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NO REHEARSAL IS NECESSARY: THE MAN WHO FLEW INTO SPACE FROM HIS APARTMENT

Michael Pinchbeck¹

Abstract: *The man who flew into space from his apartment* is inspired by an installation of the same name by the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov. The performance draws on notions of escape and makes a journey, like Kabakov, between east and west, flying and falling, attempt and failure. Using found slides and an old slide projector, I present a slideshow for an empty gallery space to be performed by a guest performer in front of an audience of ten people. The audience becomes the Ten Characters in Kabakov's work. The guest performer follows pre-recorded instructions on headphones that take him or her on a journey into the unknown like the man who flew into outer space. For this article, I consider the curatorial role of the dramaturg and the dramaturgical potential of the guest performer, exploring what it means to curate the unrehearsed and the different and complex politics implicit in sending someone on a journey into the unknown.

Key Words: *The man who flew into space from his apartment*; dramaturgy; guest performer; curatorial strategies.

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Concept

*Every time I look out of my window.
I etch his face upon the sky.
Whether moulding clouds into his likeness.
Or tracing stars with half-closed eyes.
Every time I listen to the wind I score his voice upon its staves.
Longing to hear a loving whisper.
Though the voice is not the same.
Every time I feel the rain I sense him falling down.
He permeates the concrete.
He penetrates the ground.
Every time I see the picture of the room he left behind.
The hole still serves to haunt me.
More than it reminds.
He is the sky, the earth, the stars, the sea.
His face, his voice, his history.
But I know he's standing next to me.
Every time I look out of my window.²*

The man who flew into space from his apartment is inspired by an installation of the same name by the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov. I wrote a text and a set of stage directions for a guest performer to follow. The performance draws on notions of escape and makes a journey, like Kabakov, between east and west, flying and falling, attempt and failure. Using found slides and a slide projector, I present

² Michael Pinchbeck, *The man who flew into space from his apartment*, dir. by Michael Pinchbeck (first performance Manchester: Zion Arts Centre, 28 November 2014).



a slideshow for an empty space to be performed in by this guest performer, in front of an audience of 10. The original installation Kabakov made in 1984, formed part of an exhibition comprising ten rooms along a corridor entitled 'Ten Characters'. The audience members in my piece unknowingly become the Ten Characters in Kabakov's work and are invited to read out fragments of text, close their eyes and blow up balloons. The guest performer follows my pre-recorded audio instructions on headphones that take them on a journey into the unknown like the man who flew into space.

The poem above forms part of the text for *The man who flew into space from his apartment*, and it serves as a cipher for both its aesthetic and thematic concerns. For this article, I explore the ethics, poetics and politics of the guest performer and how they become an internal dramaturg in the process of making the piece. In doing so, I propose a new dramaturgical paradigm for the guest performer involved and reflect on the way practice as research can be seen as an inherently dramaturgical and curatorial process. The dramaturg has a fluid role that moves from one context to another. S/he has been likened to a curator by Claire MacDonald, who writes about the dramaturgy of an exhibition as the curating of a narrative experience in a gallery. She writes: 'Dramaturgs engage space between composition and the unfolding of a performance in the presence of viewers'.³

I was interested in exploring how an unrehearsed performance mirrors the unplanned and unpredictable fate of the titular man in Kabakov's installation.

Context

The performance cuts across art forms, involves audience participation, explores site and immersive experience and questions notions of rehearsal and authorship through the use of guest performers. It has been performed in gallery spaces, theatre spaces, foyer spaces, a former Victorian School building in Nottingham and on the 15th floor of an unfinished tower block in Salford. I see the guest

performer as 'colouring in' the piece and it evolves with every iteration. I have changed the text and soundtrack depending on the different nuances and notes the guest performers find within it, it has been live edited through the process of being read by over forty guest performers. This has included shifting the tense from present to past or the narration from third person to first person. Their feedback (or 'feedforward') is essential to its future and they are inside eyes, internal dramaturgs, working on the drama from within.⁴ As Mary Luckhurst writes, if metallurgy is the working of metal, then we might consider dramaturgy to be a working of drama.⁵ This is an integral part of the performance's shifting dramaturgy and initiates a dialogical process around the guest performer as a dramaturg.

