

# On “Dramaturgical Awareness”

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The elasticity of cartilage, one of the kinds of connective tissue in the body, means it rebounds and protects, but only up to a point. After a lot of exertion, back and forth, back and forth, it will not recoil. Dramaturgical awareness relates to cartilage by being concerned with friendly connectivity and questions of change.

### Friendliness

I think about Bojana Cvejić’s notion of the dramaturg as the friend of the work, or, as she might frame it, the problem of the work or the problem it produces (Cvejić, “The Ignorant Dramaturg” 43; *Choreographing Problems* 46). Befriending the process entails vacillation: dilating to yes, and reforming an edge. One is not friends with everything and everyone. But the attempt to be friendly towards the unknown, the prickly, the partial, the unfolding process of making, is an awareness of non-censure, non-contempt and non-cynicism. This awareness needs its antonyms; it needs to know what is unhelpful, which it inevitably will be in order to be the vacillation of the process. Cvejić draws on the notion of the philosophical problem, not as negative, but as a set of constraints that entail answers on particular terms, conditioned by the problem (*Choreographing Problems* 2). However, for me, ‘problem’ each time requires peeling off the negative connotation and the

constriction in my throat that is provoked. This is the kind of affective, imaginative work that is useful for dramaturgical awareness: shifting perspectives, not being too attached to connotations, questioning comfort.

Working to be the friend of the work-in-progress recalls the agonistic ethics that Willow Verkerk explores with reference to Nietzsche (Verkerk 101, 148). Befriending the work in this way means having and supporting the courage that is sometimes needed in creation. The dramaturg befriends in an affirmative way that knows the piece can only flourish with struggle. Sometimes ideas appear with certainty; at other times the diffuse edges of ideas in their process of becoming open challenges that are supported by dialogue. Verkerk notes that conflict promotes growth. For ideas to develop and then not slide away, yet also not be rushed to clarification that risks over-simplification, companions are required who are capable of questioning in order to shape a space of generative struggle. The ethics of agonistic friendship is the commitment to potentiality, with shared questioning to discover and refine methods and their implications.

### **Interrogatives**

Staying with the questions, playing with what the best questions to be asking might be, and how posing a question informs the way in which it is answered are entailed in the task of dramaturgy. What you ask, how you ask, and when you ask all matter.

Interrogatives of a dramaturgical awareness poach from and are akin to the work of the anthropologist, the dancer and the therapist.

The anthropologist follows on from William James' observations of philosophy to see the "familiar as it were strange, and the strange as if it were familiar" (James 987). This helps probe 'What you ask.' The dancer's qualitative shifts of how light, strong, diffuse, direct, abrupt, gradual, fluid, or contained all modulate the 'how.' The therapist's witnessing and holding space for a process, with the appreciation of how their presence affects a shared process, helps the 'when.'

### **Typologies**

With acknowledgment of discourse on dramaturgy as explicated through presence, proximity and responsivity (Hansen reflecting upon Lepecki, 8; Bauer in Hansen and Callison 37), a consideration of dramaturgical awareness makes it possible to recognise, or at least to sense an embodied unfolding in a process of creation. The dance of that awareness cannot be predicted or tamed. To offer some types of awareness already assumes their possible differentiation. Instead, this messy whole breathes in many ways during a process, and what could be systematic will nevertheless require its own ordering.

A bodily awareness is there in the cellular, the haptic, the systems of nerves, bones, organs and so forth. How the body is space and makes space invites a spatial typology, in which bodies relate to themselves, to each other, to objects, to borders and edges of the seen and unseen worlds. A poetic awareness might be a type that does not leap too quickly to academic references and indexes, to the page in the book you read or to a canonized name in a shared field. Images, associations, transformations might be

allowed to stay in the preverbal, or pre-developmental. Yet it is the dramaturg's role also to be with words and referents. This type of awareness includes, of course, spatial and temporal specificities, diachronic and synchronic analysis, and addressing the "chronotope" (Bakhtin 84-85), or rather the new context emerging in the context in the languages parallel to and emerging from a process.

The dramaturg needs to not be cartilage; that is to say, the dramaturgical awareness is to not work and be worked to the point of no return. Even if the dramaturg's input is needed ten minutes before a premiere, and they gladly respond, the awareness is to know when to back off, when antagonism is not required, when to protect the mobility of the joints, or all the moving parts of a production. As Bauer writes on dramaturgy, the "process itself is metaphorized as a body of which the dramaturg is a part" (33). Awareness is of timing and positions. Perhaps the elasticity of cartilage and its potential precipice of damage also indicates a form of dramaturgical awareness imbued with humility.

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