece. We

also assigned specific prompts to individual dancers, a common one being simply “I forgot...”. Several of these piece also made it into this final project.

However, because of personal issues, I was forced to ultimately withdraw from the project before it was finished. However, when I approached Gerald about resuming my work on the piece for the ODC production, he was welcoming and we jumped back into it. My main task for this iteration would be to assist Gerald in translating part one, which we had choreographed with the students, on to the bodies of his company. Gerald also felt very strongly about the translation process. Gerald had recently begun to interpret choreography as a colonizing force, the conscription of one person’s body on the other, forcing another person to move in ways that might be utterly alien to them. With this in mind, Gerald and I decided that rather than trying to simply “copy” any elements of student choreography, we would engage the same choreographic structures, such as listing exercise and “I forgot...,” and many other compositional tools.

However, I again faced another gulf between myself and the company. Because these were professional dancers, I felt a renewed sense of physical inferiority. However, I also lacked a physical presence in many of the early rehearsals. Although I would regularly engage in discussions with Gerald about what was going on in rehearsal, I did not actually enter the rehearsal environment until about halfway through the process. When I appeared at my first rehearsal, I felt a certain level of fear amongst the dancers. The fear was not malicious in any way, but pure uneasiness of admitting a new person into a tight knit organization. For many of the dancers, they had never worked with a dramaturg before. Because of these scheduling issues though, Gerald had also facilitated many of the writing exercises for the dancers, which was necessary to keep the process moving along, but prevented me from sharing with the ensemble the type of understanding and contributions that I could bring to the table. Again, I mostly sat in the room taking occasional notes, but mainly observing the process. While my presence was appreciated by Gerald, I never really felt as if I became fully integrated into the company.

This last example illuminates a crucial part of any art form: failure. Even the most solid dramaturgical practices cannot be applied for every situation. Doctors make mistakes. Chekhov captures this beautifully in *Uncle Vanya*, where we see Astrov mourn the loss of a patient upon his operating table. Sometimes rituals are interrupted or stalled and sacrifices can be vain. And yet we continue on, propelled by the fundamental human impulse that the next time will be better. To achieve this, we need to perhaps re-examine the set of tools we are using for the job. If you only have hammer, the saying goes, then every problem is going to start looking like a nail. As we have seen, the dramaturg must carry a very large tool box.

Whether they be Apollonian or Dionysian, medical or murderous the dramaturg is a figure that is vital to the landscape of theater. Simply by existing in a space, by presenting an open demeanor and actively observing the rehearsal process, the dramaturg can have a profound effect on the outcome of a piece. Their presence, from the meat puppets of *Law and Order* to the scientific mirrors of Bleeker to mystics of Koszyn, alters the rehearsal process in a fundamental way. Our task is to ensure that this alteration is as beneficial as possible. Through a constant shifting of identity, the dramaturg is able to navigate the landscape of doing, creating enough kinetic energy to subtly, but substantially, push a piece of theater to the realization of its full potential. Then we turn around, walk back down the hill, and do it all again.

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