

**DRAMATURG AS ARTISTIC INSTIGATOR**

A Thesis Presented

by

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Theatre

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family for their unconditional support, and to all those theatre artists  
(dramaturgs and otherwise) who are inspired to instigate and dare to devise.

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**ABSTRACT**

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Dramaturgs have been struggling to define themselves and assert their *raison d'être* in the American theatre for the past four decades. In an evolving theatrical landscape that includes expanding new play development processes and new modes of collaborative interdisciplinary theatre-making, the role of the dramaturg must be reexamined in order for it to stake a new artistic claim in the field. Devised theatre-making processes rely on dramaturgical practice as an integral part of generating, editing, and structuring performance material and offer a fertile artistic avenue for dramaturgs to utilize their skills. To explore the role of the dramaturg in devised theatre, I chose to curate a festival of three new devised works entitled *Beyond the Horizon*. This thesis describes in detail my role as curator in the planning, creation, and execution of the festival, as well as my role as a dramaturg within the devising process of one of the three works. To encompass both the idea of the dramaturg as an active co-creator of performance and an empowered facilitator of change, I proposed a new title for the role: artistic instigator. Drawn from my conclusions and discoveries while working on the *Beyond the Horizon* festival, I have formed a description about how the dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator might function within

devising ensembles, propose changes to current new play development practices, and advocate for expanded methods of play-making.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT.....	8
The State of the Dramaturg in Contemporary Theatre Practice .....	8
Dramaturg as Curator.....	12
Devised Theatre and the Dramaturg .....	17
3. FESTIVAL PLANNING.....	22
Expanding Dramaturgies: Designing an Evening of Devised Performances .....	22
Sparking Conversation: Panel Discussions.....	28
The Way of Water: Play Reading.....	29
4. BEYOND THE HORIZON .....	33
Auditions .....	33
Professional Workshop .....	38
Rehearsals.....	41
Design Run.....	53
Technical and Dress Rehearsals .....	55
Performances.....	57
Post-show Panel Discussions.....	59



Play Reading.....	65
Capturing the Ephemeral: Scripting Devised Theatre.....	65
Process Reflection: Dual Roles.....	70
5. CONCLUSION .....	79
Dramaturg as Artistic Instigator .....	79
APPENDICES	
A. NIGHTINGALE PRODUCTION SCRIPT.....	89
B. NIGHTINGALE ARCHIVAL SCRIPT .....	98
C. TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN ARCHIVAL SCRIPT .....	106
D. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ARCHIVAL SCRIPT.....	119
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	131

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Dramaturgs have been struggling to define themselves and assert their *raison d'être* in the American theatre for the past four decades. In the preface to their 1997 anthology, *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook*, editors Susan Jonas and Geoff Proehl remark, "...the days of forever needing to explain what a dramaturg does are coming to an end" (vii). Though the title "dramaturg" appears in more playbills, is included in more theater staff directories, and has an active organization, Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), dramaturgs in America are not yet free of the endless explaining when it comes to describing what they do even fifteen years later. In February of 2012, The American Voices New Play Institute (AVNPI) at Arena Stage held a convening titled "The 21st Century Literary Office" that sought to address what AVNPI Director Polly Carl called on *HowlRound's* blog "one of the great mysteries of the American theater": the role of the dramaturg. And yet, far from being a failure, the open-ended nature of the dramaturg's definition allows for growth and change in a fluid theatrical landscape. From this nuanced complexity arises confusion, but also an opportunity to redefine the dramaturg as a vital part of contemporary theatre making.

The role of the dramaturg must be reexamined in order for it to stake a new artistic claim in an evolving theatrical landscape that includes expanding new play development processes, new experimental modes of collaborative interdisciplinary theatre-making, and shifts in the way institutional theaters structure their artistic

departments. The work of dramaturgs is varied and complex, ranging from research to public outreach to new play development to designing projects and programs. Attempts to define this multifaceted role lead early on to detrimental labels including the dramaturg as a “watchdog” for the playwright or institution and as a pair of “extra eyes” (the “extra” here indicating an implied dispensability of the artist) that still linger (Proehl, “Images” 126). Definitions like these have placed suspicion on the dramaturg and positioned the role as outside of the creative process.

While such labels threaten to dismiss the dramaturg as superfluous in the rehearsal room, there remains one element in the creative process upon which the dramaturg is expected to fix his or her eyes: the text. The convening held this year with its reference to the “21st Century Literary Office” places the dramaturg behind a desk and under a mountain of scripts. According to Anne Cattaneo, the emergence of the modern dramaturg in America coincided with the boom in new play development in the 1970’s in regional theatres such as the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, the Guthrie, and Goodman Theatre (5). Early on the dramaturg was tethered to text, reading large amounts of new scripts, organizing the incoming work, and managing play development programming. Built as they were for a playwright-centered development process, regional theatres have been slow to embrace alternative modes of play creation. Thus, the institutional dramaturg has been disconnected from a fertile avenue of artistic potential: the dramaturg as co-creator in collaboratively devised performance. In a climate of shrinking permanent dramaturg positions at regional theatres, positioning the dramaturg as a necessary

force as both a co-creator in devised theatre and a curatorial project leader opens up new artistic opportunities for dramaturgs to gain stature as indispensable to theatre-making processes.

Devised theatre-making processes rely on dramaturgical practice as an integral part of generating, editing, and structuring performance material. In devised theatre, “the performance text is, to put it simply, ‘written’ not before but as a consequence of the process” (Turner and Behrndt 170). This type of open-ended process offers potential for the dramaturg to function as a vital co-creator in devised theatre. An example of the dramaturg as co-creator can be found in Mira Rafalowicz’s dramaturgical work on The Open Theater’s 1973 production of *Nightwalker*. According to Allen Kuharski, through Rafalowicz’s active contribution to developing the show, the “dramaturg emerged as a full creative participant” and found a “distinct creative function” within the ensemble (151).

Though dramaturgy is central to various collective devising methodologies, the investigation of the role of the dramaturg in such practices includes a limited amount of scholarly work. In her 1994 landmark book, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Alison Oddey does not include the dramaturg in her discussion of key roles within devising companies. One of the newest contributions to dramaturgical scholarship, *The Process of Dramaturgy*, by Scott R. Irelan, Anne Fletcher, and Julie Felise Dubiner, focuses on production dramaturgy, but does not mention devised theatre as an option for dramaturgs. The “new play dramaturg” in the book concerns himself or herself only with the living playwright in a “writer-driven” process (Irelan, Fletcher, and Dubiner 77). Cathy Turner and Synne K.

Behrndt briefly address the role of the dramaturg in devised theatre in their book, *Dramaturgy and Performance*, but admit more scholarly work must be done to flesh out this “emerging role” (168).

To explore the role of the dramaturg in devised theatre, I chose to curate a festival entitled *Beyond the Horizon*, consisting of three new devised plays, a new play reading, and panel discussions. In light of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and subsequent environmental catastrophes, the festival considered how performance might illuminate the relationships between the human and the non-human and offer community response to ecological crisis. The theme for the festival arose in response to a campus-wide initiative issued by the University of Massachusetts Academic Deans. Their program, titled “Deans’ Theme,” chose a topic each year for disciplines across the campus to engage with via classes, projects, and speakers. The Deans’ Theme for the 2011/2012 academic year was the 2010 BP Gulf Oil Spill.

By addressing this theme, the *Beyond the Horizon* festival provided a platform for the Theatre Department to participate in an interdisciplinary conversation through performance. Though theatre is often described as a site for exploring the human condition, that human condition is intrinsically linked to the conditions of all other life on this planet. On the Steppenwolf blog, Artistic Director Martha Lavey, describes how artists give an important voice to the most pressing of social and scientific issues:

The research that science and scholarship produce is the foundation of our collective knowledge; the crafting of that knowledge into image and language is the task of the artist. Those images, those metaphors

provide story for hard science. They humanize and make vivid the story of science.

The festival asked devising participants to utilize embodied performance as a means of transmitting knowledge about our relationship to the spill and our evolving relationship to the natural world. The devising ensemble members, armed with the power narrative has to illuminate and express the most beautiful mysteries of humanity and our physical world, became empowered artists dedicated to addressing artistically and critically the complex scientific and socio-political issues facing our nation and our world today.

For this project, I planned to adopt a strategic position in overseeing the structure of the entire festival, while also taking up a tactical position as a dramaturg within the creative process of one of the three devised works. I saw the project as an opportunity to conduct practice-based research to contribute to the burgeoning conversation about the role of the dramaturg in devising processes. The festival also presented a chance to explore how a dramaturg-as-curator might function as the primary role in staging encounters between the performers and the audience, between artists, and between the festival events and the community at large.

I found that the worn-out definitions and persistent stereotypes associated with the role of the dramaturg needed to be discarded in favor of a new description that might accurately describe the creative work dramaturgs can do both in terms of curation and in devised theatre. To encompass both the role of the dramaturg as an active co-creator of performance and an empowered facilitator of change in the

theatrical landscape, I proposed a new title: artistic instigator. More than just another title for a role that has juggled fluid and multiple definitions, both negative and positive, this label points to an intrepid theatre artist who is unafraid to disrupt the status quo of the traditional theatre hierarchy. Encompassing more than the dramaturg's usual power of influence, the artistic instigator has the power of action, but wields it with the skill of a true collaborator, attentive to the creative voices of others. The mischievous instigator, imbued with a dramaturg's inquisitive spirit, constantly questions how and why theatre is made and dares to propose new methods.

Drawn from my conclusions and discoveries while working on the *Beyond the Horizon* festival, I have formed a description about how the dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator might propose such changes to current theatre practices and advocate for expanded methods of new play-making. Within the devising process, the instigating dramaturg can contribute mentally and physically to the shaping of a new work. The dramaturg, as Deborah Wood Holton suggests, works as a "cartographer," recording and interpreting the creative landscape of rehearsals, while also carving out the artistic terrain on his or her feet (251). Skilled in generating and navigating archival materials, the devising dramaturg is positioned to innovate new methods of capturing textural and somatic elements of devised performance for future use. A dramaturg's journal of his or her experiences can provide a blueprint for further scholarly research on the subject of the dramaturg's role as co-creator in alternative methods of theatre-making.

Far from being a superfluous outsider, the dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator takes artistic risks, co-creates, advocates, and curates. In order to thrive in our current theatrical landscape, dramaturgs must design their creative destinies and choose their own artistic adventures. Devised theatre offers a site for dramaturgs to occupy a “radically heightened collaborative and creative role” (Kuharski 145). It is my hope this project will serve as one model for artistic adventure that dramaturgs may use as a field guide as they continue to expand, define, and explore their shifting roles both in devised theatre, and as empowered creative leaders in the field.



## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

#### The State of the Dramaturg in Contemporary Theatre Practice

One of the oldest and most well worn labels for the dramaturg is the “in-house critic” (Cattaneo 10). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing is considered the first modern dramaturg, mostly for his work as a resident critic at the National Theatre in Hamburg. While there, he wrote a collection of essays on dramatic principles and show reviews, which were published under the title *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. His goal was not to praise the work of the theatre he was employed by, but rather to “enlighten the mass and not confirm them in their prejudices or in their ignoble mode of thought” (Schechter 29). His reviews challenged both the audience and the performances and, unsurprisingly, left some on the creative teams insulted.

Lessing’s work as a resident critic did much to shape contemporary thought on the role of the dramaturg in America. In the pedagogical sphere, one of the top dramaturgy training programs in the country, Yale University’s MFA/DFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism, focuses on training students to be dramaturgs, literary managers, educators, and scholars as well as to work as “critics,” according to the Yale School of Drama website. This program, which originated as a critical writing program before dramaturgy was added to the title, was designed with a focus on the German model of “dramaturgie” or “the theoretical study and criticism of dramaturgic structure and the theatrical event” (Zelenak 105). Out of Yale’s program came ideas of dramaturgs functioning as the “conscience of the theatre” (Zelenak 105). The use of “conscience” here implies that there is a right way and a

wrong way to do theatre, and the dramaturg is the moral entity that can identify which is which and will gladly inform and guide those who are wrong. Around this time, the ideas of the dramaturg as a critic, a know-it-all, and smarter-than-thou arise, stereotypes which still persists today.

In tandem with this notion of the dramaturg as an embodied “conscience” in the rehearsal room, came the idea that the dramaturg should operate as an outside eye during the creative process. While having a dramaturg consider a play from the audience’s point of view can yield important insights during rehearsals, the notion of positioning the dramaturg “outside” grew more extreme and in some cases threatened to remove the dramaturg from the creative process altogether. Geoffrey S. Proehl, a past president of LMDA, has declared that while “dramaturgy . . . is inseparable from theatre making” the dramaturg “is not finally essential to the rehearsal process” (“Dramaturgy and Silence” 27). Proehl suggests the most a dramaturg can do is provide a presence in the room to remind the rest of the team that the dramaturgy of a play is important. This perspective grossly undervalues a dramaturg’s work, and it also insultingly implies that the actors, director, and design team need a Big Brother presence to keep them from ignoring the inner workings of a play. The dramaturg and artistic team work together to uncover the dramaturgy of shows whether they be classics or new works. Instead of positioning the dramaturg as active collaborator, Proehl paints the role as both superfluous and as an imposing policing presence to the theatrical work at hand.

Proehl is not alone in his assertion that the dramaturg is redundant to the theatre-making process. In 2001, while serving as president of LMDA, D.D. Kugler

remarked in an interview with Judith Rudakoff that while he was in favor of a “dramaturgical way of thinking” being embraced by artistic teams, he himself would “kind of advocate for the withering away of the dramaturg” and announced his wish that “the institutional position wasn’t necessary” (106). Though other members of the artistic team may complete dramaturgical tasks, their attentions must eventually turn elsewhere to complete their primary function in the production whether it be acting, directing, or designing. It is “the depth to which a dedicated production dramaturg engages” in the process that “sets them apart from other members of the artistic team” (Irelan, Fletcher, and Dubiner 133).

Though the negative associations attached to the role are damaging, equally troubling is the gendered language surrounding the dramaturg. Peter Hay has called the dramaturg a “midwife” that “routinely assists at the birth of the play or production” (79). He is not the only theatre professional to take up and run with this moniker or other feminized ideals of the dramaturg. In his list of the complete skills a dramaturg should have, Leon Katz mentions “decorum” twice in relation to dramaturgs knowing when to speak their thoughts and when to be seen and not heard (116). Proehl writes, “the dramaturg’s work finds a voice in the language of the production - it is audible - but the source of that voice is invisible and so, in a manner of speaking, silenced” (“Dramaturgy and Silence” 27). The invocation of a traditionally female position (midwife) coupled with the attributes of silence and supportiveness often assigned to the role results in an image of the dramaturg that is “at once rarefied and servile” (Wolf 103). In this servile position, dramaturgs can find themselves underpaid (if paid at all) and their “invisible” labor undervalued.

“What can you point to on the stage that is a result of your work on the show?” This is a question dramaturgs are often asked, myself included. When asked a similar question by an audience member during a talkback, Dramaturg Mark Bly replied, “ I can’t point to anything specifically, but if you took a knife to that play, it would bleed me” (Chemers 3). The pressure for dramaturgs to define themselves and their worth by the tangible products they contributed to projects and performances has led to definitions of the dramaturg that amount to little more than an outlining of supportive administrative tasks. In a scramble to prove that they were indeed contributing to productions, dramaturgs began pointing to every bit of concrete evidence of their work including actor packets, casebooks, study guides, program notes, and script reports. While these may be parts of a dramaturg’s labor, the intangible and invisible labor happening in a dramaturg’s own intellect and in discussions with the artistic team can shape ideas that impact what is presented on stage, how it is presented, and why. Value must be placed on both the practical and conceptual work that goes into creating performance. These administrative lists of tasks limit and dilute the discussion of the larger contributions dramaturgs can and have made in shaping new artistic programs, originating projects, and acting as co-creators in theatre-making.

Former Senior Dramaturg of the Guthrie Theater, Michael Lupu, wonders if, to be heard, dramaturgs “need to move on within the system and ascend to higher and more prominent positions such as director, producer, associate artistic director, or . . . artistic director” (109). In addition to positioning the dramaturg on one of the lowest rungs on the artistic ladder, Lupu suggests the dramaturg acquire a title with

more respect and power, rather than seeking to empower the role of the dramaturg. If the role is to thrive, it's time dramaturgs begin making themselves visible and placing themselves in the public sphere by curating and instigating play development, performance, and public programing.

On LMDA's official website, the organization defines the role of the dramaturg in part in this way:

In the ecology of theatre-making, dramaturgs and literary managers forge a critical link between artists and institutions, and institutions and their communities. They work with their other artistic collaborators to hone their vision, focus their goals and find outlets for their creative work on new and classical plays and dance pieces.

Dramaturgs are positioned as bridges, facilitating encounters between artists as well as between the performance and the public. They are also framed as a bridge between conceptual idea ("vision" and "goals") and practical application, between the dream of a new theatrical landscape and its realization. Mark Bly insists, "dramaturgs need to dream about what's possible—about what could electrify the space between audiences and artists—and then bring the hope and fervor of those dreams into the American theatre" (Brown). More aptly, then, the dramaturg is not just a physical link, or bridge, but also a creative engineer, designing new plans for engagement and collaboration between artists, theatres, and the public. Not only does the dramaturg pave the way, he or she is cognizant of how those interactions are constructed, and what form will serve to best connect these groups.

#### Dramaturg as Curator

Michael Bigelow Dixon sends out an impassioned call in his 2003 article co-created with Liz Engelman titled “What Makes a Turg Tick : Two Dramaturgs Discuss What They Like About Their Profession and Why They Do It” which challenges up and coming dramaturgs to have a greater hand in shaping theatrical practice and programing. He asserts, “So please, let’s not work in the margins, let’s not only respond, let’s not restrict our imaginations to fit an out-of-touch job description. Let’s be inventors and architects, enablers, and advocates for the theatre of our time as we dream it” (98). This call pulls the dramaturg out from the margins of the back of the rehearsal hall and into a new realm of creative empowerment. His invocation of “inventors” and “architects” suggests going back to the drawing board to not only reinvent the dramaturg for the 21st century, but also build the sort of theatrical events and programing that speak to an evolving theatrical landscape. Dixon’s labels of “enablers” and “advocates” make sure to position dramaturgs as still connected to a collaborative spirit, rather than disconnected as separate entities outside the theatrical process.

Dixon and Engelman are not the only ones to suggest that dramaturgs pursue artistic empowerment. In her blog article for *HowlRound* titled, “I Dare Us: A Manifesto for the 21st Century Literary Office,” Julie Felise Dubiner maintains dramaturgs “have amazing skills, but we have become unable to fully utilize them or grow as artists and people in our own right. We must get out of our offices and bring ourselves back into the creative process.” Scholar Tamsen Wolf insists that “rather than clinging to or protesting the peripheral nature of their work within theatres, dramaturgs could generate more of their own work and ideas into the public

sphere” (104). These impassioned words call on the dramaturg to become a leader and as LMDA’s definition of the role suggests, get out of the office, and to make good on that promise to be a “critical link” between artists, theatres, and communities by spearheading and curating new projects.

Dramaturg and freelance performance curator Norman Frisch closely aligns the goals of dramaturgy and curation. Frisch describes dramaturgy as “the practice of relating form to content, or style to subject matter” and curation as “a matter of finding the appropriate presentational format for the subject under investigation” (273). Dramaturgs, well trained in the shape and structure of theatrical performance, can lend that sensitivity to a curation process when it comes to designing, presenting, and framing theatrical and public programming. Both the dramaturg and the curator are concerned with how to stage an encounter between the subject (whether it be a physical object, a space, or performance) and an audience.

The dramaturg must be able to put form to the presentation of what performance studies scholar Diana Taylor calls the archive and the repertoire. “Archival” memory, according to Taylor, “exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change” (19). For the dramaturg, the archive in a theatrical register refers to the objects that capture traces of performance. These objects might include published theatrical works, manuscripts of new works, design renderings, videos of performance, and so on. The dramaturg is often tasked with selecting these objects to exhibit in connection with theatrical programming whether the task is

choosing scripts for play readings or design renderings for a lobby display. The archive of a specific performance might include any research the dramaturg has collected and presented either to the artistic team or the audience through displays or program notes.

For the dramaturg, however, curatorial duties extend outside of an engagement with the archive and into the realm of the repertoire. According to Taylor, the repertoire consists of “embodied memory” and might include “performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing” (20). Though a dramaturg might stage a play reading and draw upon the archival object of a script, the event itself, comprised of bodies and voices communicating the script, is part of the ephemeral repertoire. The dramaturg as curator is staging an encounter, whether it is between the audience and the archive, the audience and the repertoire, or a combination of the two.