With this performance, the guest performer is always working, thinking, listening and speaking simultaneously, performing something for the first time that they have never seen or heard before. More than any other performance of mine, this piece will never be finished. It is completed by a guest performer who embodies the text without my direction. It could be argued that my dialogic engagement with the piece could be considered as a directorial intervention. The text that the guest performer follows via headphones asserts that they should make the work their own; the architecture of the piece remains the same but the dramaturgy of events is constantly in flux. In the words of Heraclitus, 'you can't step into the same river twice'.⁶

My role has been more of a dramaturg of my own work than a director or a writer, designing an architectural blueprint for the performance and inviting a guest performer to build it, to inhabit it and to furnish it with their own interpretation.

⁴ Phil Race, *The Lecturer's Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Assessment, Learning and Teaching*, 3rd edn (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

⁵ Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre (Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 10.

⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An introduction*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 28.

³ Duras, Marguerite, *Les Mains Negatives* (Paris 1979)



The man who... is a performance for non-theatre spaces that takes the audience on a journey from slideshow to show, artist's talk to artwork. It draws connections between theatre space and outer space, fine art and performance. It ends with the guest performer inviting the audience to leave their shoes on a pallet tied to the corners of the room with elastic to look like a catapult. He or she then leaves the space. The final image of the show mirrors that of the installation that inspired it. An empty space, where all that is left is a pair of shoes.

In this way, like the installation, the performance engages and enacts a dramaturgy of absence. The poem which the audience members read as part of the show (and is written in fragments left under their chairs), *Every time I look out of my window*, was always describing the absent protagonist of the installation when I wrote it originally. However, it now would seem to describe the guest performer; ghosting their physical presence into the piece. It recalls those guest performers who have worked with me discreetly, sensitively, intuitively, leaving their marks upon the piece. As Walter Benjamin describes, 'the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel'.⁷ The work bears the traces of everyone who has constructed, attended or inhabited it. It is covered in handprints. The fundamental aspect of this piece is that these "handprints" are foregrounded dramaturgically, like the negatives of hands on Marguerite Duras' caves.⁸ We see the performer's attempt to inhabit the piece as an integral part of the work.

Curation as Dramaturgy

For this publication, I consider what it means to curate the unrehearsed, along with the implicit complexity of sending someone on a journey into the unknown. I ask what it means to embrace chance. As Allan Kaprow says:

[...] it frees one from customary relationships [...] chance methodology is extremely useful in dispersing and breaking up knots of 'knowables'. Everything, the stuff of art, of daily life, the working of one's mind, gets thrown into sudden and startling patterns, so that if old values are destroyed, new experiences are revealed.⁹

For this piece, I am working with 'unknowables' to destroy the old values of rehearsing and knowing, to reveal a new experience. These 'unknowables', such as how the guest performer will interpret the stage directions and respond to my recorded voice decide how the performance unfolds and we, as performer, audience and author, share this new experience. Chance methodology influenced the aesthetic of the piece too; found slides sourced from a car boot sale and randomly narrativised, accompany a cut-up text, and the audience interactions are difficult to predict. One audience member failed to blow up the balloon and hold it aloft so the performer could pop it with a nail. Instead, they let it go and it deflated with a pathetic fanfare. The piece oscillates between these two poles: utopian and dystopian, optimism and pessimism, hope and pathos.

It also oscillates between the two poles, as outlined by Eugenio Barba in his definition of dramaturgy: the concatenation pole (cause and effect) and the simultaneity pole (presence at the same time of several actions). Barba writes: 'They are not two aesthetic alternatives or two different choices of method. They are the two poles whose tension and dialectic determine the performance and its life: actions at work – dramaturgy'.¹⁰ In the case of *The man who...* there is potential for concatenation and simultaneity to collide as the cause and effect of the instructions trigger the presence of several actions.

Kabakov's installation, which inspired the performance, explores the ontology and politics of absence. A room wallpapered with communist

⁷ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre / Archaeology* (Routledge: New York / London, 2001), p. 91.

⁸ Duras, Marguerite, *Les Mains Negatives* (Paris 1979).

⁹ Allan Kaprow in Dee Heddon and Alexander Kelly, 'Distance Dramaturgy', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2 (2010), 214-220.

