



# A Dramaturgical Guide

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*The following dramaturgical list primarily consists of thoughts and ideas drawn from my own experiences as an artist (performer and maker) and as a dance and arts teacher. Although initially created as a guide for aspiring dance dramaturges, I believe it can be beneficial for any dramaturg, artist, performer, or anyone who finds themselves on an artistic path of exploring and creating. Enjoy your journey!*

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## Embrace the 'Glade'

*Create a clearing, a space for creative exploration without fear of right or wrong, encouraging play and improvisation and wander through the unknown.*

I like this idea of being or creating something like a 'glade'. A glade is a clearing, an open area in the forest. The metaphor of the glade comes from my experience as a dance teacher, where I have always tried to facilitate or be the glade for the students. It is like a space of unbuild areas, to initiate a creative process. The idea of a glade can be seen as a playfield, a space to play, explore, improvise, and experience without right or wrong, where you can make mistakes and wander through the unknown. At the same time, as my experience as an artist, I found that having an experimental playfield, where you feel free to fail, improvise, explore the unknown, and find what you have not been looking for, is a very important aspect to cherish and pursue in an artistic process. Therefore, I feel that "embracing the glade" is the first thing on the list for a starting dance dramaturge, or any dramaturge, to remember. In this way, you may find yourself working with and perhaps diverging from the 'academic' training of dancers, or any other performers for that matter. This involves not only engaging with what they already know but also unlocking the gate to the unknown through the creation of a safe space. By valuing curiosity, taking creative risks and reflection, and the fluidity around the notions of theory and practice you can deepen the

choreographic practice.<sup>1</sup> It is about trust, a trust bond, but also about knowing one's needs to feel totally free to explore the artistic process. When you know these needs, then you can start building the 'glade'. What do you need to build your 'glade'?

## **Foster Intuition**

*Establish conditions that address and explore initial intuitions and meaningful questions, allowing unfamiliar thoughts and materials to emerge.*

The concept of fostering intuition is closely intertwined with the idea of 'the glade'. By allowing to give space to intuition, we can explore artistic paths that cannot always be trotted by following standard procedures or processes. Even though there is a lot of craftsmanship and expertise and experience in making art, art also requires venturing off the beaten track with fearlessness. Though we live in a time where a lot can be easily accessed, researched, found, and acquired in many ways, there are moments where artistic, academic or any other knowledge and experience that provides us with clues, matter, or ideas, fall short when you explore the unknown. Sometimes, we need to trust our instincts or summon the courage to take a leap and simply do something and navigate in this adventure. Creating art exists in a realm where there are no guarantees and no quick fixes. The journey itself holds equal, and in some cases, even greater importance than the end product. Whether or not the artist begins with a predefined concept or idea, intuition can serve as the key to exploration. Throughout the process, one can iteratively reflect and adjust. The explorative mode that comes from intuition can be a conversation akin to dance improvisation. When a dancer improvises, the movement is highly intuitive, and in a sense, it converses with the dancer. The dancer gives direction to the movement and the movement, in turn, gives direction to the dancer. As a dramaturge, it is necessary to arrange ways to create conditions that facilitate the exploration of initial intuitions and questions that matters to us. Allow unfamiliar thoughts, images, and materials to surface and communicate back to us, just as the movement speaks to the dancer.

## **Be a Shape-Shifter**

*Shift between collaboration, participation, friendship, mentorship, critique, support, memory, and dialogue based on project needs.*

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen, P., & Callison, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Dance Dramaturgy*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 11.