Whatever encounter is designed, the dramaturg must keep the audience in mind when creating form and content. Live performance and public programming at theatres must compete with television, film, the internet, and the multiple screens (ipods, ipads, laptops, smart phones) to which people have glued their gaze. Now more than ever, dramaturgs need to develop programming that engages audiences and artists in new and thoughtful ways. Recently, dramaturgs have stepped to the forefront of curating theatrical and performance programming across the country. Support of this trend is clearly evident in the creation of the Dramaturg Driven Grant in 2010 by LMDA. This grant offers money to projects that are designed or spearheaded by LMDA member dramaturgs. Though the content of the projects



may vary widely, a dramaturg at the helm and as the driving force of the proposal is the major requirement. Dramaturgs do not have to be attached to any professional theatre to win a grant and are thus empowered to create projects that address their own visions.

Examples of the dramaturg's potential for engagement with both archival and repertorial elements while creating innovative programming are reflected in the project winners of LMDA's Dramaturgy Driven Grants. In its first few years, recipients of the grants have designed and curated play readings, performances, an interactive site-specific promenade event, and a creative retreat for artists. A number of these projects push the boundaries of theatrical offerings and embrace new modes of storytelling that are ambiguous, multifaceted, and interactive. Fall 2010 recipient Laurel Green worked in collaboration with two designers to create *Untangled Headphones*, an intimate performance for three people who are each guided by wireless headphones through a site-specific space. The event used archival material (the recorded sound) and the repertoire (unwitting performances between participants) to create a unique theatrical experience.

Though dramaturgs may concern themselves with the interaction between the archive, the repertoire, and the audience, they may also turn their attention to curating experiences for artists. Winner of a Spring 2011 Dramaturgy Driven Grant, Ilana Brownstein lead the Freedom Art Theatre Retreat that took 9 artists (playwrights, designers, and dramaturgs) from Boston and gave them a week in the woods of Maine to collaborate. In this instance, Brownstein has staged an encounter between artists. This staging of the repertoire (the retreat itself, including all

discussions, improvisations, and shared physicality) had the potential to lead to new archival material (ie: play scripts, videos, sketches).

### Devised Theatre and the Dramaturg

If the dramaturg is one of the most misunderstood positions in the theatre, devised theatre, as a misunderstood method of play-making, is its misfit counterpart. Much in the same way people furrow their brows when trying to figure out what a dramaturg does, the question, “What exactly is devised theatre?” is often posed and not without good reason. Like “dramaturg,” the term is infused with multiple meanings depending upon the specifics of the situation and whom one asks.

How does devising differ from traditional script-based theatre? Heddon and Milling offer a useful distinction that marks devising as “a mode of work in which no script – neither written play-text nor performance score – exists prior to the work’s creation by the company” (3). A script might not be present at the outset, but devising ensembles do sometimes start from text-based research or adapt or reinvent classic stories, plays, novels, or folk tales. Though the performance score will, by necessity, become an original creation, a play-text might be a starting place for a group, even if it is unrecognizable by the end of the process.

“Devising” and “collaborative creation” are often used interchangeably, though the process of devising doesn’t necessarily imply collaborative creation. In *Collective Creation, Collaboration, and Devising*, Bruce Barton separates collaboration, which he sees as a “self-imposed framework and structure” or

“context,” and devising, which he defines as “adopted strategies and rules” or “process” (ix). A theatre auteur may choose to employ devising strategies to create a new work that clearly expresses his or her singular artistic vision with support from a theatre company. Robert Wilson could be considered an example of a theatre auteur. Working within a collaborative framework, an ensemble might employ devising strategies to craft the content of a show from their collective discoveries, rather than from the mind of one auteur. There is no single devising system or methodology, but rather a multiplicity of processes, as diverse and idiosyncratic as the ensembles that employ them. Some elements that are often invoked when describing the process of devised theatre include the use of multiple voices, texts, and authors, as well as collage or montage assembly of performance materials, and improvisation as a means of generating content.

Alison Oddey describes devising as “a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals’ contradictory experiences of the world” (1). In this description, the emphasis is on the process of an ensemble of performers that share ownership and authorship of the performance. The multiplicity of voices, far from being a problem, is expressed as a desirable quality. In this way, one performance can allow for many points of view as opposed to the vision of the (singular) playwright. Integral to the process and embedded in this definition of devising is attention to the dramaturgy of the work through “assembling, editing, and re-shaping,” all domains of the dramaturg (Oddey 1).

An early example of the dramaturg functioning within devised theatre can be found in Mira Rafalowicz's work with Joseph Chaikin on The Open Theater's 1973 production of *Nightwalk*. In her only published work about her collaboration with Chaikin, Rafalowicz describes part of her role as "adding to the texture of thought" during the development process, while "asking questions" (161). In her description of her work, she often uses the term "we," placing herself inside of the larger ensemble and indicating the shared nature of dramaturgy in devised theatre. For Rafalowicz, the dramaturg helps shape the devising process by facilitating questions from the group to "define the area of exploration," shaping and editing content, reevaluating the work with the help of the "outside eyes" of trusted visiting artists, and polishing the smaller details of the final performance (161).

Though dramaturgs have been functioning in experimental devising processes for years, there remains a relatively small body of scholarly writing exploring how the dramaturg functions in these play-making models compared to the work addressing the role of the dramaturg in traditional script-based models. This could be the result of the enormous task of tackling two topics, both devising and the role of the dramaturg, that are each so idiosyncratic, so specific to each different performance project. It could also be attributed to the fact that devising ensembles don't always have a designated dramaturg in the room, but rather share dramaturgical duties across the group. For example, the Rude Mechs, a devising troupe out of Austin, TX, see the dramaturg as "a collective position that orbits most closely (thus far) around the director and playwright" (Lynn and Sides 111). For the group, the project's director and writer work together to edit and assemble written

material created by the ensemble. Given the baggage associated with the title “dramaturg,” it is unsurprising that Rude Mechs member Kirk Lynn, while editing writings from the ensemble during a project, found that “people have less trouble being edited by the playwright than they do by the dramaturg” (113).

There also is a hesitance from some devising groups to accept someone in a dramaturg’s role into their process, particularly if that dramaturg is coming in as an outsider to the ensemble. At the 2010 American Voices New Play Institute convening on devised work, ensembles shared horror stories of working with institutional dramaturgs brought in late in the development process that sought to “fix” the play (Sobeck 3). An old and detrimental definition of the dramaturg, the “play doctor” or one who arrives to perform surgery on an ailing theatrical piece, is a feared stereotype that continues to stymie what could be fruitful collaborations between devising ensembles and dramaturgs (Prohel, “Images” 126).

At that same convening, however, members of devising ensembles did suggest that someone in a dramaturgical role could be useful so long as they were “pulled fully into the process” (Sobeck 4). Building a relationship between the ensemble and the dramaturg earlier in the creation process avoids casting the dramaturg as an outsider who is there to meddle with the play. If the dramaturg is attached to an institution, a collaborative relationship developed with the ensemble early on could keep the dramaturg from being perceived as a watchdog for the producing company. Most importantly, spending time in rehearsals during the development phases offers the dramaturg a chance to learn the performance vocabulary of the group and begin to speak its language. Understanding an

ensemble's performance framework(s) and the specific show's internal logic will keep the dramaturg from applying his or her own proscriptive frameworks, rules, or standards to the creation of the new work.

In my interview with Co-Artistic Director of Pig Iron Theatre Company Quinn Bauriedel, he addressed the topic of the dramaturg by saying, "We like to have people in the room who are making stuff." His implication was that if the dramaturg is not part of the creation process, and is merely an outside eye or passive observer, that the ensemble doesn't have much use for one. Pig Iron has used non-company member dramaturgs in the past who had an expertise on topics the ensemble was exploring for performance. Bauriedel insisted that the dramaturg must, in addition to any specialized knowledge, have a sense of shaping and structuring theatrical moments and the ability to know what might be needed in any given scene. He suggested that dramaturgs must bring more than research to the table in the devising process. He warned that the dramaturg can sometimes be "too much a scholar" and not enough a creator in the process. This is a key difference between production dramaturgy on a script-based process and a devising process. One can function as a scholar and provide lectures and research packets on a production of a finished play, but devised theatre and new play development ask for different skills. Devised theatre demands of a dramaturg a rigorous command of theatrical structure, rhythm, and shape. It also asks dramaturgs to speak up, create, and start "making stuff." Discovering what that "stuff" might be and how it gets made are the questions at the heart of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 3

### FESTIVAL PLANNING

#### Expanding Dramaturgies: Designing an Evening of Devised Performances

In the spring of 2011, Theater Department Chair, Penny Remsen, encouraged the department to address a new initiative set forth by the Academic Deans of the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The campus-wide program, titled “Deans’ Theme,” would choose an “overarching topic of broad societal or scientific importance” to provide a “shared focus” for disciplines across the campus to engage with via classes, projects, and, speakers according to the program’s website. For the 2011-2012 academic year, the Academic Deans selected the 2010 BP Gulf oil spill as the theme. Penny tasked the MFA Dramaturgy candidates with finding a way to address the Deans’ Theme in their proposal for the Theater Department’s upcoming 2011-2012 season.

Rather than choose an existing script that staged environmental concerns, I proposed to the dramaturgy team that we utilize a devised theatre model to address the Deans’ Theme. An ensemble of students would respond to the issues surrounding the BP spill through original and collaboratively created performance. The interdisciplinary nature of the Deans’ Theme initiative seemed to lend itself naturally to a devised theatre-making process. Devising provided a desirable framework, as it would allow for hybrid performance, including the blending of theatrical forms with other modes of artistic expression, as well as the possibility of interdisciplinary participants serving as ensemble members. It was important for me to stage conditions in which students who might not have a performance focus,

but who might have vital interdisciplinary perspectives regarding the theme, would have the chance to collaborate and shape the devised work.

Such work allows for multiple points of view to be woven into the fabric of an original play by the co-creating ensemble. This model, rather than one reliant on the singular view of a playwright, mirrored the Deans' Theme pedagogical quest for multiple conversations to occur around a shared focus. The devising model would also open up opportunities for participants to be empowered in a process that would value their voices and give them co-ownership of the work. In her article on the Dell'Arte International website, "Devised Theatre: No Guts No Glory," Joan Schirle describes how devised theatre provides a space for artists to address contemporary social concerns. She writes:

There has been a long, bleak period (which seems to be ending, due in no small part to dire world events) in which the American theatre abandoned its role as a forum for ideas, a place where the most important issues of the day were explored, juggled, and given imaginative life by passionate theatre artists . . . In the absence of a courageous and compelling theatre that speaks to their concerns, devising has been a way for young artists to engage with each other in the wondrous territory where art and ideas co-mingle to generate excitement, provocation, even hope.

The combination of the devised theatre-making model and the Deans' Theme would challenge ensemble members to address an important and historic event with environmental, economic, social national, and global implications through performance.

In March of 2011, Professor Priscilla Page and I wrote the initial description for a proposal to create a devised theatre piece in response to the Deans' Theme. This proposal was pitched to the faculty along with the larger proposal of plays for



the upcoming season. In April, the devised project was accepted. Originally proposed to take place in room 204, a very small studio in the UMass Fine Arts Center, faculty member Harley Erdman suggested the project be moved to the larger black box space, the Curtain Theatre, and that the incoming MFA Directing candidates be involved. This proposed venue change, the involvement of incoming students, and the full inclusion of the project in the department's season seemed to signal that the faculty valued the project as a learning tool and artistic endeavor. At this time, I agreed to curate the project and use it as the basis for my thesis to investigate the role of dramaturg as an artistic instigator as well as the position of the dramaturg in devised theatre.

I structured the project as a devised theatre festival in which three devising ensembles would create three thirty minute theatre pieces, each one exploring the Deans' Theme of the BP Gulf oil spill. The festival was scheduled to run in the spring of 2012, April 5-7 and 10-14, marking the two-year anniversary of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion. Though the spill would serve as a research starting point, I wanted to broaden the artistic scope of the festival. For this reason, I chose to title the festival *Beyond the Horizon* to both reference the Deepwater Horizon disaster while simultaneously looking forward to larger ideas surrounding humankind's evolving relationship with the natural world.

I split the festival into three separate pieces to give ensembles a chance to more fully develop and shape smaller original works. Knowing the timetable from start to finish would be tight, dividing the project between three groups seemed the best way to create a full evening of theatre, without burdening one ensemble with

making a full length and perhaps less-developed piece. Three more intimate groups would allow for greater trust and ensemble cohesion to be fostered during the process. This format would also present the audience with what I could only assume would be three very different takes on the festival theme. I was excited to track what patterns might emerge between the three finished works and how they might be in conversation with each other in performance.

Professional devising troupes sometimes take years to develop one show from conception to performance. Unfortunately, the festival's ensembles did not have that luxury. The project was slated in the Theater Department's season, which follows a production model allowing six weeks from the first rehearsal to the first performance. Though casting the ensembles early to get a jump-start on the process was possible, I felt it would limit the number of people who might audition. The Theater Department's audition calendar was structured in such a way that casting early meant students would be shut out of a chance to audition for any other spring show if they were cast in *Beyond the Horizon*. The other spring shows included popular titles such as *Urinetown: the Musical* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was afraid students would be hesitant to make a choice about auditions so early in the fall semester. I believed casting in the regularly scheduled spring slot along with *Midsummer* would net a greater pool of potential performers/co-creators.

Though I envisioned the ensembles co-creating the pieces together, I knew from the start that I wanted to establish team leaders to guide the groups through the rehearsal process. These team leaders would include a director and a dramaturg. Many professional devising ensembles including TEAM, Pig Iron

Theatre Company, and Elevator Repair Service have a person in the room who identifies as a director. This person often oversees the rehearsal process and helps structure the performance material. With the short rehearsal process allotted for the festival (only six weeks to create ninety total minutes of original material), I wanted the focus and leadership a director would bring, especially since most of the students participating would be unfamiliar with devising processes. In an attempt to defuse the hierarchical implications inherent in traditional theatre models and to empower the role of the dramaturg in the process, I planned to pair each director with a dramaturg to create a process model that valued them as equal co-leaders. By including a dramaturg on each team I wished to “welcome a more formalized engagement with dramaturgical discussion, analysis, and reflection” in the devising process (Turner and Behrndt 169). Though the dramaturgical work would be shared across the ensemble, I wanted a dramaturg present and able to devote his or her full attention to the shape of the piece and facilitate conversations about structure.

In addition to spearheading the festival, I cast myself as a dramaturg in one of the ensembles. This performance practice-as-research model would allow me to conduct a hands-on investigation of the role of the dramaturg in devised work. I also anticipated drawing upon the experiences of the two other dramaturgs working with the other devising ensembles. I began a production journal to document my findings and planned to interview my fellow dramaturgs about their discoveries in the middle of and at the end of the process. I was curious to learn about what

devising strategies they would adopt and how they would interact with their ensemble and their co-leader director.

The directors chosen to lead the ensembles included entering graduate directing students, Carol Becker and Brianna Sloane, as well as Daniel Sack, the Five College Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Performance Studies and a faculty member of both UMass and Amherst College. In October of 2011, I paired each director with a MFA dramaturgy candidate, resulting in the teams of Carol and Adewunmi Oke, Daniel and Alison Bowie, and Brianna and myself. I knew the pairings were the first crucial step in the production process. In devised theatre, every member of the ensemble shapes the final product. I assigned team members based on their overlapping theatrical interests, similar artistic aesthetics, and shared interests surrounding the Deans' Theme. Once paired, I asked directors and dramaturgs to develop a question or theme to explore that related in some way to the Deans' Theme or humankind's interactions with the physical world. This question or focus could be changed or modified later in the process, but would offer a starting place for their ensembles' work.

My dramaturgical sensibility guided me to ask questions of the directors and dramaturgs rather than set down rigid rules about themes or the content they would explore with their ensembles. The groups could choose to address any number of ideas and questions surrounding the Gulf oil spill. At the first meeting of all six directors and dramaturgs in late October, we began tossing around potential sites of artistic inquiry. How do technology and innovation affect our relationship to the natural world? How do we map the world, and how do explorations into

unknown territory bring both new resources and disaster? How do we address the ideas of responsibility, damage, and repair not just in terms of large-scale human-created disasters, but also in our personal lives? In addition to posing my own questions, I created a website filled with dramaturgical research about the BP Gulf oil spill, and presented it to the director/dramaturg teams as a creative jumping off point. Each of the six directors and dramaturgs could add research to the site so that it might grow organically as a central hub for inspiration, accessible to all teams.

### Sparking Conversation: Panel Discussions

While laying out the festival structure in October 2011, I knew I wanted to create a space for reflection and discussion where audiences would have a chance to engage with the larger theme of ecology at work both in the subject matter of the project, as well as its collaborative process. Since the Theatre Department did not regularly present devised work, I decided to produce a series of post-show discussions as an opportunity to educate audiences about this model of theatre-making. I scheduled post-show discussions with members of the artistic teams for April 6 and 13.

I also developed two themed panel discussions to follow the *Beyond the Horizon* performances on April 12 and the afternoon of April 14. The first, titled *The Ecology of Theatre: New Models of Theatre Creation*, was designed to explore theatre creation that lies outside of traditional script-based models as well as what role(s) ensemble members play in such models. Will Power, a playwright and performer,

was scheduled to speak and share his knowledge of devised, interdisciplinary, and collaborative work. In the fall, I continued to look for other guests to speak about alternative theatrical practices to fill out the panel.

The second panel discussion, titled *Intersections: Where Art, Science, and Society Meet* would investigate how artists, ecologists, and social activists address socio-scientific issues and raise awareness about the ways individuals and communities impact the natural world and each other. I wanted to expand conversations surrounding how the devised works engaged with the theme of the festival by inviting environmentally minded campus and community members to speak on this panel. I turned to the list of faculty members engaging with the Deans' Theme in their classes to scout for potential panelists as well as a list of environmental groups on campus. The timing of the panel proved prohibitive for some potential guests, but in the end, I confirmed that Meghan Litte, a member of the UMass Permaculture Initiative, would take part in the panel. I planned to fill the remaining panelist slots with members of the *Beyond the Horizon* artistic team, who would speak to the ways in which scientific and environmental research influenced their processes.

#### *The Way of Water: Play Reading*

In addition to laying the groundwork for the devised pieces, I wanted the festival to include a play reading of a new script by a theatre professional that examined the relationship between humankind and the physical world. This companion event would situate our festival in the larger conversation of how artists

are engaging with socio-scientific issues through performance. There is growing interest for this type of work, as evidenced by Earth Matters on Stage's annual Ecodrama Festival, which awards workshop productions and readings to plays that relate to ecology, and the 18th annual Chicago Humanities Festival, which featured readings of commissioned one-act plays that addressed the topic of climate change.

In January of 2012, dramaturg Heather Helinsky, after hearing about *Beyond the Horizon*, contacted me via email about collaborating in some way with playwright Caridad Svich's *The Way of Water: 2012 Reading Scheme*. According to Heather, the reading scheme would be comprised of multiple readings of Caridad's new play, *The Way of Water*, throughout the month of April in theatre venues across the country and the world. *The Way of Water* explores the lives of four people affected by the BP Gulf oil spill.

Caridad chose not to utilize verbatim interviews or use a documentary theatre approach to give life to the stories that were coming out of the Gulf after the spill. Rather, she created a poetic play with fictional characters to explore the real-life consequences of the disaster. Jimmy and Yuki, two poor fishermen, and their wives, Rosalie and Neva, are struggling to make ends meet as the lingering effects of the oil spill ravages their livelihoods. When a young boy dies after swimming in water polluted by Corexit, the chemical used to disperse the oil slicks, the two men must decide how much more they can take. Yuki, eager to express his outrage, sets out to join protesters challenging the oil company, while Jimmy seems submersed in denial. That denial turns out to be a symptom of his refusal to admit his own

deteriorating health, also ravaged by the polluted water. In an interview with Daniella Topol, on *The Way of Water* blog, Caridad says of her play:

... the play merges layers and levels of research with my own take on the situation in the Gulf region, and the impact the disaster has had on men and women who have been tenders of the waterways their whole lives, whose very livelihoods indeed depend on the ways of water ... real events are woven into the fabric of events I've dreamt up as a writer. Poetry, politics and a human story are at the play's core. Here is a love story between people and their environment, between men and women, between friends, and between children and the legacies into which they have been born.

Caridad's dramaturgical research on the lingering negative effects on the livelihoods and health of those in the Gulf following the BP spill lends her play an urgency and weight. The script provided an interesting take on how theatre artists are speaking to the effects of environmental pollution on a human-scale, while using theatre to raise awareness about concerns that might otherwise disappear in our 24-hour news cycle culture.

Not only did the subject matter of *The Way of Water* correlate directly with the theme of the *Beyond the Horizon*, but including a reading of it offered the festival a chance to take part in a larger dialogue stretching across national and international borders about the impact of the BP spill and our relationship to the environment. Heather Helinsky wanted to feature and cross-promote *Beyond the Horizon* on the reading scheme's blog, while also promoting UMass' reading of *The Way of Water*. This opened up the entire *Beyond the Horizon* festival to greater public exposure. It was my hope this coverage might also highlight devised theatre as a viable mode of producing meaningful theatrical work to address important issues facing our world.



