

CONVERSATIONS

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This small-scale project facilitated a process of research which led to the creation of three different formats and writings on my part: an article on devising as a model of creation;¹ a keynote address on the relationship between dramaturgy and artistic research² and the following companion piece in which I think more on the relationship between devising and dramaturgy. I will draw on conversations with collaborators and artists, as well as on observations on dramaturgical work within creative processes. I have previously and often come back to the particular relationship between dramaturgy and devising, and this small-scale project was an opportunity to align – or perhaps situate – my thinking on devising and dramaturgy with(in) discussions on artistic research, as became evident in said keynote. At the heart of my interest in the relationship

¹ Published in *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary European Theatre and Performance*, eds. Ralf Remshardt and Aneta Mancewicz, Routledge 2023.

² Presented at the CARPA8 conference *SOLVITUR AMBULANDO* ‘solved by moving’: *Dramaturgies of Artistic Research*, Helsinki, 24–26 August 2023. The keynote will be published and made available in the conference proceedings.

between dramaturgy and devising is the realisation that, in these open-ended processes, where the task is to shape the dramaturgy while simultaneously developing the methodologies and an architecture for the process, the dramaturg becomes a kind of researcher *in action*. If dramaturgy sits on the fault line between theory and practice, then a devising process calls on those skills because, when there is a genuine exploration, it is a form of research in which one *finds out something* through and in performance. Speaking on a personal note, dramaturgical work within devising has often felt like the most creative way to learn, investigate and find *something out* by way of making a performance because, on the level of principle, it is about inventing strategies for experimentation, extrapolating and naming potentialities while proposing methodologies for further development.

Throughout the project there have been various points of contact with my discussion partners Sodja Lotker and Jon Refsdal Moe. We came into the project with different questions but we shared an interest in the proposal that performance and its making embody sophisticated models of and for research. On 12 April 2023, this year we gave a seminar on dramaturgy and devising to staff and students at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU), and here Lotker talked about embodied knowledge in performance and the fact that knowledge is formed in the doing itself. She referred to dramaturgy as a gesture of watching, and I found both her question ‘What does it mean for dramaturgy when you don’t know what you’re going to

find?’ and her proposition that performance is a form of research, which is done together with the audience, deeply relevant. One answer to the first question could be that dramaturgy is not something which is articulated before ‘the work’ happens; rather, it is likely a process which happens together or *alongside* the unfolding process and hence in the shaping of a work. During the seminar, Refsdal Moe presented the provocative statement that theatre is not (always) about communication; instead, he advocated that performance give space for the spectator to *be with* the work. It’s a good point: How do you create dramaturgies that give space to the audience? A question I have been thinking about myself in connection with two recent performance projects in which the dramaturgical structure was intentionally ‘liquid’ with a view to (also physically) giving space to the audience: when working with choreographer Milla Koistinen on her pieces *Breathe* (2021) and *Magenta Haze* (2022), one challenge was to conceive of the dramaturgy as an encounter or meeting between work and spectator(s). Certainly, dramaturgy always emerges in the spectator’s meeting with the work, yet one question was how to build a dramaturgy in which the spectator would feel ‘implicated’ and invited to engage without forcing or coercing direct interaction or participation. More on this later.