Dramaturgy has undergone a profound transformation, no longer confined to its historical role of providing textual support for theatrical productions. In the contemporary landscape, dramaturgy manifests itself in diverse ways, reflecting the evolution of theatre itself. The traditional 'job' description has expanded into a multifaceted service, adapting to the dynamic needs of modern projects. This metamorphosis makes dramaturgy challenging to define in a fixed sense, as it now navigates various roles and functions within the artistic sphere. Much like dancers, who fluidly shape their bodies and movements, dramaturgs too can be shape-shifters, embodying an ever-adapting stance and adjusting to the intricacies of each project. In other words, the embodied position of the dramaturg, which encompasses according to Ana Dubljević "practice, modes of working, observing, and collaborating with the material of performance", becomes a dynamic and integral aspect of the transformative role.<sup>2</sup> It involves collaboration, participation, friendship, mentorship, critique, support, memory, dialogue, navigation, and more. As a dramaturg, you can skillfully shift between, combine, and modify these modes, tailoring the approach to the specific needs of each project. Therefore, as a dramaturge, you may find yourself adopting various roles, approaches, and strategies influenced by the specific sources of inspiration, movement approaches, and working methods of each project. Similar to fostering intuition for the artist and the artistic process, as mentioned earlier, dramaturges apply their own experience, expertise, and intuition to navigate between these modes. This diversity in work is an art in itself and can be an exciting variation of work. But caution is also required. There's a risk of overcommitting, losing sight of the overall picture, and attempting roles that may not align with one's strengths. Despite the appearance of a 'superpower,' we are not superheroes. It's essential to identify the roles and working methods that suit you best and give you energy. Know your strengths and weaknesses, and where you can be of added value to the process and the artists you are working with. Focus on what sets you apart, as others will seek your services based on your strengths. So, stay true to yourself while you enjoy the versatility.

## Weave Impactful Connections

*Prioritize the effect and affect of interactions between ideas, people, materials, and spectatorship, emphasizing what a performance is doing rather than what it is trying to be. Weave impactful connections by navigating beyond 'who' to 'where'.*

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<sup>2</sup> Dubljević, A. (2021). *The Feminist Pornscapes on feminist dramaturgical thinking in dance and performance practice*. Station Service for contemporary dance, 8.

In the dynamic evolution of dramaturgy, a profound shift towards embodiment has taken center stage, directing our attention to the 'doing' and 'affect.' This transformative wave, now ripples through various forms of performative arts. Departing from the conventional text-centric approach, contemporary dramaturgy embraces a more performative and post-anthropocentric stance. Here, we witness the deliberate "decentering of human agency in the process" and the intriguing notion of "the death of the character".<sup>3</sup> At its core, this shift is about exploring "the effect and affect of interactions between ideas, sources, people, materials, and the perceptual practices of spectators." It's about understanding what a performance is doing rather than fixating on what it is attempting to be.<sup>4</sup> This ethos aligns seamlessly with the concept of embodied enactment – a celebration of interaction with the environment over mental representations, acknowledging matter as an active participant.

As dancer jacki job and decolonial thinker Rolando Vázquez suggest, the pursuit is to unearth alternative forms of being in a body. No longer treating the body as merely representational or as a technical, anatomical body. Instead of the body being the center of space, it's about a shift towards a post-anthropocentric approach where everything is connected.<sup>5</sup> This aligns with the ideas upon ecology by Timothy Morton who states that "Ecology shows us that all beings are connected. The ecological thought is the thinking of interconnectedness".<sup>6</sup> While anthropocentric theatre is looking for answers to question "who we are", ecological or post-anthropocentric theatre focusses its perspective to "where we are".<sup>7</sup> "It is a deep relation to other forms of life that connects us to other vibrations of life."<sup>8</sup> In the midst of the ongoing discourse within post-humanism, where all matter is accorded significance, the spotlight is on the idea of affect and the intricate interconnectivity of all matter. Here, humans take a step back, and affect gracefully flows between bodies, reaching even those that aren't human. This dance extends its arms to the more-than-human world, inviting interaction and collaboration. Yet, this emphasis on impact isn't confined solely to the (affective) process of creating art. It extends a daring hand towards the impact we seek to make and, more crucially, why. In these uncertain times, where the world holds its breath, art, like a vibrant performer,

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<sup>3</sup> Bleeker, M. (2017). Thinking that Matters, Towards a Post-Anthropocentric Approach to Performance Design. In *Scenography Expanded An Introduction to Contemporary Performance Design* (pp. 128–130). Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Hansen, P., Callison, D., & Palgrave Macmillan. (2015). *Dance dramaturgy : modes of agency, awareness and engagement*. Palgrave Macmillan, 6.

<sup>5</sup> job, jacki, & Vázquez Melken, R. (2023). Nurturing the Relational Body: Decolonizing Dance Pedagogies. *Curating Dance : Decolonizing Dance*, 55, 61–65.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Morton. 2010. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard University Press: 7

<sup>7</sup> Balcare, Kitija. 2022. "Ecotheatre: Changing Perspective From Who We Are Towards Where We Are." *Culture Crossroads 21*: 56–65. <https://doi.org/10.55877/CC.VOL21.271>.