It was of interest to me to hold the reading in a public space to reach community members outside of the Theater Department and UMass. Professor Priscilla Page suggested Food for Thought Books in the center of Amherst. Food for Thought Books Collective is a local, independent, not-for-profit workers' collective. Its website outlines part of its goal as creating "a space where voices, people, and ideas silenced and ignored by the mainstream media are given room to be heard, to be seen, to be supported, and to be realized." This seemed an ideal venue to present a play about the marginalized voices coming out of the Gulf after the oil spill. It also offered an opportunity to promote *Beyond the Horizon* to the greater Amherst community. April 10th was set as the date for the reading and Dawn Monique Williams, an alumna of the MFA Directing program at UMass, was selected to direct.

## CHAPTER 4

### BEYOND THE HORIZON

#### Auditions

Auditions for *Beyond the Horizon* were slated for January 30 and 31, with callbacks on February 1. All directors and dramaturgs gave input into the discussion of how the audition process should be conducted. The project, due to its devising model, demanded ensemble members who could generate content and effectively communicate whatever narrative or story resulted. All three teams were interested in many modes of storytelling including spoken text, movement, puppetry, dance, and song. We wanted to keep the door wide open to unusual talents and test the creativity of students by challenging those auditioning to generate or assemble their own audition material. The audition requirements were posted as follows on flyers:

Please prepare 2-3 minutes of material that best showcases your talents. This could include a monologue, a poem, a joke, song, dance, a musical instrument performance, a movement piece, storytelling, circus arts, puppetry, a display of your own special talent, or any combination of those. Whether choosing one or more of the above, what is most important is that you use the time to show us what you do best.

The flyer was later revised to remove the list of possible skills one could showcase and instead read, “actors can give a monologue, singers can sing, dancers can dance” to avoid confusion for students who were unused to such an open audition process and might be intimidated by too many options. All flyers contained a description of the festival’s mission to address the Deans’ Theme and explore our evolving relationship with the natural world. In addition to the audition flyer, I

created a poster that targeted science, environmental studies, and ecology students who might be interested in participating, but who might not feel comfortable auditioning for a performance. It asked for students to email a description of their research interests and to describe any experience they had in community programs that engage with wildlife or the environment in lieu of auditioning.

On January 30 and 31, around sixty students auditioned for all three pairs of dramaturgs and directors. Those who auditioned displayed a wide array of talents including singing, dancing, monologue work, puppetry, poetry, circus arts, and musical instrument performances. The auditions succeeded in bringing in students from various academic disciplines including dance, music, theatre, business, medicine, English, and earth sciences. After students presented their prepared material, directors and dramaturgs had the chance to ask to see something more from performers or make adjustments to their pieces.

Callbacks for *Beyond the Horizon* were scheduled for February 1 and held at the same time for all three teams, but in different spaces. Daniel and Alison, with an interest in those who could communicate physically and through written text, gave students writing prompts and improvisation exercises utilizing masks Daniel had crafted. Carol and Adewunmi, mainly interested in singers and dancers, asked students to create movement phrases and improvise songs in response to inspirational quotes and images related to the environment. Brianna and I focused our improvisation exercises on movement. We asked those called back to respond to excerpts of nature writings we had collected as well as to the theme of connection versus disconnection. We were looking to see how the students used movement to

express abstract concepts and how they interacted with each other. In our search for a balanced ensemble that would work together effectively, Brianna and I watched carefully and noted how individual students initiated a creative impulse, responded to our adjustments, or followed the creative impetuses of others in the room.

After callbacks, Brianna and I discussed our casting choices, weighing heavily what skills each potential member would bring as well as their passion for the subject matter and their interest in working within a collaborative creation model. Without preset roles to cast, we had to take into consideration individual personalities and skills, how those personalities and skills might work in a group dynamic, and how to best structure a balanced ensemble. The three director/dramaturg teams created their ideal cast lists, negotiated over a few names, and settled on a final list each. Across the three teams, 21 students were selected in total. The whole process of arriving at final lists together took less than fifteen minutes and was conducted with a spirit of respect and generosity. Though we were crafting three ensembles, I reminded the group that we were all part of the same project.

As per the Theater Department's usual audition scheme, the other spring play, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, guest directed by Shakespeare & Company's Artistic Director Tony Simotes, had auditions at the same time in a different studio with their callbacks scheduled for February 2. Typically, department productions in the spring show slots audition in the same week or even in the same room and later the directors of each play get together to discuss casting

options. Department policy stipulates that students not be consulted during this process and they are not asked to indicate what their preference might be in terms of casting. I requested that *Beyond the Horizon* hold separate auditions from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* due to the differing audition requirements for the two shows. Production management and faculty indicated the process of casting would be negotiated as usual, though this time not between directors only, but between Tony Simotes and the *Beyond the Horizon* director/dramaturg teams.

The first casting meeting scheduled for Friday, February 3 was cancelled the day of without explanation by the production manager, Julie Fife, and rescheduled for Monday, February 6. The *Beyond the Horizon* team of directors and dramaturgs (with the exception of Daniel, who was out of town) walked into the rescheduled casting meeting expecting a conversation with Tony Simotes and to arrive at final cast lists for *Midsummer* and all three ensembles for the festival. Instead, we were met by Theatre Department Chair Penny Remsen, Julie Fife, and Tony Simotes' cast list. Julie indicated that due to the very special opportunity students would be afforded by working on *Midsummer* with Tony Simotes, it had been decided that everyone on his list would be cast in his play without discussion. Julie noted that she and Penny had been "swayed" by Tony's reasons behind his casting decisions, though up to this point, the *Beyond the Horizon* team had been given no chance to articulate the method or reasoning behind their casting.

Though the *Beyond the Horizon* team and I expected to make serious concessions and compromises in casting, we were unprepared for production management's decision that indicated being a supernumerary fairy in a Shakespeare

play was a more valuable experience for a student than the opportunity to be an integral part of creating and shaping new work. It was impossible to distinguish whether this casting decision resulted from a sincere belief that working with Tony was in the students' best interest, a pejorative view of devised theatre, a disregard for new work in the face of Shakespeare, the fact that *Beyond the Horizon* was a nearly exclusively student-driven festival as opposed to *Midsummer* that had a professional director attached to it, or some combination thereof. Whatever the reason, in that moment, the hierarchy of productions was made abundantly clear: *Midsummer* reigned.

As the festival curator, the responsibility fell to me to advocate for the validity and importance of our project and our process. I responded to the casting announcement by expressing my shock and disappointment at being misled by the meeting's purpose and the decision to disregard the validity of our festival. I explained the care and consideration that went into selecting our ensembles. I advocated for the artistic opportunities devised theatre offered, including allowing students to become empowered artists and providing them a space to nurture their artistic voices. The directors and dramaturgs of *Beyond the Horizon* also voiced their feelings, which opened up a conversation about casting. At no time was the *Beyond the Horizon* team allowed to look at Tony's cast list, which seemed highly unusual. We were only informed as to the overlapping names on the lists. One third of the total cast for *Beyond the Horizon* was slated to star in *Midsummer*. In the end, Penny allowed us to make a case for those on our list who were supernumeraries in *Midsummer*.

A few days later, Penny called a meeting with the graduate student directors and dramaturgs to apologize for the manner in which the casting was announced to us. She also offered a space for us to air any lingering feelings or concerns. Appreciative of the gesture, but still smarting from the sting of the first meeting, I knew we had too much work to do to be slowed by this first bump in the artistic road. I rallied the group to focus our energies on the project at hand. The dramaturgs and directors were still tasked with going back to our audition notes to fill out our cast lists with new names. Shaken by the casting meeting, but excited by the prospect of our new ensembles, the *Beyond the Horizon* teams and myself pressed onward in the process.

### Professional Workshop

From my position as curator overseeing three ensembles, it was important to me to foster cohesion across the entire *Beyond the Horizon* artistic team at the outset of rehearsals and set up all ensembles for success in their processes. I wanted to supply all cast and crew with a devising workshop that would present some devising methods and exercises for generating performance content as well as helping to establish a shared vocabulary within ensembles. Though a devising course was offered that spring in the UMass Theater Department, it was the first of its kind available in the last two and a half years. I wanted the *Beyond the Horizon* participants to feel confident and prepared for the work ahead. It was imperative to me to offer support programming for students and participants who might not have any experience with devising.

Scheduling a workshop also seemed a natural extension of my dramaturgical duties. Dramaturgs are expected to provide research before and during the rehearsal process, though that research often takes the form of archival materials, whether they are text, images, or videos. For this process, I wanted to stage an encounter between a professional devising theatre artist and the *Beyond the Horizon* team. If, as Jerzy Grotowski once said, “[k]nowledge is a matter of doing,” than a workshop drawing upon the dissemination of embodied knowledge relating to devising strategies seemed the most useful option for the work that lay before us (qdt. in Arlander 78).

After hearing of my search for a devising professional, Professor Harley Erdman suggested I contact Quinn Bauriedel of Pig Iron Theater Company, a professional devising group based in Philadelphia. Founded in 1995, the OBIE award-winning Pig Iron Theatre Company has created over 25 original theater works and toured to festivals and theatres nationally and internationally. The mission of Pig Iron Theatre Company in part is “to create original performance works which test and break the boundaries of dance, drama, clown, puppetry, music, and text . . . to develop a physical, theatrical performance technique that draws from many performance traditions . . . to reach out to new audiences by redefining theatre as an interdisciplinary art form . . . and to pose the difficult questions of our difficult times” (Salvato 209). I was drawn to the group’s focus on interdisciplinary and collectively created work and its passion for tackling complex questions about our world through performance.



I also wanted to be sure I invited an artist that would be skilled at interacting with students, particularly those who might be new to theatre-making or devising. It was clear to me that Quinn Bauriedel and Pig Iron valued educating performers since they recently created the Pig Iron School for Advanced Performance Training. According to the school's website, members of Pig Iron have instructed hundreds of students in universities, colleges, and high schools. Bauriedel's position as Co-Artistic Director of the company and his extensive experience acting, directing, and teaching made him an excellent choice to lead a workshop at UMass.

After corresponding with Quinn and securing funding for his visit through a grant submitted to the UMass Arts Council, I scheduled a workshop for February 19 for the entire *Beyond the Horizon* team (designers and crew included). The four-hour workshop emphasized the generating of original material, the building of characters through physicalization, and the structuring of group improvisations. I shared the theme of our festival with Quinn, who then integrated it into a discussion about how to explore abstract concepts through devising techniques. For Quinn, the BP Gulf oil spill conjured up ideas of collapse: the collapse of the oil rig, the collapse of injured animals, the impending collapse of the infrastructure of fossil fuel companies.

This discussion grew into an improvisation exercise expanding upon the many ways to address collapse in performance. The exercise, called Blank Canvas, offered a space for collaborators to sketch out an idea or response to whatever theme was being explored. Additional performers could layer their own

contributions to any sketch by joining the “canvas.” After a physical sketch was presented, the area was cleared and ready for the next sketch. This gave participants a chance to delve into physical explorations and respond to each other in a supportive low-risk setting. Later, groups of five composed short performance pieces that built upon any physical or textual discoveries we had made over the course of the workshop. This experience provided an array of valuable devising techniques, as well as a space for participants to start trusting their creative impulses and respond physically to stimuli, particularly abstract conceptual ideas. Perhaps most importantly, the workshop offered an opportunity for all three devising groups to play together as one before splitting off into separate rehearsals. In the following section, I will outline my experience as a dramaturg inside the devising process of my ensemble in detail, while touching on the experiences of fellow dramaturgs Alison and Adewunmi.

### Rehearsals

Before rehearsals began in mid-February, my director partner Brianna and I met to decide what research, questions, and inspiration to focus on initially with our ensemble. What struck me most about the BP oil spill, aside from the suffering of humans and thousands of animals, was how impossible it all seemed as it played out in real time in 2010. Though witnessing the catastrophe via television brought me closer to the disaster, those mediated images and video of the spill also caused me to feel utterly disconnected from the event. The “spill cam,” which appeared on every news media outlet throughout the eighty-seven day ordeal, showed live video

footage of the broken pipe spewing millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf. Framed as it was to show only the sight of the leak, the “spill cam” felt disembodied from the rest of the oil rig and the rest of the ocean around it. The video, captured at 5,000 feet below the water’s surface, seemed as though it was from another world. The paradoxical feeling of being brought closer to nature thorough technology while simultaneously feeling alienated from it became a starting place for Brianna and me. We kicked off our first rehearsal on February 13 by asking the ensemble to delve into the theme of connection verses disconnection in regard to humankind’s relationship with nature. We saw the Deepwater Horizon disaster positioned in a long line of destructive actions by humans that harmed the earth and all its inhabitants. Our question became, “How do we reconnect with nature?”

To answer our question, Brianna drew upon the writings of her childhood hero, nature writer Rachel Carson. Carson, the author of *Silent Spring* and considered by many to be the mother of the modern environmental movement, posited that it is through a child-like wonder that one might return to a healthy relationship with nature. She wrote, “The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction” (111). We wanted our piece to capture some part of that wonder and leave the audience with a sense of connection to the natural world. My function as dramaturg in these early conversations was to share ideas, but also to ensure Brianna and I had enough material to provide an inspiring and clear starting place for the ensemble.

We began our rehearsals on February 13 with an ensemble comprised of undergraduate students Annelise Neilson, Devyn Yurko, Katrina Turner, Samantha Creed and Lisa Bettencourt. Lisa's schedule conflicts caused her to drop out of the show after the first week, but due to the malleable nature of roles in devised theatre, Brianna stepped in as the fifth performer. The doubling of her role also signaled a new role for me. I would now lend a directorial eye to the scenes in which she would take part. This decision was embraced by the ensemble and seemed the best course of action given the casting troubles the process had already endured.

We set to work by spending ample time sharing research. Brianna and I came in with texts from Rachel Carson, while the rest of the group brought in songs, text, images, and discussions surrounding the oil spill as well as ideas of beauty and destruction in connection with the environment. As dramaturg, I contributed and collected materials, making note of where interests and ideas overlapped, identifying possible narrative structures, while also marking areas for further research.

The group immediately hooked into Carson's words and began looking at her as a possible character in the piece. In *Silent Spring*, Carson outlines the harmful effects of DDT on animal life. At the time she wrote the book, DDT was being sprayed over crops and in suburban neighborhoods to control mosquitos. Deeper probing into Carson's work lead to the discovery of a 1948 *Life Magazine* cover that showed model Kay Heffernon in a bathing suit, drinking a Coke, and eating a hotdog surrounded by a cloud of DDT. DDT photo shoots like the one illustrated in the image and live DDT spraying demonstrations, we learned, were conducted in public

spaces to prove the chemical was harmless to humans. The image prompted many questions. Who was this toxic beauty queen? Why and how were women being used to sell dangerous products? We began generating ideas about an apocalyptic world in which everything was toxic. What was the hierarchy of this world and who or what was being controlled and contained by poisons?

Into our budding theatrical world, and partly in response to the vivid research images of oil covered birds from the BP spill, ensemble member Annelise Neilson introduced Hans Christian Anderson's fairytale *The Nightingale* to the group. In this story, an emperor discovers a beautiful nightingale and invites it to sing for him in his castle. In honor of the bird whose fame travels far and wide, a leader of a neighboring kingdom sends the emperor the gift of a mechanical bird that winds up and plays music. Soon everyone is enamored with the mechanical bird. Forgotten, the nightingale flies away. But when the emperor lies dying and the worn-down mechanical bird can offer no comfort, it is the nightingale who returns and sings a song that chases away Death. The group was drawn to the theme of choice in the story, as the emperor chooses what is man-made at the expense of what is natural. He must learn to reconnect with nature in order to stay alive. We were also interested in having a protagonist bird character on stage to contrast with our idea of a mechanical chemical spokeswoman, the toxic beauty queen.

To our growing pot of characters, we added trickster figures or storytellers who could move between the materialistic world of the toxic beauty queen and the natural world of the nightingale. As an archetypal figure, the trickster's association with childhood, impishness, and humor made it an appropriate addition to the

emerging fairytale structure we were shaping. The opening of *Silent Spring* provided more inspiration for our fairytale theme as it begins with “A Fable for Tomorrow” (Carson 1). The embodiment of Carson’s “child-like wonder,” we saw these trickster creatures as the audience’s guides through the story. Our next step was to build all of our characters, the tricksters, the nightingale, Rachel Carson, and the toxic beauty queen on paper. In a circle, we began describing and debating character traits for each one. When we discovered Carson and the tricksters shared almost all the same traits (curious, impish, child-like, playful, dreamer, subversive), we deleted Carson as a character, but retained her writings to use as text for the piece.

Though I served as a researcher, scribe, and record-keeper during these early rehearsals, once up on our feet in the second week, Brianna and I both lead and participated in games and exercises with the ensemble. The groundwork of ideas we laid out during table work gave us plenty of characters and scenarios with which to play as we started to give form to the material we had assembled. We began to flesh out our characters through improvisation and movement. One by one and in groups, members of the ensemble would present improvised interpretations of each one of the characters we created. This collective character-building model offered many different possibilities as to how each character should move and speak. For example, taking inspiration from 60’s public service announcements, “duck and cover” campaigns, and 60’s television commercials, each ensemble member wrote and presented text for the toxic beauty queen. In each presentation, ensemble

members favored an over-the-top silly interpretation of the character. Kitsch and camp defined our collective view of the Toxic Beauty Queen's style.

These group improvisations also lead to a particular animalistic yet playful physical vocabulary for the trickster characters. Nearly non-verbal, the tricksters relied on physical comedy and slapstick in their interactions with one another. They utilized finger snapping, butt slapping, and child-like nonsense noises to communicate. During this process, the most engaging character choices were repeated or elaborated on by the ensemble members, while less interesting choices naturally fell away. I continued to participate in the exercises and take written notes during this process, noting any emerging patterns that arose from our interactions with the research material. I also recorded our brainstorming notes on large sheets of butcher paper so the whole team could add to, access, and return to the information.

Armed with compelling characters, in the third week of rehearsal we set out to find the narrative of our piece. I began thinking about how to bring these three different kinds of characters into a cohesive story. Were their narratives intertwined and overlapped? Did they all interact with each other or just occupy the same toxic world? What was the dramaturgical logic of our play? Whose story, ultimately, were we trying to tell? To get to some answers, Brianna and I asked the ensemble to write down their version of the story, taking into consideration everything we had talked about up to that point and the loose framework of Anderson's *The Nightingale*. At the end of the writing exercise, we each presented our five different takes on where the story could go.

The dramaturg has been called a “compass-bearer” in the devising process, and I found that description an apt one, particularly during rehearsals (Turner and Behrndt 176). With many different narrative roads to travel down, at this point in our process my role was to navigate the waters of artistic difference and organize a cohesive narrative with the group. I began mapping our multiple points of overlap and the shared theatrical moments in our individually written narratives. In a room with six unique artistic opinions about our evolving story, my role also included facilitating productive discussions to avoid conflicts within the ensemble. The points of narrative agreement I recorded became a useful place to base our conversation as we talked through how to blend our different versions of the story into one.

In the end, we created a simple narrative comprised of moments written on index cards. A bird arrives in a toxic world. It is captured, held captive, and has its wings clipped by a society that considers it an “undesirable organism.” Trickster characters find one of the bird’s feathers and try to return it to her, but are repeatedly foiled. The toxic beauty queen arrives at intervals to remind the audience of the necessity and danger of chemicals used to maintain “our way of life.” The level of “undesirable organisms” escalates causing more chemical blasts, which eventually leads to the breakdown of the beauty queen (our loose stand in for Anderson’s mechanical bird). The tricksters, meanwhile, construct new wings for the bird, which ascends from its captivity.

Once the structure had been collaboratively agreed upon, we began to flesh out each one of the moments we had outlined with more concrete content. In



crafting the different elements of storytelling in the piece, we began drawing on the various skill sets and strengths of the ensemble members. We knew we wanted song to play a central role so we sat down together and deconstructed bits of Rachel Carson's text to create the lyrics for the opening number and the nightingale's song. Katrina, an a cappella performer, arranged music and suggested a cyclical blues structure to tie back to the Gulf. Devyn improvised musical melodies. I mixed Katrina's vocals into an mp3 soundscape to underscore heightened moments in the show. We also wanted to expand on the physical vocabulary and imagery in the piece. Annelise, an accomplished dancer and choreographer, created physical phrases for the tricksters as well as a dance number for the toxic beauty queen. Brianna suggested shadow puppetry as a mode of storytelling for our nearly text-less tricksters to execute. Finally, Brianna and I worked in tandem on writing, combining, and editing the toxic beauty queen text, while I also focused on creating a working script.