¹⁰ Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 68.



propaganda is escaped through the ceiling, a catapult-like device sits beneath a hole in the ceiling, shards of plaster litter the floor, where we can see a pair of shoes left behind by the protagonist. Kabakov made the piece in response to his artistic incarceration in the Soviet Union where he said it was easier to get into Outer Space than the West. He only exhibited the work when he had actually emigrated to the USA. As an audience, we imagine the DIY cosmonaut that launched himself into space. We imagine him and his motives. We join the dots to trace his fate and follow the trajectory of the question mark that surrounds his destiny. We piece together the evidence of what might have been. We read the ruins of an event that putatively took place here; much like how the dramaturg practises both a semiotic and a phenomenological response to piece together the fragments of a performance.

Pearson and Shanks suggest, 'What begins as a series of fragments is arranged in performance. Dramaturgy is an act of assemblage'.¹¹ There is an implicit dramaturgy within Kabakov's installation, in which meaning is assembled. However, Tim Etchells is more pragmatic about what is left behind after the event. He writes: 'Fragments in and of themselves are meaningless. Only by piecing them together can we begin to form a picture of what a performance may have been. The creation of a history is a manipulation of fragments'.¹² We could argue that, somewhere between architects and archaeologists, dramaturgs both assemble futures and create histories. They operate in a liminal space between process and product, both reading the ruins and witnessing the catastrophe that caused them.

Dramaturgy as Curation

Rachael Walton of theatre collective Third Angel, who has performed in the piece, says 'I think the role of the dramaturg is to ask the right questions'.¹³ When asked to define his work as

dramaturg in the US, Mark Bly simply writes: 'I question'.¹⁴ My question for this piece was how to explore a sense of not knowing. I had seen guest performers before in other work, for example Tim Crouch's *An Oak Tree* (2005) and Nassim Soleimanpour's *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* (2007) both exploring notions of surrogacy and what Stephen Bottoms calls 'authorizing the audience', making them a part of the process as well as the product. I wanted to make the form intrinsically linked to the story, and allow an audience to see a performer for the first (and last) time.

I wanted a performer to imprint their personality upon it, to become agents of its narrative and inform its future development. By not rehearsing, I wanted to embrace the methodology of chance, the curation of unknowables and the notion of the internal dramaturg. *The man who...* takes place in a liminal space between composition and performance and sees dramaturgy as both a process and a product, as Claire MacDonald writes, it is 'both the weave and the process of weaving', both the text and the process of performing it.¹⁵

In Richard Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013) there is only one mention of the dramaturg as: 'A person who works with the director in a wide variety of ways'. He suggests that: 'Dramaturgical work includes researching the historical and cultural contexts and past production history of the dramatic text working closely with the director in interpreting the dramatic text and writing program notes.' He adds: 'During rehearsals, the dramaturge may offer detailed criticism of the ongoing production process'.¹⁶ This is literally a textbook reading of the role that precludes and therefore limits a wider understanding of its

(3 November 2010) <<https://outsideeyeproject.wordpress.com/2012/01/07/dramaturgy-in-dialogue-rachael-walton/>> [accessed 28 February 2016].

¹⁴ Mark Bly, *The Production Notebooks, Theatre in Process: Volume 1* (New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc., 1997), p. xxiv.

¹⁵ Stephen Bottoms, 'Authorizing the Audience: The conceptual drama of Tim Crouch', *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), 65-76.

¹⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An introduction*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 250.

¹¹ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre / Archaeology* (Routledge: New York / London, 2001), p. 55

¹² Steve Di Benedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 209.

¹³ Michael Pinchbeck, *Outside Eye Project blog* [online]



potential. Though he suggests that the dramaturg works in a wide variety of ways, Schechner here insists that a dramaturg always works with a text and a director. What he ignores, perhaps out of economy, or out of tradition, is the fact that dramaturgy is a slippery practice that operates across different contexts that overlap and coalesce.

In the 21st century, the dramaturg has a fluid role that moves from one context to another, entering and exiting artform, discipline and research territory like a critical cosmonaut orbiting the world of the work. Cathy Turner suggests we might use the phrase ‘porous dramaturgies’ to describe the way the composition of contemporary performance is becoming less easy to define.¹⁷ David Williams suggests we should turn to other disciplines for answers, such as the novelist Paul Auster.¹⁸ In *The New York Trilogy* (1987), Auster describes the role of detective as ‘the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them’.¹⁹ Auster here could be describing the role of the guest performer as dramaturg, in search of the central thought, moving through the text and being instructed by my stage directions, to use objects and words to make sense of the story.