<sup>8</sup> job, jacki, & Vázquez Melken, R. (2023). Nurturing the Relational Body: Decolonizing Dance Pedagogies. *Curating Dance : Decolonizing Dance*, 55, 61–65.

has a unique role to play in reflecting and resonating with the world. Consider what you want to focus on – that unique movement that can leave an indelible mark on your audience and perhaps echo beyond.

## Serve, Question, and Navigate Chaos

*Embarking on the adventurous terrain of dramaturgy, we discover its multifaceted role – a dynamic interplay of service, inquiry, and an artful navigation of chaos.*

Picture the dramaturg as a rehearsal's cartographer, intricately mapping the landscape of creative exploration. A critical observer who gracefully soars above the matter, the dramaturg stands shoulder to shoulder with the choreographer, a trusted confidant in the formulation of artistic challenges.<sup>9</sup> Yet, their role goes beyond observation. The dramaturg, like a skilled guide, provides maps and notes for all members of the distributed dramaturgy.<sup>10</sup> In the collaborative process, the dramaturg assumes the role of a facilitator, uncovering interdisciplinary connections, sourcing and shaping material, and dismantling hierarchies of knowledge and ownership. The practice of dramaturgy itself steps into the spotlight, revealing its essence through work-in-progress, workshop culture, and a celebration of collaboration.<sup>11</sup> As a dramaturg you need to deal with complexity; a realm of interconnectedness and non-linear dramaturgy, where chaos and structure engage in a dance of perpetual motion. The dramaturge, a solver of puzzles, adept at navigating complexity, must also be comfortable in solitude. The work dissolves into the production, seeming almost invisible. As Marianne van Kerkhoven articulates, the dramaturg is positioned amidst a web of entanglements between collaborators, materials, references, and the public, yet paradoxically remains invisible, not seeking the spotlight but orchestrating from the shadows, and “does not have to appear on the photo”.<sup>12</sup>

## Navigate the Choreography of Thought

*Reflect and guide with the aspects of Space, Time, Weight, and Flow, to offer a profound lens to observe and shape the artistic landscape.*

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<sup>9</sup> Hansen, P., Callison, D., & Palgrave Macmillan. (2015). *Dance dramaturgy : modes of agency, awareness and engagement*. Palgrave Macmillan, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Dubljević, A. (2021). *The Feminist Pornscapes on feminist dramaturgical thinking in dance and performance practice*. Station Service for contemporary dance, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Van Kerkhoven, M. (1994). Looking without pencil in the hand. *Theaterschrift* , 4–5. <http://old.sarma.be/docs/2858>

Space, Time, Weight, and Flow are aspects of Laban's Movement Analysis, a versatile tool known and embraced by many dancers and actors alike. In this intricate model, each element intertwines, offering a lens to analyze movement. To reflect and guide dramaturgically, you can also use these aspects beyond their original intention, as a philosophical tool to think about your dramaturgy, process, or event. The beauty lies in the adaptability of Laban's framework, transcending strict rules and blossoming into a philosophical tool. You can apply this for instance if you value something but cannot quite put your finger on it. Consider the aforementioned idea of the 'glade'. Applying Space, Time, Weight, and Flow opens a vista of reflections and inform you on what is happening in your 'glade'. You can observe and analyse organisational behaviour or a process, you can see what is happening and it might inform you how to solve an issue or pursue a certain direction. From this you can start a choreography of thought and ask yourself if it carries the purpose. For instance:

- Space: Is it indirect or direct: flexible, meandering, wandering or with single focus and channeled? Also, how do you, as a dramaturg, take your place in the space, what space is given to you?
- Time: Is it sustained or sudden: lingering, leisurely or hurried, urgent? When to accelerate or to slow down? Amidst the haste dictated by deadlines, the art of slowing down can help, to reflect, lounge in the moment, and regain energy. Standing still also can mean progress, as it can accelerate the next phase.
- Weight: Is it strong, powerful, having an impact or light, delicate, overcoming gravity? It's about 'giving to passion what passion asks for'.
- Flow: Is it free or bound? The ebb and flow of uncontrolled and restraint manifest in the creative workflow.

Altogether, you can view from a single aspect, but ultimately, everything is connected. The choreography of thought, shaped by Space, Time, Weight, and Flow, unveils the intricate dance that underpins every artistic endeavor—a symphony of interconnected dimensions. This choreography of thought, transcends the boundaries of mere analysis, becoming an intricate tapestry where philosophy and dramaturgy intertwine.