During rehearsals, I visited the other two devising teams to offer my support and see how they were navigating the process. Daniel and Alison spent the first few rehearsals on what Alison called "the development of team" and not content. They both lead trust and team-building exercises that allowed the ensemble members to open up to each other and take artistic risks. Once their rehearsals shifted to focus on generating content, Alison believed her role, as dramaturg, was to act as a "bank of information" by collecting the materials brought in or created by the ensemble. Not only did she gather the text, images, and sound recordings the group offered, she also captured the rehearsal process by video recording every rehearsal and

photographing exciting moments. Acting as a self-described “filter” for the materials, Alison, in conversation with Daniel, began editing and shaping a script from the group’s contributions.

According to Alison, her ensemble’s piece focused on the notion that an unheeded warning brings disaster. They sought to investigate how humans struggle to communicate after catastrophic events. Alison described the play in terms of “movements” or self-contained, but relating parts of a whole piece. The first “movement” opens with voices calling out into a pitch-black theatre. In the second and third movements, to address the idea of waste and disaster, the team decided to spill hundreds of plastic water bottles all over the playing space. This wasteland would provide the setting for an exploration of how communities respond after a devastating event. The fourth movement contained a slow building cacophony of actor-generated monologues. The monologues were inspired by the real and imagined stories of those impacted by the BP oil spill including journalists, citizens, rig workers, and BP CEO Tony Hayward. Some of the monologues reinforced the feelings of loneliness and hopelessness that follow catastrophes, while others focused on the premise that we must rely on one another when disaster strikes. In the fifth movement, performers roamed the wasteland of bottles in the dark. Armed with flashlights, the performers picked up bottles and read the messages inside. For Daniel and Alison, the messages in the bottles were the ultimate hopeless act, an act that paradoxically asks for hope. The entire ensemble wrote messages for the bottles, and because of the random nature of the way the bottles were spilled, different messages were read every time it was rehearsed.

When I visited Carol and Adewunmi's ensemble's rehearsals, I saw them also dealing with the question of how people cope and move on after a disaster. According to Adewunmi, the group wondered what we truly learn in times of crisis, and how we might use that knowledge to prevent disasters in the future. Carol set the structure of their ensemble's piece from the very beginning. She decided it would consist of six vignettes, each about five minutes long. Focusing directly on the BP oil spill, Carol and Adewunmi asked their ensemble to improvise scenes and songs in response to pictures of the devastation in the Gulf and quotes about the environment. Carol and Adewunmi also asked their ensemble to explore the different emotions disaster engenders through text and movement. They assigned writing prompts that asked the team to write letters, either to the perpetrators of the spill or from the points of view of those directly effected by it. Adewunmi participated in bringing in materials and completing writing assignments. She also collaborated with Carol to choose and organize the content created by the ensemble. Together, they worked to integrate text, music, and dance elements into the developing piece.

I was surprised and intrigued to note the different ways the director/dramaturg pairs interacted with each other. Perhaps due to his position as a faculty member at UMass, Daniel's group responded to him as a clear authority figure in the room. I witnessed ensemble members raise their hands to speak in rehearsal, though Daniel never encouraged this behavior. In conversation with Alison, she described her working relationship with Daniel following fairly traditional roles. Once they had structured the content of their piece, Daniel

concerned himself with staging, while Alison was responsible for the script. Alison also mentioned that early on she had felt left out when Daniel made decisions outside of the rehearsal room and brought them to the group. This style of creative leadership was drawing upon an auteur devising model and rubbing up against Alison's expectations of her role as dramaturg. Drawing on their positive working relationship and mutual respect, Daniel and Alison were able to discuss their roles openly and resolve any tensions.

While watching Carol and Adewunmi work together, I marked Adewunmi's quiet, but engaged presence in the room. In my interview with her, she mentioned feeling very involved in the process and touched on her creative rapport with Carol. They also seemed to follow traditional roles of director and dramaturg as Carol took the lead in running rehearsals, while Adewunmi focused on bringing in source materials and shaping the script.

During rehearsals, the *Beyond the Horizon* directors and dramaturgs were also engaging and collaborating with the design and production teams. The festival as a whole was breaking new ground for the Theater Department in terms of its structure and its play-development process. Never before had UMass presented devised theatre in such a way and with so many directors and dramaturgs at the helm. The process asked for a different type of engagement from all involved, and I actively encouraged those on the design and production teams to share in devising by attending rehearsals.

The devising process opens up a chance for designers in particular to have a greater voice in shaping a play's narrative. It was my hope that this freedom would

entice designers to participate in a devising model that didn't limit their artistic ideas through a predetermined script. Evan Laux, the costume designer for all three pieces, fully embraced the model, came to multiple rehearsals, and participated in development of the pieces. His pictorial research directly influenced my ensemble's thought process as we crafted characters.

Though the student designers did attend rehearsals, seemed open to collaboration, and appeared willing to give the devising model a chance, there was a pervasive attitude in the production meetings that suggested the devising model was looked upon with suspicion by some production team members, advisors, and faculty. Though the ensembles were simply creating plays, the term "devised" seemed to make a number of people in the room nervous. The label appeared to carry a negative connotation that suggested the process of development was strange or somehow less legitimate than a script-based process.

It was not entirely unexpected that the directors and dramaturgs might feel some resistance from department and faculty members accustomed to following a traditional script-based production model. Dramaturgs and directors were repeatedly asked in production meetings by those who had never attended rehearsals, if they had "really thought about" their artistic choices and production needs. I wrote a play the year before, *Unruly Mujeres*, that received a workshop production in the department, and never once was I asked by the production team if I had "really thought about" why I included certain theatrical and storytelling moments or particular technical requirements. In *Beyond the Horizon* production meetings, there was tension surrounding the discussions as to when the three

pieces would have fixed scripts. The open nature of the devising process seemed to invite some members of the production team to assume that our pieces weren't legitimate until they were recorded on paper.

While I could not control how people felt about devised theatre, I addressed this attitude by keeping the development process as open and inclusive as possible. I also checked in with all three groups to make sure they were staying on task and communicating their ideas clearly to the design and production teams. In addition to setting and meeting the agreed deadline for the creation of working scripts, the dramaturgs and directors on each team met with designers outside of production meetings to discuss the artistic development of the pieces.

### Design Run

Working scripts in hand, the *Beyond the Horizon* team presented its first design run on March 14. Though I had been visiting the other teams' rehearsals, this was the first time I saw all three pieces together. After the design run, I asked questions of the teams and gave notes. I encouraged the teams to talk to each other about their processes, but did not force feedback sessions. My dramaturgical focus shifted at this point from my team's individual work to how the three pieces would live and breathe together on stage. This work-in-progress run helped inform my thought process as I considered how to construct the journey and compositional structure of the festival as a whole.

Though the works were still in flux, after the run I noted each one's overall tone and contemplated how they might tell a story to the audience through their

order. Carol and Adewunmi's team's piece, *What Have We Learned*, relied heavily on music and was composed of a number of loosely associated vignettes, related directly to the BP oil spill. Its final song ended the piece with a challenge to the audience to find connection to the natural world and each other or get left behind. This piece, more than any other, addressed the Deans' Theme and the human stories coming out of the Gulf. I thought the audience would hook into this examination of the human condition onstage and so I positioned it first in the festival.

Daniel and Alison's team's piece, *To whom it may concern*, offered a tonal counterpoint to the humor and song present in both *What Have We Learned* and my ensemble's piece *Nightingale* which prompted me to position it second in the performance line-up. It focused on destruction, the struggle for communication, and the waste humans produce. *To whom it may concern* utilized a computerized voice near the top of the show that would offer an interesting juxtaposition to the lush musical voices of the preceding piece. While it addressed various points of views surrounding those impacted by the BP oil spill, it ended with all the performers in animal masks, suggesting a link between the human and animal worlds. I chose to end with my ensemble's piece, *Nightingale*, as this work traveled the furthest away from the Deans' Theme of the BP oil spill and more toward an examination of the relationship between humans, the environment, and animals. It also had a solid story arc, physical comedy, and a rousing dance number to carry the audience's attention through the evening's end.

## Technical and Dress Rehearsals

Technical rehearsals started on March 31 leaving teams just one week of rehearsals to address any notes from the design run and fine-tune their pieces. My ensemble's piece was in good shape after the run, and my job as devising dramaturg became about refining any unclear storytelling moments and supporting Brianna as she worked with performers to deepen their acting choices. Going into tech, my focus was trained on the structure of the entire show.

With an order established, it was up to me to develop the transitions that would get the audience from one piece to the next. The transitions offered a place for spectators to take a breath and reflect between works. We were asking them to journey into three very distinct and different worlds, and so I wanted clean breaks between the pieces. Lighting Designer Brittany Deventer helped to achieve this through blackouts between pieces and transition lighting. Sound Designer David Wiggall and I, with input from Directing Advisor Gilbert MacCauley, collaborated to find a soundscape that mixed natural wind and surf with a hummed blues riff to signal the transitions, while evoking the sounds of the Gulf.

Moving into the tech/dress rehearsal on April 3, the biggest transitional challenge included how to get the 500 plastic water bottles spilled on the floor during *To whom it may concern* off the stage for the beginning of the next piece. The transition was long and clunky, with stage crew coming out to sweep the bottles. We were still troubleshooting the transition when Department Chair Penny Remsen (who in this instance was acting as an artistic director/producer hybrid in the room) insisted that the end of *To whom it may concern* include the entire clean



up of the bottles. Alison felt the change would compromise the dramaturgical integrity of the piece and the meaning of the ending. Daniel also had trouble trying to fit the request into the logic of the piece. I tried to ask questions and present possible solutions that respected the work the ensemble had done and also sought out an answer to the transition quandary before us.

The late dramaturgical intervention of the producer/artistic director put Daniel and Alison under pressure to “fix” the ending of their piece to conform to her wishes. This specific instance of tension between a devising ensemble and producer is not an uncommon occurrence in the professional realm. Though it is important for producers to ask questions of the devised work they are presenting, those questions must stem from a combination of respect and open communication. Devised theatre is a dialogue and an ongoing conversation. Melanie Joseph, founding Artistic Producer of The Foundry Theatre suggests that the way in which “presenters might engage in this process is something to think about not in terms of fixing, but asking in the process of making” (Sobeck 58). In these cases, the input of the producer/artistic director can yield important discoveries for the artistic team, but the communication of such feedback requires a delicate and skillful hand.

A dramaturg can be helpful in facilitating productive conversations surrounding artistic notes, though in this specific instance, I did not feel successful in my attempts to do so in my role as curator. This challenge was exacerbated by a couple of factors. First, I was hindered by my role, not as curator or dramaturg, but as student. While navigating my empowered role as curator of the festival, I was also caught in the larger power structure of the Theater Department. My position as

a student limited the ways in which I could challenge the Head of the Theatre Department acting as producer/artistic director. At my disposal were the same tools of inquiry, listening, and brainstorming solutions, but the collaborative creation model was now subject to the hierarchical structure of the department. A second challenge I faced in this interaction between Penny, Daniel, and, Alison was time. The conversation happened near the end of the day when all parties were exhausted from a long tech weekend. I believe the desire to solidify an ending for the sake of the actors and avoid a drawn out confrontation lead Daniel and Alison to change the ending. They used the moment to regroup and find a creative solution to the artistic problem at hand.

### Performances

The *Beyond the Horizon* festival of devised works opened in the UMass Curtain theatre on April 5, 2012. My focus for this portion of the process shifted from the work of my collaborators to the experience of the audience. Knowing that the Theater Department's audiences would not be terribly familiar with devised theatre, it was important for me to inform spectators about the nature of the work they would see. At the start of each performance, I gave the curtain speech addressing the collaborative nature of the creation process and its connection to the Deans' Theme of the BP Gulf oil spill. I also included a curator's note in the printed program to give audience members a sense of the festival's origins. It read:

On April 20, 2010, BP's Deepwater Horizon off-shore drilling unit exploded. For the next three months nearly 5 million barrels of oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico, negatively impacting plant, animal, and

human life. The full extent of the catastrophes aftermath is still unknown. Addressing this spill and its position in a long line of environmental disasters, the Beyond the Horizon Festival explores our ever-evolving relationship to the natural world. Developed by a community of theatre artists, musicians, dancers, and environmentalists, the festival offers three original devised pieces that use the power of performance to illuminate interactions between humans and the environment of which we are all part. Theatre gives us a space to play out these sites of connection and disconnection. It creates a place to reassess our destructive actions and celebrate the most beautiful wonders of the world around us. Above all, it offers the chance to rediscover and announce what poet Mary Oliver calls our "place in the family of things."

In the note, it was important for me to contextualize the ecological nature of both the festival's subject matter and its collaborative creation. This ecology was taken into consideration in the design of the program as well. Alison Bowie created the program layout to include a fold-out poster page. Each of the dramaturgs contributed inspirational quotes that informed their ensembles' processes for the poster page which were printed atop a large photograph of the Gulf's horizon at sunset. Living together on one page, the collective research mirrored the spirit of the festival, suggesting visually how the ideas and concepts with which the ensembles engaged overlapped. The quotes were in conversation with each other on the page, just as the performances were in conversation with each other on the stage.

Each of the three pieces in *Beyond the Horizon* dealt in some way with the breakdown of communication and the longing for connection, and I wanted to reflect these shared ideas in the lobby of the theatre. Bundling together bare branches and securing them in a pot of soil, I created a small tree to serve as an

interactive lobby display. Next to the tree, I placed instructions for audience members to share their hopes, wishes, or messages on pieces of green paper and tie them to a branch. It also invited the audience to read the messages already hanging there. The tree became a record of the messages, connecting the hopes of audience members across nine performances. As it continued to “grow” each night, it provided a space for the audience to release unexpressed feelings, share dreams, and be heard. A complete list of the messages was recorded and posted on the *Beyond the Horizon* festival website I created to promote the show.

#### Post-show Panel Discussions

Adewunmi Oke lead the first post-show discussion on April 6, featuring *Beyond the Horizon* ensemble members Director Carol Becker, Performer Katrina Turner, Costume Designer Evan Laux, Performer Kevin Cox, and Dramaturg Alison Bowie. Adewunmi asked each of the team members to explain their roles and share a bit about the work they contributed. Clearly illustrated in their various answers were the overlapping roles inherent in the devising process. For instance, Evan designed costumes and helped inspire characters for *Nightingale*, Katrina acted, wrote, and arranged music, while Alison lead ensemble exercises, wrote, and edited her team’s text.

Once the discussion was opened up to the audience members, it was clear they were particularly curious to hear more about the devising process itself. One spectator asked, “Where was your starting place and how did you devise your pieces?” This prompted a discussion highlighting the teams’ journeys through the

audition process, their strategies for generating material, as well as tracing how germinal ideas found their full expression in the finished pieces. This gave audiences a chance to hear the history of how particular visual moments they had just watched began as simple ideas or whims.

Katrina spoke to how “natural” the devising process felt as characters emerged from her group’s research and similar themes and moments kept repeating themselves in rehearsals. She enjoyed how the process asked her to identify, tap, and share her talents. She noted that when co-creators are engaged with bringing in inspirational materials they are passionate about in order to make work, that level of ownership “makes for the best theatre.”

I moderated the first themed panel discussion titled *The Ecology of Theater: New Models of Theater Creation*, which featured playwright and performer Will Power and *Beyond the Horizon* directors Brianna and Daniel. I began by touching upon some ingredients often found in devised processes including an ensemble of co-creators, improvisation exercises, and source material rather than a script as a starting place to create a new work. I asked the *Beyond the Horizon* directors to speak to the ecology of their ensembles and where they started in their devising journey.

Brianna responded to the question by pointing to an “ecological mind-set” inherent in the devising process, one that is extended into the performance space. She explained that in their collaborative process, she and her ensemble strived to create work that would draw the audience into a relationship with the finished piece. She said they tried to meet this goal by posing questions in

*Nightingale*, rather than preaching answers. Conversations around devising models often focus on how the co-creators interact, but the audience, too, is asked to co-create the performance experience by thinking, drawing dramaturgical connections, interpreting, and making meaning.

Many devisers take on multiple roles in the rehearsal room, and I asked Will Power to address how, as a performer/playwright hybrid artist, he navigates the ecosystem of professional theatre. He responded by stressing the importance of original works, which artistically feed such a system. He insisted that it is through the creation of original work that an artist can find his or her voice and address meaningful social issues. Recognizing that in order for original work to thrive in an environment teeming with artistic material, Will insisted such work needed more support through development and funding. Producers and funders are also an important part of the artistic ecosystem, and that night at the discussion two people who have the potential to fund new work at UMass, Theater Department Chair Penny Remsen and Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Dean of the Faculty Joel Martin, were in the house.

Though he could not attend the *Ecology of Theatre* discussion due to scheduling conflicts, Matthew Glassman, a co-director and performer at Double Edge Theatre Company, joined the April 13 post-show discussion as a special guest. I focused this discussion on the devising strategies employed by *Beyond the Horizon* artistic team members before opening up the conversation to address the professional devised work being created locally at Double Edge, based in Ashfield, MA. Matthew started off by acknowledging the varying methodologies and

strategies of devising troupes, calling Double Edge singular in its approach to creating theatre. Operating on a hundred-acre former dairy farm, Double Edge uses a collaborative play-making model to craft and tour original work. Matthew has worked with the group for over a decade and also leads their training programs, which teach new generations of artistic leaders the ensemble's art of collaborative theatre-making.

At the heart of Double Edge's methodology is physical training, which Matthew asserts prepares actors for a higher level of awareness and connectivity, both to themselves and their fellow collaborators. It is this engagement with a heightened sense of presence, Matthew insists, that allows for discoveries in the creative process. When I asked him to describe where Double Edge starts when embarking on a new project, Matthew replied that the group engages in research and physical improvisation work. All of the co-creators are encouraged, in Matthew's words, to "think dramaturgically." This means ensemble members are responding to artistic and inspirational source materials, while exploring the expression of their responses through movement, music, and vocal work. His anecdotes illustrated the skill, dedication, and precision collectively created theatre requires in order to manifest.

The second themed panel discussion, *Intersections: Where Art, Science, and Society Meet*, was held after the matinee performance on April 14 and moderated by Alison Bowie. The panel featured Meghan Little, a member of the UMass Permaculture Initiative, and *Beyond the Horizon* artists Daniel, Adewunmi, and Brianna. To frame the conversation, Alison posed the same question to all of the

panelists: What is sustainability and how does it influence your work? Meghan Little described sustainability as a theory and a practice. The UMass Permaculture Initiative takes grass lawns on campus and transforms them into sustainable and ecological permaculture gardens. She mentioned that the gardens are created with soil that is layered with recycled cardboard and compost from the campus dining halls. These edible landscapes in turn supply the dining halls with fresh herbs and vegetables. Through her work with permaculture, Meghan strives to help communities discover how they can “rejuvenate, and not just deplete our environmental resources.” The Permaculture Initiative, according to Meghan, offers opportunities for student volunteers to tend to and construct the gardens while learning about renewable and responsible food production.

Daniel addressed the question by describing performance as an unsustainable act. For him, performance’s ephemeral nature cannot sustain itself and by necessity it ends up disappearing. Daniel’s observation echoed Peggy Phelan’s notion that performance “becomes itself through disappearance” (146). If the performance act itself cannot be sustained, the question remains: What parts of theatre can be made more sustainable? Attempts to make “green” theatre, or more environmentally responsible theatre through sustainable production practices, are catching on in the professional field. In addition to reusing, recycling, and reselling production materials, theatres are looking to make their spaces more sustainable. Some theater buildings, including Wild Project and the Center for Performance Research, both in New York City, take pride in being certified sustainable by environmental organizations like the Leadership in Energy and



Environmental Design (LEED). LEED evaluates the water efficiency, energy efficiency, indoor atmosphere quality of theaters and other buildings, and takes into consideration recycling practices as part of its certification process.

Daniel acknowledged the inherent wastefulness of performance citing the “incredible amount of debris” that gets built for one show only to be discarded. He saw this unsustainability as an issue theatre needed to more actively address. In the developmental stages of *Beyond the Horizon*, he wondered how waste could be repurposed on stage and therefore pursued using recycled goods in his devised piece. In the work Daniel directed, *To whom it may concern*, five hundred plastic bottles littered the stage. The image of the bottles on the floor was incredibly striking and vivid. We are used to putting our trash in bins, taking those bins to the curb, and returning later to find the trash has “magically” disappeared. By putting the bottles on stage, Daniel and his ensemble asked audiences to confront the waste it participates in producing. That waste, in reality, does not vanish as readily as performance does.

The discussion then turned to the role of theatre and how it fits into larger ideas of society and ecology. Daniel noted that in devised theatre “ecology is at root of what we do.” He went on to elaborate about how devised theatre invites an ecological relationship between ensemble members and between an ensemble and the community for which it performs. Devised theatre speaks to communities, Daniel asserted, by addressing local or immediate social concerns through personal artistic responses.