Embedded Criticism

The dramaturg works with both playwrights and choreographers and sometimes with neither a text nor a director. They may write programme notes but it is perhaps more likely now that the dramaturg will write texts from, for, around and about the creative process. These are then folded back into the narrative of the piece and also become part of its wider publicity material, or increasingly appear

online in the form of rehearsal blogs or embedded criticism. For *The man who...* I invited critic Wayne Burrows to write a creative response to a work-in-progress in the form of a blog. His knowledge of Soviet artwork informed both the aesthetic and the content of the piece. He writes:

None of us, neither audience nor performer, knows where this is leading. We are asked to deliver lines and perform actions that have been handed to us in envelopes like instructions passed between Cold War spies. We find ourselves becoming co-conspirators in the reconstruction of a history of news bulletins, propaganda posters, photographs of lunar landings and earthly commemorations.²⁰

Burrows’ post-show reflections chime with Claire Bishop’s summation of relational art and performance, and how it ‘privileges intersubjective relations over detached opticality’.²¹ It asks how the audience might try to find meaning between objects in the space that are only really connected by their being there. How they might try to narrativise their experience with that of the central protagonist. How they become somehow embroiled in a ‘conspiracy’ and are drifting between artforms, and between a passive and active engagement in the work. On re-reading Burrows’ text it makes the piece sound more like a game than a show. There is a playfulness to it that is at odds with the formality of its text. It is a playfulness that comes from the tone of Kabakov’s installation’s irreverent concept. It is a formality that comes from the tone of its context.

I invited screenwriter Jonathan Wakeham to contribute programme notes to the show from a film perspective. He wrote:

¹⁷ Cathy Turner, *Dramaturgy and Architecture: Theatre, Utopia and the Built Environment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), p. 15.

¹⁸ David Williams, ‘Geographies of Requiredness: Notes on the Dramaturg in Collaborative Devising*’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20.2, p. 202.

¹⁹ Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 8.

²⁰ Wayne Burrows, ‘The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment’ a response by Wayne Burrows’, *Primary Blog* [online] (6 November 2015) < <http://www.weareprimary.org/2015/11/the-man-who-flew-into-space-response/>

²¹ Claire Bishop (2004). ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, *October* 110. Fall. 51-79, p. 61.



This is the story of Ilya Kabakov inside the story of Yuri Gagarin inside the story of the space race inside the story of the Cold War inside the story of all of us inside a room with a projector, a performer, ten postcards, some boots and a balloon. A set of Russian dolls. A multiverse. An intimate epic. A show.²²

We could argue that both Burrows and Wakeham are embedded critics of the devising and rehearsal process. The phrase ‘embedded criticism’ stems from a question set by writer Maddy Costa at a Devoted and Disgruntled Roadshow in 2012, this was an opportunity for theatre makers and producers to discuss topics and raise concerns about the industry using an Open Space framework. Costa asked: ‘When embedded in rehearsals, is there a potential model in critic as dramaturg?’²³ Costa’s model is at odds with the traditional paradigm of the dramaturg sitting on the row behind the director, silently taking notes. Even Robert Wilson’s assistant director, Maria Da Nascemi sits: ‘behind him, slightly to the left, and tries to see things as he sees them’.²⁴ The dramaturg is always trying to see things like someone else might see them, to look through someone else’s eyes at the work, to try to see like they might see it, etc. etc.

Contract and Expand

I am writing this article from the perspective of someone who had no one to sit next to, someone who had no one else’s eyes to see the work through. The only other eyes in the room were those of the

guest performer and the ten audience members wondering what will happen next. I want to make work free from the traditional hierarchy of the director as auteur and the dramaturg as a mediator of their vision. I want to make work free from the traditional paradigms of dramatic theatre. I want to write freely about how the dramaturg can be an auteur too, who knows how to make theatre and how to inspire others to do so. One of the reasons for working with a guest performer was so that I could sit out of the work and watch how it evolves. The text is the seed but it grows in different ways depending on how it is interpreted by the performer. It is germinated in performance in front of an audience, rather than the usual incubation in the rehearsal room.

