

Within the shifting culture of making new work (as opposed to new writing) that David Eldridge spoke of in his keynote speech to this Playwriting and Dramaturgy series, as a free-lance theatre director, I've explored a number of dramaturgical functions in a number of different contexts. Is the term 'dramaturg' so broad as to be almost meaningless?

With Foursight Theatre, based in the West Midlands of England, for example, I devised a method of analysis and interpretation of Greek plays based in questions of 'character'. Prior to rehearsals, I applied this method of analysis to the texts of *Medea*, *Agamemnon* and *Hecuba*, and it was out of this process that the concepts for each of these multi-lingual productions evolved. With Theatre Alibi, based in Exeter, I constructed a list of 'research tasks', and the actors' autobiographical written and spoken responses to these, provided the raw material for the script of the play *Close to Home*, developed by the writer Daniel Jamieson. A third area of exploration into making new work has involved using yoga as a source and resource for writing for performance. In relation to this, I have worked with performance writer and playwright Cathy Turner to develop a written and embodied piece entitled *Air*; and also with Lesley Wade, to develop another piece called *Keeping Mum*. Most recently, with Echo-Arts, Cyprus, I explored a number of compositional strategies within the making of an interdisciplinary piece entitled *the still small voice of the people*.

It is this last situation, and function, that I focus on in this paper: that of dramaturg as composer, working in conjunction with a number of different creative artists, to make a performance composition, within a clearly defined period of time. I argue the case for multi-authored work and the alignment of that with the voices of ordinary people - especially in a context such as Cyprus, with its history of invasion and colonisation, where the 'wrighting' of the piece was dominated by the macro political voices of the UN, the EU, Greece, Turkey, the USA and Britain. I also argue, via the etymological route offered by the term 'interplay', that the piece was as much a 'play' as it was a 'performance composition': these terms, in my view, defining themselves along a continuum, rather than separating themselves on either side of an aesthetic divide.

Primarily, however, in the paper, I attempt a reflection and analysis of the process of creating a multi-authored piece, naming seven strategies or factors that determined its composition. I call these: Site as a source and resource for generating material for performance, Autobiographical presence, both live and mediated, Metaphor, Rhythm, Momentum, Repetition and Interplay.

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The following notes were written by Professor Peter Thomson, who was the respondent to Dorinda Hulton's paper.

### **Responses to Dorinda Hulton's paper**

#### *The role of dramaturg*

DH asked, at the opening of her paper: 'Is the term "dramaturg" so broad as to be almost meaningless?' It's certainly used to cover a variety of theatrical practices. Knowing something of what Dorinda did to make *the still small voice of the people*, my mind turned first to the idea of the playwright, and then to Jean-Luc Godard (and Meyerhold!) as auteur.

But DH prefers the term 'composer' – not in the musical sense, not comparably with a composer of symphonies, but neither as a composer of crosswords. More, perhaps, as a composer of patterns out of given material ('working in conjunction with a number of different creative artists')

The substance of the paper analysed seven ‘compositional strategies’ deployed in the making of *the still small voice*.

#### 1) *Site as source and resource*

Whilst this performance was generated by the autobiographically centred ‘one square foot’ project, which had originated in Exeter, this one combined autobiography with politics. In effect, there was a Greek-Cypriot ‘square foot’ and a Turkish-Cypriot ‘square foot’, separated (held apart) by the militarily patrolled border. The locations had in-built political (as well as autobiographical) resonance for the two principal performers. *I found myself speculating on the possibility that an arbitrarily selected (without precedent resonances) ‘square foot’ might generate its own resonances – that the site itself, rather than already-existing associations, might be the sole ‘source’.*

#### 2) *Autobiographical presence*

Some personal engagement with the ‘square foot’ chosen by the performers was, on this occasion, a *donnée* (but then, of course, personal engagement could be the consequence of choice rather than its cause).

#### 3) *Metaphor*

DH proposed that ‘metaphor’ can serve as a vital cohering factor in a performance that draws on a number of distinct (and potentially amorphous) creative contributions. The metaphor here was the Cypriot ‘seven-pronged’ loom (physically present on the indoor stage, and used to punctuate the seven ‘movements’ of the final composition). [*‘movement’: ‘composition’ – it’s suggestive that the creative process reaches out for musical terms....*] The metaphor served the whole piece’s impulse towards connecting across borders.

#### 4) *Rhythm*

Away from the performance itself, rhythm is an elusive concept (though DH provided us with a schematic network that went some way towards pictorializing rhythm). Rhythm, though, is only secondarily a pictorial concept, unless as a moving sculpture of time passing under control.

#### 5) *Momentum*

In *the still small voice*, the momentum was towards a third ‘square foot’, unreachable because of the militarized border, but one which would bridge that border in a potential future. (But it was DH’s intention, in the composing of the piece, that each movement should generate its own momentum – from its own patterning – and that there should be development towards an end throughout.)

#### 6) *Repetition*

Repetition (of various kinds) was inherent in, and essential to, the piece. But it was a particular concern of Dorinda’s that, for the single performance in Germany, linguistic repetition was enforced from outside by an insistence on reducing the (colonial) English-language component. Verbal repetition has, of course, its uses (hearing things more clearly the second time round), but the unhappy effect was a reduction of the audience’s focus on embodiment (e.g. a Turkish performer embodying Greek grief).

7) *Interplay*

DH argues that an 'interplay' is a kind of 'play', and that *the still small voice* was an interplay kind of play. I found myself attracted by the complexities of the notion. (Thus, for example, a 'play' tends to be dependent on presenting itself as a sequence-in-time, whereas an 'interplay' might be more concerned with what goes on 'between' (between times, between people, between ideas). It seemed to tie in with the impulse towards *connecting*, and perhaps to the condition of *becoming* rather than the condition of *being*.

Peter Thomson

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