### Play Reading

During the second week of the *Beyond the Horizon* performances, the reading of Caridad Svich's *The Way of Water* was presented at Food for Thought Books in Amherst on April 10. Directed by Dawn Monique Williams, the reading featured Erin Wholley as Rosalie, Joshua Mauro as Jimmy, Jimmy Vidal as Yuki, with Dawn reading the part of Neva. This reading marked one of the very first in the national and international *The Way of Water: 2012 Reading Scheme*, which included the participation of over thirty theaters.

The reading was presented to an intimate but engaged crowd, which included students, faculty, community members, and the director of Pioneer Valley Climate Action, a local organization dedicated to working toward sustainability and a solution to our climate crisis. Though the turnout for the reading was smaller than I hoped, dramaturgs at UMass should continue to develop a relationship with Food for Thought Books and other public venues in the local community. To more fully engage community members and showcase their programming, UMass dramaturgs must continue to reach out, beyond the walls of the university.

### Capturing the Ephemeral: Scripting Devised Theatre

During the rehearsal and production processes of all three devised works, *Nightingale*, *To whom it may concern*, and *What Have We Learned* were recorded in the form of play scripts arranged by the dramaturgs of each ensemble. During the rehearsal process, the scripts served as a mode of communication between the designers and the devising teams as the plays were being developed. The scripts

were also a working tool for performers and stage management, a blueprint for what would happen during the performances. The strategy in their construction was to convey information to the full production team internally. They became a kind of roadmap to performance, bumpy at first, but smoothed with each layer of revision. A certain short-hand developed in these scripts for reasons of practicality. For example, in *Nightingale*, the trickster characters put on a shadow puppet show on stage. The script listed the beats of the shadow show numerically and without elaboration: “1. an egg appears and breaks open / 2. a bird appears from the egg” and so on (See Appendix A). The ensemble, fully aware of the nuances of the shadow show since they helped create it, needed only the minimum information. Adewumni noted that she and Carol were focused on creating a script mainly for those “in the booth,” who needed to call and run the show.

In crafting a script for archival purposes, the dramaturgs and I went back to our production drafts to try to capture more fully through language the essence of our pieces, the spirit of the actions, and the intentions of the co-creators in our final archival scripts for *Nightingale*, *To whom it may concern*, and *What Have We Learned* (See appendices B, C, and D). A balance must be struck however, between making a script accessible and coherent and leaving the language open enough to invite future artistic interpretation. Dramaturgs, in creating a script, become the frame through which the memory of the show and the intentions of the creators are filtered. In the devising process, the dramaturg must capture in written words a culmination of both process and performance. This is no easy task. Diana Taylor posits, “A cry or a Brechtian *gestus* might find no adequate verbal description, for these expressions

are not reducible or posterior to language. The challenge is not to ‘translate’ from an embodied expression into a linguistic one or vice versa, but to recognize the strengths and limitations of each system” (32). Working within these limitations, the dramaturg must draw upon his or her creativity in finding ways to capture the essence of performance using the materials of the archive.

One unique challenge Alison faced while scripting *To whom it may concern*, became finding a way to describe moments in the performance that varied night to night. During one section of the show, performers picked out bottles at random that had been dumped on the floor and read aloud the messages they contained. With more than forty different possible messages, and no set order as to how many might be read, Alison listed twenty possibilities in the body of her script and included a list of the rest in an appendix.

For Alison, the appendix served as a record of her group’s performance material, but also a place to encourage further invention and devising from any ensemble looking to perform the script again. She believes that future performers who pick up the script should add more messages, or exclusively use their own in subsequent performances. For Alison, the devising process shouldn’t end with her own ensemble’s work, and though the script was a result of her group’s artistic explorations, she maintains, “If anyone were to do this again, they should feel ownership.”

A script can also become a site for moments created by the ensemble that might not have been fully realized in performance. For example, the performance of *To whom it may concern* ended with all the performers in animal masks clearing the

stage of the bottles spilled at the top of the show. This was a modified ending included to accommodate the festival format specific to the UMass production. Originally, the bottles were to be left on stage at the play's end. Due to the piece's positioning in the middle of the festival, and the need for a clean stage for the following piece, the ending was changed. Wishing to capture the original intention of the ending, Alison did not change the script to reflect the staging. In the archival script, she writes, "All the animals are gone. The wasteland is deserted" (See appendix C).

Devising processes can lead to a greater sense of ownership of the theatrical work across an ensemble, but does that co-ownership translate into shared authorship? Pig Iron, on the advent of their first published anthology of works, recently had to consider how to credit their material. In our interview, Quinn Bauriedel said the scripts are listed as created by Pig Iron Theatre Company. This collective recognition also resulted in the collective sharing of the profits for the book across the company. He noted that this equal ownership has the potential to anger co-creators who might feel like they contributed more to the creation of the scripts. Quinn insisted that an ensemble must work to establish an "ethical relationship to rights" when setting out to publish works.

In creating our scripts, the *Beyond the Horizon* dramaturgs also had to make a choice about how to attribute credit for the creation of the pieces. I recognized each ensemble member as jointly authoring the piece. Any interpretive choices I made in describing the non-verbal action or the essence of *Nightingale* were directly influenced by conversations with my group during the rehearsal process, in addition

to what I witnessed in performances. Alison also listed all of her ensemble members as creators, but created separate lines for Daniel and herself. In the archival script for *To whom it may concern*, the script is listed as “written by” Alison and the “original production directed by” Daniel. Adewunmi did not list names at all. At the beginning of the project, Adewunmi’s ensemble adopted a collective name, “Team CarWunmi.” This conflation of Carol and Adewunmi’s names signaled the merging of minds and a spirit of unity, which was gladly adopted by the rest of their ensemble. Adewunmi used this team name as the author of her script.

Many devising troupes agree that the “script-oriented” focus of producing organizations puts devised work at a disadvantage since scripts may not be the best mode of communicating the full representation a show, especially a show that contains a great deal of spectacle or a specific physical vocabulary (Sobeck 61). Getting a producer to a live performance of the work, or submitting a DVD recording of performance is often preferable. For *Beyond the Horizon*, I collaborated with members of the UMass Film Club to record and edit a recorded version of the festival for archival purposes. However, when the goal of a devised piece turns to repeatability, that is, the ability for the show to have an afterlife in the hands of another company, scripting a performance is useful. While a video recording would provide a record of one way to perform the show, it would be limiting to any company wishing to perform the show with their own artistic interpretation. In the devising process, the dramaturg struggles to sustain the ephemeral performance and capture the repertoire through archival materials. However, the archive is not necessarily stable. According to Taylor, the archive does not “resist change, “ and

the value and interpretation of those archival materials change depending upon who is looking at them (19).

When scripting devised performance, it becomes up to the team, including the dramaturg, to determine what ideas, design elements were just specific to their production and which are essential to the storytelling. Central questions for the dramaturg include, “How does one leave a script open enough to avoid becoming proscriptive, while making it specific enough so someone outside of the creation process could make sense of it?” and “How do you capture the essence and spirit of a piece in the form of a script or performance score?” The scripts in the appendices to this thesis mark the attempts of the *Beyond the Horizon* dramaturgs to answer these questions in practice.

#### Process Reflection: Dual Roles

Throughout the process, I found my role as curator and my role as dramaturg following similar trajectories. In both instances, I was asked to be a co-creator while simultaneously taking into consideration the work as a whole, whether it was the piece, *Nightingale*, or the shape of the entire festival. What Turner and Behrndt call the dramaturg’s “curious balance of intimacy and distance” was most successfully realized in my work when I was asking questions as well as offering solutions during both the devising and curation processes (181). As much a co-creator as facilitator, I was responsible for creating a space for creativity and discovery to flow in both roles.

I approached my curator role and the responsibility of overseeing the entire festival in much the same way as I approached devising within my ensemble: in the spirit of collaborative creation. Both processes began with assembling a team of collaborators, starting with the selection and pairing of the director and dramaturgs. This process repeated itself as I helped facilitate auditions and shape ensembles. Though I had input into the creation of the ensemble I selected with Brianna, I also had an eye on balancing the casting needs of the other two teams. As a curator, and later as a dramaturg, I presented a theme to collaborators to respond to and flesh out artistically. Each process involved asking questions of the work being generated and facilitating the exploration of ideas while allowing time for creative play.

My dramaturgical sensibility played an important role as I navigated overseeing the collaborative creation of three new plays. In a playwright-based new play development process, a dramaturg will work to establish a relationship of trust with the writer. A skillful dramaturg will allow the writer to control feedback sessions and remember that a dramaturg's function is not to rewrite the play. Instead, the dramaturg should ask questions of the work and respond to what the playwright has created. I treated the ensembles as writers creating new work. This meant I asked and answered questions about the work as it developed and offered my notes. I also respected the varying artistic processes of the teams without being proscriptive about the work generated or imposing my will.

Though I was in a power position as curator, I was not interested in exercising any hierarchical might. Through my work on this project, I learned that devised theatre asks for a different kind of curatorial leader. It asks for one that is



sensitive to the varying and idiosyncratic methods of creative ensembles. It asks for one who is patient with what can be an unwieldy, circuitous, and frustrating process. It asks for one who is not afraid to try out new artistic ideas and fail, or let others try their ideas and fail. It reminds us that in failure there is knowledge to be gained. It is not for the risk averse.

This devising process asked me, as an artist, to trust and listen to my own creative instincts, while balancing the needs and input of my fellow collaborators. This was perhaps the hardest task. My training as a dramaturg has taught me to advocate intelligently and fiercely for my opinions, but also to be ready to let a director take those opinions or leave them. Acting as an artistic instigator, I was constantly challenged to fully own my empowered voice in the process, while also remaining receptive and open to the ideas of the creative team. I had to be careful that in managing the requests of others, that the good of the whole festival stayed foremost in my mind. As a dramaturg in my own piece that freedom and responsibility to play an active role in creation through dialogue continued.

Though Brianna and I lead rehearsals, I was pleasantly surprised at how much the entire group contributed to creating and outlining the story. I was unsure, both at the outset and during the process, how exactly our six different points of view would magically coalesce to create one story. I discovered there is a moment in the devising process when leadership is essential to shape the final story. In my interview with Quinn Bauriedel, he described this moment as the “hinge.” According to him, this is the moment when decisions are made, and the process is more directly lead by one or two members of the ensemble, typically the director

and writer. He noted that “everything after the hinge changes” as the writer and director create a play map, arrange content, and establish the play’s arch. This idea of a “hinge” did not seem unusual. As Turner and Behrndt suggest, “this seemingly free and open-ended [devising] process might require an even stronger sense of structural organization and overview than a production of a conventional play would demand” and one could see how the director and writer might establish that organization (171). For my ensemble the “hinge” was worked out collectively. Together we mapped the play, blending our structural ideas together, while rearranging scenes on index cards. Brianna and I guided this story mapping session, but the work and decisions were shared.

A moment did arise after the play arch was completed in which Brianna and I sought to polish what the ensemble had created. After the design run, when the performers were focused on their roles, Brianna and I began editing our existing text without asking the whole group to participate in rewrites. Though we took the lead in polishing the script, this in no way diminished the collaborative devising process. The “hinge” serves important functions in a devising model, including moving the play process forward (particularly if there is a production date looming as a fixed deadline) and establishing the shape and story of the play. The “hinge” needn’t hinge on the director and writer (or dramaturg). As we discovered, the “hinge” can be comprised of the joint efforts of the whole ensemble.

As a curator and devising dramaturg, I discovered that introducing experiential learning opportunities, and not just archival materials, into rehearsals is an effective way to enrich the artistic process and get over creative slumps. It was

my goal for the workshop with Quinn Bauriedel to transmit embodied knowledge of devising techniques to the entire *Beyond the Horizon* team. This group endeavor was also useful in bonding the newly formed ensembles. In the process of working on *Nightingale*, Brianna and I took the cast on a field trip in preparation for the development of our shadow puppet show. We traveled to the Eric Carle museum to watch *Fjords*, a multimedia show by the Chicago-based contemporary shadow puppetry performance group, Manual Cinema, in collaboration with Chicago Q Ensemble. *Fjords*, based on the poetry of Zachary Schomburg, utilized live shadow puppetry, interaction between actors and puppets, video projection, and slide projection. Our ensemble was able to talk to members of Manuel Cinema after the show, look at the puppets, and ask questions. This experiential research offered exciting inspiration as we set out to create our own shadow show. It also rejuvenated the group, which helped us get past some of the artistic walls and creative fatigue we had been encountering in rehearsals.

Finally, in both my role as curator and dramaturg, I was responsible for shaping and considering theatrical structure both in terms of the entire festival and of *Nightingale*. I structured the festival as three separate theatrical responses to the Deans' Theme both for practical and dramaturgical reasons. Knowing the rehearsal process with the full ensembles would be limited to six weeks, dividing the festival into three smaller more manageable pieces seemed most desirable. Dramaturgically, I was interested in presenting three pieces as one evening of theatre collage-style to mirror the multiple points of view surrounding our relationship to the natural world in light of repeated human-made disasters. There isn't one way to repair the

destruction we cause or one answer (artistic or otherwise) to the question of how we find a way to reconnect to nature. The fragmented stories, put in conversation with each other, invited the audience to draw connections and share in the dramaturgical process of decoding our interactions with the world around us.

*Nightingale* offered similar structural questions. My ensemble's piece contained two worlds on stage: the natural world of the trickster characters and the glossy world of the toxic beauty queen. These characters were all part of the same story, yet never interacted with each other on stage. These seemingly separate worlds were structured to interrogate the idea that human beings are somehow outside of nature, while simultaneously exploring the interconnectivity of all life on this planet.

Where my roles as the curator and devising dramaturg trajectories deviated, were also the sites of my biggest challenges. The largest obstacle I faced as a curator was finding a way to make a devised theatre-making process work within the limited confines of a traditional production model practiced at UMass. Though I had control over the shape and structure of the festival, it was bound to a production calendar and rehearsal model built for script-based theatre. The devising process and the department's model for producing shows were at odds and their interface during the project required flexibility and patience for all those involved.

This example is reflected in the professional theatre realm, which is also mostly built to accommodate a text-based playwright-centered process of development and production. I learned through this process that the dramaturg/curator must be constantly vigilant when it comes to questioning the

standard operating procedures of theatres, particularly if those procedures do not serve the project at hand. Bruce Barton suggests that “the inherent curiosity, self-critique, and creative unrest that characterize much of...[devised] theatre stand as undeniable reminders to constantly reconsider the normalized activities, categorizations, and institutional structures that define our vocation” (“Navigating Turbulence” 116). The dramaturg, also curious, self-reflective, and restlessly inquisitive, can act as a force to question the theatrical norm. The dramaturg-as-instigator must do more than reconsider theatre-making processes and structures, however. He or she must be proactive in anticipating sites of potential tension between the producing institution and the devising process, while outlining clear expectations for those involved. Looking back, I would have made more of an effort in the fall of 2011 to reach out to each member of the production team individually to talk about the devising process and address expectations on both sides before the project got under way. The dramaturg can help demystify the devising process and work with the institution to design models that can better serve this kind of theatre. This requires building strong working relationships with producers, designers, and production team members who might feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar theatre-making models.

When designing devising models, conversations surrounding development and production timelines offer an important starting place for discussion. In retrospect, one change I would have made to the *Beyond the Horizon* process would be the timeline of the ensembles’ rehearsals. I delayed the casting of the show after being told that the *Beyond the Horizon* team would have a voice in casting

negotiations with the director of *Midsummer*. Knowing now that the department had no intention of facilitating a conversation about casting between the leaders of the two spring shows, I would have cast the festival in the fall. This decision would have given ensembles more time to develop work that could have culminated in an in-progress showing before being mounted as part of the season in the spring semester. A public showing of a work in progress, much like a public play reading of a script, can offer important insights to the creative team.

As I learned in the *Beyond the Horizon* process, change isn't easy and institutional habits die hard. A big challenge I faced was navigating the negative attitudes of those in the department who were overtly or subtly dismissive of our devising model or disrespectful to our artistic process. These attitudes challenged me to assert my creative voice and trust in my artistic instincts. I knew the festival was an informative experimental process, as well as a useful pedagogical tool that offered students a chance to find their artistic voices as co-creators. The *Beyond the Horizon* festival of devised works was an important step for the UMass Theater Department in opening itself up to alternative play-making models as part of educating the next generation of theatre leaders.

I was floored by the overwhelming positive response from the student ensemble members about the value of the devising models in which they participated. When I asked if they would ever want to work this way again in the future, students' responses included "Yes, 100%. Or more like 150%," "Yes...it was a learning process like no other," and "Yes! It's so different from traditional theater but it's so organic, so unpredictable...very exciting!" Students are hungry to take an

active role in creating and shaping the art they make. As a result of the festival, there have been conversations in the department about continuing to stage and support devised theatre at UMass. I can only hope that the work I have instigated and realized, through the help of my collaborators, will further devising opportunities for students in the future.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The process of designing, curating and devising, during the *Beyond the Horizon* festival was filled with successes, challenges, and set the stage for future investigations of the emerging role of the dramaturg in devised theatre. It was my goal to forge a space where I could lead creatively and collaboratively while empowering my fellow co-creators to chart their own devising processes within their ensembles. Though that goal was realized with difficulty, the larger question of how a devised theatre model might be integrated within more traditional theatre structures loomed large at the end of the project. Advocating for the validity, worth, and artistic merit of devised theatre, while crafting working conditions in which such a theatre model could thrive, were my largest tasks as curator. More work must be done to find ways to support alternative methods of play-making both outside and inside traditional theatre models. This project has shaped my ideas about how the dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator, armed with an intimate knowledge of devising methods and new play development processes, a command of navigating the archive and the repertoire, and a collaborative spirit, can lead the way.

#### Dramaturg as Artistic Instigator

The dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator is in an excellent position to facilitate change by daring to question traditional new play development practices and advocating for expanded models, including devised theatre practices, which offer an empowered position for the dramaturg and all co-creators involved. Dramaturgy is



often shared across ensemble members in devising processes, and the inclusion of a named “dramaturg” in the rehearsal room does not threaten that practice. The dramaturg can only serve to enrich, deepen, and enliven the collective dramaturgical discussions. The presence of a dramaturg as an “explicit function” offers the team someone who is focused on structure and composition in a “living process” in which form and content develop as the process unfolds (Turner and Behrndt 170). In rehearsal, the devising dramaturg acts as a surveyor, who observes and maps the theatrical territory. He or she makes note of exciting discoveries, wayward research paths, and forks in the artistic road. The dramaturg can also organize and translate the lay of the land into archival materials that can be accessed and used later. In an organic and shifting process, the dramaturg can identify artistic landmarks to return to and viable narrative roads to explore. In addition to creating and adding to an ever-expanding map of the process, the dramaturg is also adding to the landscape by planting conceptual seeds and both leading and participating in exercises to generate content with fellow co-creators in the rehearsal room.

The dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator can play an important role in acting as an advocate for devised theatre outside of rehearsal. Currently, new play development dramaturgs and literary managers operate as gateways between playwrights and regional institutional theaters. New plays being developed at such theaters usually move through some type of trajectory that includes script reading(s), workshop(s), and (possibly) a full production. This model, while useful for playwright-centered play development, cuts out devising at the ground level by

privileging the script as step one to production. Many devising ensembles believe their work doesn't translate well to the page, particularly if they employ spectacle or specific movement or dance vocabularies on stage. Steven Sapp of the ensemble Universes proclaims the importance of visual representation for advancing development opportunities for devised work, "In terms of not having a script, we don't have one. We have stuff . . . it's more about the live performance, if we can get people to come see us live . . . kinda get a sense of what's working or where we're going, but in terms of having a 'script' script, it takes a while for us to even hold one." (Sobeck 61).

Institutional theaters and development centers have a myriad of programs to support the new work of playwrights that could be modified or restructured by a dramaturg to address the development needs of devising ensembles. Many dramaturgs produce new play reading festivals at theaters as a way for playwrights to develop their work through a public showing. While script readings might be less useful for devising ensembles, a dramaturg might propose and design a festival of minimally staged in-progress workshop showings of devised work. Such festivals could serve as a more appropriate development tool for devising ensembles looking to test their work in front of spectators. This sort of festival would make devised work visible to audiences and give them a chance to experience the work in a low-risk, low-cost setting. It would also give devisers an opportunity to present their work to potential funders or producers who may want to invest in the project.

During the American Voices New Play Institute convening on devised work, devising artists identified the most important element to their work was "simply

time: time to sit with an idea, time to be together (if the work is ensemble-based), time to explore” (Sobeck 56). As I discovered curating *Beyond the Horizon*, devised work needs a flexible development and production schedule sensitive to the needs of collective creation. Currently, there are a number of play development institutions, such as Lark Play Development Center in New York City, that provide time and space to playwrights to develop their work. Lark, and other development centers like New Dramatists which currently employ playwright-centric development schemes, could open their doors and resources to devisers. A dramaturg, already skilled at developing relationships with playwrights and with a finger on the pulse of the work of devising troupes, could forge these new connections between institutions and artists.