When I interviewed theatre maker, Andy Smith, he said that the dramaturg ‘represents the audience in the rehearsal room’.²⁵ I also want the guest performer to represent the audience and to go on a journey of discovery into the unknown together ‘...not knowing whether they will live or die...fly or fall...succeed or fail...’ as the guest performer says of themselves in the piece. The only instruction I give the performer is an email before the performance, which serves as a kind of contract.²⁶ However, contract means to make

²² Jonathan Wakeham, ‘The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment Programme Notes’, *Michael Pinchbeck Website* [online] (6 November 2015) <<http://michaelpinchbeck.co.uk/assets/wp-content/.../04/THE-MAN-WHO-Programme.pdf>> [accessed 18 September 2016].

²³ Maddy Costa, ‘What new dialogue can we set up between people who write about theatre and people who make it?’, *Devoted and Disgruntled 7 blog* [online] (29 April 2012).

²⁴ Susan Jonas, Geoffrey Proehl and Michael Lupu, *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1996), p. vii.

²⁵ Michael Pinchbeck, *Outside Eye Project blog* [online] (3 November 2010) <<http://outsideeyeproject.wordpress.com/2011/05/24/dramaturgy-in-dialogue-andy-smith/>> [accessed 17 May 2016].

²⁶ The email reads as follows: Thank you for accepting the invitation to take part in The man who flew into space from his apartment. Please find below the final running order and some instructions for your journey into the unknown. If you could arrive at the venue 30 minutes before the show then I will brief you in person but please find below a more detailed briefing.

- It is a 35-40 minute performance featuring props, a slideshow, a soundtrack and a text. The text is an audio track for you to follow.

- I will operate the technology and be in the space with you at all times.

- There are only 10 audience members and at certain times in the performance you will be asked to interact with them.

- if you could possibly arrive 30-45 minutes before your performance time I will then meet you outside the



narrow as well as to make an agreement and it is this process of making narrow which is a potential obstacle when it comes to working as a dramaturg. A dramaturg makes wide, a dramaturg opens, a dramaturg expands, a dramaturg sees a work and reads it many ways. Contracts are at odds with this and therefore do not function on the same terms, in the same territory. In this sense, it is fitting there is no official contract for *The man who...* other than the tacit relationship between a guest performer and a set of instructions. These are the base rules that facilitate/frame their involvement in the piece and, in some ways, enable an expanded dramaturgy to take place.

The contract resides in the relationship between the artist and the work, and it writes itself as the project evolves as the artist and audience are authorized. This relationship is built on a process of drafting and redrafting texts; each draft is an attempt at layering material, each draft represents a change of mind, much like the phenomenon of *pentimento*. In oil painting, as the paint ages, it

becomes translucent and layers of paint begin to reveal revisions or amendments made by the artist in the form of *pentimento*. The layering of the devising process is equally open to making amendments visible. John Freeman argues that practice as research exhibits *pentimento*, as you can see through the finished work, the layers of previous drafts and alterations. There is an element of *pentimento* involved in the role of working as a dramaturg in contemporary performance, as the process of writing the text for performance is often made visible through the performance itself and I, as the writer, imagine how the guest performer feels.

These are words someone else has written. Someone else who isn't here any more. Someone who left this space a long time ago. This space with lights pretending to be stars. A projector pretending to be a space shuttle. A pallet pretending to be a catapult. Me pretending to be him.²⁷

Weave as text

In *The Stay of Illusion* (2009), Andrew Quick writes: 'Theatre[...] always involves placing. Derived from the Greek *thea*, it has (at least) two interconnected meanings, the activity of putting into place, placing, and secondly, the creation of a place from which to see'.²⁸ We could argue that a dramaturg is both putting the work into a place and creating a place from which to see it. Certainly, they are active in terms of contextualising and framing the work critically and seeing it take place physically. Synne Behrndt writes that a dramaturg's role is 'to help recognise and unfold the place or the moment where the work becomes hot, when it starts to move as if by itself, inviting a feeling of a world to discover there, a sense of pushing the limits of what we can perceive, imagine or

space to brief you.

- When you hear a beep that is a stage direction for you to follow.

- When you hear me say 'Please repeat after me' that is text for you to speak.

- The text moves quite quickly so you have to speak in the gaps between my voice. For example the text starts like this:

Me: Please repeat after me - T minus 15

You: T minus 15

Me: T minus 10

You: T minus 10 etc.