What is also bundled into ensembles’ desire for time to work is inherently a call for funding. As the adage goes, “time is money,” and theatre artists can’t develop work if they must spend all their waking hours working to make ends meet. Dramaturgs at institutional theaters can help alleviate this financial strain by championing commissions for devising ensembles. This idea is already being tested at theaters like Center Theatre Group, which allotted nearly “one-third” of its sixteen commissions to those making devised work in 2010 (Sobeck 65). In addition to commissions, residencies and fellowships could also be extended to members of an ensemble.

Funding a group of artists, rather than just one artist, does present complexities. With more than one creator in the room, theaters must decide how to go about paying the group. Also, playwrights, already forced to fight for limited

resources and funding support, might not look kindly to devising ensembles being awarded money. This attitude assumes that devisers aren't writers too.

Fellowships, residencies, and commissions, championed by instigating dramaturgs, could signal to the theatre community that the process of empowered devising co-creators is as legitimate as a script-based process and worthy of support.

Another course of action for the dramaturg to support devising artists could include creating and supporting new development models, rather than stretching pre-existing development models to fit devising needs. The Network of Ensemble Theatres (NET) has already laid the groundwork for ensembles to think about how to empower themselves outside of traditional theatre models. According to NET's website, their mission is to "propel ensemble theater practice to the forefront of American culture and society." NET connects affiliate members from a wide array of ensembles and devising-friendly organizations across America. NET has made great strides in providing useful resources to ensembles by designing conferences and festivals for exchanging of ideas, creating professional development programs, and serving as an online hub for finding funding information and nationwide member events.

Though NET provides a strong start in the advancement of supporting ensembles, in the future, perhaps devisers will have a development center building focused exclusively on the needs of collective ensembles. In such a space, the dramaturg-as-instigator, armed with a knowledge of new play development practices and devising methodologies, could collaborate with ensembles to create not a one-size-fits-all development model, but rather a series of options so devisers

might custom build their experiences. Such development experiences could include workshops, work-in-progress showings, festivals of excerpts from the work of multiple troupes, creative play sessions, feedback opportunities lead by the devisers, and meet and greet events with other ensembles. A devising development center could become a physical hub for devisers to build community by sharing methods, resources, and support. Devising dramaturgs might flex their grant writing muscles to bring national and international guests to the center to lead discussions and workshops.

The devising dramaturg, skilled in dealing with both the repertoire and the archive, might also work with collective ensembles to find effective or innovate ways of documenting the work to function as a blueprint for remounting the piece, as an archival record, or as a submission tool to get produced. Dramaturgs might explore digital means of recording and compiling the various parts of a performance through images, drawings, text, and video and laying them out in a virtual performance score, much like a musical score. Interactive technologies could allow a reader to visually take in the score, by selecting which “parts” of the storytelling to view: text, video, music and so on. The website “capzles” offers a free and easy to use interface which allows users to storyboard a play in a series of moments. Clicking on a moment square allows the user to access the text, images, and video contained in that moment or scene. These moments are sequenced in a timeline. This takes the dramaturgical index card outline I created for *Nightingale* to the next level by allowing a dramaturg to bundle different parts of the performance score (text, video, music) together in one moment for easy multimedia access. This

one example is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of how devised theatre might find a more full expression outside of performance.

The insufficiency of a script to adequately capture some kinds of devised performance doesn't just limit such work from being considered for development at institutional theaters, it also limits the ability for a completed show to get produced. The dramaturg/literary manager at institutional theaters could open the door to devising ensembles by designing and implementing new play submission policies that acknowledge diverse play-making models. This would require the dramaturg to go beyond waiting for a script to arrive from an agent and venture out of the office and into the community to build relationships with devising ensembles whose work is vivid, transformative, and worthy of consideration. New policies might also expand what submission materials a literary office accepts, particularly when dealing with devised work. Such materials might include accepting DVD recordings, a portfolio of multimedia materials, or taking a trip to see a group's performances live.

These proposed changes will present challenges to the traditional theatre model and resistance from some, but the dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator is ready to design, implement, test, and redesign new programs in support of devised work. Liz Engelman points out that the job of the dramaturg is to "constantly be dramaturging our own theatre's programming . . . Ideas have a life span. New programs become old" (95). To keep programs fresh and to acknowledge the shifting theatrical landscape that includes devised theatre, the dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator has in his or her

tool kit passion, persistence, generosity, patience, and a ear open to ensemble artists and those working within institutions.

The dramaturg can play an important role advocating for devised work internally at institutional theaters, but he or she must also help educate audiences about this process of theatre-making. During the *Beyond the Horizon* festival, I used post-show discussions as opportunities to inform audience members about the devising process. While the talks were stimulating, they only impacted a limited section of our audience. My desire to find a way to reach out to more audience members prompted me to consider other methods I might employ in the future.

In our interview, Quinn Bauriedel acknowledged the need for devisers and theaters “to teach” audiences about devised work which might seem foreign to them at first. A few ways Pig Iron has addressed this is through smart marketing which sets up audience expectations and by reaching out to the same community in order to build a fan base. Quinn noted, “the more they see, the more they speak our language.” Devising, through its use of collage, montage, and multiple points of view, often doesn’t look or sound like traditional plays following a two act structure. Devised work is often fragmented, multimedia driven, and non-linear and expects a different level of interaction from audiences. They are often expected to think dramaturgically, draw their own interpretive connections, and make meaning from what they are presented. As a bridge to the audience, the dramaturg is responsible for helping the audience “speak the language” of a devising troupe.

It has been a conversation in the field for a long time that audiences are aging and changes must be made to harness the next generation of theatre-goers.

Promoting and presenting the process and the artists involved in devised theatre as much as individual shows could help groups generate an audience following that feels personally invested in the ensemble. This might mean staging encounters between audiences and artists that break with the traditional pedagogical talkback models and move the conversation to a bar, a rooftop, or a dance party.

“Collaborative” is a term used often to describe the process of all kinds of play-making models. In an ideal devising situation, all members are equal co-creators in the artistic process, though in practice this may seldom be the case. In a conversation with Andy Paris of Tectonic Theatre Project, he remarked that people always ask him how to create an egalitarian ensemble. His answer, he said, remains the same, “I don’t know, I’ve never seen it happen.” Anne Bogart and Tina Landau ask artists to pause and reconsider if the process they engage in can truly be called collaborative. They write:

Can the artistic process be collaborative? Can a group of strong-minded individuals together ask what the play or project wants, rather than depending upon the hierarchical domination of one person? Of course a project needs structure and a sense of direction but can the leader aim for discovery rather than staging a replica of what s/he has decided beforehand? Can we resist proclaiming, “what it is” long enough to authentically ask: “What is it?” (18).

My reply is yes. The artistic process is collaborative. It is teeming with transformative potential and discovery. While curating and shaping the *Beyond the Horizon* festival, it was my goal to allow the creative process to unfold organically and rhizomatically across and within the three ensembles. Though I made decisions regarding structure and staged the initial encounters between dramaturgs and



directors within the teams, I sought to free the process of the hierarchical domination of traditional theatre models by empowering my collaborators at each stage of the process and respecting their ensembles' multiple visions. To lead the project in this way was artistically risky. I had to rely on the talent and creativity of my fellow co-creators as we set out to discover what the project wanted to be and how it would find its full expression. It also proved to be incredibly thrilling, fulfilling, and rewarding.

The dramaturg-as-artistic-instigator is uniquely positioned to access the collaborative potential of the artistic process and lead thoughtfully through his or her questioning spirit. Questions, as Michael Bigelow Dixon maintains, are "the most dignified path to revelation because they honor difference, the other, the past, and our search for shared understanding of the collaborative process" (94). Questioning is an active process and an important tool in the hands of an artistic instigator who is skilled enough to innovate, ask, listen, lean in, share ideas in the spirit of artistic generosity, actively co-create, and thus, collaborate. This work requires leaders who risk boldly and use their power to empower others. It suggests that through mutual respect and questioning, we might arrive collectively at the artistic answers we seek, and uncover answers we never could have imagined on our own.

APPENDIX A

NIGHTINGALE PRODUCTION SCRIPT

**NIGHTINGALE**

By Samantha Creed, Megan McClain, Annelise Neilson, Brianna Sloane,  
Katrina Turner, and Devyn Yurko

**Moment - Birth (one bird can break the sky)**

*(In the darkness, the sound of waves. The waves fade out and are replaced by the breath of the actors. As the light of dawn comes up, the chorus begins to sing.)*

CHORUS/TRICKSTERS

There was a strange stillness  
There was a strange stillness  
The birds where had they gone?  
The people had done it to themselves.

*(The chorus sings in rounds, walking around the bird as it slowly begins to hatch. One by one, each chorus member stops singing, physically transforms into a trickster figure, and watches the bird. They are playful scavengers, childlike, and of the earth. Adorned with the scraps of a polluted world, they create whatever they need with whatever they can find. They are storytellers. The song dies out as each trickster leaves the circle. They hide and watch. The bird fully emerges and delivers her broken warning.)*

BIRD

If had song  
sing morning  
sing evening  
over land  
sing warning  
sing danger  
sing love  
brother sister  
over land

**Moment - I asked for water, and she gave me gasoline**

*(A Hazmat Suit enters which causes the tricksters to scatter. The Hazmat Suit surveys the situation, making her way tentatively to the bird. Trust and danger are weighed on both sides. The bird overcomes her fear and stretches toward the Hazmat Suit. Finally, their hands touch. Blackout. In the darkness we hear an isolated thundering wave crash. Then we hear the bird sing)*

BIRD

I asked for water and she gave me gasoline.

*(Lights up. The Hazmat Suit has taken the bird to a confined space above the stage and is ready to clip its wings. The following phrases repeat and overlap while the bird and Hazmat Suit struggle in a deconstructed tango.)*

BIRD

I asked for water, and she gave me gasoline

HAZMAT

BIRD

Why you wanna fly bird?

The world's a wingspan wide.

Gasoline

Why you wanna fly bird?

The world's a wingspan wide.

Gasoline-Gasoline

If you'd only understand, dear, we'll only clip your pride.

*(The Hazmat Suit strips the bird of her wings. Hazmat Suit leaves her in a confined space. The lights fade out on the bird as they come up on the tricksters.)*

*(The tricksters enter and discover each other. They create, play, and dissolve a game. They become bored. They discover a feather from the bird. They interrogate the object with joy. )*

*(Suddenly, an air raid siren scares them away and signals the entrance of the Toxic Beauty Queen. She enters grandly and with poise in a 60's inspired dress. The air raid dies down. In a pool of light, she speaks as though addressing a camera. A canned 60's smooth jazz song underscores her monologue.)*

## Moment - Storytime with the Toxic Beauty Queen

### TOXIC BEAUTY QUEEN

*(The Beauty Queen walks down the grand staircase, waving and smiling.)*

Once upon a time, there was a town in the heart of Suburbia where people lived in harmony. Where there was stillness, there was safety. A “control of nature” - progress! Every piece existed for the innovative use of man. On the mornings once marred with the drone of insects and undesirable organisms there was now no sound. Only peace and quiet lay over the fields and woods and marsh. The people had done it themselves! The end.

Oh! It’s almost time for our regularly scheduled eradication blast! Our brave sterilization pilots drop chemical bombs from the sky *(She salutes)* – why, you ask? To help us control nasty non-approved natural matter and undesirable organisms, of course!

Do you remember what to do to help our chemical friends work their magic, boys and girls?

Start every morning by washing your face with your officially issued protectant cream. It’s like a raincoat for your face! Now, don’t fuss- washing behind your ears can be so much fun! Nobody thinks itchy chemical burns are fun—so you must wash, and you must never, ever play in sludge or slurry.

When you hear the alarm for a scheduled blast, stop and find a place to hide. Don’t look for home, just go right to any building that’s nearby. There may not always be an adult around to help but you know what to do! You can make a game of it. Close your eyes and breathe shallowly. Imagine you’re on a deep sea dive! Weeeee!

It’s so easy to remember the rules- Hygiene, Avoidance and Caution or “Hack” for short! All Clear!

*(The Toxic Beauty Queen exits.)*

## Moment - Voice of Nature

*(Tricksters enter. They make fun of the Queen, mocking her gestures. They play a game that explores humankind’s excess and destructive relationship toward nature. It ends with them all “dying.”)*

*(Lights up on the bird as she sings from her confinement)*

BIRD

I asked for water...

*(Tricksters snap to attention. They begin to clap out a rhythm.)*

BIRD

Everything here for the convenience of man  
They tell only their story  
Can't you see it? Can't you feel it?  
Once voice cannot make harmony

*(The Tricksters respond with a percussive dance, then continue clapping.)*

BIRD

The road you've been traveling  
is deceptively easy  
A smooth super highway  
at the end lies disaster  
Can't you see it? Can't you feel it?  
Can anyone hear me?

*(The Tricksters respond with a percussive dance, then continue clapping.)*

BIRD

Can anyone hear me?  
Find a voice to call  
ebb and flow

TRICKSTERS *(echoing the bird)*

ebb and flow

BIRD

rise and fall

TRICKSTERS *(echoing the bird)*

rise and fall

BIRD

Find a voice to crow  
rise and fall

TRICKSTERS *(echoing the bird)*

rise and fall

BIRD

ebb and flow

TRICKSTERS(*echoing the bird*)

ebb and flow

BIRD

is it only my echo?

is it only my—

*(The tricksters try to return the bird's feather to her, but they cannot reach. The sound of the air raid siren scatters them again. The Toxic Beauty Queen enters. Her signature 60's smooth jazz piece plays under this monologue.)*

### **Moment - Denial is a state of mind**

TOXIC BEAUTY QUEEN

*(Entering in a pink sweater and apron, like we've discovered her in her own kitchen.)*

Ladies! Did that latest chemical occurrence disrupt your dinner? Disturb your beauty routine? Shake-up your party guests? In these trying times it can be difficult to look your best AND keep your home running smoothly. But don't give up! You play an important role in controlling non-approved natural matter. And best of all, maintaining one's own cleanliness and the cleanliness of the home keeps the spirits of our sky-bound sterilizers flying high. *(She salutes)* And they need your help!

Feeling overwhelmed by such a big job? Take my advice, start your morning right with officially issued cleansing cream. *(She mimes applying cleanser to her face.)* Applying the cream provides a wonderful calming effect ... and it obliterates microscopic pore-clogging particles and killer germs while reducing chemical scarring! Looking my best helps ME remember I'm doing my part.

When it comes to those bothersome eradication blasts, remember: chemical occurrences benefit the public by providing a higher standard of living! Keep yourself on a schedule. We all know it can be awfully confusing to have to walk away right in the middle of a recipe, so don't start the soufflé until after you hear the all clear signal!

Hear the warning siren and little Tommy or Betty are nowhere in sight? Just keep smiling and go ahead with your usual protective measures. They know what to do! Stock your family home shelter with your favorite magazines, cosmetics, food.... and

water! You can't live without it. In extreme emergency, thirsty people should not be denied water, even if it's been contaminated.

How do I keep myself so cheery, you ask? I stock up on great tasting sugar-coated half-truths! Whenever anxiety sets in, I just savor the sweetness of a sugar-coated half-truth, which maintains my sunny disposition.

These days, Chemical Occurrences can sometimes happen without warning. But don't panic and DON'T listen to gossip- experts agree that increased levels today mean a better tomorrow! After chemical events, make sure you waft, like so. If you feel a burning sensation, just wait a few moments for it to pass. You see? You can maintain control if you know what to do.

*(Sound of oven timer "ding!")*

Oh! That's my soufflé! Excuse me. All Clear!

*(She exits.)*

### **Moment - Beginnings are apt to be shadowy**

*(Lights up on the bird. The recorded Voice of Nature song begins to play. Tricksters enter and greet her. They go grab their puppet pieces and set up a screen. They snap on a clip light, and all other lights go out as they begin their shadow puppet show. The bird sings over the music.)*

*Shadow play*

1. *Egg arrives*
2. *Egg hatches bird*
3. *Egg hatches trickster 1*
4. *Trickster 1 pulls Trickster 2 from the earth, They pull Trickster 3 from ground*
5. *they make a trickster gesture and exit*
6. *Bird flies*
7. *Bird close up: preening*
8. *Human enters, feeds bird, pets bird, cages bird*
9. *Bird trapped in cage*
10. *Tricksters plan*
11. *Tricksters free bird*
12. *Bird spreads big wings*
13. *Feather falls slowly into outstretched hands*

*(Tricksters come out from behind screen. Air raid siren sounds. Tricksters scramble to clear their puppet show pieces.)*

## **Moment - War on Undesirable Organisms**

*(Toxic Beauty Queen enters. She marches on like a soldier pin-up, dressed in a provocative beach-wrap. She arrives in place a blows a sexy kiss to the audience. Her 60's music plays.)*

### **TOXIC BEAUTY QUEEN**

Fellas, we're fighting a WAR against non-approved living matter! We have seen a sharp increase of undesirable organisms – but experts are working hard to make sure they're contained and controlled. I know you're eager to get in there and FIGHT, to protect our way of life! Volunteer today to fly an eradication bomber airplane and decimate this unregulated infestation.

Eradication blasts have been increased to kill off this invasion. Chemical bombs are being dropped from the sky in record numbers, all over- and you can help! Don't listen to rumors that say prospects are grim! Measure your courage and never go outside without your officially approved protective gear. If you keep a level head, you will make it home without worries of skin poisoning, hair loss or asphyxiation!

Keep a sharp eye out for undesirable organisms. Report any strange or unidentified living matter you spot. In times of emergency, be a man. When danger strikes, don't join the "run for the hills" fraternity! Don't turn and bolt with your tail between your legs! The day we desert our duties is the day we fail. I'm proud to stand behind you! I salute you! And I'll be waiting for you to come home!

*(She is about to say "All Clear" but all that comes out of her mouth is an air raid. She tries again. The siren sounds again. She discovers it only stops when she closes her mouth. After a beat she tries to open her mouth again and the siren sounds. Three people in hazmat suits rush out to respond. She closes her mouth and the sound stops. A 1960's song, Up and Down, blasts over the speakers. The hazmat suits come off revealing women in beach wear. They dance the dance of denial, which speeds up and breaks down. They rush off leaving the Queen alone. She tries again to speak. It is the siren. She runs off stage in a tantrum.)*

### **Moment - Ascension**

*(The Voice of Nature song plays with echo and reverb effects. The tricksters enter carrying bundled up wings they have constructed and feathers they have collected. They attach the feathers to the wings.)*

TRICKSTER 1

Once...

TRICKSTER 2



Strange stillness.

TRICKSTER 1

Only silence.

TRICKSTER 3

Control.

TRICKSTER 2

Convenience.

TRICKSTER 1

People destroying. (*Beat*)

TRICKSTER 1

Voice!

TRICKSTER 3

Broken.

TRICKSTER 2

Beauty. Meaning.

TRICKSTER 3

Harmony.

TRICKSTER 3

Singing sunsets.

TRICKSTER 2

Singing memory.

TRICKSTER 1

Singing eons.

*(They sense danger and make their way toward the bird. When they reach her confinement, in a ritual fashion the tricksters dress the bird in the wings they have created and gather at her feet. She begins to flap and the tricksters flip the switch on her wings that illuminate them. She freezes displaying her full wingspan. She ascends in a lighting event. Blackout. Sound of crashing waves.)*

*(A single pool of light center stage illuminates feathers falling from the sky in silence. They settle in a pile on stage.)*

## **Moment - Epilogue**

*(A Hazmat Suit comes to sweep up the feathers. Lights fade to black).*

APPENDIX B

NIGHTINGALE ARCHIVAL SCRIPT

**NIGHTINGALE**

By Samantha Creed, Megan McClain, Annelise Neilson, Brianna Sloane, Katrina Turner, and Devyn Yurko

**Moment - Birth (one bird can break the sky)**

*(In the darkness, the sound of waves. The waves fade out and are replaced by the breath of the actors. As the light of dawn comes up, the chorus begins to sing. With them on stage is a bird, not yet hatched.)*

CHORUS/TRICKSTERS

There was a strange stillness  
There was a strange stillness  
The birds where had they gone?  
The people had done it to themselves.

*(The chorus sings in rounds, their ritualistic movements accompanying the slow hatching of the bird. One by one, each chorus member stops singing and physically transforms into a trickster figure. They are playful scavengers, childlike, and of the earth. Adorned with the scraps of a polluted world, they create whatever they need with whatever they can find. They are storytellers. They hide and watch the bird. The bird fully emerges and delivers her broken warning.)*

BIRD

If had song  
sing morning  
sing evening  
over land  
sing warning  
sing danger  
sing love  
brother sister  
over land

**Moment - I asked for water, and she gave me gasoline**

*(A Hazmat Suit enters which causes the tricksters to scatter. The Hazmat Suit surveys the situation, making her way tentatively to the bird. Trust and danger are weighed on both sides. The bird overcomes her fear and stretches toward the Hazmat Suit. The Suit grabs the bird's wrist suddenly. Blackout. In the darkness we hear an isolated thundering wave crash. Then we hear the bird sing)*

BIRD

I asked for water and she gave me gasoline.

*(Lights up. The Hazmat Suit has taken the bird to a confined space above the stage and is ready to clip its wings. The following phrases repeat and overlap while the bird and Hazmat Suit struggle in a deconstructed tango.)*

BIRD

I asked for water, and she gave me gasoline

HAZMAT

BIRD

Why you wanna fly bird?

The world's a wingspan wide.

Gasoline

Why you wanna fly bird?

The world's a wingspan wide.

Gasoline

If you'd only understand, dear, we'll only clip your pride.

*(The Hazmat Suit strips the bird of her wings and exits, leaving the bird alone. The lights fade out on the bird as they come up on the tricksters.)*

*(The tricksters enter and discover each other. They create, play, and dissolve a game. They become bored. They discover a feather from the bird. They interrogate the object with joy. )*

*(Suddenly, an air raid siren scares them away. The Toxic Beauty Queen enters grandly, waving and smiling in 60's inspired attire complete with rubber gloves to the sound of canned 60's smooth jazz. In a pool of light, she speaks as though addressing a camera. The music underscores her monologue.)*

**Moment - Storytime with the Toxic Beauty Queen**

## TOXIC BEAUTY QUEEN

Once upon a time, there was a town in the heart of Suburbia where people lived in harmony. Where there was stillness, there was safety. A “control of nature.” Progress! Every piece existed for the innovative use of man. On the mornings once marred with the drone of insects and undesirable organisms there was now no sound. Only peace and quiet lay over the fields and woods and marsh. The people had done it themselves! The end.

Oh! It’s almost time for our regularly scheduled eradication blast! Our brave sterilization pilots drop chemical bombs from the sky (*She salutes*) – why, you ask? To help us control nasty non-approved natural matter and undesirable organisms, of course!

Do you remember what to do to help our chemical friends work their magic, boys and girls?

Start every morning by washing your face with your officially issued protectant cream. It’s like a raincoat for your face! Now, don’t fuss- washing behind your ears can be so much fun! Nobody thinks itchy chemical burns are fun—so you must wash, and you must never, ever play in sludge or slurry.

When you hear the alarm for a scheduled blast, stop and find a place to hide. Don’t look for home, just go right to any building that’s nearby. There may not always be an adult around to help but you know what to do! You can make a game of it. Close your eyes and breathe shallowly. Imagine you’re on a deep-sea dive! Weeeee!

It’s so easy to remember the rules- Hygiene, Avoidance and Caution or “Hack” for short! All Clear!

*(The Toxic Beauty Queen exits.)*

### **Moment - Voice of Nature**

*(Tricksters enter. They make fun of the Queen, mocking her gestures. They play a game that explores humankind’s excess and destructive relationship toward nature. It includes airplane noises and falling bombs. It ends with them all “dying” and splayed motionless on the floor.)*

*(Lights up on the bird as she sings from her confinement)*

BIRD (*singing*)

I asked for water...

*(Tricksters snap to attention. They begin to clap out a rhythm.)*

BIRD *(singing)*

Everything here for the convenience of man  
They tell only their story  
Can't you see it? Can't you feel it?  
Once voice cannot make harmony

*(The Tricksters respond with a percussive dance, then continue clapping.)*

BIRD *(singing)*

The road you've been traveling  
is deceptively,  
deceptively easy  
A smooth super highway  
at the end lies disaster  
Can't you see it? Can't you feel it?  
Can anyone hear me?

*(The Tricksters respond with a percussive dance, then continue clapping.)*

BIRD *(singing)*

Can anyone hear me?  
Find a voice to call  
ebb and flow

TRICKSTERS *(echoing the bird)*

ebb and flow

BIRD *(singing)*

rise and fall

TRICKSTERS *(echoing the bird)*

rise and fall

BIRD *(singing)*

Find a voice to crow  
rise and fall

TRICKSTERS *(echoing the bird)*

rise and fall

BIRD (singing)

ebb and flow

TRICKSTERS (*echoing the bird*)

ebb and flow

BIRD (*singing*)

is it only my echo?

is it only my—

*(The tricksters try to return the bird's feather to her, but they cannot reach. The sound of the air raid siren scatters them again. The Toxic Beauty Queen enters in a new outfit, but with her same rubber gloves to the tune of her signature 60's smooth jazz..)*

### **Moment - Denial is a state of mind**

TOXIC BEAUTY QUEEN

*(Entering in a pink sweater and apron, like we've discovered her in her own kitchen.)*

Ladies! Did that latest chemical occurrence disrupt your dinner? Disturb your beauty routine? Shake-up your party guests? In these trying times it can be difficult to look your best AND keep your home running smoothly. But don't give up! You play an important role in controlling non-approved natural matter. And best of all, maintaining one's own cleanliness and the cleanliness of the home keeps the spirits of our sky-bound sterilizers flying high. *(She salutes)* And they need your help!

Feeling overwhelmed by such a big job? Take my advice, start your morning right with officially issued cleansing cream. *(She mimes applying cleanser to her face.)* Applying the cream provides a wonderful calming effect ... and it obliterates microscopic pore-clogging particles and killer germs while reducing chemical scarring! Looking my best helps ME remember I'm doing my part.

When it comes to those bothersome eradication blasts, remember: chemical occurrences benefit the public by providing a higher standard of living! Keep yourself on a schedule. We all know it can be awfully confusing to have to walk away right in the middle of a recipe, so don't start the soufflé until after you hear the all clear signal!

Hear the warning siren and little Tommy or Betty are nowhere in sight? Just keep smiling and go ahead with your usual protective measures. They know what to do! Stock your family home shelter with your favorite magazines, cosmetics, food.... and water! You can't live without it. In extreme emergency, thirsty people should not be denied water, even if it's been contaminated.

How do I keep myself so cheery, you ask? I stock up on great tasting sugar-coated half-truths! Whenever anxiety sets in, I just savor the sweetness of a sugar-coated half-truth, which maintains my sunny disposition.

These days, Chemical Occurrences can sometimes happen without warning. But don't panic and DON'T listen to gossip- experts agree that increased levels today mean a better tomorrow! After chemical events, make sure you waft, like so. If you feel a burning sensation, just wait a few moments for it to pass. You see? You can maintain control if you know what to do.

*(Sound of oven timer "ding!")*

Oh! That's my soufflé! Excuse me. All Clear!

*(She exits.)*

### **Moment - Beginnings are apt to be shadowy**

*(Lights up on the bird. A hauntingly, but beautiful a cappella song floats in the space. Tricksters enter and greet the bird. Then, they go grab their puppet pieces and set up a screen. They snap on a clip light, and all other lights go out as they begin their shadow puppet show. It is a wish, a hope, a dream, an origin story, a love letter to the bird. The bird sings over the music.)*

*(Shadow play: It begins with a birth, an egg, shaking with life. It cracks open to reveal a bird. The bird exits the screen as the egg begins to shake again and a Trickster silhouette emerges from it. The trickster plants a seed. From the seed, a hand grows from the earth. The first Trickster pulls the second up and out of the ground. They both reach down as two hands sprout from the bottom of the screen and pull the third Trickster to life. They exit. The bird flies, disappears, and then reappears in close up. It is preening itself when a Trickster, impersonating a member of the Toxic Beauty Queen's world, enters. It beckons the bird. Wary at first, the bird draws nearer and finally eats out of the figure's hand. The figure traps the bird in a cage. The scene dissolves and the Tricksters enter and hatch a plan to save the bird. They exit. The bird in the cage reappears and is freed by the Tricksters. The bird spreads enormous wings and flies away. A single feather falls slowly into the outstretched hand of a Trickster. The Trickster with the feather busts through the screen as the lights come up. The air raid siren sounds. Tricksters scramble to clear their puppet pieces and exit.)*

### **Moment - War on Undesirable Organisms**

*(Toxic Beauty Queen enters. She marches on like a soldier pin-up, dressed in a provocative beach-wrap and rubber gloves. Her 60's music plays.)*

TOXIC BEAUTY QUEEN



Fellas, we're fighting a WAR against non-approved living matter! We have seen a sharp increase of undesirable organisms – but experts are working hard to make sure they're contained and controlled. I know you're eager to get in there and FIGHT, to protect our way of life! Volunteer today to fly an eradication bomber airplane and decimate this unregulated infestation.

Eradication blasts have been increased to kill off this invasion. Chemical bombs are being dropped from the sky in record numbers, all over- and you can help! Don't listen to rumors that say prospects are grim! Measure your courage and never go outside without your officially approved protective gear. If you keep a level head, you will make it home without worries of skin poisoning, hair loss or asphyxiation!

Keep a sharp eye out for undesirable organisms. Report any strange or unidentified living matter you spot. In times of emergency, be a man. When danger strikes, don't join the "run for the hills" fraternity! Don't turn and bolt with your tail between your legs! The day we desert our duties is the day we fail. I'm proud to stand behind you! I salute you! And I'll be waiting for you to come home!

*(She is about to say "All Clear" but all that comes out of her mouth is an air raid. She is startled. She tries again. The siren sounds again. She discovers it only stops when she closes her mouth. After a beat she tries to open her mouth again and the siren sounds. Three people in hazmat suits rush out to respond. She closes her mouth and the sound stops. An upbeat 1960's surf song blasts over the speakers. The hazmat suits come off revealing women in beach wear. They all dance the Dance of Denial, which speeds up, rewinds, and breaks down. They rush off leaving the Queen alone. She tries again to speak. It is the siren. She is mortified. She tries again and finds the sound swells and threatens to envelop her. She runs off stage in terror.)*

### **Moment - Ascension**

*(The same haunting a cappella melody from earlier plays, with echo and reverb effects. The tricksters enter carrying bundled up wings they have constructed and feathers they have collected. They attach the feathers to the wings.)*

Once... TRICKSTER 1

Strange stillness. TRICKSTER 2

Only silence. TRICKSTER 1

Control. TRICKSTER 3

Convenience. TRICKSTER 2

People destroying. (*Beat*) TRICKSTER 1

Voice! TRICKSTER 1

Broken. TRICKSTER 3

Beauty. Meaning. TRICKSTER 2

Harmony. TRICKSTER 3

Singing sunsets. TRICKSTER 3

Singing memory. TRICKSTER 2

Singing eons. TRICKSTER 1

*(They sense danger and make their way toward the bird. When they reach her confinement, in a ritual fashion the tricksters dress the bird in the wings they have created and gather at her feet. She begins to flap. She freezes displaying her full wingspan as her wings illuminate. She ascends. Blackout. Sound of crashing waves.)*

*(A single pool of light center stage illuminates feathers falling from the sky in silence. They settle in a pile on stage.)*

### **Moment - Epilogue**

*(A Hazmat Suit comes to sweep up the feathers. Lights fade to black).*

APPENDIX C

ARCHIVAL SCRIPT FOR TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**To whom it may concern.**

**Script written by Alison Bowie**

**Original production directed by Daniel Sack**

**Material created in rehearsal by Daniel Sack, Alison Bowie, Tiahna Harris, Ella Peterson, Kevin Cox, Christina Mailer-Nastasi, Rachel Garbus and Pheobe Vigor**

## MOVEMENT 1 – The Tale of the Ocean

*Blackout. The cast members are scattered about the space. They speak the following text, as if their voices are coming from a void, a vastness. A heartbeat whispers underneath the text. The sound of the wind shifts in and out, as if we are in the middle of the ocean.*

ELLA: We built a house in the ocean.

CHRISTINA: A house in the middle of the wild, wild ocean.

RACHEL: We built a boat and took our house into the ocean.

KEVIN: We built a rig—

TIAHNA: we built a rig—

KEVIN: we built an *oil*rig.

ELLA: We built a house in the middle of the ocean.

*Pause.*

RACHEL: We struck out into the unknown.

CHRISTINA: We wanted new land,

TIAHNA: New routes,

KEVIN: Oil from whales,

ELLA: Oil from the bottom of the deep sands below.

*Pause.*

CHRISTINA: We kept our water in bottles:

KEVIN: water, water all around but not a drop to drink.

RACHEL: We kept our nights in bottles, liquored up for the lull of days at sea.

TIAHNA: We kept our promises in bottles—

KEVIN: our ships in bottles—

TIAHNA: our promises in bottles.

ELLA: And when our ships went down and when our houses sank,

RACHEL: when the storms bore down and when our houses sank,

TIAHNA: we kept our promises and dreams,

CHRISTINA: our cries and whispers in bottles.

RACHEL: We kept our messages in bottles.

ELLA: We sent our messages in bottles out to the wide and wild sea.

## MOVEMENT 2 - Foreshadowing

*Darkness, but not a complete blackout.*

*Bottles begin to drop from above.  
STOP.*

*A bag of bottles descends, spinning. It is glowing. The bag spills open and bottles pour down onto the stage. The light falls as well and lands in the middle of the bottles.*

*Silence.*

### MOVEMENT 3 – The Spill

*Listings of oil spills begin to play (digital voice). The following will be heard:*

*Forte.*

Thomas W. Lawson.	December 14, 1907.	"7,400 tons".
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*Mezzo forte.*

Lakeview Gusher.	December 14, 1907.	"1,230,000 tons".
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African Queen Oil spill.	December 30, 1958.	"21,000 tons".
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*Mezzo piano.*

Sea Star.	December 19, 1972.	"115,000 tons".
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Argo Merchant.	December 15, 1976.	"25,000 tons".
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*Piano.*

*Rachel speaks the following using the flashlight as the list of oil spills continues.*

As I was sailing along that summer,  
under a dazzling sky, and drifting  
lazily in  
the wind and sun, I found myself, one  
fine morning, in the green and stagnant  
waters of the Sargasso Sea, at a  
mysterious spot where thousands of tiny  
sparks,  
all shapes and all colours, were glimmering

Betelgeuse.  
January 8, 1979.  
"64,000 tons".  
Ixtoc 1, oil spill.  
June 3, 1979.  
"454,000 tons".  
Nowruz Field Platform.

in the early morning light. Bearing off, I  
was dumbfounded to see an area almost two

February 4, 1983.

*More bags of bottles fall and recorded sound of bottles falling begins to play, piano to forte. Rachel stands up and begins to gently toss the ball, playing with it like a child. She tosses it higher and higher into the air. Suddenly, Ella catches the ball at its peak.*

#### MOVEMENT 4 –Truth and Order

*Ella is at the top of the stairs. She drops the ball. The light shifts drastically. She begins to speak.*

ELLA:                               The first thing I'd like to say is that I'm sorry. I'm sorry for the disruption this \*incident\* has caused in everyone's lives- including mine.

*A series of strings of tape will be created in this movement. The tape being passed from one person to the next. When a person has the tape, they speak part of their narrative. Ella pulls the tape out and passes it along to the next person. The tape gets passed from person to person as the text continues. Each person begins by speaking one full section of their narrative as they pull down the tape. As the movement progresses, the narratives get fragmented and mixed together. Eventually they are all speaking together.*

RACHEL:                            You wouldn't have known anything was wrong waking up that morning. It was brilliant blue, blue like only the Gulf can be. That's how I remember it. I was on break, down on the deck talking to Angus and Petey. That's when it started shaking, like an earthquake or something. Just wrong, you know? Angus looked up from the drums he was moving and the look on his face was the scariest thing I have ever seen. It turned my blood all icy. I grabbed hold of one of those rusty drums, Angus starring at my like he knew something really bad was about to happen. Did he know it was coming? You know, that he was going to die?  
When the pipe blew up, everything near the scaffold got swept up into the air. There was no more than ten feet between us. Sometimes at night I still see him getting shot up into the air with all that oil and the flames. I don't remember seeing it when it actually happened. Petey says that when he grabbed me I was just standing there, clutching the drum, looking at where Angus had been.

TIAHNA:

10:21 AM. Our fire boat was swiftly on the scene to hose down the pitiful remnants of that ghastly oil rig. Two cutters, four helicopters, and a rescue plane. The cutters worked all through the night. 1,940 square miles surveyed and nothing. Already eleven men gone and seventeen others maimed. Time to accept that there is no reasonable possibility that any of those missing are still alive. Time to accept that there is no reasonable possibility that any of those missing are still alive. We issued warnings beforehand we should have seen it coming. At least eighteen pollution citations in ten years. Sixteen fires as well. They violated federal regulations that were there for a reason; they ignored crucial warnings that were not put there for banter and made horrendous decisions during the cementing of that well. Vital information regarding the pressure data appeared on the monitors during a smoke break, but he can't be blamed. Stock has plummeted, but I'd say that the drill pipe would have buckled regardless. Besides, we're all in this together. The enemy here is the oil.

KEVIN:

One of our top stories this evening goes across the pond to the Gulf of Mexico, where scientists have finally claimed victory in their three-month ordeal of containing and capping the oil spill created by April's explosion at the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform. The impact of the disaster continues to make itself felt through the American media. An editorial in USA Today was critical of BP, saying that the explosion "was likely the result of corner-cutting and risk-taking ingrained in BP's culture." On CNN, Ted Turner commented "I think maybe we ought to just leave the coal in the ground and go with solar and wind power and geo-thermals". Here in the UK, there is still much anger at the American press and news outlets for the consistent usage of the name "British Petroleum" for the company. As our local viewers know, but our American viewers might not, the company has been properly known and incorporated as "BP" for the past ten years, and its slogan is "Beyond Petroleum". This could be considered 'dumping' the blame onto the innocent British people. There have been many calls for Prime Minister David Cameron to protect British



interests in America. Channel 4's Jon Snow said that United States President Barack Obama "is now at war" with BP.

CHRISTINA: My 5 year old son, Avery, asked me after watching the news on TV what a BP was and why did they spill all of their oil into the ocean. How do you explain such a messy situation when you, yourself, don't even know the answer? Around 10pm on April 20, my husband, John, and my son were watching cartoons while I was doing the dishes in the kitchen and suddenly Avery shouted: "Mom! The ocean is bleeding!" All I could think about was what this meant for us, for John's fishing market, for Avery's school, and for our daily meals. On April 22, we drove two hours down to the coast of Louisiana. John wanted to see the damage for himself. He wanted to go alone so that he could check up on his fishing market, but when Avery found out that his father was going he demanded that he come along with him. I was afraid Avery was too young to understand what was in front of him but his father said that maybe it was time Avery saw the reality of mankind. With each passing mile the awful stench of burning oil wafted through the air, growing stronger and stronger. There was oil everywhere. John's business was sure to be fucked; all hope was lost. On the drive back home, Avery told me that he wanted to become a Marine Biologist so that he could help stop the ocean from bleeding and save Daddy's business. I looked at him and he smiled. I began to cry.

ELLA: Believe me, there's no one who wants this over more than I do. Since April 20, I have spent a great deal of my time in the Gulf Coast region and in the incident command centre in Houston, and let there be no mistake - I understand how serious this situation is. I'd certainly like my life back. 2 cancelled holidays and a son's birthday party overshadowed by this event is not something I'd wish for. I want to acknowledge the questions that you and the public are rightly asking. How could this happen? How damaging is the spill to the environment? Why is it taking so long to stop the flow of oil and gas into the Gulf? We don't yet have answers to all these important questions. Of course we are trying our hardest to resolve the situation. But

people must keep their perspective. The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean and so the volume of oil we are putting into it is tiny in relation to its total water volume. The environmental impact of this disaster is likely to be extremely modest. Perspective is key: it must be kept in times of tragedy. People are giving me grief, but at the end of the day, I'm a Brit. I can take it.

*Underneath the passages begins a list of dates, read in the same voice as the list of dates at the beginning. It starts with April 20, the date when the spill occurred. It ends with July 20. As the speaking gets more frantic, the dates get louder and louder. A heartbeat also exists. It gets louder and louder as well. Panic.*

*The lights flicker and go out.*

#### MOVEMENT 5 – Searching for Hope

*In darkness, Rachel descends the stairs with the glowing ball. She stops several times, reading sections of the following passage:*

RACHEL:                   The raft is giving way beneath me, the bottles drifting off to the four winds as the currents call them home. There is no sign of land. I am like that polar bear of its thinning island of ice: my house is sinking to the wide and wild sea. I have placed a message in each tiny vessel as it departs, in the hopes that one may find you. But you must also know that your every reading is a taking from my vessel; every message I send is one less buoy to keep me afloat.

*Ella descends the staircase with the use of a single flashlight. Perhaps she calls out, "Hello? Is anyone there?" She sings a children's song to herself. ("Ten green bottles, sitting on a wall...") She searches in the darkness, eventually finding Kevin, who is building a structure out of tape and bottles under the safety of the tape structure. She tries to get his attention, but he does not respond. "Can you hear me? Why can't you talk to me?" He continues to build.*

*The others begin to move through the bottles in the darkness. The following sequence of events is repeated:*

*Searching with the light.  
Finding a message in a bottle.  
Stop.*

*Searching for help.  
Found.  
Stop.  
Shining the light on the bottle.  
Move.  
Lift.  
Read.  
Passing the light.  
The game continues.*

*Once a message has been read, it is attached to the tape. The bottle is passed to Kevin.*

*A second flashlight becomes illuminated at some point during the game.*

*Not all of the messages in the bottles will be read. The order will change with every performance.*

*The messages in the bottles that could be read out are included at the end of the script.*

TIAHNA:                   To the message in the last bottle, thrown out to sea with the last hope of meeting another's eye. How can I put all the stories I never told, the names of dear friends and regrets, the soft words I would have whispered in your ear; how can I put these many letters into this one foursquare sheet? The message that would contain all messages must remain unwritten, must say nothing. My open mouth. My blank stare. My blank page.