- The idea is that you are travelling on a journey into the unknown so I am not sending you the script for the show in advance of the performance

- I can tell you that it contains some Russian words such as Spasibo (pronounced spass-ee-bo), Ilya Kabakov (pronounced Kab-ak-off) and Yuri Gagarin.

- You will be required to wear an outfit and take off your shoes so it might be a good idea to wear trousers if possible, socks instead of tights and a pair of boots or black shoes if possible.

Thanks again for agreeing to be a guest performer. Please let me know if you have any questions. Please find below an image of the installation that inspired the performance

²⁷ Michael Pinchbeck, *The man who flew into space from his apartment*, dir. by Michael Pinchbeck (first performance Manchester: Zion Arts Centre, 28 November 2014).

²⁸ Andrew Quick, 'The Stay of Illusion', *Performance Research*, 14.1 (2009), 29-36 (p. 31).



articulate'.²⁹

The dramaturg's work resides in the seam between the semiotic and the phenomenological, between reading and feeling. Central to this article is Eugenio Barba's concept that "The word 'text', before referring to a written or spoken, printed or manuscript text, meant 'a weaving together'.³⁰ In this sense, there is no performance without 'text'".³¹ The notion of 'text' standing for 'weaving together' has prescribed the style of both *The man who...* and this reflection on it; just as the dramaturg becomes a metaphorical seamstress, weaving elements of the performance together, weaving together the devised and the written, so I am weaving together my interrogation of that role, folding dramaturgy into dramaturgy.

Text as weave

The man who... is concerned with the role that 'text' plays in performing dramaturgy, both in terms of the written notes I take each time it is performed, and the embedded criticisms I have written and drawn from here, but also in terms of the text (or weave) of the performance I have made, and how it has been unravelled or unravelled by the guest performer. Text in a literal sense is the main form of communication for any dramaturgical dialogue. But text, as weave, is also the way in which the work a dramaturg does is most visible. As Thies-Lehmann writes, 'Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text', and for this practice as research I wanted to move away from the text as a primary tool towards the postdramatic theatre that he invokes.³² *The man who...* is a post-dramatic text but completed by the guest performer. They are the ones doing the weaving.

Barba proposes that the work dramaturgs do is that of carving out actions, and that these actions make up the key elements of the performance.³³ He suggests that '[...] objects used in the performance are also actions, transforming themselves, acquiring different meanings and different emotive colorations'.³⁴ The work I have done for *The man who...* has tested the notion that the guest performer (as dramaturg, as curator of the unknown) is in control of these actions and that objects used in performance also make up these actions. It is these 'actions' that have helped me to frame the guest performers as dramaturgs. Following on from Barba, MacDonald suggested that dramaturgy is 'both the weave and the process of weaving'.³⁵

The man who... explores the process of raveling the work from its own devising, of making something wide open and making something narrow, of opening and closing a weave. This is the crux of the unspoken and often unwritten contract between an artist and a dramaturg; how do you open without closing, make visible something that is not tangible, tell a story without making it too easy to read or too difficult to understand? How do you move from inside to outside? For the eye is both internal and external, looking out and projecting images within. As Bert O. States suggests:

... the mission of any form of phenomenological critique is to describe what Cezanne called 'The world's instant', not simply a paintable instant, but also any instant that is perpetually apprehended as carrying or leading to an intuition about what it is and what it is doing before our eyes.³⁶

'What is it?' and 'What is it doing?' are the two questions a dramaturg asks of anything they see.

²⁹ David Harradine and Synne Behrndt, *Invisible Things: Documentation from a Devising Process* (Brighton: Fevered Sleep).

³⁰ Eugenio Barba, 'The nature of dramaturgy: describing actions at work', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 1.1 (1985), 76.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

³² Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jurs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁵ Claire MacDonald, 'Conducting the flow: Dramaturgy and Writing', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 30.1 (2010), 91-100 (p. 93).

³⁶ Bert O. States, 'The Phenomenological Attitude' in *Critical Theory and Performance*, eds. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 35.



Let us compare this reading to the analysis of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the first dramaturg, who wrote in 1769, ‘The dramaturg bridges the gap between theory and practice... like a poet, (he or she) thinks in our presence.’³⁷ The dramaturg both bridges places and places bridges, they think by doing and do by thinking, and in doing so enable a number of texts to be written and read.