*She is the last to get a message. The message is so overwhelming with possibilities that it takes away her ability to speak. She stuffs the message back into the bottle as if it were a disease and puts the bottle back down, upright, on the ground. She is alone. She can't speak.*

#### MOVEMENT 6 – Return

*A single light shines on Tiahna from above. It is a small column of light surrounds her.*

*Tiahna begins to sign the following words (not necessarily in this order) and sentences that contain these words:*

I'm sorry  
Wish  
Heroes  
Missing

Blue  
Earthquake  
Bleeding  
Surface  
International  
Wrong

*Tiahna begins signing as if she is learning the movements for the first time. She cannot communication in any other way. She is trying to communicate with the audience. Her movements get frantic, as she needs to get her message across.*

*The other cast members, now wearing masks (they are all different animals), enter the stage one by one. The animals peak into the pool of light and then back away. They continue to move in the dark space around her.*

*Ella is the last to enter the space. She peaks into the pool of light and then backs away. She then moves towards Tiahna, from behind, with purpose. The animals slowly move in closer to Tiahna, like a net closing in on her. The audience cannot see them until they get close enough to her that they can reach out and grab her.*

*All of the animals stand up straight, neutral. Tiahna turns around. They are surrounding her. They each place their hands on her head as a mask is placed on her. She slowly turns around. She becomes a bird. The lighting shifts suddenly as she transforms. The others turn with her, returning to their animal states. They pose as if they were taking a family portrait.*

*The animals turn quickly, as if they hear a noise. They disappear, but Tiahna stays there. She doesn't know what is going on. They return, rolling out a giant glowing ball of tape. Tiahna approaches it slowly. She begins to tear open part of the ball and the other animals join in. She picks up the last bottle with the last message and thrusts it into the middle of the ball. The animals scatter.*

*The tape structure begins to get torn down between movements. It begins to get balled up. The accumulation grows.*

*All of the animals are gone. The wasteland is deserted.*

*END*

## List of Messages

To Whom it May Concern: I write you these words as a warning. How many times I, too, thought I was saved when I was *in fact* drowning.

To Whom it May Concern: You might read this letter as the preface to the book I did not write, the imagined book that not only asks for rescue but explains why it is so necessary that you—*and only you*—come to me. The impossible book that finally explains why you will never come.

To Whom it May Concern: my house is on fire. All our houses are on fire. And we are still sleeping in the sun.

To Whom It May Concern: Come find us, we are at the dock waving farewell to the ship that will take the children away and will never return.

Dear lover. I am tired of dragging my heart against the repeated criticism of these waves. They say: I am sorry. I am sorry. I am sorry.

To the blue sky of my childhood fading to the grey sky of today.

To Whom it May Concern: I write you all the time. That is all I do, on the back of the same card every day, outlining these same words every day. Every day growing darker.

To Whom it May Concern: the tide is changing, has changed, or will change soon.

If you are in need of hope, clinging to the last plank, to your last dollar, to the last drop of water in the last glass, this message will find you, but it will always arrive too late.

To my broken men, I led you into battle with a heart made of clouds and it showed.

To Whom It May Concern: By the time you read this I will be so far away. I can stay here no longer. Years from now, perhaps, my children's children will discover your long-awaited reply and finally put my bones to rest.

To my dearly departed: The apples hang heavy on the trees this year and grass thickens without you. In your absence, the vines on the trellis have insinuated themselves into the living room, the bedroom. Empty bird nests grow stale in the fireplace. I sit here in the kitchen, in the cracking paint, watching the storm pass over, and listening for your knock on the door.

Dear one, Look for me on all the forgotten islands and in all the forgotten coves, I will be waiting on the last you remember, the final shore you will remember just before you fall asleep.

To the castaway stranded on the desert island: you can redeem this winning lottery ticket at your nearest convenience store.

My dearest one, my only: I have nothing but contempt for you and the grace with which you abandoned me here.

To the self-righteous, to the preacher and the choir, to the man that talks to himself in the mirror, to you, always to you.

To the escapist who left me here with all my shoelaces tied together in that impossible knot: If you return, brings scissors, knives, and all your sharp teeth.

To my long lost love: how these days keep wearing at the hollows you left behind and how the wind howls through me.

To the lonely: There is no one reading this over your shoulder. No one will take note of your departure. You can pack your bags in the morning hours and be gone long before the traffic, and drive and drive and drive and you will never arrive.

To the recipient of this letter: Please come soon. Our food is running low and our water gone. We spend these listless days sucking the leather of our shoes, licking the tears from each other's faces. There is not much time.

To Whom It May Concern: This message was meant for you and only you. Let no other hear its contents or it will be too late.

Dear Reader: I write you the most beautiful and promising words only to read them back to myself, to make something beautiful of this small island, to make promises that I can keep.

To my long-lost invisible friend: It all turned terribly dark with your departure, as if the world had lost its shadow. I lie awake at night, thinking you are at my side, but it is always some other invisible person.

To the children we would have raised together: What stories we would have shared. What great adventures. The snowmen we would have built in our backyard would have lasted into fall.

To Whom It May Concern: Please stop sending me the catalogues. Please remove me from your list of friends, of lovers, of confidantes, of long-lost family members.

Dear family and friends: treat this message as you would my absent body, stolen as it is by the sea. Make a place for it at the table and when the time comes, scatter its ashes far and wide.

Dear Peter, I am sorry for not believing you. The key should be under the foot of the dresser.

To Whom It May Concern: I write you these words as a warning. How many times I, too, thought I was saved when I was in fact drowning.

To Whom It May Concern: You might read this letter as the preface to the book I did not write, the imagined book that not only asks for rescue but explains why it is so necessary that you – and only you – come to me. The impossible book that finally explains why you will never come.

To Whom It May Concern: If you are in need of hope, clinging to the last plank, to your last dollar, to the last drop of water in the last glass, this message will find you, but it will always arrive too late.

Dear one: Look for me on all the forgotten islands in all the forgotten coves. I will be waiting on the last you remember, the final shore you will remember just before you fall asleep.

To the charming man who rescued me from Thursday afternoon: How many times I've looked through my pockets for the napkin with your number.

To the lonely: There is no one reading this over your shoulder. No one will take note of your departure. You can pack your bags in the morning hours and be gone long before the traffic, and drive and drive and drive and you will never arrive.

Dear Mum, I never had a chance to say how much I appreciated that cake you made for my sixteenth birthday.

To Whom It May Concern: Who am I kidding? Nobody is concerned and nobody will ever be concerned.

To Whom It May Concern: I am always apologizing to you.

Dear Mum and Dad: I never got the chance to say what I needed to say. I forgive you. I hope you forgive me.

## APPENDIX D

### WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ARCHIVAL SCRIPT

*By Team Carwunmi  
Inspired by Kübler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief*

*Darkness: We open on an empty stage with a projector in center and musical instruments lined up in front of the curtains. Slowly, each of the players comes on stage perhaps in a flock formation led by the Emotions (Alex, Ryan and Tyler), the Muses (Kat and Tori), and then the Global Consciences (Jing and Shailee).*

*Mother Earth (Corrina) enters and projects a series of transparencies.*

Mother Earth:

According to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a person experiences five stages when grieving over a great loss or trauma. These stages comprise the “grief cycle”.

The Emotions: (*in unison*)

The stages are not linear.

Muse #1 (Kat):

Some are experienced over and over.

Muse #2 (Tori):

Some are never experienced.

Mother Earth:

People have to pass through their own individual journey of coming to terms with loss.

Global Conscience #2 (Shailee):

The grief cycle model helps us understand our own—

Global Conscience #1 (Jing Jing)

and other people's—

The Emotions: (*in unison*)

—emotional reactions to personal trauma and change—

The Muses: (*in unison*)

—irrespective of cause. (*beat*) The Five Stages are:

Global Conscience #1 (Jing):



Denial

Emotion #2 (Alex):  
Anger

Emotion #1 (Ryan)  
Bargaining

Global Conscience #2 (Shailee):  
Depression

Emotion #3 (Tyler):  
And acceptance.

Mother Earth (Corrina):  
Now, we journey...

*The projector is struck as Mother Earth begins hooping center stage. She stands in a pool of light that serves as a boundary. The Emotions, Global Consciences and Muses watch as Mother Earth reacts to her alarm.*

*At the close of her alarm, Mother Earth stands frozen with her hoop in center. She drops her head as...*

All: (*in unison*)  
Denial

### **Stage 1: DENIAL**

*The Global Consciences (Jing and Shailee) approach Mother Earth (Corrina) in denial speaking Chinese and Gujarati.*

Global Conscience #1 (Jing):

不！不要！这不可能，这不可能发生，鱼全部都没了，全部都没了，今天我有捞了一趟，海面上全是油，让人恶心的油！不不！这是梦！你告诉我，我是在做梦吧，你让我醒了吧，求你了，你带我离开这场噩梦！这一定是场噩梦，求求你了，让我离开这里！我不相信，我也不接受！你凭什么这样对我！你凭什么！这不公平！求求你，求求你，我求求你带我离开吧，！你看着我吧，你看看我吧，你带我离开啊，你让我醒过了吧，这不是真的！我不接受！

*NO! It can't be! It cannot happen! Fishes are all gone! All gone! I went out to ocean, oil covered everywhere! Disgusting oil! No! no! this is a nightmare! Tell me this is a dream! Please wake me up! Please help me out of here! Please!!!! I cant believe and I don't accept this!! How could you treat me like this! How*

*could you! This is not fair to me! No fair!! Please, please! I beg you!! I beg you please!!! Get me out of here! Please you look at me! You look at me please!!! Wake me up and pull me out of here! Because this can't be real! I don't accept this!*

Global Conscience #2 (Shailee):

Maanvaa ma nathi aavtu. Aavu kem thai shake? Aani javabdaari kem nathi letu koi? Naa. Aa shakya j nathi. Aavu thai j naa shake. Maare Dariyaa ma tarava javu chhe, pan kaheta nahi ke hun naa jai shaku. Tamaaro kahevaa no matalab shun chhe? Aavu thaay j nahi. To pachhi Maachhli o nu shu? Maachhli o kem jai shake? Loko nu shu? E loko je aa jalcharo thi gujaraan chalave chhe. Aaatla badha loko no dhandho, Rojgari kem bandh thai shake? Haji maara maanvaa ma nathi aavtu ke koi aani javabdaari kem nathi letu? koi no vaank nathi? koi madad kem nathi kartu. Bilkul maara manvaa ma nathi aavtu. Aa sachu nathi. Maherbaani kari amne koi madad karo.

*I can't believe this. How could this happen? How can no one be taking responsibility for this? No. this didn't happen. Don't tell me when I want to go swim in the ocean, that I cant. What do you mean? This couldn't have happened. What about the fish? How can the fish be gone? What about the people? The people who thrive of the sea life. How can so many people be out of business? I can't believe no one will take responsibility. There is no one to blame. There is no one to help. I just, can't believe this. It can't be true. Please Help Us.*

*As the Global Consciences' dialogue intensifies, Mother Earth elevates her hoop until she cannot take it anymore.*

Mother Earth: (screams)  
STOP IT!

*Mother Earth then drops her hoop and exits. As she exits, she attempts to make a connection with everyone else onstage, but they ignore her.*

### **“Half-truths and Fairy Tales”: A reflection of DENIAL**

*The Global Consciences, the Emotions, and the Muses stand reciting the following poem with music underscoring it:*

Muse #2 (Tori):  
Rejection of the truth will  
Lead us blind into the world,

Emotion # 3 (Tyler):

Half truths and corporate fairy tales  
Will fill your head with gold.

Emotion # 2 (Ryan):  
While outside the marble buildings  
Mother's song has been denied

Global Conscience #1 (Jing):  
How can we get her message to those  
Locked up tight inside?

Emotion #1 (Alex):  
Out of all her answers  
They try so hard not to see.

Global Conscience #2 (Shailee):  
So I search the sign to tell me  
of the truth that's meant to be.

Muse #1 (Kat):  
I gather bits and pieces  
of the past that's covered up.

Muse #2 (Tori):  
But there's nothing I can do-  
Can't find the pain, or make it stop.

Emotion #3 (Tyler):  
They've boxed up all the evidence  
And marked it down to burn.

Emotion #2 (Ryan):  
Through system's humble processing  
It never will return.

Global Conscience #1 (Jing):  
Now free of all hard figures  
Doors are locked and eyes are closed.

Emotion #1 (Alex):  
They justify the mess that's left  
and the muffled sound of blows.

Global Conscience #2 (Shailee):  
But outside their marble buildings

All the world resumes its turn.

Muse #1 (Kat):

And what is left for us to know  
from the inferno— (*music ceases*) just the burn.

*At the poem's close, the Muses step forward and pick up Mother Earth's hoop. They bow their head as...*

All (*in unison*):

Anger

## **Stage 2: ANGER**

*Emotion #2 plays drum to initiate the Global Consciences' angry dance.*

*We hear an angry voicemail, in which the beeps are left to our imagination—the brackets indicate a beep:*

Dear Idiots,

Read my [ *fucking*] lips; you fight with Mother Earth and she will [ *fuck*] you with a spoon. You think that crazy bitch gives a [ *fuck*] whether you exist? No, she doesn't need us, we need her and taking a dump in her ocean is only gonna lead to our increasingly quickening extinction, because Mother Earth doesn't [ *fucking*] play dude.

- Sincerely, NOT YOUR DUDE

*Music exploration of the various **shades of anger** by the Emotions (Alex, Ryan, and Tyler). After this exploration ends, we then hear...*

*Next, we hear a young woman's experience at a local seafood restaurant:*

Dear Oil Spill,

The other day I went to my favorite seafood restaurant for a birthday celebration, with my new man. I got all dressed up, ready to chow down on some scrumptious crab legs, shrimp tails, and lobster claws. Turns out the restaurant is all outta of seafood because of you. Got crabs? I sure as hell don't!

Sincerely, Down-Right Hungry

*The Muses walk forward four steps downstage and bow their heads as...*

All (*in unison*):  
Bargaining

### **Stage 3: BARGAINING**

*The Muses sing:*

Muse #2 (Tori):  
Give and take, Mother,  
Hours are long.  
Our first stop was  
To write this song.  
While the water's dark  
We can't move along.  
You've worked so hard-  
How can we right this wrong?

Both:  
We've given time, we've given tears,  
For such a crime must we pay for years?

Muse #1 (Kat):  
Give and take, Mother,  
What do you need?  
Tell us how  
And we'll take heed.  
Forget the money,  
Don't talk of greed.  
Provide the earth  
And we'll plant the seed.

Both:  
So take our time and take our tears  
Give us something to allay our fears.

Muse #2 (Tori):  
We'll give you life

Muse #1 (Kat):  
We'll clean you up

Muse #2 (Tori):  
We'll show you how much we can love

Muses #1 (Kat):

We'll make you see how we can change

Both:

Oh Mother, hear us when we say

Muse #2 (Tori):

We'll show you how much we can do

Muse #1 (Kat):

We will not stop until we're through

Muses:

And if you will accept our deal  
We might just find a way to heal.

*The Muses, Emotions, and Global Consciences form a circle around Mother Earth, who has a silver, slinky bracelet that she plays with. She then hands it to the nearest Muse. During this section, the silver slinky serves as a sacred conch.*

Muse #1 (Kat):

I promise to rebuild the bridges I have burned.

Emotion #2 (Ryan):

I could drive a car like Fred Flintstone. It doesn't need gasoline.

Global Conscience #1 (Jing):

I offer you the freedoms I hold dear.

Emotion #1 (Alex):

I am willing to give up my good looks... and part with the mediocre ones.

Global Conscience #2 (Shailee):

I will teach my future generations to be kind to the Earth.

Emotion #3 (Tyler):

I swear to you, Mother Earth, that I would go without my ability to feel anything.

Muse #2 (Tori):

I would sacrifice my own life if it meant that this atrocity never happened.

*Muse #2 hands back the silver "conch" to Mother Earth, who plays with it for the last time. Then, Emotion #1 (Alex) begins drumming as his fellow Emotions, the Muses, Global Consciences, and Mother Earth get into place for "Beyond the Horizon." The*

*Emotions and Muses come together and sing, while Mother Earth and Global Consciencs use flow lights (glowing poi) during the song in darkness.*

**“Beyond the Horizon”**

Muse #1 (Kat)

Look across the hills  
the world is so lovely  
dark and deep  
Green and dark and deep.

But the brown and orange  
Haze in the sky  
won't leave my mind  
It won't let me sleep

All

All I can do is stand here  
watch the sun as it's risin'  
but its hard for me to forget  
What's **Beyond the Horizon**

Emotion #1 (Ryan)

I looked into the eyes  
of all those whose tired cries  
Turned silent and to no surprise  
I knew I could do nothing

If there's something I can *do*  
To add some hope, to pull us *through*  
I would, but no one thinks its true  
when I *say* I can do *something*

All

All I can do is stand here  
watch the sun as it's risin'  
but its hard for me to forget  
What's **Beyond the Horizon**

Muse #2 (Tori)

*Like children we have no regard  
for the things we break  
heartless we think not of the world we shake*

Emotion #2 (Alex)

Who's responsible?  
And who are we left to trust  
and what do we do  
If the culprit was us?

All

All I can do is stand here  
watch the sun as it's risin'  
but it's hard for me to forget  
What's **Beyond the Horizon** (x2)

*As the song closes, the ensemble gets into their final poses. On the cue of Global  
Conscience #2 (Shailee),*

All (*in unison*):  
Depression

#### **Stage 4: DEPRESSION**

*As the children's letters are heard, the ensemble slowly gets into their places for the  
Sound of Sadness*

Dear President Obama,

I am just a little kid, but I wanted to see if you would please help my family? My Dad's restaurant is going out of business because people will not come to our restaurant anymore. My parents are hurting very much and I am very sad right now. We are going to have to move away and I don't want to move and leave my friends and my home. I don't know what to do. Do you?

Sincerely, Isa

Dear God,

I hear my Mommy praying at night now. I know there's something wrong because when she prays she cries too. My Daddy's always at home now too and doesn't fish any more. They always talk really



quiet, like they're telling secrets. Maybe if you tell Mommy what to do, she will smile again and won't cry so much. Maybe you could help. I don't like it when she cries because it makes me cry.

Your friend, Lianna

*Mother Earth initiates a communal hum as the Muses, Emotions and Global Consciences face various directions during the following montage of phrases from the children's letters. Designate various directions as "images" of different scenarios.*

Please help

*The oil spills into the ocean*

Hurting very much

*The deaths of marine life*

Very sad

*Oil sludge washes ashore*

There's something wrong

*The families whose livelihoods are affected*

Telling secrets

*An aerial view of the oil spill*

Because it makes me cry

*Seeking answers*

*One by one, the Muses, Emotions and Mother Earth cease their hum; thus, leaving the Global Consciences to fend for themselves. Ultimately, the Global Consciences collapse. At this moment, the Muses reach out and help the Global Consciences.*

Mother Earth:

*"If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete."*

*~Viktor E. Frankl, Holocaust survivor and author of *Man's Search for Meaning**

*We then hear a collage of the ensemble asking, "What have we learned?" During the sound collage, Mother Earth stretches out her arms. Meanwhile, the Muses, Emotions and Global Consciences turn around facing the audience. As Mother Earth drops her head...*

All (*in unison*):  
Acceptance.

### **Stage 5: ACCEPTANCE**

The Emotions: (*in unison*)  
Acceptance is shown by people—

Global Consciences (*in unison*):  
Who take responsibility for their actions.

Muses (*in unison*):  
In this stage, people will find their inner peace and courage—

Mother Earth (Corrina):  
As they move forward in life.

### **“Don’t Be Left Behind”: A Finale of Hope**

*The Emotions play music, while the Muses sing. Meanwhile, Mother Earth and the Global Consciences dance.*

Muses:

No matter what world we live in now  
We are all people of the earth  
Honor mother and the land  
From where we come

Voices of the first day  
Echo back to us  
Balance now with then  
And connect these separate worlds

People of the earth wake  
And face the dawn  
See the way things are  
Or be left behind (x5)

*Music break*

No matter what world we live in now  
We are all people of the earth  
Honor mother and the land  
From where we come

People of the earth wake  
And face the dawn  
See the way things are  
Don't be left behind (x4)

*Music ceases*  
Don't be left behind (*A cappella*)

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