Dot dot dot not a full stop

I want to end with feedback sent by Terry O’Connor (Forced Entertainment) who performed in both Tim Crouch’s *An Oak Tree* and *The man who...* (Wrought Festival, Sheffield, 2016). She writes:

It was difficult to pull out of the immediate demands of the task in order to think about how the piece was going or what it was. I found that really interesting as a performer. It meant that I had really intense eye contact with the audience but no ability to theorise or steer it whilst in the act. No directorial focus pull. No chance to dwell or milk. This was a really rare experience, perhaps not even the Tim Crouch piece came close to the exacting nature of the task. I imagine that the gap opened up between me and the text was additionally foregrounded by this ‘racing after’ the words. It meant that sometimes sentences changed shape and meaning as additional clauses were added. I met a student today who loved it. She said she couldn’t take in the whole text, perhaps our faltering relation with its sense creates another level of mismatch in the audience. For her this was a rich grasping for sense, for another’s experience, yet it’s clear there are very poignant metaphors and images to keep an anchoring in place. So words to objects are nicely re-balanced, where words more often too easily win out.³⁸

In conclusion, *The man who...* is a piece that has now been performed over 40 times by different

guest performers from across contexts, cultures and disciplines.³⁹ It challenges the way a dramaturg abdicates responsibility for what the actors say. The way a dramaturg sits in the dark in the audience, anonymous, trying to imagine what everyone is thinking. The way a dramaturg has to let a text go, like a balloon drifting from a child’s hand, and trust that it will find the sky eventually. There is an old, Russian proverb: ‘If you go out to your porch, look at the sky and jump to the stars, you will just land in the mud.’⁴⁰ *The man who...* sits somewhere between living and dying, knowing and not knowing, jumping and landing, the stars and the mud.

Perhaps like the protagonist in the installation that inspired it, he will never fall to earth and continue to orbit these research questions; I ask how the dramaturg might play a similar role to that of a curator and argue that it is a catalysing role that enables intersubjective relation with a number of texts that are authorized by an audience. I seek to explore what happens when an artistic process embraces ‘unknowables’ and how we might be able to ‘curate the unknown’. I propose that practice as research as a field, or as a mode of research enquiry, is implicitly an ‘act of dramaturgy’ and by definition the researcher becomes a dramaturg by so doing. I propose that the ‘curation of unknowables’ with a guest performer has a dramaturgical flow and that in this sense curation is a dramaturgical practice and dramaturgy is, arguably, a curatorial

³⁹ A full list of guest performers is as follows: Ollie Smith, Nicki Hobday, Anna Fenemore, Daniel Hunt, James Hudson, Rochi Rampal, Nick Walker, Francesca Millican-Slater, Olwen Davies, Iara Solano Arana, Deborah Pearson, Caroline Horton, Chris Thorpe, Christopher Brett Bailey, Claire Marshall, Emma Hall, Ira Brand, Rachel Porter, Richard Lowdon, Oliver Bray, Niki Woods, Adele Wragg, Jimmy Fairhurst, Tom Barnes, Priya Mistry, Jack. A. G. Britton, Lewys Holt, Andrew Westerside, Rachel Baynton, Aylwyn Walsh, Ryan O’Shea, Krissi Musiol, Rachael Walton, Terry O’Connor, Jessica Latowicki, Karen Christopher, Hetain Patel, Inua Ellams, Tom Marshman, Chris Wright and Chloe Dechery.

⁴⁰ Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 7.

³⁷ Gotthold E. Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. xx.

³⁸ Terry O’Connor, Personal Correspondence, 19 April 2016.



practice. I ask how it will ever be finished if it is always different and each guest performer presents a different iteration. It is a dot dot dot not not a full stop and asks questions about narrative, liminality and finality like the installation that inspired it. It ends with a pair of shoes on an empty stage.

As Boris Groys writes in his biography of the original Ilya Kabakov artwork:

... It is finished. The flight was successful; our hero's body has disappeared. Admittedly, this does not answer the question as to whether he has flown off into cosmic weightlessness or has plunged to his death. And this is actually the question – as to what it means when people say a story has come to an end, that a project has finished, or has been completed... Whatever the case, it is certainly easier to disappear from reality than to be released from utopia.⁴¹

⁴¹ Boris Groys, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (London: Afterall Books, 2006), p. 40.

